

SINS OF PERMISSION

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Abstract

I explore various aspects of *permissiveness* – a topic which has been strangely neglected in anglophone moral philosophy. I argue among other things that it can be wrong to permit or allow what it is not wrong to do (as well as what it is wrong to do), and that in several areas of applied ethics the proper account of why some things are wrong requires adverting to permissiveness in a way not currently appreciated. As I point out, being clear about the structure of permissiveness affords insights into what makes permissiveness objections to particular things plausible and robust against many of the objections brought against extant well-developed accounts of their wrongness. In its second part – Sections 4 and 5 – the paper's discussion of these permissiveness objections to particular things is intended to motivate new directions for further debate, suggesting and motivating promising ideas whilst not being able to offer a final word on those topics.

Key Words: Permissiveness, Allowing, Markets, Violent Sports

Philosophers, in the anglophone analytic tradition at least, pay surprisingly little attention to the topic of *permissiveness*.¹ Permissiveness is the wrong of permitting or allowing too much, or of permitting the wrong things. Perhaps permissiveness has been neglected recently as a topic for moral philosophy because of a sense that a charge of permissiveness is bound to strike an unfashionably reactionary or conservative note, redolent as it is of complaints about the ‘permissive society’. But if the word ‘permissive’ is one which many people these days would shy away from, the idea that it can be wrong to permit or allow something is alive and well. So, I shall resurrect ‘permissive’ as the most appropriate condemnatory description of something which moral philosophers still have every reason to be interested in.

I am not only interested in permissiveness because I think it has yet to be fully theorised and understood. I also think that the most promising accounts of why some things are wrong appeal to permissiveness, including the most promising accounts of some wrongs which have, I think, yet to be fully explained. So, in this paper I set out to do two things. Firstly, I shall attempt to say something about how permissiveness is more complex and interesting than might be assumed. And secondly, I shall indicate some ways in which invoking permissiveness (properly understood) affords us promising accounts of some moral wrongs, or at least cogent explanations of what might be morally objectionable about some things. The examples I shall discuss are violent combat sports and some markets.

¹ But there has been much discussion of ‘forbidding wrong’ in various traditions of Islamic thought. See Cook (2003) for an overview and discussion; or Cook (2000) for a school-by-school analysis of views on the topic. Forbidding wrong, as understood in most of those traditions, isn’t quite the same as avoiding permissiveness as I’ll understand that below; but the parallels are close enough for an interesting discussion elsewhere. Also worth considering in relation to the general topic of permissiveness would be the various discussions of *toleration* in a political context, such as in Marcuse (1965/9).

1. Permission

Before I say anything about *permissiveness*, I need to say something about *permission*. My aim in this section is to forestall potential misunderstandings and establish some very general ideas about permission which will be important later. And the first thing to say is that throughout I shall use ‘permitting’ and ‘allowing’ (and their cognates) interchangeably, because very often ‘allowing’ is a more natural term for what permissiveness involves.

When I write about permission in this paper, I am always writing about permitting as something *done* (albeit perhaps by omission) by somebody, or some organisation, or some set of regulations.² I am not writing about permission as an abstract deontic modality. As well as being used in the way I am using it, ‘permission’ is also a name given to one of the deontic modalities in discussions of deontic logic. In Standard Deontic Logic, for example, everything obligatory is permitted. But obviously not everything morally or rationally obligatory (or obligatory in some other way) is permitted *by someone* or by some *organisation*, or even by some *set of rules*, if – as throughout this paper – ‘sets of rules’ refers to *positive* rules, in the sense of rules which have been drawn up by someone.³ Just as ordinary alethic logic is not

² The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of ‘permission’ includes: ‘(1a): The action of permitting, allowing, or giving consent; consent, leave, or liberty to do something’. (OED Online, 3rd ed., 2005) Note ‘action’, and note that actions can be by commission or by omission.

³ In the sense I intend, permission to φ is not given by someone who tries to prevent φ -ing. It is quite possible that someone, or even everyone, tries to prevent everything which is (deontically) obligatory. Incidentally, even if ‘obligatory’ denotes that which is demanded with threat of sanctions for non-compliance (mirroring the performative – not deontic – sense of ‘permission’ I am focusing on), it is *possible* that everyone threatens reprisals for not φ -ing, whilst also (unkindly) trying to prevent φ -ing, so, permitting *as something done* is not entailed by requiring (or making obligatory) *as something done*, either.

necessarily a guide to what is or ought to be uttered, deontic logic is not necessarily a guide to what is permitted, nor even what ought to be permitted, in the sense intended here.

If permitting (allowing) is something done, when and how is it done? *A* permits (allows) *B* to φ if and only if *A* does not try to prevent *B* from φ -ing, for *A*'s permitting (allowing) *B* to φ just is *A*'s not trying to prevent *B* from φ -ing.⁴ Permitting is something which can be done by individuals, groups, institutions and perhaps other, non-agential, entities as well, such as regulations or sets of rules, if there is a sense of *trying to prevent* which finds application in such cases.

There is bound to be something figurative about talk of non-agents 'trying' to do something. But we commonly speak and think of sets of rules, for example, allowing some things and not others, and so perhaps we should find an interpretation of our schema which has application there. Perhaps 'trying to prevent' in such cases means *being designed to prevent*. In any case, even if sets of rules and other non-agential things fail to permit or allow things in the strict sense defined here, they can be connected in important ways to permitting or allowing things – by, for example, regulating the punishing behaviour (designed to prevent) of individuals or corporate agents. And we might well be able to speak of sets of rules permitting things as shorthand for *those guided by those rules* permitting things: 'the rules permit forward

⁴ In a note to sense IV of 'allow' (i.e. 'to permit, enable'), the *OED* (ibid) says: 'This branch covers a range of meaning from actively giving permission to *passively not preventing something*' (my emphasis).

Some might worry that a person counts as permitting things which they are not even aware of or in a position to do anything about according to the very broad definition I have adopted here. But nothing I say about wrongful permission below requires us to say that a person is wrong to permit such things: it might be that whilst we permit a great deal in my intended sense of 'permit', we are never being *permissive* or apt for censure for permitting things which it is beyond our power to prevent, or about which we know nothing. And if the reader prefers, they may add further conditions to my analysis of permitting without doing any violence to the points argued for below. Or they may treat my 'permission' and its cognates as technical terms.

passes' means, at the very least, that those who enforce the rules do not try – in so far as they are enforcing the rules – to prevent forward passes.

2. Permissiveness I: Structure

With a conception of permission in hand, we can begin to think about *permissiveness*, which is morally problematic permitting. (If you think that 'permissive' is not necessarily a morally loaded term, and that to be permissive is simply to allow something, regardless of whether that is morally problematic, then you should treat 'permissive' and its cognates as used here as technical terms, the meanings of which I have just stipulated.) The relation between permissiveness – which is permitting too much, or the wrong things – and the wrongness or moral permissibility of that which is permitted in permissiveness is not straightforward. Several points are worth making.

(A) It can be wrong to permit something because what is permitted is itself wrong. The case of the permissive parent who allows their children to throw rocks at their neighbours' windows is presumably an example of this.

(B) It is not necessarily wrong to permit what it is wrong to do. So, for example, it might be wrong to tell someone a harmful lie but equally or more wrong to prevent a person from telling such a lie, for example with threats of punishment. This is what someone who values liberty very highly might think: liberals need not deny that some acts which ought to be permitted are wrong. But you don't need to be a liberal who places special emphasis on liberty to agree that it is not *necessarily* wrong to permit what it is wrong to do. (Reasons for agreeing with this might be connected to point (E), below.)

(C) It can be wrong to permit something even though what is permitted is not itself wrong. That is, it can be wrong to *permit* what it is *not* wrong to *do*. Thus, it would be wrong for the authorities to permit drivers to drive on either the left or the right according to their fancy, if permitting this would put the lives of drivers at

unnecessary risk; but none of the permitted things – driving on the left, and driving on the right – are wrong in themselves (states whose traffic laws require driving on the right are not requiring something wrong, and nor are states which require drivers to be on the left). In such cases, it is the *permission* which is wrong, not *what is permitted*. So, a person or institution can be permissive in a morally problematic way, whether or not what they permit is itself morally problematic. Similarly, it can be wrong to let someone win. We are racing, and I hold back, letting you streak to the finishing line to claim victory. Your crossing the finishing line first – your winning – is not objectionable, though my *letting* you win might very well be (for reasons discussed below, in Section 3). It is not just that your winning races is not *generally* wrong; your winning *this* race against me is not wrong.

(D) A person or institution can be permissive in the morally problematic sense regardless of whether anybody does (or even would do) what that person or institution permits. Think again of the permissive parent, who permits their child to throw rocks at the neighbours' windows. It does not matter whether or not their child ever actually throws rocks at the windows, nor even whether they ever *would*; the parent is at fault for allowing it nonetheless. (If you find it hard to make sense of this, take it that the parent *mistakenly believes* that their child is going to throw rocks at the neighbours' windows, but does nothing to try to prevent it.) Or take the case of wrongfully allowing someone to win: my letting you win would presumably be wrong (if it is wrong at all) if you *didn't* win, just as much as if you did: if I hold back, intending to hand you the Pyrrhic victory, but at the last moment you trip and fall, as I am carried past you by momentum to finish first after all, I am presumably as apt for criticism for my holding back as I would have been had fate not intervened – regardless of the fact that you didn't, in fact, do what I was allowing you to do (standard issues of moral luck notwithstanding).

(E) Permissiveness is context dependent. That is because whether a permission is wrongful depends upon whether it ought not to be in place, and it is often the case that what ought not to be allowed by one person (or in one context) ought to be

allowed by another (or by the same person, in a different context). What makes the difference might just be that one person is in a position of responsibility which brings with it the obligation to prevent something, whilst the other person is not. So, whilst we can say in context independent terms whether or not permission *is* in place, we often cannot say whether or not it is *wrongfully* in place without due attention to facts about who the permitter is, what their relation to the permittee(s) is, and what reasons there are for allowing or preventing things – and who they are reasons for.

(F) It follows from (B) that it is not necessarily permissive to permit permissiveness.⁵ That is to say, it might not be wrong to allow others to permit what *they* ought not to permit. This is a view many people take with respect to allowing one's children to throw rocks at the neighbours' windows: whilst judging that it is *wrong* for the parents to permit their children to do this, many people hold that it is not wrong to allow (in the sense of not trying to prevent) those parents to be permissive in this way, for it is 'not our place' to interfere with what parents allow their children to do. It might, of course, be our place to intervene directly to prevent the children acting wrongly, so *we* might try to prevent it even as we permit (not wrongly) the children's *parents* to be permissive: it is one thing to intervene to stop a child throwing bricks; but quite another to, e.g., threaten the child's parents with some sanction if *they* don't try to prevent their child's misbehaviour. This is connected to point (E): sometimes, whether it is wrong for us to permit something depends upon whether or not we stand in a particular relation (most obviously, of authority) to those who are doing what we are permitting. According to a common view, most of us don't

⁵ This follows from (B) for the following reason. Permissiveness is a *wrong*: to be permissive is to *wrongfully* permit something. But according to (B), the fact that something is a wrong is not sufficient to render permitting it permissive. So, according to (B), the fact that permissiveness is a wrong is not sufficient to render permitting *it* permissive. However, (B) does *not*, of course, entail that what it is not wrong to permit is *not wrong*. So, permissiveness retains its wrongful character even if permitting it is not wrong. There is no confusion or particular tension, then, in the suggestion that given (B) it is not necessarily wrong to permit permissiveness.

stand in the appropriate authority relation to other people for us to be responsible for regulating how they bring up their children, so whilst it might be wrong for someone with such a responsibility (if there is any such person) to permit permissive parenting, it would not be wrong for us to do so. Many people have a similar view about government responsibility: whilst the government might well have responsibility for many things, it does not have a responsibility to prevent permissiveness in every domain in which it can occur, so it is not *wrong* (i.e. permissive) of governments if they fail to (try to) prevent citizens, corporations or other agents from themselves being permissive in at least some ways.⁶

3. Permissiveness II: Grounds

It is obviously not always wrong to permit someone (or some institution) to do something. So, when is permission *permissive* – i.e. morally objectionable – and when is it not? There need be no single answer to this question which decides every case. Let's return to some of the examples I have already invoked.

It is wrong to permit one's children to throw rocks at the neighbours' windows. One story about *why* permitting that is wrong goes like this: it is wrong to throw rocks at people's windows, and thus wrong not to try to prevent it happening if one can. We had better not say, if what I said in Section 2, above, is right, that this is because it is always wrong not to try to prevent a wrong if one can. That principle runs afoul of point (B). But this general claim isn't required if we just want to say that *in this case*,

⁶ This point will be important to bear in mind during the discussions in Sections 4 & 5, below. There, I set out some arguments which purport to show that some sports and markets are permissive, and therefore morally problematic. But, even if they turn out to be *so* problematically permissive that their benefits – or the value of liberty, or anything else – do not outweigh this moral cost, the point explained in this paragraph should make it clear that permissiveness objections to such things are no less able than any others to accommodate the common principle that what is morally objectionable ought not necessarily to be *illegal* or otherwise prevented by law or the state.

given the sort of naughty action in question and some basic principles of civic responsibility, the wrongness of the children's actions explains the duty of their parents to try to prevent those actions.

Generally, we are not morally required to try to prevent merely possible wrongs which we believe are not going to happen anyway (I am not required to try to prevent you from murdering someone if you have no intention of murdering them, at least if I know you have no such intention or have no grounds to suspect that you do), so if the permissiveness of allowing one's children to throw rocks at neighbours' windows depends upon the wrongness of that kind of rock-throwing, it is *not* permissive to permit one's children to throw rocks at those windows if one knows that one's children wouldn't do that anyway. (For the relevance of such cases, see point (D) of Section 2, above.)

Another story about the same case goes like this: it is wrong to throw rocks at people's windows, and so *failing to disapprove of* doing that *and failing to express one's disapproval* (as one would do by forbidding one's children to do it) when one is in a position of authority is wrong. Since we have an obligation to disapprove of even merely possible – i.e. non-actual and even enormously unlikely – acts of wrongdoing, and an obligation to express our disapproval in appropriate ways and contexts, this account of what makes permission wrong in this case vindicates the idea that it is wrong to permit one's children to throw rocks at the neighbours' windows regardless of whether one's children do or even would do such a thing.⁷

Perhaps both stories are correct, and permission is wrong in this case for both reasons. And no doubt there are other plausible stories to tell as well, which may also be correct. But notice that the story to tell about the permissiveness of allowing drivers to drive on either the left or the right will not be the same, if only because it will not

⁷ Here it is useful to remember that prohibitions, as well as permissions, can be implicit. It is not that parents have a duty to *say* to their children that they are not allowed to do each of the merely possible things which ought to be prohibited; it is enough if the required prohibitions are implicit.

make any reference to the wrongness, in itself, of what is permitted. It is not wrong to drive on the left, and it is not wrong to drive on the right, other things being equal. What makes it wrong for the relevant authorities to permit driving on either side according to one's fancy is that the *consequences* of such a permission are (likely to be) very bad, not that such a permission fails to respond in the right way to the wrongness of some acts. Similarly, the wrongness of letting someone win might not be grounded in the wrongness of their winning, for it might not be wrong for them to win.

The wrong of letting someone win plausibly highlights additional and different grounds for the wrongness of permissions. Again, different accounts might be given. According to one of them, it is wrong for me to allow you to win because my doing so amounts to a form of dishonesty: in the competitive context I present myself, if only by default, as trying to win and as therefore trying to prevent you from winning; but I am *not* trying to prevent you from winning. (Obviously, this cannot be the objection if I make it clear that I am letting you win.) According to another (not incompatible) account, my letting you win (whether deceptively or openly) involves a patronising and/or contemptuous attitude towards you. According to yet another (again, not incompatible with either of the preceding), it is unfair to others if I let *you* win, for that amounts to our working together (though perhaps unbeknownst to you) whereas each other competitor can rely only on their own efforts. Letting someone win might be wrong for some or all of these reasons, and/or for others besides – for example, that letting someone win deprives them of a chance to be properly tested so as to develop their talents, or deprives them of a loss from which they could learn.

An argument for the wrongness of permitting something which is based on the consequences need not be concerned with the consequences of acts *compared to the consequences of other acts*. It might be that the consequences of φ -ing are terribly bad, but that the consequences of trying to prevent anyone from φ -ing are no better than the consequences of permitting everyone to φ . (Perhaps whether or not we permit φ -ing would make no difference to whether anyone actually φ -s). If that were the case, there would be no reason to withhold permission on comparative consequentialist

grounds; but the bad consequences of φ -ing might give us reasons to withhold permission to φ nonetheless – because, for example, permission to φ would express indifference to the bad consequences of φ -ing. That is one reason why it can be permissive to allow something even if one could, in fact, do nothing to prevent it.

The preceding paragraph explains one way in which it can be permissive to allow what cannot, in fact, be prevented, even when one *knows* that prevention is impossible. But also, one might very well try to prevent something because one mistakenly *thinks* prevention possible. If it is wrong for *A* to allow *B*'s φ -ing when *B*'s φ -ing cannot, in fact, be prevented by *A* then that cannot be entirely because of the consequences, in respect of *B*'s φ -ing, for it makes no difference in respect of those consequences whether *A* allows *B* to φ or not: obviously *A*'s allowing *B* to φ can make no difference to whether *B* φ -s if *B*'s φ -ing is not preventable by *A*. But *A* might have an obligation to try to prevent *B* from φ -ing which is grounded in something other than the moral need to prevent *B*'s φ -ing. For example, *A*'s *trying* to prevent *B*'s φ -ing might serve a decisively valuable expressive purpose. Or *A* might have an obligation to try to prevent extremely bad or wrong things *when it seems to A that they can*, and this obligation presumably applies even when *A* is wrong in thinking that they can prevent the evil of *B*'s φ -ing.

Finally, for now, it is possible that permitting can itself make things worse. Not only can permitting something morally problematic represent a missed opportunity to prevent bad things from happening; it might be that in some circumstances, people are more likely to do bad things when permitted by an authority who might not have permitted them than they would be to do those things if no authority were present. This might be because permission can amount to tacit approval. So, it might be best to have an authority who (or which) does not permit, second best to have no authority at all, and *worst of all* to have an authority which permits.⁸

⁸ See, e.g., the discussion in Segal & Kohn (1959) of permissiveness as an influence on children's aggressive play.

I have given a (very incomplete) survey of some of the possible and, I think, real grounds of the wrongness of permissions in various contexts to illustrate and highlight the extent of their variety. This is partly because it is interesting that so broad a range of moral concerns give rise to plausible charges of permissiveness.⁹ But it also prepares the way for what follows, which is a pair of brief case studies. I will argue in each case that if there is a moral objection to be raised, it is plausibly an objection of permissiveness. But, as should not be surprising by the end of this section, I will not be assuming or arguing that these case studies are united by anything more than that. I certainly do not want to argue that in each case the permissions in question are wrong for the same reason, nor even for the same sort of reason.

4. Violent Sports

In what sense does a *sport* permit something? The most obvious way in which sports – as opposed to their officials – permit something is by having rules which do not count that thing as a foul or as an illegal action. There is a clear sense in which the rules of rugby union do not allow forward passes. What has this got to do with *trying to prevent*, or allowing as something which is *done*? Ideas of agency might be out of place here if taken literally; but there is at least a metaphorical sense in which the rules of rugby union try to prevent forward passes, by specifying a penalty for performing them and counting them as illegitimate. And if it is true that *the rules* are not trying to do anything, those who draw them up and enforce them are. We can at least charge a sport with permissiveness to the extent that its officials allow (i.e. do not enforce

⁹ Brännmark (2016) has articulated a form of ‘moral disunitarianism’ which holds that, especially with respect to applied ethics, the relevant normative principles might be rather different from case to case. What I have said in this section might be grist to that mill, or depend upon the tenability of that view; but I don’t think so. Brännmark distinguishes his view from the familiar normative pluralism of, e.g., Ross (1930). But it seems to me that such a pluralism might be all that is required for the claims I have made here.

penalties, sanctions or disqualifications for) things which ought not to be allowed for whatever reason, in so far as those officials are acting properly in respect of applying and enforcing the rules of that sport.

It is not only the codified rules of a sport which might be relevant here. Some sports, such as cricket, refer in their rules to the 'spirit of the game', and since what is penalised or disqualified (by officials officiating properly) will depend in some cases on what is and is not in the spirit of the game, the content of that spirit will be relevant to whether a sport is permissive, too – though it might be hard to say precisely what is and is not allowed by that spirit.¹⁰ Even when explicit reference to such a thing is not made in the operative codified rules, those officiating in sports will generally be called upon to make judgements which take into account nebulous and uncoded facts about what is acceptable and what isn't according to the current understanding of what the sport is all about and how its rules are to be interpreted.¹¹ (In this, of course, referees and umpires are not so different from judges, who must interpret and apply legislation in light of considerations which are far from black and white.)

A sport such as boxing permits fighters to do a great deal of deliberate violence to each other.¹² It is not only that its rules fail to penalise or disqualify a fighter from violent acts such as deliberately punching her opponent in the head. It is also that the spirit of the sport, in light of which referees officiate and promoters, managers and fans think about the sport and those who participate in it, sees such acts of violence not as regrettable necessities, but as perfectly inapt for censure. So, the spirit of the game doesn't even disallow deliberate violence by classifying it as the proper object

¹⁰ Actually, the spirit of the game is emphasised in the *preamble* to the MCC laws of cricket. See MCC (2017).

¹¹ This point deals with the fact that there are, e.g., no rules of football explicitly prohibiting hitting a member of the opposing team with a baseball bat: that is *not* permitted in football, because such actions *would* obviously be met with serious penalties by any official who was properly sensitive to the full range of norms by which the sport is played.

¹² For a discussion of 'violence' in this context, see Weimer (2012).

of regret, or of criticism, which might deter such violence. A plausible suggestion, then, is that the moral unease many people feel towards boxing and other combat sports is vindicated by the fact that those sports are permissive: they allow deliberate violence which should not be allowed.¹³

Combat sports such as boxing are not alone in permitting deliberate violence. Hard tackles, for example, are allowed by both the rules and spirit (and therefore the officials) of rugby and American football, and such tackles are clearly violent, and deliberately so. And it won't do to argue that in those sports the violence involved in hard tackles isn't intended to harm (although it foreseeably will), because often harm *is* intended, to intimidate or neutralise members of the opposing team.¹⁴ To various degrees, then, some non-combat full-contact sports will be permissive in the same way that boxing is. That is not to say, however, that those other full-contact sports are morally *as bad* as boxing: the deliberate violence they permit is much less than the deliberate violence allowed in boxing, for example.¹⁵ And one not unreasonable view is that their permissiveness is relatively innocuous enough to be outweighed in the all-things-considered moral reckoning by considerations such as the liberty of individuals to pursue activities they find rewarding – considerations which are to be taken into account in the all-things-considered moral reckoning of boxing, but which in that case do not outweigh the relatively much greater moral cost of that sport's greater permissiveness.

What I have said might meet with the following response: it is not the fact that serious harm is *allowed* which is morally problematic about boxing; it is the fact that

¹³ The penultimate paragraph of Section 3, above, suggests grounds for thinking the permissions to commit violent acts which are a feature of violent sports wrong: perhaps these permissions in fact *encourage* morally problematic violence which would not otherwise occur. But this might not be the explanation for the wrongness of these permissions; and, crucially for what I argue below, it might not be that the violence in question (whether encouraged or not) is itself wrong.

¹⁴ For some discussion of these points, see Dixon (2016).

¹⁵ See Dixon (2015: §6c).

serious harm is *likely*, or more likely than it is reasonable to countenance, and that participation in such sports *risks* doing – and perhaps suffering – serious harm. But focussing on the *risks* fails to account for something, namely the fact that many people feel what is arguably a reasonable moral repugnance at boxing and other combat sports which they do not feel towards rugby and other sports in which serious injury – and causing serious injury – is also very likely, and perhaps even more likely than in boxing.¹⁶

I am not the first to say or imply that a morally objectionable feature of combat sports is that they permit acts of violence which ought not to be permitted.¹⁷ But this suggestion tends to be run together with another point – which I think is taken to be more fundamental – about the risks or harms involved in boxing and similar combat

¹⁶ I have focussed on cases in which there is risk of one player causing harm to another, but there are plenty of ‘extreme sports’ which involve relatively high risks to oneself (such as competitive rock climbing) which might be usefully compared to combat sports in respect of our attitudes to their moral status for the purposes of this point.

¹⁷ See e.g. Parry (1998) and Herrera (2002). As Herrera says, ‘[t]he boxer who threatens to kill another can be just as determined to follow all the rules.’ (2002: pp. 168-9) The point, of course, is that those rules do nothing to prevent the boxer carrying out their threat, so long as they only do so by punching to the (front of the) head without being told to stop by the referee. (Incidentally, Herrera is too sanguine, I think, about the permissiveness of most martial arts (pp. 169, 170-1). It is true that twisting ankles, choking etc are part of several martial arts (such as judo and jiu jitsu) where those techniques are usually applied only until an opponent submits. But if they *don’t* submit, then you will not generally be penalised for continuing to apply pressure until, e.g., an ankle is broken.) I think Simon (1991: ch3) could also be construed as providing the basis for a permissiveness objection. He concludes that ‘If society should not glorify violence, and if violence in sports might contribute however indirectly to greater tolerance and commission of violence throughout society, or to the erosion of *defensible* community standards, we can be led by such considerations to freely, rationally, and autonomously choose to reduce the level of violence in sports’ (p. 64). We might argue, in tune with this, that the indirect effect is achieved by the permitting of violence in sporting contexts setting bad examples of *norms*, if not necessarily bad examples of behaviour. This relates to the point in the penultimate paragraph of §3, above.

sports. Usually, if it is mentioned that the rules of combat sports permit violence, and that this is morally significant, that is another way of putting the suggestion that what is wrong with those sports is that participants are put at excessive risk or are often harmed excessively.

I do not want to argue that focusing on the risks or harms involved in combat sports is a mistake – doing so might well afford a good account of at least one thing morally objectionable about them. But I should like to point out that permissiveness objections to combat sports need not be based upon risks or harms, and that our assessments of particular sports might be very different depending upon whether we object primarily to their permitting violence or to the risks and/or harms they involve.

To illustrate the difference focusing on permissiveness or focusing on risks or harms might make, consider the example of two different forms – or sets of rules, administered by different associations – of taekwondo. World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) rules allow kicks to the head, but not punches to the head: punches are allowed only to the body. (This is the type of taekwondo practiced in the Olympics.) Points are scored for clean, firm strikes, and a fighter can win by knock-out: as in boxing, there is no prohibition against hard strikes, however powerful, so long as they are legal in other ways. One rationale for prohibiting punches to the head is that given the extremely light gloves worn, allowing head punches (given that strikes are allowed to be as hard as is liked by the aggressor) would be excessively dangerous – a hard kick to the head is, of course, far more damaging than a hard punch; but the likelihood of receiving a clean hard head kick – and especially of receiving several – is much lower than the likelihood of being successfully punched – repeatedly – in the head. On the other hand, International Taekwondo Federation (ITF) rules *do* allow punches to the head, as well as head kicks. But the standard rules of ITF taekwondo explicitly prohibit

‘excessively hard’ contact.¹⁸

You might assume that ITF taekwondo is, therefore, safer. But that assumption might not be correct. It is quite possible that the risks of injury in ITF taekwondo are greater than those in WTF taekwondo: the chances of receiving a hard head shot in a WTF bout are relatively slim; but an ITF fighter might well end up receiving plenty of hard head shots (even if these invite penalties), since punches to the head are relatively easy to deliver and, whether or not the rules prohibit them, hard punches are likely as the fight progresses and fighters trade heavier and heavier blows. If we judge according to the risks, then, we might conclude that ITF taekwondo is morally worse than WTF taekwondo. But if we are judging those sports’ permissiveness, we should probably rank them the other way around, since the hard shots which cause harms in ITF taekwondo are not permitted (even though they are more likely).¹⁹

It might be thought that a similar thing could be said about the differences between amateur and professional boxing. (cf. Dixon (2015: pp. 369-70)) But there

¹⁸ For the relevant rules see: WTF (2017), esp.: art. 16.1 and 17-18.1; and ITF (2013), esp.: T 36a, 38b&i, and 39b (esp. (i)). Another safety-relevant difference between WTF and ITF rules is that ITF taekwondo requires more padded protective gear to be worn on hands and feet.

¹⁹ In practice, the *spirit* of ITF taekwondo probably means that in applying the rules referees and umpires allow contact which is every bit as hard as that permitted under WTF rules, at least when highly ranked competitors are fighting. So, the best considered judgement might be that one association’s rules are more permissive than the other’s in one sense, but that they are both more or less equally permissive in the most important sense, which takes into account not only the rules but also how they are applied (i.e. what is permitted *in practice*).

I have focused on head shots and associated risks here because concussion and brain injury associated with being knocked out or repeatedly hit in the head is a serious harm. In fact, according to one study, concussion is only the 6th most common form of injury in (WTF) taekwondo (Kazemi et al (2009)). But – even aside from the fact that the cuts, broken limbs and noses and sprains (sometimes to those attacking, rather than receiving an attack) which are more common still matter as harms – concussion has been shown to be twice as common in taekwondo as in college level American Football (Zemper & Pieter (1994)).

seems to be only a safety difference (if there is even that) between those two forms of boxing, and not a difference in how permissive they are: amateur rules only make it *less likely* that a fighter will, for example, be deliberately knocked out; they do not disqualify or otherwise penalise a fighter who deliberately knocks their opponent out by hitting them very hard. In so far as we are concerned with the permissiveness of rules which allow serious deliberate injury, then, amateur boxing is little, if any, better than professional boxing, though it might be safer.

A predictable objection goes as follows. All I have done with my suggestion that we focus on the rules of violent sports and what they permit is to *recast* the debate, but I have done nothing to *advance* it: we are only entitled to assert that it is wrong to permit violence if we have decided that violence is itself wrong in the relevant context; but whether or not some particular forms of violence *are* wrong *in the context of these sports* is precisely what is at issue. So, according to this objection, it might be right to say that the rules of some violent sports are permissive and that that is a way of seeing what is morally objectionable about those sports – but they are permissive only in virtue of the fact that the violence they permit is morally wrong, so focussing on the permissive nature of the rules is not going to make the moral status of those sports any more perspicuous than it is if we concentrate, as is traditional, on the rights or wrongs of the actions participants engage in.

But here our investigation of the structure and grounds of permissiveness above pays dividends. The objection I have just described assumes that if the rules of some sports are permissive, that must be in virtue of the wrongness of the violence which they permit. As we have seen, though, it is not safe to assume that the wrongness of permitting something is explained by the wrongness of what is permitted. Indeed, it is not even safe to assume that what is wrongfully permitted is itself wrong, either generally or even in the specific context in question. We should not assume, therefore, that all plausible vindications of the idea that the rules of some sports are permissive in respect of allowing violence which should not be allowed will mention the fact that the violence in question is itself wrong.

To see how it could easily be wrong to allow violence which is not itself wrong, consider the following. Plausibly, individuals have the (moral) right to defend themselves from (serious) physical harms by means of violent remonstrance with the perpetrators of those harms. What that amounts to, in many contexts, is a right to get into a fight with someone who is trying to do you serious harm. (Plausibly one also has the right to get into a fight with someone who would otherwise do serious harm to someone else – especially if that is someone for whose safety one has particular responsibility.) But this right of yours to have such a fight does not, presumably, undermine the responsibility of at least the law enforcement authorities (and perhaps of others, too) to intervene in order to put an end to such a fight, or to seek to prevent the fight from occurring (at least so long as it is safe for them to do so). So long as preventing or stopping your fighting does not put you at risk (by, for example, leaving you exposed to the attacks of your assailant who is *not* restrained), it seems like a clear responsibility of at least some people *not* to simply stand by and let the fight continue. It would, in fact, be *wrong* for them to allow it to continue. Here, then, is a case in which the wrongness of allowing violence is not explained with reference to the wrongness of the violence allowed: *your* violence towards your assailant ought not to be permitted (in the sense that at least some people have a duty to try to prevent or end it), even though it is not wrong for you to meet your assailant with violence.

We can easily imagine a version of the case in which *neither* fighter's violence is wrong, so the wrongness of allowing the fight to continue could not possibly be explained with reference to *any* wrongful violence: your assailant might herself be acting in self-defence, falsely believing (sincerely and as an epistemically respectable response to genuinely misleading evidence) that you pose an immediate and serious threat to her safety, meaning that both of you are engaged in self-defence fighting which, plausibly, cannot be condemned as wrong (though it might be very regrettable, given that it is all due to an unfortunate mistake). Here, we could not hope to explain the wrongness of law enforcement authorities (and perhaps others) not intervening by appealing to the wrongness of any of the violence involved, for there is no wrongful

violence involved.

Once we have understood that it can be morally wrong to allow violence which is not itself morally wrong (as the cases above show), we should be able to see that it is premature to assume that the permissiveness of some violent sports could only be understood if we already had an account of the wrongness of the violence they involve. It might be that focussing on their permissiveness really does afford interesting new perspectives on the moral status of those sports, which don't simply amount to recasting claims already substantiated by arguments about the morality of the violence itself. The self-defence examples I considered above seem to establish that there is a wrong in permitting violence which is not explained by the wrongness of the violence allowed. Call this the *act-independent wrongness* of permitting violence. We might simply argue that it is *always* an act-independent wrong to permit violence of a certain severity, and that some sports do allow violence of that severity, so they are morally problematic for that reason; or that at least in the case of sport, it is wrong to do so.²⁰

But what, specifically, could ground such a charge of act-independent wrongness with respect to permitting violence (of a certain severity) – a charge which is not based in any way upon the wrongness of the violence permitted? As I've already suggested, some role-responsibilities (e.g. those of the police officer) include particular responsibility for maintaining order, which includes preventing and stopping acts of violence on the part of others, regardless of whether those others are morally wrong

²⁰ I do not pretend to have shown that this argument is sound, and those who argue on libertarian grounds that permitting even extreme violence is not only morally unproblematic but even *required* in cases where consent is given by all relevant parties will (if they think consent *is* given in the right way by participants in these sports) simply reject the claim that it is always an act-independent wrong (or indeed any wrong) to permit violence of a certain severity. But I do think I've set out an argument which is *cogent*, and for illustrating the explanatory power of permissiveness I think that is enough for now: libertarians who would reject the premise under discussion here would presumably not think that there is any wrongness in these sports which requires explanation.

to engage in that violence (e.g., out of self-defence). More generally, though, we might say: permitting others to do violence to one another is bound up with the moral defect of lacking proper concern for the welfare of those whom one allows to be the victim of violence. Concern for others' welfare does not only require us to prevent harms done to them which are done by others acting wrongly: if that concern motivates us to prevent someone from being hungry by donating some food to them, there need be no question of their hunger being due to anyone's wrongdoing (it might just be that they are in unfortunate circumstances, which are nobody's fault). So, if proper concern for others' welfare requires us to prevent, where reasonable, violence being inflicted on them – or at least requires us to refrain from setting up practices and events in which such violence is explicitly permitted – that does not necessarily mean that the violence we are required not to permit is wrong. It is simply that in so far as we care about the welfare of others, we have reason – and perhaps decisive reason – to keep them safe, or at least not contribute to their being harmed by marking some acts of violence against them as permissible.²¹ This is just one suggestion, though; the broader dialectical point I am making does not depend upon the success of this particular proposal.

If it turns out that the violence they allow is also wrong in itself, then that might be *another* reason to condemn combat sports. But if their rules and officials are act-independently wrong for permitting that violence, they remain act-independently wrong for permitting it whether or not the violence is itself wrong, and the conclusion that those sports are morally problematic is sound regardless – and not because – of the moral valence of the violent acts themselves.

²¹ Note that this need not be a particularly paternalistic view: one might be under an individual obligation to prevent violence when one can, without that being associated with a general requirement to prevent any and all violence – even violence of that type. It is one thing to think that *you* ought not to stand by and allow harm to occur to others, but another (though not incompatible) to think that there ought to be some law, for example, prohibiting such harm. This is related to the general point about moral objections not requiring legal prohibitions touched upon in point (F) and fn.6 in §2, above.

The argument might be developed along the following lines, in order to vindicate two common moral intuitions – intuitions which are usually assumed to be unreconcilable. Participants in violent sports consent to be the objects of their opponents' violence. Indeed, they often don't just consent to be the objects of violence; they *want* to be: many a fighter wants to win the title the hard way, rather than the easy way, earning their victory by defeating an opponent on top form who fights hard, rather than by default because their opponent has fainted at the start of the first round. Plenty of philosophers and sportspeople will argue that this point about consent suffices to establish that there is nothing morally wrong with combat sports *per se* (although, of course, there might be serious questions about whether the 'consent' in question is of the most authentic kind in particular cases).²² So, there are two apparently plausible but *seemingly* incompatible ideas: first, that an opponent's consent renders a fighter's actions morally unobjectionable; and second, that there is something morally problematic about combat sports. But a way to accommodate both ideas is to argue that neither *fighter* acts wrongly in deliberately attacking their opponent (because they have consent for what they do), but the *sport* in which they are participating is objectionably permissive. This view has the advantage of doing justice to two strongly held moral intuitions – albeit that those intuitions tend not to be held by the same people. It is, in that way, a conciliatory account of the morality of combat sports, with the virtue of acknowledging what is plausible on what is often thought of as two opposing sides of the argument.

Regardless of those conciliatory merits of the view just sketched, focussing on

²² See e.g. Weimer (2012). Dixon (2015; 2016: §3) argues on supposedly Kantian grounds that consent does not suffice to render unproblematic what amounts to treating another person merely as a means to one's end, as (he argues) is the case in boxing and similar sports when a fighter 'objectifies' their opponent in trying to hurt and incapacitate them. I do not wish to endorse Dixon's reasoning here, but I do agree with him that consent does not suffice to make violent actions morally unproblematic. So, the argument I develop in this paragraph is offered to others, rather than being one I would endorse myself.

the permissiveness of sports such as boxing rather than on the moral status of the acts which participants engage in allows us to distinguish, in a nice way, between the morality of *boxing* and the morality of *the boxer*. Imagine a boxer who scruples at hitting her opponent once it is clear she has won on points, minimising the harm she inflicts (though still trying to win). We might object to her willingness to do even enough to win, but if we object to the violence involved in boxing we should probably say that she is morally better than the boxer who thrashes her opponent with all her might, even once it is clear she has won. Nonetheless, we might want to say that the sport in which both boxers are participating is bad *per se* – the same sport, and as bad *qua sport* in each case. It is easy to see how the sport is as morally objectionable *per se* in respect of its permissiveness: the boxer with scruples doesn't take full advantage of the opportunities for violence which the sport affords, but she is allowed to if she wants to just as the boxer without scruples is. On the other hand, focussing on the wrongness of the acts performed by each boxer makes it hard to sustain the judgment that boxing *per se* is equally morally problematic in each case: the second boxer is more brutal in her actions than the first, and if this is what the wrongness of their sport depends upon we should say that the sport is less problematic when practiced by one than by the other. I don't expect that this differential judgement about the moral character of different boxing matches captures all that is concerning to those who object to boxing *as a sport* – although, of course, even those who think that there is something equally objectionable about all boxing matches might well distinguish between the more and less brutal ones, criticising *the boxers* differentially even as they judge *their sport* in the same way.

5. Noxiously Permissive Markets

Just as sports and games are governed by rules and by 'spirits' which inform the interpretation and application of those rules, markets in various goods are also governed by both formal and informal devices and rules for allowing and prohibiting

or penalising particular (types of) transactions. And just as referees and umpires officiate to apply the penalties provided for in the rules of each sport, to prevent certain forms of conduct, law enforcement agencies, regulatory authorities and the courts impose penalties on individuals, companies and all manner of other market agents to prevent certain (types of) transactions from occurring.

In virtue of these features, markets can be said to permit some transactions, and to try to prevent (i.e. not permit) others. They are therefore apt to be permissive, if some of the transactions they permit ought not to be permitted. And the best explanation of what is morally problematic about markets in certain goods or services might well be that they are permissive.

Philosophers have tried to articulate the theoretical basis for some widely held views about the proper limits of markets, and about the threat of ‘commodification’ posed by the extension of market mechanisms into domains which have traditionally not been governed by market norms and forms of exchange, or which ought plausibly not to be governed by such norms.²³ But Brennan & Jaworski (2015a; 2015b) have highlighted the way in which many of the arguments offered by these philosophers are problematic.²⁴ The permissiveness objection, however, is immune to many, at least, of the criticisms which have been levelled at other accounts of the wrongness of particular markets.

Before addressing its immunity to these criticisms, I should illustrate how the permissiveness objection might go. Start from the simple idea that there are people who should not have particular things (goods or services), perhaps because they do

²³ See, e.g., Anderson (1993), Radin (1993), Satz (2010), and Sandel (2012).

²⁴ See also Duxbury (1996) for an earlier discussion along similar lines. Duxbury says in passing that ‘[t]he use of the pricing system to encourage environmental responsibility has traditionally met with the objection that monetary valuations of environmental degradation destigmatise particular polluting activities by making them *permissible* at a price’ (p. 336, my emphasis). I think, whilst they have not discussed permissiveness very explicitly or carefully, many who have objected to markets have been moved by the sort of objection I am developing here.

not *deserve* them – or perhaps because those things are *needed* by others instead. It would not be unnatural to argue that a market which *indiscriminately* permits the acquisition of things is permissive, since those who don't deserve things, or whose need is trivial compared to the need of others etc., ought, in at least some cases, not to be allowed them.²⁵

Talk of what the *market* permits in respect of acquisitions or the enjoyment of services might be taken as figurative. But where a market exists, that is at least partly a matter of certain regulatory authorities, legal agencies, government and all manner of individuals being prepared to allow exchanges of goods and services on the basis of monetary consideration (in the legal sense of 'consideration', not necessarily the sense in which 'monetary consideration' means *thinking about* money). What these agents permit, in so far as they are acting in their capacity as regulators, facilitators and arbitrators of or in markets, is what the market permits. And if they fail to discriminate, with respect to the transactions they allow, on the basis of desert – or on the basis of some other important moral consideration, such as need – between would-be buyers of goods and/or services, then the market is indiscriminate.

It is often argued that what is morally objectionable about markets is that they change and/or degrade the attitudes of those who participate in them towards the goods or services being bought and sold. This is what is often meant by talk of

²⁵ This is not the only way to motivate a permissiveness objection to a particular market. The need based version of this argument has affinities with, but wouldn't be quite the same as, the medieval and early modern 'right of necessity' doctrine (see Mancilla (2017) for a defence of this right, some references to classic sources, and discussion). As far as the desert version of the argument is concerned, more would need to be said to accommodate a point about the distinction between moral desert and other proper determinants of rights nicely articulated (in a different context) by Putnam: 'we have to know and *say* that if everyone *should* have the *legal* right to "do pretty nearly as he pleases," it does not follow that one *deserves* that right as a matter of course. Some people are *morally* underserving of rights that it would be wrong to take away from them. Some of one's rights should be *earned*, morally speaking' ([1992] 1994 p. 188).

‘commodification’: goods or services which should be valued in a certain way are, by virtue of being priced and exchanged for money, thought of in a rather different way. But Brennan & Jaworski (2015a) make an important point, which is frequently made by market enthusiasts: those who buy and sell things (including services) in market exchanges do not necessarily value what they are buying or selling any less or any differently from those who have or exchange those things outside of markets. Art lovers who buy paintings might see the art they have bought as *aesthetically* valuable in just the laudable way a person who enjoys the art in a public museum would; they need not necessarily see it as merely an investment or status symbol. So, we had better not argue that markets necessarily – or even, perhaps, *probably* – give valuable things to people who won’t value them properly and therefore don’t deserve them, or degrade them by their lack of appreciation.

Proponents of the permissiveness objection would not be embarrassed by this, though. Regardless of whether those who buy and sell things in certain markets *do* value them in appropriate ways, the market is indifferent to how goods or services are valued, and it *permits* those who value things in inappropriate ways to have them all the same. Here, the permissiveness objection builds upon point (D) of Section 2, above: it can be permissive (i.e. wrong) to permit what is not *actually* done, for it can be wrong to permit what *might* be done but, as a matter of fact, isn’t. This general point about permissiveness was made, above, with respect to other ordinary cases of permissiveness – so it would not be ad hoc for a proponent of the permissiveness objection to markets to claim that markets are problematic not because of what happens (in respect of participant’s attitudes), but what those markets *permit* to happen (in respect of what is acquirable by those with inappropriate attitudes – regardless of whether anyone with those inappropriate attitudes actually acquires things via those markets). So, those who remind us that markets do not necessitate – and perhaps do not even promote – inappropriate valuing of things might have a cogent rebuttal of the commodification objection which relies upon assumptions about the actual valuing of things which goes on in markets. But they have no reply

to the permissiveness objection unless they can argue that markets don't even *allow* those who value things inappropriately to have them. It is hard to see how such an argument could be made without undermining the idea that what is being discussed is a (free) *market*.²⁶

Similarly, Brennan & Jaworski (2015a) argue at length that what they call 'semiotic' objections to markets fail, because they depend upon the problematic attitudes or ideas *expressed in* participation in certain markets. They argue that what is expressed in a transaction is contingent, and that a change of social attitudes towards the buying and selling of something might make it the case that what used to be seen as, for example, disrespectful no longer is (they cite our changed attitudes towards life insurance). So, they argue, semiotic objections to markets are not objections to markets *per se*, since it is always in principle possible to have the market without the problematic attitudes supposedly expressed.

Again, the permissiveness objection is prone to no such counterargument. Whilst *what is expressed* by some market transaction, or by the existence of a market, is arguably contingent, as Brennan & Jaworski claim, *whether something is permitted* by a particular market (constituted in a particular way) is *not* contingent: the market *just is* a set of facts about which transactions are permitted, and how they are to be conducted. So, whilst it might make sense to suggest that we ought to revise the way we interpret market transactions, it can make no sense to say that we ought to revise the facts about how a particular market permits certain transactions, without changing the nature of that market. To that extent at least, the permissiveness objection targets

²⁶ Of course, those who wish to rebut the permissiveness objection will be on much better ground if they focus their attention instead upon the assumption that how people value things is sufficiently important to make their having those things morally problematic if they value them inappropriately, or on the assumption that there is such a thing as inappropriate valuation. I think those assumptions are sound, but again my purpose is to articulate an argument, not to fully defend it. And it might not be *valuing inappropriately* which is permissively allowed at all. It might be their mere undeserved or unneeded *having* of something which is allowed where it ought not to be, as noted above.

the essence, and not merely some contingent feature, of particular markets.

There is another defence against so-called commodification objections to which the permissibility objection is immune. Brennan & Jaworski (2015a; 2015b) argue that only if the *possession* or *use* of some good or service is itself wrong can a market in that thing be wrong (unless the market breaks the rules of honesty and information required for fair markets) – and they argue that it is always *because* possessing or using that thing is wrong that a market in it is or would be wrong. The conclusion drawn from this is that it is never the *market* per se which is morally problematic – unless it is problematic *qua* market, by being a monopoly or depending upon deception, for example. But recall point (C) of Section 2, above: it can be permissive (i.e. wrong) to allow even what is it is not wrong to do. So, it need not only be markets in things such as child pornography which would be wrong, because having such things is itself wrong. It might also be that markets are problematic in virtue of *how* they facilitate the transfer of goods or provision of services, regardless of the merits or moral status of (having) the goods or (using the) services being exchanged. (Here, the points about *indiscriminate* markets sketched above might be relevant.) Since it is part of the logic of permissiveness that it does not depend upon the wrongness of what is permitted, permissiveness objections to markets would not necessarily be undermined by the observation that what is being bought and sold is not in itself objectionable. Again, this point about the logic of permissiveness was made, above, in a perfectly general context, so this would not be an ad hoc point for a critic of particular markets to make.

Permissiveness objections might target non-market exchanges as much as markets. If a market in sexual acts is permissive, social norms which allow casual sex might also be permissive. This parity of objectionability is sometimes taken (by Brennan & Jaworski (2005a: pp. 1072-3), for example) to show that there is nothing objectionable about markets per se. But from 'A and B are both objectionable in virtue of having feature F', it does not follow that 'A is not objectionable for having feature F' (quite the reverse, in fact). Permissibility objections might well be raised against markets *and* other institutions or social arrangements.

Finally, recall our discussion, in Section 3, above, of the various grounds of permissiveness. It might be that what is morally problematic about the market permitting certain transactions is that that permission has bad consequences. Perhaps, for example, merely *permitting* those who don't deserve things to have them undermines the bonds of social cohesion. Envy being a powerful emotion, it might be that if it is widely known that important goods *may* be owned by those who don't deserve them, it would be common to regard those goods as *actually* owned undeservedly in a great many cases (regardless of whether or not that is true) with the result that property rights are not respected as diligently as ought to be the case for the sake of civil society and the economy. It need not be the case, therefore, that permissiveness objections to markets can only be made on the sorts of non-consequentialists grounds (to do with fairness or the intrinsic importance of desert or need) suggested above.

6. Conclusion

I have not had space to argue in this paper that the permissiveness objections to violent sports or markets in certain goods and services I have sketched are ultimately convincing. But I hope to have shown some of the ways in which moral philosophers can make progress in doing justice to some strong intuitions by appealing to permissiveness as a feature of some things and as a distinctive wrong which is not reducible to other, more often discussed, wrongs. Not that permissiveness is only interesting as a way of vindicating intuitions: it might well prove to be a powerful idea for all sorts of purposes in moral and political philosophy. We should, therefore, take care to understand both its general character and the interestingly different ways in which it is manifested.

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