MARKETING AND THE COMMON GOOD

Essays from Notre Dame on societal impact

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18

CAN WE GET THERE FROM HERE?

Charting the contours of the common good

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In their analysis of the historical interplay of commercial mythmaking and free-market capitalism, in which new market ideologies are launched to counter crises of faith provoked by critical activists, Giesler and Veresiu (2012a,b) draw upon Foucault's (1978) concept of governmentality to trace the evolution of society's recent relationship to the market: protecting the state from the market in the seventeenth century yielded to protecting the market from the state in the eighteenth century, which in turn yielded to a triumphal hybridizing of the market in search of its ideal form in the twentieth century. The progression moves from a *governing* the market through a governing *through* the market to a governing *for* the market (Giesler and Veresiu 2012b: 1). Rather than anticipate the next activist response to be precipitated by the current crisis of faith in market triumphalism, we propose a provocation straight from the heart of academic marketing thought leadership itself, which builds upon the critical scholarship of recent years. Think of it as a governing *beyond* the market phase. In this volume, we ask what marketing can do to help harness the market to work in consort with other social institutions to realize the common good.

One of the consequences of living in a brand culture is that virtue can become reframed exclusively as a product of capitalism, such that people trade in moral capital as readily as in economic or social capital, and corporate social responsibility can become a translation or embodiment of business logic, a profitable value-added (Banet-Weiser 2012: 144–45). Sociologist Donald Black (2011: 145) has characterized modern morality as a "morality of distance," wherein people prize their right to be left alone as they pursue their right of unlimited personal opportunity, expecting others to "mind their own business." Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1988, 147) has asserted that we inhabit a world in which it is "increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way." These perspectives collide in the contemporary marketplace, where the consequences of decisions made by consumers, managers, public policy-makers and activists reverberate around the globe. Political economist Gar Alperovitz

(2011: 232–33) has challenged the polity to develop a "meaningful," "morally coherent," and "positive" politics that enhances our inexorably diminishing values of "equality, liberty and democracy" in an era of "technological abundance." Such an ambitious reformation rests upon our ability to clarify the nature of the common good, and to work comprehensively and systematically to achieve it. Each of our contributors has pulled on the marketing thread of this larger fabric, but has stopped short of making many normative pronouncements. In this concluding chapter, we consider some of the specific contours of the common good.

As early as the 1970s, the incipient Quality of Life marketing movement (hereafter QOL), known then as "sociomarketing," recognized the extraeconomic obligations of the firm, and called for the understanding of our disciplinary concepts in their "full complexity," as they bear upon the nested dimensions of well-being from the micro to the macro, envisioning marketing as the "science of positive social change," or, more succinctly, "proactive marketing" (Sirgy 2001: 6-11, 22). Managerial and public policy implications for QOL have been broached in connection with just society theory, the satisfaction of human needs, ecology, and a host of other perspectives that might inform our understanding of marketing's role in shaping the common good (Sirgy 2001).

QOL, a business practice compatible with Kotler's (1972) societal marketing orientation and intended to promote both marketing beneficence (customer well-being) and marketing nonmaleficence (stakeholder well-being), is alleged to have multiple antecedents: macro characteristics of social consciousness related to consumer well-being, industry ethical climate, commitment to organizational ethics, and long-term orientation of firms, as well as individual manager characteristics of autotelic personality, moral idealism, cognitive moral development, and caring attitude for customer well-being (Lee and Sirgy 2004: 45, 52–55). QOL seems a noble refinement of current managerial and disciplinary effort, if not an outright redirection. While the consequences of QOL are implicitly endorsed by the contributors to this volume, these antecedents pose something of a challenge to conventional marketing wisdom. In short, we believe that marketing should be tasked to help produce an intellectual and emotional climate in which these antecedents may be catalyzed. That is, a significantly different Utopian vision is required of marketing if the common good is to be realized. How can marketing foster such a reformation of its present purpose?

The brothers Skidelsky – political economist Robert and philosopher Edward – point us in a promising direction. They have recently urged society to revive a long dormant line of inquiry: What is wealth for? They lament that the Faustian bargain society has struck with the forces of wealth creation has robbed citizens of a sense of proportion or propriety, leaving individuals without a collective vision of the good life (Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012: 68–69, 218). The Skidelskys seek to bring the idea of the good life (what our contributors have called the common good throughout this volume) back into the public forum. Believing that modern liberal theory and neoclassical economics have monopolized public discourse, leading to a world consumed with the "satisfaction of private wants" wherein the good life has become a "marginal concern," the brothers advance what they call a "non-coercive paternalism" to help correct the situation (Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012: 87, 93, 193). Such an approach would help ensure that "the fruits of productivity are more evenly shared" and that the contemporary "pressure to consume" would be reduced (Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012: 194).

After rehearsing a litany of familiar shortfalls, Peter Corning (2011: ix–xii), who holds an interdisciplinary doctorate in social and life sciences, adds his voice to the throng proclaiming that free market capitalism "has not lived up to its billing," and calls for a "rethinking" of the social (indeed "biosocial") contract that recognizes the anthropological insight that a sense of fairness and a concern for social justice are cultural universals. Equally critical of socialism, he proposes a revised public philosophy that embodies a new synthetic set of ground rules for a biosocial contract that includes these tenets: an unqualified commitment to meet the survival needs of all members; an equitable distribution of surplus beyond survival based on merit; and a requirement for universal (with few exceptions) contribution of equitable share to collective survival (Corning 2011: 12). He identifies fourteen primary "needs domains" – thermoregulation, waste elimination, nutrition, water, mobility, sleep, respiration, physical safety, physical health, mental health, communications, social relationships, reproduction, and the nurturance of offspring – deemed "indispensible" for the "biological adaptation/fitness" of humanity (Corning 2011: 96). His is a sustainability platform writ large.

Corning's (2011: 170) Fair Society model seeks a "proper balance" between equality in the satisfaction of primary needs, "fair recognition" of merit, and "proportionate reciprocity." His advocacy of "stakeholder capitalism" as a decisive step for achieving such balance resonates with many of the ideas proposed by the contributors to this volume (but also conflicts with a few). His advocacy of a nonpartisan "fairness coalition," a political movement designed to seek such reformation (Corning 2011: 177, 192), might be construed as a righteous intervention in public policy. Most germane to our present concern is a paraphrasing of his activist orientation: What can marketing do to "help bend the arc of the moral universe" (Corning 2011: 195), and what would the resultant society resemble?

Breaking the "addiction" to consumption and work would depend in part upon universal access to "basic goods" such as health, security, respect, personality, harmony with nature, friendship, and leisure (Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012: 145, 154–66). The Skidelskys suggest that the state that has failed to provide all of its citizens with the material conditions of the good life might seek enlightenment from moral opinions expressed in religious traditions, citing Catholic Social Teaching and Protestant New Liberalism as potential sources of secular inspiration (Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012: 169; 186–90). Since several of the contributors to this volume have referenced the former tradition in their analyses, and given its traction in the literature (Santos and Laczniak 2009), we employ a few of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching here in our Conclusion to suggest some secular ways that marketing might address the issue of the common good (which is itself a fundamental tenet of CST). As educators, we adopt a scholastic perspective with the notion that a spirited intellectual engagement with the discipline's perils and

promises might lead efficiently to innovative, practical interventions in the marketplace. By reinvigorating the moral ties between classroom and boardroom, a marketing reformation may be catalyzed.

- *Human dignity*. One of the principal goals of marketing education at every level – undergraduate, MBA and executive – ought to be the cultivation in our students of a critical imagination capable of discerning alternative Utopias to which the marketing imagination might be applied, the outcome being actionable recommendations for creating a marketplace that serves the common good. This would be an explicitly moral undertaking (as opposed to the implicit morality which often goes unexamined in our curricula) that moves beyond the simple (but necessary) application of ethical precepts to elements of the marketing mix. Such a reformation of vision might begin with a consideration of successful contemporary alternative or "real" Utopias, the relationship between economic, social, and state power, and the hybrid strategies that might transform the marketplace toward the ends of social and political justice (Wright 2010). That public goods must in many cases supersede private goods if enlightened cultures are to survive might provide the initial premise for a critical investigation of the relationship between market and nonmarket logics. A reconsideration of the essence and nature of the gift might serve equally well. The most ancient and enduring source of social cohesion, the gift creates an energy with the potential to humanize and harness the economy in the service of community. The charge of this moral education is to get all stakeholders to examine, challenge, and reformulate foundational precepts of marketing, and use our knowledge of marketing to construct a more equitable, viable system. Hard-form stakeholder theory (Laczniak and Murphy 2012) is a promising step in this direction.
- *Preference for the poor and vulnerable*. Given the fallout of the 2008 economic meltdown (including the misalignment of moral hazard and moral panic) and the growing income disparity around the globe, one of the immediate goals of marketing education ought to be a rigorous and comprehensive elaboration of bottom-of-the-pyramid (BOP) development principles (Prahalad 2006; Yunus 2009) for impoverished and emerging markets (Santos and Laczniak 2008) and a recalibration of BOP best practices for developed markets. A detailed rethinking of the dynamics of debt (Graebner 2011) and the feasibility of sharing (Belk 2010) on a grand scale is also warranted. Each of these exercises will demand an egalitarian reconceptualization of needs and wants, such that the former might universally be met and the latter not impinge upon creation of the common good. Cultivation of an ethos of philanthropy over acquisition as a touchstone both of identity and community would be an integral component of this rethinking process.
- *Solidarity*. To the extent that capitalism becomes inimical to community, a near-term goal of marketing education might be the close examination of hybrid forms of market mechanisms that help to produce the organic solidarity requisite to authentic social life. Throughout this volume, we have emphasized that marketers are also social architects and behavioral engineers, not merely material provisioners of society. As they help create the milieu in which they operate, they share responsibility for correcting problems of misplaced identity, cultural dislocations of income disparity, mercarigenic disease, and other dysfunctions chronicled in this book. Progress will require creative collaboration between marketers, thought leaders of other disciplines, and civic authorities. Beyond the sociological study of real Utopias, a careful consideration of a range of values-based exchange systems requires undertaking. Religion is one such potential font of insight, and the primer by Coward and Maguire (2000) contains a number of practical proposals from Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, and indigenous African religious traditions. Sherry (2000) has identified other religious sources (notably animist) for marketers interested in catalyzing a progressive Utopia. In a secular key, our disciplinary understanding of the dynamics of brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) might be repurposed in the service of place-making, and directed toward creating meaningful engagement with locales, whether neighborhoods, bioregions, or nations. Ron Nahser (Chapter 9 this volume) suggests a productive context for such an enterprise.
- *Stewardship*. Perhaps the most pressing goal of marketing education is to develop a discipline whose philosophy and practice are grounded in an ecological understanding of our enterprise. A planet-centric conception of marketing can no longer remain the rallying cry of critics and reformers; it must be elaborated into an actionable set of managerial practices, and practitioners must assume more responsibility for the behavioral architecture that will preserve not just the market, but the planet. Inherent in this obligation is the understanding of the sacramentality of sources presently construed as resources. A closer look at our relationship with "stuff" may help us learn to reinvest our animistic impulses in nature, and to reorient our ethos of consumption along much more sustainable lines.

By adopting and creatively applying just these few precepts, let alone plumbing the wisdom of other spiritual traditions, a reformulated marketing might have a stunning impact on the social order. Imagine a society whose:

- modal ethical agent was a distributed, communal extended self;
- measure of self-worth was decoupled from possessions and invidious comparison;
- status system rewarded charitable giving and discouraged appetitive acquisition;
- conception of the good life exalted leisure to the same level as work;
- civic agenda was an equitable redistribution of resources insuring universal thriving;
- commercial, civic, and social spheres operated in synergistic harmony;
- cultural ethos insisted that humanity inhabit the biosphere in a sustainable manner.

If such a liberal democracy (or democratic pluralism) were the Utopian vision to which our society aspired, a reconfigured marketing could facilitate the achievement, or, at least, a heroic approach.

In a recent eulogy, Donaldson (2009) problematizes Peter Drucker's lament that pluralistic societies like our own eventually crumble for lack of attention to the common good, and that the market's failure to nurture community demands volunteerism as a corrective. Donaldson (2009: 46) views the threat that corporations pose to community to be a "fault line that runs through the very structure of modern democratic capitalism," that may never be sealed. Citing consumerist movements and virtual communities of moral activism as market-based responses to this problem, Donaldson is skeptical of Drucker's incitement of business leaders to go "over the walls" in pursuit of community whose constitution is mandated by civic responsibility. If consumer-led initiatives of resistance in the service of community are to rise above the local and the reactive, the collaboration of business leaders must be enlisted. How might that collaboration be achieved?

The need to imagine models beyond investor capitalism that recognize the "legitimate economic and social interests of members of society other than stockholders," that question the "very purpose of corporate leadership," and that foster virtues such as "custodianship, duty and responsibility" is the urgent message behind Khurana's (2007: 365–66, 381) magisterial analysis of the evolution of the American business school. Khurana (2007) advocates a rehabilitation of the profession of management that would renounce the current commodification of the business degree and restore the moral sense of a "calling" to students that chartered our original foray into higher education. This reformation demands a reclamation of "cultural authority" by the professoriate, and a re-infusing of curricula with normative training related to identity beyond the cultivation of technical expertise (Khurana 2007: 370–71). We have suggested throughout this volume that a careful and comprehensive consideration of the questions "What are markets for?" and "What is the common good?" are the collective cornerstone upon which an enlightened marketing might be raised.

The critique of neoliberalism should not be relegated to departments of sociology, nor the correction of its global excesses to schools of government or public policy. Just as charity begins at home, so also must the remaking of marketing begin in the business school. The University of Notre Dame has long considered itself to be a place where the Catholic church can do its thinking. In a parallel, small "c" catholic spirit of that conviction, our faculty trusts that this volume will stimulate readers of all traditions to reimagine the nature of marketing, and begin to craft the principles necessary to its reformation. We believe a focus on the common good is the key to a righteous re-enchantment of marketing. We hope this volume advances the ball closer to the goal line of the common good.

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