

# Aetiology and Mutability of Commodification

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## Abstract

Concerns over the erosion of a comprehensive public conception of morality are longstanding in political philosophy, but while some contemporary political philosophers see the relevant cause as being an increase in the acceptance of ethical relativism, others see this trend as the result of an increased intrusion of a market-based ethos into various social spheres that have traditionally been the province of non-market values. Thus while both accounts agree on the normative claim that there are certain values appropriate to particular areas of our lives, and on the descriptive claim that these values seem to be under threat, each postulate a different aetiology for the perceived phenomenon. This paper tentatively accepts the two claims over which both accounts agree, and examines the question over which they do not; the issue of causation, as well as looking at the feasibility and desirability of reversing the perceived progression. Taking into account cross-cultural longitudinal empirical studies of attitudinal change towards various socio-cultural issues, this paper postulates in qualified accordance with the first proposed aetiology, suggesting ethical and cultural pluralism to be prior to market forces, while accepting the probability that each play a significant role, and looks at the likelihood and advisability of change.

## Introduction

In an article entitled "On Morals and Markets" Barry Schwartz discusses the corrosive effect he considers the market to have upon social morality (Schwartz, 1994.) This morality, which he describes as the 'moral sense', is a concept he adapts from James Wilson, expanded upon in his eponymous book which Schwartz reviews. In *The Moral Sense*, Wilson argues for the existence of a social morality, varying in expression across cultural contexts, but universally centering around four qualities; sympathy, fairness, self control and duty, sharing common origin in our 'natural sociability' (Wilson, 1993.) Profoundly influenced by gender and culture and strengthened by social practices, Wilson sees these virtues as nevertheless vulnerable to attack from the onslaught of Marxism, utilitarianism, analytic philosophy, psychoanalysis, and in particular (and as a consequence of the other four) ethical relativism. Schwartz broadly agrees with Wilson on the existence and nature of the moral sense, but considers that he has overlooked its chief adversary. Both Wilson and Schwartz consider morality to revolve around commitment; obligation and duty, and Wilson describes the nature of moral erosion as the replacement of the idea of commitment with that of choice.<sup>(1)</sup> Given its emphasis on choice, Schwartz considers the market to be the most likely mechanism of this change. Yet regardless of whether one shares Wilson's and Schwartz's belief regarding moral fundamentals, if one agrees firstly that these particular virtues are significantly constitutive of social morality, secondly that their role is a desirable one, and thirdly that they may well be threatened, then one may share these concerns. But should we accept the claim that the social role of sympathy, fairness, self control and duty are threatened by an expansion of market influenced ethics (or lack thereof)? What sort of a case does Schwartz make?

## Morality and the Market

Schwartz suggests that the values and behaviour engendered by participation in the market directly undermine each

of the social virtues both he and Wilson embrace. Sympathy, according to Schwartz, relies upon an 'other-regarding', altruistic perspective; the ability, as he puts it, to envision walking a mile in another's shoes. By emphasising the anonymity and fungibility of buyers and sellers and by increasingly operating over long distances, Schwartz considers the market to foster distant and impersonal social relations; the 'antithesis of what sympathy seems to require.' He suggests that self control finds scant reward in the market, with the pressure to quickly and maximally reward shareholder investment encouraging 'short-termism', and what Schwartz terms 'me-first management', constituting, in his view, 'pure greed', and cites Derek Bok's exploration of the matter in 'The cost of talent' (Bok, 1993.) Furthermore, Schwartz suggests that the market undermines self control in consumers as well. Noting Wilson's claim that addiction is the ultimate enemy of self control, Schwartz suggests that the rise and rise of consumerism, or 'thing addiction', represents the greatest increase in addiction in contemporary western society, and one that is actually endorsed by contemporary social values. Anti-consumerism, Schwartz claims, is perceived as down right unpatriotic, at least in the United States. With regard to fairness, Schwartz has a little more empirical muscle up his sleeve. Citing research by Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler into people's intuitive reactions to hypothetical transactions in "Fairness as a Constraint of Profit Seeking", and their findings that the 'overwhelming majority of people have a strong sense of what is fair', Schwartz notes further studies where the same hypothetical transactions were proposed to MBA students and to CEOs. Both studies found the target groups to have far more lenient approaches regarding the reasonable constraints posed by notions of fairness to profit maximisation. In addition, he cites studies of undergraduate student performance both in the Prisoner's Dilemma and the 'Ultimate Bargaining Game' which found considerable disparity between economics majors and other undergraduate students on apparent attitudes towards fairness. Finally, considering free riding to represent the

antithesis of duty, Schwartz observes that economics students interviewed in the same studies were far more approving of free riding, it being, as he is keen to point out, rational, self interested behaviour. Thus Schwartz considers that participation in and exposure to the market undermines each of the constituent virtues of the moral sense. Yet is this necessarily the case?

Even if we accept that economics students are prone to free riding and that MBA students and CEOs consider questions of fairness to be comparatively irrelevant, this does not demonstrate that the market made them so. Perhaps these individuals already exhibited these tendencies, and were attracted to a career in the market in order to most profitably exploit them. In contrast to Schwartz, one might note, Wilson considers the market to be a beneficial institution, encouraging pacification and social stability, and necessitating fiduciary relationships. Wilson embraces the position of the economist Albert Hirschman that 'the pursuit of one's interests, in markets, was an enormous improvement on the world of Hobbes, in which people pursued their passions, often on battlefields.' Yet while Schwartz concedes this point, he suggests that the same institution may perform different roles in different historical contexts (as indeed does Hirschman) and notes the view of another economist, Fred Hirsch, who stated some time ago that while the market depends upon a moral sense it simultaneously undermines it. Indeed, even Friedrich Hayek, in his swan song; *The Fatal Conceit*, declares the market to depend upon the limits offered by traditional morality for its own protection lest it undermine itself (Hayek, 1988.) Thus perhaps we may allow that Schwartz's views on the morally corrosive nature of the market carry some weight. And he is certainly not alone in his views.

### Commodification and the Domino Effect

One of the more comprehensive treatments of this issue is offered by Margaret Jane Radin in *Contested Commodities* (Radin, 1996.) Radin considers that the market tends to erode other value systems as market-based evaluations or conceptions of things tend to replace alternative evaluations or conceptions, a process she describes as the 'domino effect.' As Radin sees it, all things which (properly) exist within the market domain have a value that is explicable wholly in term of dollars and cents. As such the value of any thing within this domain is completely commensurable with- and exchangeable with- any other. Furthermore, given this commensurability, all things with a comparable value may be considered entirely fungible. All things within the market domain thus become commodities; a price may be put on each. Yet some things, Radin holds, are not appropriately conceived of in this fashion. Their value is not wholly commensurable with the value of other things, but is instead both intrinsic and specific to their nature. These are the things one should not put a price on.

The problem, in Radin's view, is that we have something of an inevitable tendency to commodify. Should we begin to conceive of these things in market terms, these market-based conceptions and evaluations will replace their prior nonmarket alternatives, for the two cannot coexist. As she puts it; 'We can not know the price of something and know at the same time that it is priceless.' (Radin, 1986.) In this fashion, we lose the nonmarket sense of the value of things, and they slide into the market domain. Thus as soon as something begins to be 'partially commodified', that is, as soon as the first commodified understanding or evaluation of a given thing enters public discourse, then it begins its inevitable journey down the slippery slope of our conceptualisation towards complete commodification; being

understood and valued solely in market terms. Furthermore, commodification is taken to be contagious, not simply within the realm of one kind of object or relation (where any instances of commodification of that thing will lead to its complete commodification), but also between different objects and relations, leading, eventually, to a state of universal commodification. For example, certain instances of the commodification of sex will lead not only to the complete commodification of sex, but also to the complete commodification of related concepts and phenomena, such as romance, friendship, the body, reproduction and so on. When one domino falls in this fashion, it begins an inevitable cascade until all are down:

To summarize: The domino theory holds that there is a slippery slope leading from the toleration of any sales of something to an exclusive market regime for that thing; and there if a further slippery slope from a market regime for some things to a market regime encompassing everything people value. The domino theory implicitly makes two claims: first, as a background normative premise, that it is important for a nonmarket regime to exist; and second, as an empirical premise, that a nonmarket regime can not coexist with a market regimes. The market version drives out the nonmarket version, hence the market regime must be banned.

Of course Radin is not the first to discuss such things. The concept of the slippery slope towards complete commodification is one she takes from Lukacs, and the concept of a domino effect is one articulated, albeit in a different form, by Michael Walzer in *Spheres of Justice* (Walzer, 1983) where he discusses the propensity of the market sphere to invade the other spheres (public, personal and so on); a process he describes as 'market imperialism.' Walzer also discusses the necessity for 'blocked exchanges'; the prevention of the sale of a number of things which, in his view, should not be marketable, such as public office, friendship and 'desperate exchanges' (those exchanges so exploitative as to occur only because of the desperation of one party), in order to prevent it. However, Radin considers that theorists such as Walzer too narrowly conceive of the number of paths of market domination; complaining that 'the traditional view is wrong in granting too much ground to the market.' In specifying a limited number of exchanges that are to be prevented by market exclusion, Radin fears that Walzer, and those who follow his lead, abandon all else to inevitable commodification. She instead emphasises the necessity to be wary of the commodification of a much greater variety of things, and to salvage their nonmarket meanings, stating that 'the way to a less commodified society is to see and foster the nonmarket aspect of much of what we buy and sell, rather than to erect a wall to keep a certain few things completely off the market and abandon everything else to market rationality.' (Radin, 1996) But are her fears justified? Do market-based evaluations inevitably and completely replace alternative evaluations? And if this process is inevitable, then how are we to stand in its way?

If, for example, we accept Radin's claim that we cannot both know the price of something and know that it is priceless; if commodified conceptions drive out the noncommodified conceptions of 'much of what we buy and sell' (rendering their commodification complete) then how are to be expected to 'see and foster' their 'nonmarket aspects'? Conversely, if these aspects can be adequately appreciated; can be 'seen and fostered' despite the fact that these things are (at least to some degree) commodified -we are buying and selling them after all-, then does this undermine the domino theory; is it less of a threat than Radin makes out? And it would seem reasonably clear that we can see and foster the nonmarket aspects of much of those things

threatened by the tide of commodification; Radin's own work is testament to this. One of these claims must give to the other; either we can maintain both a commodified and non-commodified conception of that which we market, we can know that (at least some of) these things are both priceless and have a price, or we will be unable to see and foster the nonmarket aspects of that which we buy and sell. Indeed, practically speaking, we frequently conceive of things in two independent fashions. Wherever we consider something to have a use value as well as an exchange value, as is the case with a great many consumable items, we know the price of it (or can easily find out) at the same time as valuing it along entirely different lines. Indeed, it is the use value, in combination with various market forces, which sets the commercial value of a great number of commodities.

Radin's contention can be roughly separated into a conceptual claim and an empirical claim; the former holding that we are simply unable to conceive of something both in market and nonmarket terms, and the latter holding that the more we become acquainted with conceiving of something in market terms, the more unlikely it is that we will conceive of it in nonmarket terms, as the commodified conception becomes increasingly prevalent. Now while the conceptual claim seems unfeasible, can we give more credence to the empirical claim? There are certainly examples to be raised against it.

Perhaps the strongest example against the domino effect is that of sex. Sex has existed in commodified forms for thousands of years (often being colloquially referred to as the 'oldest profession'.) Were any but the weakest interpretation of the domino theory to hold true in this case, then all understandings of sex, and indeed of those things strongly associated with sex should be by now completely commodified, and it would be extremely unlikely that any noncommodified understandings of it should exist. This is patently not the case. Of course, this is not to deny that instances of commodified sex have not increased, even considerably, in our society at least. Yet given that commodified sex has existed for so long in a great variety of cultures, the recalcitrant existence of noncommodified conceptualisations of sex speak strongly against the theory. But can we extend this beyond the example of sex? One critic of Radin's, Eric Mack, believes that we can (Mack 1989.)

He raises two anecdotal examples of gift giving, one of a sweater to his wife, the other of a litre of blood donated on his sick friend's behalf (who has required a litre of blood) to the blood bank in lieu of a charge of \$50. In the first case, he considers the fact that he would buy his wife a sweater rather than giving her the money to do so herself, or a certificate for that amount, despite the difficulty and probable inaccuracy of his choice, as testament to the persistence of the noncommodified aspects of gift giving. Similarly, in the latter case, he considers the fact that he would donate a litre of blood on his friend's behalf even though he probably not give him the \$50 to compensate the blood bank, nor sell a litre of his blood for \$50, demonstrates the complex social relations within which many acts of exchange occur that are not themselves commodified in nature. Hence according to Mack there are various social and sentimental values which, like use values, persist in spite of and remain independent of their commodified rivals.

In addition, one might note that many cases of commodification that draw the greatest degree of concern; commercial surrogacy, the sale of cell lines and organs and so on, are increases that have resulted as much from the progress in new technology (biotechnology in particular) as from permissive attitudes towards the market. Whether or not people would have objected to the purchase of organs fifty years ago, such purchase would

have been pointless before transplant techniques had advanced sufficiently. Similarly, only since the study of cellular development and differentiation has come into its own have cell lines become exchange commodities, only since fertility enhancement procedures have become reliable have people's gametes, and wombs, gained a notable monetary value. As such it may not be clearly discernable as to whether there is a commodifying effect independent of the effect of technological advance in these kinds of situations.

Yet even if commodification does proceed into the realm of social relationships, Mack suggests that this may be cause for celebration rather than consternation; holding that '[o]ne great liberating feature of the market order is the way it challenges existing social patterns' and that '[a]nother liberating feature of the market is precisely its depersonalization and monetization of otherwise oppressive and intrusive relations. One is freed from society as one big family'. He considers that 'the alternative to the society of contract is the society of status', and that '[w]hile the latter may provide its creatures with a sense of self and place, it is an assigned self and a confined place.' Mack sees the instrumental relationships of the market as the building blocks for social relations, and social relations that, being pursued by choice, are free from the tyranny of uniformity.

It is precisely these networks that make possible the great variety of chosen areas for self-fulfilment that characterizes pluralistic liberal societies. These impersonal ties, which sustain a pluralist pursuit of personhood and community because they do not require uniformity of belief in substantive values, are constituted by market relations that are motivated largely by anticipated monetary payoffs.

Mack argues that the erosion of and distraction from certain values by the market can be a good thing, for not all intrinsically valued things are lovely. If the market may be used to render certain pursuits (his example is sadism) costly, then so much the better. Indeed, this is much the same thinking as underpinned the championing of the market some two centuries ago as a mechanism to quell the dynastic feuds and ongoing wars that rendered economic relationships unprofitable. In a similar vein, another writer, David Smith, focuses on the market's beneficial capacity to neutralise noxious political and social discourse (Smith, 1994).

## Sacralisation: Turning the Tide of Commodification

Describing above the potential for intrinsic goods to evolve from instrumental ones, Mack touches upon the possibility for the reversal of commodification. The halting of the market tide is one thing (through recalcitrant non-market evaluations), but the turning of it another. Again, there are strong counterexamples to Radinesque contentions.

Both marriage and rape were once the domain of property law, even half a century ago. A wife was quite literally her husband's chattel, and appropriation of her by another a crime against him rather than her. Furthermore, he was immune to prosecution should he have forced non-consensual intercourse with her himself (how can one appropriate that which one already owns?) This is no longer the case in either instance. Yet when it comes to chattels, there is probably no clearer example of wrongful commodification than that of slavery. For a person to be owned or traded offends the sensibilities of even the keenest advocate of market values. But again, this commodification has been (thankfully) reversed. Of course, slavery- or something very close to it- still exists in various forms, but it is at least bereft of the endorsement it otherwise once had in (nominally) demo-



cratic societies. In addition, as Viviana A. Zelizer discusses in *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Value of Children* (Zelizer, 1985), two centuries ago children, particularly among the working class, were valued heavily for their potential for economic production. One hundred years ago processes of reform were initiated in various western countries to change both the nature of their occupation and the spirit of their value. Zelizer describes the process common to each of these examples where economic value is gradually reinvested with social, spiritual or sentimental meaning as sacralisation. Sacralisation occurs, as attested by these and many other examples, and, as Zelizer notes, while a great deal of attention has been paid towards commodification, comparatively little has been paid to its reverse.

However, little attention does not mean no attention at all. In 1900, as Zelizer notes, George Simmel, in *The Philosophy of Money*, traced the 'historical dissociation of money and values'. According to Zelizer, Simmel attributed this dissociation to a radical change in the value of the person and the value of money. While the latter, in Simmel's view, progressed from an often ritualistic, sacred role to a more mundane everyday one, the former progressed from a 'relativised concept of human life' which 'made its quantification legitimate' to one sacralised by Christianity which set 'life above any financial consideration.' While Simmel, prophesying the attitudes of many contemporary thinkers, considered there to be a 'radical contradiction and necessary tension between a monetary economy and personal values', he considered that this served to obstruct the expansion of the market. Yet his thought was not free of the anxiety of more recent theorists; considering that this means of protection was vulnerable, even precarious; holding that 'the more money dominates interests and sets people and things into motion, the more objects are produced for the sake of money and are valued in terms of money, the less can the value of distinction be valued in men and in objects' and that pricing would inevitably trivialise value. Thus in Simmel's work we find an exposition both on sacralisation and on commodification, more than one hundred years ago. Furthermore, if we take his lead, we will find the examples of sacralisation, and those of resistance to commodification less reassuring than we might. Thus Simmel's work raised two points of interest.

Firstly, while we may consider Margaret Jane Radin's explanation of the domino effect conceptually unfeasible, and her empirical concerns a touch paranoid, the refutations offered by those like Mack may be similarly limited. Mack may prefer to buy his wife a sweater than to give her the money, or a gift certificate, but gift certificates abound. Indeed, now even banks have started putting out gift cards that can be used in any store that uses bank cards. Thus the symbolic differentiation between the gift cards and simply gifts of cash has dwindled to the infinitesimal (particularly when the majority of transactions in most shops probably occur via one kind of bank card or another anyway.) The increase in biotechnological commercialisation discussed earlier; the sale in cell lines, organs, and in the use of one's womb may be novel phenomena which are in response (in some significant part) to increased technological capacity, but this does not explain away the expansion of commodification represented by the extension of biotechnological intellectual property rights to the discovery of new proteins, new gene sequences, and even new life forms, where once such rights could previously apply only to inventions, and never to life forms. Furthermore, the expansion of the role of the market in many contemporary western liberal societies to one that runs not only private companies but public infrastructure and even essential services (going well beyond the domain that Friedrich Hayek recommended) seems

unlikely not to influence a corresponding expansion in market ethos. Hence while we may not agree with the extent of Radin's concerns, we may accept a more attenuated form of the domino effect, and this, in turn, raises a pair of concerns.

On the one hand the market may well undermine the moral sense, as described by Schwartz and Wilson, and indeed various other social values that we may consider beneficial. To the extent that this may safely be taken to be a bad thing, then we ought to do something to prevent it. On the other hand the market, as Fred Hirsch pointed out more than twenty years ago, may undermine itself, if left unchecked. One need not be a one-eyed apologist for freemarket thinking to see that the market confers certain benefits. As Mack points out, it can liberate us from oppressive social relations, and distract us from or combat various undesirable phenomena and behaviours. As Smith notes, it can neutralise noxious political discourse. As Hirschman stresses, it can insulate us from Hobbes's state of nature. Indeed, even Barry Schwartz admits the market does do some good things (so long, one presumes, as it is kept in its place.) If we are to capitalise on these benefits, we may need to save the market from itself.

The second point of interest raised by Simmel is the role he attributes to Christianity in the process of sacralisation. While it may seem tautological to say that a religion will play a role in sacralisation, we should keep in mind that he and Zelizer do not intend the term to literally mean 'make sacred', but to reinvest value, and indeed to describe the fashion in which value may come to determine price (or, in the strongest cases, pricelessness). Recall Simmel's claim that the pre-Christian, relativistic ethical framework enabled the quantification of life, but the later sacristy afforded to life by Christianity raised it above any fiscal equivalent. Now describing the pre-Christian ethical climate as 'relativistic' may seem presumptuous, but there is undeniably a rejection of material and economic value central to Christianity. Indeed, Jonathan Sacks focuses on the otherworldly and nonmaterialist nature of Christianity in contradistinction to the emphases of its Jewish lineage in his article, "Markets and Morals" where he discusses the merits of Judaism as possessing both the economic and materialist rationality and the emphasis on moral meaning and spiritual ritual that may offer the kind of contemporary salvation which the market, according to Hayek, needs (Sacks, 2000.) Christianity has had an undeniable role (at least in the West) in forging a division between material success and moral achievement. The pre-Christian age may well have seen the two as more commensurable, even interdependent. Perhaps even Simmel's accusations of relativism may find support. However, while I will not here attempt an in-depth exploration of the validity of this final claim, we might note its resonance with Wilson's warnings regarding the contemporary attack on the moral sense: ethical relativism is once more in the sights. But is relativism, once merrily enabling the commodification of all things, shackled for an all-too-brief two thousand years by Christianity's suspicion of false idols, really resurging to tear down the moral dam that restrains the tide of market imperialism?

### Pluralism, Liberalism, Communitarianism

One thing that has seen a considerable growth in recent decades is multiculturalism, particularly in western liberal democratic societies, and with multiculturalism comes value, or ethical, pluralism. Different cultures have, to a greater or lesser extent, different systems of value, and the way they evaluate a given thing may vary greatly. Ethical pluralism does not necessarily entail ethical relativism. Ethical relativism essentially holds

that the validity of any moral judgement is entirely relative to the speaker's subjective perspective; X is right or wrong if and only if X is right or wrong for me. It denies any objective claims about the rightness or wrongness of moral propositions, essentially denying that there are any objective standards by which their validity may be measured. As such there is no standard by which a given moral or ethical value judgement, doctrine or perspective may be demonstrated to be more or less valid than another. Ethical pluralism does not go this far. Pluralism allows that there may be a plurality of competing ethical value judgements, doctrines or perspectives, and we may have no objective standards by which to judge whether one is more or less valid than another, but ethical pluralism does not hold that any ethical doctrine, perspective or value judgement may be as valid as any other, as ethical relativism tends to. Furthermore, ethical pluralism may be taken in a descriptive, an epistemological or a normative sense. That is to say;

1) it may simply be describing the fact that a number of competing and contrasting ethical doctrines exist,

2) it may be suggesting that there is little way to reliably distinguish between the validity claims of the various doctrines in an unbiased fashion, or

3) it may be suggesting that, (given the first two), there are various behavioural demands that such pluralism entails (often regarding such things as mutual tolerance and respect, the division of political and social authority from moral belief, and so on.)

Now the first of these claims I will go so far as to take as self evident. If anyone living in a liberal democratic society does not accept that a plurality of ethical doctrines exist, then they must be keeping heavily to themselves. The second claim is largely a metaethical claim, and as such is both beyond the scope of this paper and beyond the pale so far as relevant considerations go regarding market boundaries. Suffice to say that if the most prominent and most cited liberal theorist- indeed political theorist- indeed philosopher- of the 20th century considered that we should accept the existence of reasonable pluralism as a fact, (Rawls, 1993) then I think that I might go so far as to accept as sufficient for my current purposes that there are some number of reasonable competing ethical doctrines that disagree over certain value claims. The third claim is one that is oft taken as politically correct law, and it is precisely this contemporary social quasi-legal standing that Wilson objects to, complaining against the idea that moral judgements 'must be relative to the culture's own conception of moral worth', that '[w]hen moral judgements are made, they must be made with due humility and uncertainty. And perhaps it is best if they are not made at all' (Schwartz, 1994.)

The recognition of reasonable pluralism, and the ethical requirements so entailed, may have been most comprehensively articulated by John Rawls- a name now so strongly synonymous with liberalism- but they were first explained by a demi-name-sake of his, one of liberalism's founding fathers; John Locke. In Locke's 'Letter Concerning Toleration' (Locke, 1983), he sets forth the very principles of liberal toleration to which we adhere today (at least on our good days), and while the pluralism to which Locke responded may have been somewhat less multifarious than that with which we are today confronted, the principle remains largely the same. And though the liberal tradition has, throughout the years, become a many splintered thing, the necessity for the tolerance requisite such that each may pursue their own good in their own way remains central to each and every strand (and if it doesn't, it ought to.) Thus when Wilson gripes about the consequences of ethical relativism, he locks

horns with a long and proud tradition. But of course, that's not all there is to liberalism, or indeed to Locke.

Locke may have been one of the founding members of the political tradition most closely concerned with liberty, but he is also a founding member of the tradition most concerned with property. Having, in his *Two Treatises of Government*, justified the right to private property with various arguments, both by divine right and by his famous labour-desert principle (Locke, 1988), Locke began a pre-arranged marriage that wedded the liberal tradition with ideas of justified private property accumulation- indeed, according to some scholars, unlimited private property accumulation- from its very infancy, just as he had made the same conjugal arrangements with the dynasty of liberty. This was a move that not only drew opprobrium from his contemporaries- notably Rousseau- but continues to this day (in the case of Schwartz, explicitly in the name of Rousseau) (Schwartz, 1994). But the dynasty of property has borne stronger fruit than that of liberty (indeed, a century after Locke's writing, the industrial revolution was to offer it an unprecedented fertility boost.) Thus as the liberalism of Locke became reinvigorated by the 'classical' liberalism of Adam Smith, it cemented itself in the minds of a certain tradition of later critics as the 'ideology of capitalism.' (The fact that the industrial revolution and hence the advent of capitalism proper proceeded the advent of liberalism by a century need not complicate such accusations, apparently.) And so when Schwartz complains of the attack of the market upon our social sensibilities, he locks horns with the same long and proud tradition that Wilson does (though perhaps with different horns.) In this respect liberalism, pluralism and capitalism have formed a rather heady triumvirate for some time, and with such interdependent and intertwined roots that at times this particular ménage au trios is difficult to pick apart. Hence when Friedrich Hayek claims that the only just method of distribution in a modern pluralist society is the market, for it alone is neutral between competing cultural and moral perspectives, we see the perfectly formed offspring of this three way encounter (though one wonders how this reconciles with his later moralistic call to arms.) No wonder the attacks come from different angles. And come they do.

Of course liberals have a name for those like Schwartz and Wilson; communitarians (despite their differences, the same name.) And the fact that they have the same name despite their differences is a consequence of the fact that communitarians are a far more multifarious camp even than liberals. As Steven Kautz puts it in *Liberalism and Community*:

Communitarians are above all "antiliberal" who seek to establish a politics of the common good and thereby tame the prevailing liberal politics of individual rights. Beyond that fundamental antiliberalism, the communitarian "movement" is marked by a remarkable diversity of views regarding the nature of community itself, from traditional conservative to classical republican to social democrat to radical postmodernist- among many other communitarian parties. (Kautz, 1995)

But communitarians the opponents of the market tend to be. Wilson and Schwartz both seem to have tarred themselves with the communitarian brush through their advocacy of the moral sense (and of course their opposition to various aspects of liberalism.) Walzer is one of the most prominent, though sometime ambiguous (2), communitarians of our time. But considering this ambiguity, perhaps it would be edifying to attempt a definition of communitarianism. Communitarianism is much as it sounds. The emphasis is on community rather than the individual, the focus is upon that which binds us, rather than that which separates. This goes by many names, and is divisible in

many ways, but may, I think, loosely be referred to as culture. In fact, perhaps one of the best explanations of the salient constitutive concerns of communitarian thinkers is offered by Radin as she describes what should be exempt from invasion by market ethos;

The kinds of goods that deviate most from *laissez-faire* are those related to human beings' homes, work, food, environment, education, communication, health, bodily integrity, sexuality, family life and political life. For these goods it is easiest to see that preservation and fostering of the nonmarket aspects of their provision and use is related to human flourishing and social justice- to personhood and community as reconceived to meet the critique of liberalism. (Radin, 1996.)

Of this list, only religion, or spirituality, seems notably absent from a comprehensive account of the constitution of culture. Yet for Radin, not only does this communal culture serve to indicate the acceptable limits of the market, but it is the values produced by and expressed within such a culture that are to provide the active opposition to market expansion, analogous to the role Simmel saw Christianity playing in the past.

If we assume that it is intuitively obvious or a matter of definition which kind of

liberty an asserted transaction belongs to, then we have solved the normative issue of the limits of the market. Otherwise, as I think is the case, the categories of personal liberty and market inalienability must be the conclusions of a moral argument rather than the basis of one. In my view, moral argument will turn on our substantive commitments to a theory of proper human flourishing within a properly constituted community. (Radin, 1996.)

But while this approach seems reasonable, common sense even, it has a major blindspot; that of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism. Personal liberty and market inalienability doubtless do depend on the conclusion of moral argument, and such argument will inevitably turn on our substantive commitments, but if different cultures have different substantive commitments, then it will make such argument difficult (if not impossible) and hence leave us without any clear conclusions regarding the desirable extent of personal liberty or of market inalienability. Is there hope that we, in contemporary western pluriethnic liberal societies, can form a sufficient communal culture to oppose unacceptable market expansion? There is some tentative support for such a hope.

### Postmaterialism, Culture Shift, and the Search for Meaning

In his book *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Inglehart, 1990), Ronald Inglehart maps the changing attitudes towards various socioeconomic questions over a period of eighteen years in more than two dozen countries. The initial aim of Inglehart's project, begun in 1971, was to test his hypothesis that the unprecedented affluence experienced by advanced industrial societies in the latter half of the twentieth century would cause a popular transition from what he termed 'materialist' values to 'postmaterialist' values. The reason for and mechanism of such a value change is explained in his two fundamental hypotheses;

1. A scarcity hypothesis: An individual's priorities reflect the socioeconomic environment: One places the greatest subjective value on those things that are in relatively short supply, and

2. A socialization hypothesis: The relationship between socioeconomic environment and value priorities is not one of immediate adjustment: A substantial time lag is involved because, to a large extent, one's basic values reflect the conditions that

prevailed during one's pre-adult years.

Inglehart hypothesises that the impoverished conditions of the prewar years, and the constant physical threat of the wartime years, would tend to promote a popular emphasis upon what he terms 'materialist' values; revolving around economic and physical security. Conversely, as the postwar period progressed, as many nations experienced unprecedented levels of wealth (he cites the figures of four to five times previous levels of wealth in some countries, and as much as twenty times previous levels in some others), and as the welfare state became increasingly embodied in the institutions of advanced industrial societies, economic values would be deemphasised. Similarly, as war became less of a fore-grounded threat in these countries, physical security would cease to be as much of an imperative. (3) Instead, as financial and physical security became the norm, and as the population became more educated, an assortment of values to which Inglehart refers as 'postmaterialist' - a reasonable degree of autonomy in lifestyle choice, a sense of belonging, individual self expression and a greater emphasis upon the search for meaning- would come to be considered important. However, in accordance with the socialisation hypothesis, this change would not represent a prompt response to environmental changes, but would incorporate a generational delay. Those generations that grew up in conditions of material scarcity would tend to retain highly materialist values, despite experiencing significantly greater affluence in their adult life than they had during their formative years. Only those growing up in conditions of plenty would tend to develop a more postmaterialist value system. Inglehart's body of research was drawn from countries in both eastern and western Europe, The United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina, Mexico, South Africa, Japan, and a small amount of research material from China and Hong Kong, and his hypotheses found heavy support within this sample.

In addition to documenting the transition from materialist to postmaterialist values, Inglehart discusses the findings of the World Values surveys measuring adherence to traditional Judeo-Christian norms. These beliefs were arranged around three thematic clusters; belief in God and adherence to monotheism, the inviolability of the family unit (including attitudes towards abortion, divorce, extramarital affairs, adultery, prostitution and homosexuality), and the importance of civil order (regarding property, lying, and violence against others.) A highly consistent correlation was observable both within and between these belief sets, and between these belief sets and materialist values. Those showing postmaterialist worldviews, on the other hand, were less likely to adhere to Judeo-Christian norms. Inglehart notes the apparent paradox regarding the association between materialism and Judeo-Christian beliefs, given that the latter tend to emphasise a reorientation away from materialist goals towards spiritual ones. However, he considers that the association is, nevertheless, quite intelligible if one sees them as an example of correlation rather than causation: Far reaching though it is, the rise of postmaterialism is only one aspect of a still broader process of cultural change that is reshaping the political outlook, religious orientations, gender roles, and sexual mores of advanced industrial society. These changes are related to a common concern: the need for a sense of security, which religion and absolute cultural norms have traditionally provided.

According to Inglehart, individuals under high stress have considerable psychological need for rigid, predictable rules. Under conditions of security, on the other hand, diversity finds greater tolerance. 'Taking one's world apart and putting it back together is psychologically stressful in any case. But people with relatively high levels of security, such as the Postmaterialists, can



more readily accept deviation from familiar patterns than can people who feel anxiety concerning their basic existential needs.' Postmaterialists, Inglehart found, are far more likely to demonstrate permissive attitudes towards abortion, homosexuality, extramarital affairs, single parenthood, adultery and prostitution; all phenomena traditionally encountering censorship from the more devout followers of Judeo-Christian value systems. Essentially, for Inglehart, the feature that defines their social attitudes most starkly against those of the materialists is their abandonment of the view of the family as the sacrosanct societal and economic unit. So what relevance do Inglehart's findings regarding culture shift have for the matter at hand?

On the one hand they seem to trace a de-emphasis on economical values while at the same time indicating a move towards a more morally neutral outlook (so far as the increase in permissive attitudes may be taken to indicate.) These findings sit more comfortably with Wilson's views than with Schwartz's. But what of Radin's hopes for turning the tide of commodification by fostering the nonmarket meanings of things? The documented emphasis on belonging and the search for meaning would seem to bode well, but the abandonment of traditional approaches to morality may concern various communitarians. And there are, as noted, a great variety of communitarian approaches. However, in *Liberalism and Community*, Steven Kautz offers a clarifying distinction between two broad and broadly oppositional camps of communitarians; those he refers to as republicans and democrats, which sheds some light on the current discussion.

### Republicans and Democrats: Virtue and Equality

Roughly analogous to- but by no means limited to or defined by- the political parties of the same name, Kautz considers republicans to be characterized by their love of virtue, and democrats by their love of equality, and both opposed to liberals to the extent that liberals violate these objects of affection. And the strands of communitarian thinking described thus far seem to be analyzable in these terms. James Wilson's fear of moral degradation seem clearly republican, Radin's fears of market expansion clearly democratic. Of course, this is not to say that the division can not be crossed in certain ways. Barry Schwartz's emphasis upon traditional social morality seems republican, but his suspicion of the market democratic. The postmaterialist view Inglehart describes seems most amenable to a democratic view, though the emphases on autonomy of lifestyle and individual expression are distinctly liberal. The abandonment of traditional morality certainly sets this approach well away from the republican communitarian ideal. We might therefore describe their approach as liberal democratic, which pretty well accords with the political tradition with which these kinds of views would best accord.

Recall the two imperatives raised earlier; that of restraining the expanse of the market, and market based ideology, in order to protect alternative value systems (as Radin and Schwartz exhort), and that of holding the ethos of the market in check in order to prevent it from undermining itself, and maintaining the benefits that even critics of the market concur that it provides (as Hirsch recommends). While the trend towards postmaterialist values seems to offer some hope for the first imperative, it is perhaps unlikely to aid the second. Hayek was insistent upon the role of traditional morality in shoring up the market (in his later writing), and this suggestion has been taken up by others (recall Sacks's discussion of the propriety of the Jewish ethos for this purpose) and it is just these mores that the postmaterialists reject (as well as many liberal thinkers, and many democrats.)

Yet if Hayek is right in considering an adherence to traditional moral values to be necessary to control the excesses of the market, perhaps it is in the democrat's interests that such values are embraced, as an embrace of purely democratic communitarian values may be insufficient to counter market forces, yet those of the left are unlikely to be any more eager to embrace those of the traditional right than those who trade in the no man's land between. Similarly, it is the countering of certain aspects of traditional morality for which many liberal thinkers applaud the market; its liberation from oppressive social relations. If the only way to maintain the market in a sustainable and measured fashion is to utilise these moral traditions, the very benefits many see the market as offering may be undermined. We might note that one manifestation of a preference based approach to morality which raises Wilson's ire, and which Schwartz attributes to the expansion of market ethos, is the idea of marriage and the family unit (as traditionally conceived) as but one among various relationship options, among trial, open and revocable marriages, childbirth out of wedlock and single parent families. How comfortable are those democrats who warn against market excesses with becoming bedfellows with those republicans who consider that our sexual and familial private lives should be the subject of the kind of moral prescription which these sentiments seem to recommend? Would they consider their opposition to some of the more rapacious consequences of liberalism worth this?

### Conclusion: A Choice between Evils

While expansion of the market ethos feared by Schwartz and Radin may be less of a concern than either suggest (particularly Radin) the possibility that it nevertheless presents cause for considerable concern remains, and so long as we value that which it appears to threaten- whether we describe it in terms of a moral sense or alternative intrinsic evaluations of things and concepts- then we may be required to oppose this trend. Likewise, while I am unsure that social values face imminent engulfment by an onset of ethical relativism (as Wilson warns), the increase in ethical pluralism consequent upon the trend towards multicultural, pluriethnic social constitution in contemporary liberal societies does appear to have encouraged a rise in value neutrality. And if this value neutrality enables both an unstable overexpansion of the market (as Hayek feared) as well as chipping away at the more beneficial tenants of social morality that forge our communities, then it is not something to be ignored. Yet in opposing either the expansion of market ethos or value neutrality, we may find ourselves somewhat torn.

Should the various theories discussed in this paper carry weight, then both liberals and democratic communitarians may face a difficult choice. Liberals may have to ask themselves whether they are willing to sacrifice their commitment to ethical neutrality (at least in the public domain) in order to preserve the institution of the market (an institution justified in many liberal eyes by its neutrality between competing ethical doctrines.) Democrats may have to ask themselves whether they find the institution of a stable conservative market or an increasingly rapacious liberal market a more concerning prospect.

At the risk of trying the reader's patience, and further muddying the waters this paper has already polluted, I wish to end on another economic example. As documented by Joseph Henrich et al in "In Search of Homo Economicus: Behavioural Experiments in 15 Small-Scale Societies", a group of researchers posed one of the very same fairness tests, discussed by Schwartz- the 'Ultimate Bargaining Game'- to inhabitants of a variety of small societies, with a variety of social structures, and with a great va-

riety of results (Henruch et al, 2001.) One interesting finding relevant to the issue at hand was the tendency of some heavily family-oriented societies to see very little obligation to share benefits outside the confines of the family unit (quite possibly on a comparable scale to the economics majors, MBA students and CEOs who drew Schwartz's opprobrium.) Considering the effect of these particular family values on attitudes towards fairness, one might question how desirable a heavy ethical focus on the community- or the sanctity of the family unit- may end up being for the preservation of the moral sense so dear to both Wilson and Schwartz, and whether it would be better to embrace the devil we know or to raise the devil we don't.

## Notes

1. Of course, in defining morality in terms of obligation, Schwartz is choosing a heavily deontic approach to morality,

and one inherently opposed to choice or preference based approaches to behaviour. Consequentialist approaches to ethics (utilitarianism being most prominent among their number) would not view choice or preference based models with this kind of suspicion, but it seems that Schwartz agrees with Wilson's about utilitarianism.

2. For instance, while Kautz lists him as a communitarian, Bellamy does so as a liberal.

3. This is not to say that physical security would cease to be any kind of priority at all. Aside from Korea, Vietnam and other 'hot' wars which would have influenced the value systems of many participants in Inglehart's research, the advents of perestroika and glasnost only very closely preceded the culmination of his research, and the cold war would without doubt have continued to influence the value systems of many, perhaps all, concerned. Nevertheless, the influence of the cold war would have surely been less than that of the first or second world wars

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