

ABSTRACT

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The Philanthropic Foundations of Consumocratic Developments

Submitted by: Martin Dumas
 Organisation: Laval University, Faculté des sciences sociales, Canada
 Author(s): Martin Dumas
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Abstract:

This theoretical presentation will explore the main determinants of philanthropy and suggest that they serve as the foundation for consumocratic developments. Consumocracy may be defined as a system soliciting philanthropic, other-regarding dispositions in consumers, allowing them to exert more authority on market enterprises through broadened qualifications of what a desirable good is. It thus provides consumers the opportunity to exert new authority outside the traditional spheres of consumer influence, generally shaped by a deficient ideology – one under which it is assumed that market mechanisms are inherently guided by the solicitation of consumers' individualistic concerns.

We indeed owe to Alfred Marshall the development of a rather sophisticated notion of a market made visibly imperfect. It implies a disconnection between individualism and solidarity in the guidance of private markets and the pursuit of the ‘public good’. In the face of ‘market failures’, it is generally believed that the virtue of solidarity in regulation matters is the preserve of states; corrective interventions. Under this instrumental view, it is because markets intrinsically ‘under-train’ workers (a positive externality) and ‘over-pollute’ (a negative externality) that the state must promote training and discourage polluting, pre-eminently and for the benefit of all. Hence the reinforced myth of a paternalistic state correcting markets that are naturally born selfish.

This exclusive approach to the exercise of individualism and solidarity has been the source of an influential assumption. When faced with the failure of solidarity-derived functions (e.g., the functions of reducing environmental pollution, or protecting vulnerable people), social analysts

are typically drawn, under it, to invoke the contingent failure of the protective state, in contrast with the necessary failure of the market. The state would therefore fail in its attempt to prevent or redress the undesirable effects, thus deemed inevitable, of private markets and individualistic logics of action.

On the basis of the author's work on the development of consumocratic regulation over the last ten years, and on Bekkers & Wiepking's literature review of the determinants of philanthropy, this presentation is intended to shed some light on eight (8) such determinants and the likely development of consumocracy.

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