

CONSUMER SOVEREIGNTY AND THE INTEGRITY OF PRACTICES*

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1 The problem of boundaries

A central feature of current attempts to construct an 'enterprise culture' in Britain has been a series of institutional reforms designed to introduce market principles and commercially modelled forms of organization into a wide range of activities previously conducted upon different principles, and 'protected' by means such as public funding or subsidy from the forces operating in a free market economy. These extensions of the market have raised, in an often acute and practical form, an important set of theoretical issues about what kinds of activities are, and are not, appropriately governed by market mechanisms: about how, and upon what basis, the boundaries should be drawn between market and non-market domains.¹

In this paper I shall consider some of these issues by exploring a particular kind of critical response often voiced by those whose activities are affected by such extensions of the market domain; and in doing so I shall focus upon activities which might loosely be described as 'cultural' in character, such as academic research and teaching, broadcasting, the arts, and so on. The general form of this critical response is that such activities are not appropriately judged by 'market criteria'; and hence that their subjection to the kinds of forces operating upon and within commercial enterprises tends to distort or undermine the values and standards by which they had previously, and rightly, been judged.

Thus, for example, academics complain that the pressure to compete for students undermines their own conception of what is educationally worthwhile, and that the value of their research is now being judged by intellectually facile considerations of 'marketability'; television programme-makers argue that government-initiated reforms of broadcasting will lead to a decline in the quality of programmes; theatre directors, dance companies, and musicians claim that the new criteria for funding imposed by the Arts Council make it increasingly difficult to nurture innovation or to maintain artistic integrity; museum curators protest that by being reduced to the status of a leisure industry the purposes properly served by their collections are put at risk; and so on.

As an initial step in analysing the nature of such claims, and their possible rationale, it may be helpful to consider the implications of a powerful and influential argument often employed to support the use of free markets. According to this, markets are the most efficient means of producing goods and services whose 'value' is

□ First published in R. Keat and N. Abercrombie eds, *Enterprise Culture*, London: Routledge 1991, pp. 216-30, and reprinted in *Cultural Goods and the Limits of the Market*, London: Palgrave 2000, pp. 19-32. The opening reference to attempts to construct an 'enterprise culture' in Britain was written at a time when this was a central project of the Thatcher government in the 1980s: see the other papers in *Enterprise Culture* for more on this.

¹ This problem of boundaries has been highlighted and explored by Michael Walzer (1983, especially ch. 4), though my approach differs somewhat from his, and owes much to discussions with John O'Neill and Nick Abercrombie. [See also my discussion of Walzer in 'Colonisation by the Market: Walzer on Recognition', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 5, 1997, pp. 93-107, reprinted in *Cultural Goods and the Limits of the Market*, London: Palgrave 2000, pp. 70-85].

determined by their satisfaction of people's wishes or preferences: that is, they generate a greater total amount of individual want-satisfaction, from a given set of inputs, than any alternative economic system.

This argument derives its justificatory force from an essentially Utilitarian standpoint, being both *aggregative* and *want-regarding* in character.² For on the one hand, it focusses exclusively upon total amounts of want-satisfaction, without attending to their pattern of distribution between individuals or groups; and on the other, it 'takes people's wants as given', in the sense that it rules out any judgments about the respective merits of some kinds of wishes or preferences as against others. The satisfaction of people's wishes is taken to be intrinsically desirable, whatever the character or content of those wishes may happen to be: one is not permitted to discriminate between more or less valuable, desirable, or acceptable forms of satisfaction. To do so would involve adopting instead what may be termed an *ideal-regarding* standpoint.

Suppose now that markets do in fact maximize aggregate want-satisfaction. Then one might object to their use either on distributive or on ideal-regarding grounds: by arguing, with respect to particular kinds of goods or services, either that they should not be distributed in the ways which would result from market mechanisms, or that they are not suitably judged solely by reference to their satisfaction of people's preferences.

The former, 'distributive' argument against the use of markets can be illustrated by the kind of objection that might be made to the privatization of education and health-care: to transforming them from freely provided, publicly funded services, into purchasable commodities like any other market product. Since the operation of market economies tends to generate major inequalities of income and wealth, the relative ease of people's access to these services (and indeed the relative quality of the services thereby received) would then broadly reflect these inequalities, and hence be unrelated to people's need for them. Whatever the merits of market economies, their distributive consequences clearly do not satisfy need-based criteria of justice; and hence their obvious unsuitability for the provision of goods and services where such criteria are regarded as relevant.

Yet this is not what is at issue in the kinds of criticism of market principles with which I am concerned, where the objection appears to be not that markets make the quality of what is available to people dependent upon their (unequal) income and wealth, but rather that they operate in ways that fail to meet the appropriate criteria for judging the 'quality' or 'value' of what is provided, whether or not this is justly distributed.

This objection would seem then to be 'ideal-regarding' in character; and it therefore depends, inter alia, upon the claim that the value or quality of what is 'produced' by these cultural activities cannot properly be assessed by reference only to their satisfaction of consumer preferences. And if this is so, it might partly explain - though not, I believe, justify - such criticisms often being met with the charge of 'elitism': if the participants in such activities are unwilling to subject themselves to the judgments of the market, this must be because they accord to themselves some 'privileged' status or authority in judging what they produce, and regard the wishes and preferences of at least many of their potential consumers as ill-informed, indiscriminating, philistine, and the like.

²The distinctions and terminology introduced here, and their use in characterising utilitarian arguments for the free market, derive from Brian Barry's *Political Argument* (1965, pp. 38-47; see also his discussion of public funding for the arts).

Of course it may be argued, against the supposition made above, that market mechanisms do *not* in fact maximize aggregate want-satisfaction; or alternatively, that they do so only by virtue of the ability of producers to shape and control the preferences of their consumers, thereby making this justification for the market quite vacuous. But such arguments will not be examined here. Indeed, if the latter were correct, participants in cultural activities would presumably have little to fear from their relocation in the market domain, since they would then be able to impose their ideal-regarding criteria of value upon their new-found consumers. But it is not this prospect which they seem to find so alarming.

Having now indicated what may be involved in these criticisms of the extension of market boundaries, I shall explore one particular direction in which they might be developed and substantiated. I shall start by outlining the account of 'practices' presented by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981, especially ch. 14), and will then go on to develop this in a way that may explain the potentially antithetical relations between the conduct of cultural activities (understood now as 'practices'), and the forces operating in a free market economy. I shall conclude by addressing a certain problem about the nature and status of value-judgments which faces those who wish not only to exclude such practices from the market domain, but also to argue for their support by public means.

2 Practices and institutions

MacIntyre defines the concept of a *practice* in the following way:

"By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." (MacIntyre 1981, p.175);

and from the examples that he provides - farming, architecture, portrait-painting, chess, football, the sciences and humanities, music, and so on - there is clearly a wide range of activities which might display the characteristics of a practice, including amongst others those of a 'cultural' nature.

Two elements in this definition require some elaboration. First, 'standards of excellence'. Every practice involves a set of standards which serve to identify what counts as a good or bad (genuine or spurious, exemplary or worthless, etc.) instance of the activity concerned, and by reference to which the success or otherwise of attempts by individuals to perform these activities is thus to be judged. In 'entering' a practice one must (at least initially) be willing to subject one's own attitudes, choices and tastes to the authority of its standards. Thus:

"If, on starting to listen to music, I do not accept my own incapacity to judge correctly, I will never learn to hear, let alone to appreciate, Bartok's last quartets. If, on starting to play baseball, I do not accept that others know better than I when to throw a fast ball and when not, I will never learn to appreciate good pitching let alone to pitch." (MacIntyre 1981, p.177).

However, this is not to imply that the standards accepted at any one time are beyond criticism or impervious to change; and the history of particular practices is thus in part a history of such criticisms and of consequent changes in those standards. This itself is one reason why practices never consist merely in a specific set of 'techniques', of ways of achieving some fixed and pre-established goal. For part of what is involved in a practice is a continuing process of critical reflection on existing goals, and the development of new ones whose content cannot be articulated in advance (MacIntyre 1981, pp. 180-1).

The second element to be considered in MacIntyre's definition of practices is the concept of 'internal goods', and the related contrast with what he terms 'external' ones. The internal goods which are realised by engaging in a practice are such that their character can only be identified by reference to the specific nature of the practice concerned, and its particular standards - for example (mine, not MacIntyre's), the elegance of a scientific theory, or the truthfulness of a theatrical performance; and they are achievable only through the experience of involvement in its activities.

By contrast, the character of an external good is not thus dependent upon the particular nature of the practice through which it may be achieved. The prime examples of external goods are *money, power, prestige* and *status*. When the reasons for which people engage in a practice refer predominantly to such external goods, what counts as success in terms of the practice's own standards becomes valued only instrumentally, as a means to achieving other goods which might equally well be acquired by some other means; and not intrinsically, as is the case with internal goods.

Further, it should be noted that this contrast between internal and external goods, and the ways in which they operate as reasons for engaging in the activities of a practice, does not imply or rest upon any simple distinction between altruistic and egoistic motivations. Both types of goods are potential sources of pleasure or satisfaction for those who experience them: they are both 'good' *for* their recipients. Hence orientation towards the internal goods of a practice is not to be seen as involving some kind of self-sacrifice on the part of those concerned, acting 'for the good of the practice' at the expense of their own interests. Rather, their form of involvement in the practice is such that their own identities, and hence interests, are at least partly bound up with those of the practice and its standards.³

Nonetheless, whilst both external and internal goods are beneficial to those who achieve them, they differ in the 'exclusivity' of the benefits they produce. Those who possess external goods do so to the exclusion of others who do not; and in the competition for external goods, there are necessarily both winners and losers. By contrast, although competition with others may also be involved in achieving internal goods, such competition is itself conducted in relation to the shared standards of the practice concerned; and because of this, success comes at least partly in a non-exclusive form. Thus:

³ Hence the tendency for professional bodies to present themselves as committed to an 'altruistic' ethic is generally misconceived: see Johnson 1972. [See also my discussion of professions and 'commitment' in 'Science and Recognition', in *Cultural Goods and the Limits of the Market*, London: Palgrave 2000, pp 86-107].

"Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice. So when Turner transformed the seascape in painting or W.G. Grace advanced the art of batting in cricket in a quite new way their achievement enriched the whole relevant community." (MacIntyre 1981, p. 178).

It might seem to follow from these claims about internal and external goods that, as it were, practices would do well to avoid contact with the latter altogether. But this would ignore the fact that practices cannot normally survive for long without being sustained by *institutions*, and that institutions necessarily involve the use of external goods. Chess, physics, and medicine, for example, require institutions such as clubs, laboratories, and hospitals; and these institutions depend in various ways upon money, power, status and so on (MacIntyre 1981, p. 181).

Thus practices require institutions, but this makes them highly vulnerable to various forms of 'corruption' stemming from the use of external goods. To see why this is so, it may be helpful to identify a number of reasons why institutions -and hence external goods - are required to sustain practices.⁴ First, there is the fact that most practices make demands upon material resources, which must somehow therefore be acquired, typically in competition with other demands upon them. Second, the rules and standards of the practice must be potentially enforceable: they must not only have 'authority' in an abstract sense, but must also be backed by some authoritative system of power, involving the use of various kinds of sanctions. Finally, whilst the primary motivation of participants in a well-ordered practice may be directed towards internal goods, they are unlikely to be altogether indifferent to their acquisition of external ones - not only money, but also prestige and status, especially where these involve some form of public recognition or reward for their performance in the practice concerned.

But in each of these dimensions of 'institutional life', the role of external goods can easily develop in ways which are damaging to the practice. First, for example, the acquisition of material resources may come to be pursued as an end in itself, rather than as a means to further the ends of the practice, which may then turn out to conflict with what is required in meeting this new objective. Second, the institution's structure of power may come to take on a life of its own, and instead of serving to maintain the rules and standards of the practice, tend rather to subvert them. Third, and possibly as a result of either or both of the preceding, the system of external rewards for the practice's participants may come to diverge significantly from the judgments of their relative contribution and success made by reference to its standards. If this happens, participants may then experience serious 'strains of commitment' to the practice, its internal goods no longer providing sufficient motivation for them.

3 Practices and markets

Given this account of practices, their institutional requirements, and their consequent sources of vulnerability, one can now consider how far they are likely to be damaged or undermined by being subjected to the kinds of forces operating in a free market economy. But before doing so it is worth noting that markets are by no means the only potential threat to the integrity of practices. For example, their subordination to the state, or indeed to any system

⁴ From this point on, and through the following section of the paper, I develop and apply MacIntyre's analysis of practices in ways which he might well not endorse. [For further discussion of practices and markets, see 'Markets, Firms and Practices', in *Cultural Goods and the Limits of the Market*, London: Palgrave 2000, pp 111-132].

which allocates external goods in ways which conflict with their own institutional requirements, may well be at least equally damaging.

I will begin by presenting an argument designed to show that the integrity of practices cannot be sustained when transferred to the market domain, where different firms compete with one another in selling their goods and services (the 'products' of their previously shared practice) to consumers.⁵ But this argument will later be modified in response to an important objection.

There are two main features of the market which are relevant here. First, competition in the market is oriented primarily towards the maximization of external goods, in the form of financial profits. The aim of such competition is not to further the development of a practice in ways that are then available to all of its participants, but rather to gain exclusive access to goods which are only contingently related (through the circumstances of the market) to its standards being met or developed. The logic of market competition implies that the success of one's competitors must be greeted with dismay, since it is inimical to one's own: at best it may provide ideas to exploit to one's own advantage, measured in external terms, rather than contributions from which one may learn, and which may enhance one's experience of the practice's internal goods. Competing producers are thus unable to regard themselves as sharing membership in a practice whose internal goods are held in common.

Second, success and failure in the market is supposedly determined by the relative ability of competing producers to satisfy the preferences of their potential consumers. Thus what counts as a 'good' product is judged by reference to the wishes and preferences that consumers happen to have, whether or not these are consistent with the practice's own internal standards; and when the two conflict, the market dictates who will be the victor. Markets are want-regarding, whilst practices are ideal-regarding - they give no weight or credence to 'uninformed' judgments, and typically regard themselves instead as involved in the 'cultivation' of these, and hence of the potential to appreciate their internal goods. Practices subordinate individual inclinations and wishes to the authority of their own criteria of judgment, whilst markets subordinate producers to the preferences of individual consumers. They therefore, *inter alia*, allow no 'free space' for the kinds of open-ended, reflective development characteristic of practices, which itself contributes to new conceptions of the human good.

Taken together, these two features of the market seem clearly inimical to the integrity of practices. One way of seeing this is by attending to the 'strains of commitment' that may be expected to be experienced by the members of a practice which is transferred to the market domain. For a variety of reasons, external goods will tend no longer to be distributed (either between competing groups, or between the members of each such group) in ways that map on to the judgments of performance made by reference to the practice's own standards. Further, the relative priority of internal and external goods, and their means-ends relationship, will be reversed; and the kinds of activity or performance leading to the achievement of external goods will often diverge from those leading to internal ones. Thus the continued commitment of participants to the standards and goals of the practice will

⁵ The relations between markets, practices and institutions has an important bearing on the social organization of science: see Ravetz 1971, especially pp. 273-89 on problems of 'quality control'. [See also my discussion of Ravetz in 'Science and Recognition', in *Cultural Goods and the Limits of the Market*, London: Palgrave 2000, pp 86-107].

require a potentially unsustainable degree of self-sacrifice on their part, measured in terms of external goods. Far from their previous altruism being threatened by egoism, it is only now that such altruism becomes necessary.

However, the preceding line of argument might well be thought to prove too much, at least if it is taken to imply that the characteristics of practices could never be displayed by firms operating in a free market economy. For intuitively, anyway, it seems that such characteristics are by no means always entirely absent; and correspondingly, that the account of practices provided earlier would not be altogether alien or unrecognizable to some of those involved in them. And if this is so, it may suggest that the preceding argument depends on too abstract a picture of markets, one which ignores the many significant differences that can exist between their more concrete, specific forms.

For example, competition for external goods may in some cases have a relatively low salience in the ways in which 'rival' producers conceive of the primary rationale for their activities, and they may correspondingly have a relatively strong sense of the bonds which unite them with other producers in a shared activity whose internal goods are held in common. Rather than aiming at strict profit-maximization, they may instead adopt some individual or collective version of 'earning a decent living'; and they may also be inclined towards some form of 'gentlemen's agreement' to limit competition with other producers. (Such behaviour is usually condemned by free market proponents, and depicted in a sinister light. But it might sometimes be better understood as a quite innocent or admirable expression of the desire to conduct economic life as a practice).

Turning now to the relations between producers and consumers, one can note a number of reasons why the kind of conflict presented earlier, between consumer preferences and the standards of 'producer-practices', may not in fact arise. For whilst it is true that there is no pre-established harmony here, neither is there any pre-established discord. For example, consumers may in some cases exhibit a high degree of 'deference' towards producers, being quite willing to accept the 'authority' of the relevant practice's standards, and thus readily allowing their choices to be shaped by producers' judgments; or they may likewise be rather passive and undemanding, but this time because the whole activity of consumption has relatively little significance in their lives. Alternatively, there may be situations in which consumers and producers regard themselves more or less equally as members of a single practice, so that although the latter, unlike the former, actually earn their livings through the practice, this distinction is in other respects seen as superficial or fortuitous. (It should not, after all, be assumed that only 'producers' can be members of a practice).

However, although these points suggest that, under certain specific conditions, firms in a free market economy may be able to possess some of the characteristics of practices, such situations are inherently fragile or unstable. In particular, it requires only one reasonably powerful firm to, as it were, take seriously the aim of profit-maximization, for others to be forced to follow suit on pain of elimination from the contest. And if the changes thereby required are damaging to the practice, there is nothing that can realistically be done to protect it - the well-attested dynamic nature of market economies has, after all, a nasty habit of presenting people with unattractive options between which to choose.

Furthermore, it is arguable that at least some of the recent developments in both the organization of production, and the relations between consumers and producers, are likely to be inimical to the character of production as a practice. For example, the increasing role in commercial enterprises of financial control and marketing may militate against the priority that might otherwise be given to the internal goods associated with direct involvement in productive activities; and the shifts towards 'consumer-driven production' may indicate an increasingly active and non-deferential mode of consumption which challenges in various ways the privilege or authority of the producer. Indeed it is significant that in areas such as private sector publishing and broadcasting, the criticisms which are often made of their growing 'commercialization' bear a striking resemblance to those made within non-commercial cultural practices, subject to similar changes. For this would suggest a common set of problems in the relations between market forces, at least in their contemporary forms, and the integrity of practices.

4 Consumer sovereignty and subjective values

Suppose now that, for the kinds of reasons outlined above, the forces operating in a free market economy will tend strongly to undermine the character of, amongst others, cultural practices of the kind noted at the outset. It would nonetheless not follow from this that they have any claim to be supported or protected by public means. For it is one thing to argue that certain activities are best conducted outside the market domain, and quite another that public funds and resources should be provided to sustain them. In particular, it might instead be proposed that they should basically be ascribed the status of 'private' hobbies or pastimes, their resources being provided by whatever voluntary means happen to be available - like amateur sports, or bird-watching.

Such a proposal might be justified in the following way. The moral basis for the market is quite simple: produce what people as consumers show they wish to have, and one has a right to receive the ensuing external rewards (which themselves enable production to take place). But if one is unwilling to meet this requirement, on the grounds that to do so would distort the nature of one's preferred activity, one has no such right. There is nothing to prevent people engaging in such activities if they so choose, and deriving what satisfactions they may from the internal goods involved. But there is no obligation on the part of anyone else materially or otherwise to support them.

The issues raised by this response have an important bearing upon some well-known problems confronting certain kinds of socialist critique of the market, including Marx's. For there is obviously a close resemblance between Marx's conception of non-alienated labour, and MacIntyre's account of practices - a resemblance due partly to their shared Aristotelian ancestry.⁶ Marx believed that production in communist society could both provide workers with the intrinsic satisfactions of such labour, and at the same time satisfy the needs of those who received its products. But it seems that no non-market mechanisms have yet been discovered by which both these aims can be simultaneously achieved; and hence the current attempts by many socialist theorists to develop models of an economic system which makes use of market mechanisms, but without capitalist property relations. However, such attempts still have to deal with the problem of boundaries between market and non-market

⁶ See Kamenka 1972, especially pp. 110-117 on Marx's use of artistic production as a model for non-alienated labour. Throughout this paper I focus on those features of markets that are not dependent on the kinds of property relations peculiar to *capitalist* market economies.

domains, and thus also with justifying the provision of public resources for activities deemed unsuited to the market domain.

In broad terms, any such justification must presumably involve showing that such practices have a social value over and above the benefits accruing to their participants, and which cannot appropriately be judged by reference to consumer preferences: it must appeal to ideal-regarding rather than want-regarding principles. There are many ways in which this justificatory task might be performed. But rather than trying to survey or adjudicate between these, I shall conclude by focussing upon a particular difficulty which they are likely to face, especially in the case of cultural practices.

This difficulty is generated by what is arguably an increasingly marked feature of modern (or indeed post-modern) societies, namely the widespread acceptance of 'subjectivist' theories of value, according to which questions of a moral, aesthetic, or political nature have no objective or authoritative answers (cf. Whiteley, this volume). Judgments of value are instead regarded as the expression of individual opinions, tastes, or attitudes, for which no rational justification can be provided - though these 'judgments' may sometimes happen to be shared by other individuals with similar inclinations. Nor is this subjectivist view confined to the elevated realm of meta-ethical theorists, be they existentialist, analytical, post-structuralist, or otherwise. It seems also to be accepted in a good deal of everyday thought and action, as evidenced, for example, in the terms 'value-judgment' and 'subjective opinion' being widely treated as more or less synonymous.

But there is a close relationship between subjectivist theories of value, on the one hand, and the criteria by which judgments are made in the free market, on the other.⁷ For the latter depend ultimately upon the satisfaction of consumer preferences, 'whatever these may happen to be'; whilst according to the former, values are themselves essentially a matter of individual preferences. Hence, as it were, the market makes value-judgments upon precisely the same basis (or rather, lack of basis) as the subjectivist proposes; and its ability to maximize aggregate want-satisfaction will thereby also maximize the provision of whatever has value, understood in subjectivist terms. (Of course it will not do so *justly* - but that is a separate issue, as noted earlier).

This is not to say that the use of the market can only be justified by reference to a subjectivist theory of values. For it is one thing to claim that there is a value in satisfying people's preferences - a claim which might itself be justified on non-subjectivist grounds - and quite another that judgments of value are no more than the expression of preferences. Rather, the point is this: if a subjectivist theory of values is accepted, then the use of markets will provide one obvious means (though not necessarily the only one) of allocating material resources to the production of whatever is judged to be valuable.

This link between subjectivist theories of value and the market may itself be embodied in a specific interpretation of the concept of consumer *sovereignty*. Consumers may be ascribed sovereignty not only in the sense that it is they who should 'rule' over producers, and hence that the success or failure of rival producers is to be determined by

⁷This relationship is explored by MacIntyre in ch. XV11 of his later book (1988); but my concluding remarks about democracy and citizenship depart from his views there. [See also my discussion of MacIntyre's politics in 'Ethics, Markets and MacIntyre', *Analyse und Kritik*, 30 (1), 2008, 243-257]

their ability to satisfy consumer preferences; but also in the additional sense that they are the sole and unchallengeable arbiters of value -that there are no further, objective or authoritative criteria by reference to which their own opinions and preferences can be assessed.⁸

There seems, then, to be a kind of natural alliance between value-subjectivism and the market, mediated and expressed by this particular understanding of consumer sovereignty. In the face of this alliance, it may prove difficult to justify non-market provision for activities whose value is claimed not to reside exclusively in their satisfaction of preferences -especially when, as is the case with cultural practices, they do not produce the kinds of goods and services, such as health-care, about whose value most people are not in fact prepared to be subjectivists. And in order successfully to combat this alliance, it may thus prove necessary to articulate some plausible alternative to value-subjectivism.

One way in which this might be done is suggested by considering the implications of replacing public by market provision in a particular area of cultural practices, namely public service broadcasting - for example, news and current affairs programmes, documentaries, and so on. This replacement might well take the form of a single channel devoted to such programmes, financed by subscriptions from those willing to pay for them; and what had previously been regarded as a service of public value would be seen instead as satisfying the preferences of a particular 'niche' audience. (No doubt this would be called an 'up-market' channel, thereby expressing a kind of commodified remnant of non-market, non-subjectivist values - just as 'high culture' comes to be re-defined as an up-market leisure activity).

But such a development could be criticized for its potentially damaging consequences for the operation of democratic political institutions, which depend, inter alia, on their citizens being suitably equipped to make well-informed and reflective decisions.⁹ The judgments made by democratic citizens are not regarded, at least in theory, as the mere expression of personal preferences, but as resulting from a certain kind of critical engagement with the issues involved in the political sphere. But this is something which requires the acquisition and exercise of a number of skills and capacities, and hence also the availability of a wide range of cultural resources which provide, as it were, the necessary basis for relevant forms of 'educative experience'. There is thus a crucial role for certain cultural practices in contributing to this process, whose significance is itself at odds with any purely subjective theory of values.

Thus at least in the political sphere one can see how the value of certain cultural practices might be viewed as partly residing in their contribution to the educative experiences involved in acquiring and exercising the ability to make genuine 'judgments' about values. But similar arguments might also be constructed in relation to other areas in which it seems equally important to provide people with the cultural resources for critical reflection: in particular, to enable them to determine what place in their lives is to be given to activities such as consumption

⁸ Cf. the following claims about consumer sovereignty in a lecture by Sir Alan Peacock, at that time chairman of the Scottish Arts Council - though these are significantly qualified later on in the lecture: "This view implicitly rejects any notion that there is a hierarchy of tastes and preferences however this could be decided. It explicitly rejects the idea that the creative artist, the performing artist, or the informed aesthete can ... have any special status in the community when it comes to the allocation of resources to the arts." (Peacock 1987, p. 3).

⁹ For a somewhat similar, but much more elaborate argument, see Keane 1989.

itself. And it would be counter-intuitive, to say the least, if the cultural practices contributing to the kinds of experience involved in coming to terms with *this* kind of question were themselves to be subordinated to the preferences of consumers in a free market economy.

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