

NO MARKET OF ANY TYPE

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The article deals on the significance of the market in the contemporary society. The author observes some moralizing position that the market as such promotes general alienation and increasingly developing fragmentation of the members of community. It is sustained the idea of Karl Marx that the individual at the standpoint of the market becomes the atom of the industrial forces and loses its own identity. The exploitative tendencies which Marx supplies that they increasingly intensify from the standpoint of the postcapitalistic society. The market is defined as self-dependent and autonomous deterministic entity which can be divorced from the usual array of social contingencies in the context of the social. The author affirms that it is stimulating not only social fragmentation and general alienation but it is inciting total irresponsibility which contradicts with the dogmas of Christianity, of christocentrism in the market-place and the philosophical notions of Emmanuel Levinas who follows these lead. The postindustrial forces manipulate by the individuals and reduce to the economical logical imperatives rendering them into the screws of reproductional apparatus just like the producible objects. So there are eliminated all the possibilities of social solidarity and establishes "unconscionable consumerism". The author claims that in this particular case contemporary consumerism develops the deorganising forces in our society and takes us to the situation as Margaret Thatcher says, society does not exist at the marketplace.

Keywords: market, Karl Marx, alienation, social irresponsibility.

Introduction

At this time, most societies are part of what might be called the Era of Markets. Although capitalists have always extolled the benefits of markets, since approximately 1980 this theme has become very prominent. Following the rise to power of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, markets have been touted to be the savior of any economy. Any society that wants to advance, at least economically, but in other areas also, should install markets to regulate trade and other important social processes.

But what is so special about markets? According to their proponents, markets are fair and objective.

In other words, they are not linked to politics and other extraneous factors and thus are efficient. Unaffected by intrusions, markets clear and distribute goods and services in the most effective manner possible. Given this ability, Harvey Cox declares that nowadays the market has achieved the status usually reserved for a God (Cox 1999: 18, 20-21).

This exalted position has been acquired, according to Franz Hinkelammert, through a questionable philosophical maneuver that he calls abstraction. Traditionally, this gambit has been made through the help of dualism (Hinkelammert 1995: 238-239). In this case, the assumption is made that

the human presence can be overcome in the pursuit of knowledge, and thus information untainted by interpretation is available to traders. With the human presence sequestered from fact or truth, pristine or objective knowledge can be discovered. And based on this information, trading can ensue that is rational and profitable.

Due to this schism, the market can be divorced from the usual array of social contingencies and treated as an autonomous entity. In this way, this device is shielded from the uncertainties that plague social life, and thus can be viewed to embody reason. To many persons, the market should be the final arbiter of any dispute because of this autonomy.

Some advocates, accordingly, argue that markets should be extended beyond the economy. They believe that every facet of social existence would be improved because of the discipline that is instilled in persons by this mechanism. As the saying goes, markets do not lie and identify quickly poorly designed ideas, products, or policies. And as a result of this belief, writers such as Hinkelammert (Hinkelammert 2002: 176) and Serrano (Serrano 1995: 11) claim that the world has become a “Total Market”.

Their point is that the market is no longer simply one vehicle among others for regulating social life. The market, instead, has begun to monopolize all cultural discourse and marginalize alternatives. As Hinkelammert and Serrano describe, ideas and practices that are incompatible with the market are dismissed as irrelevant or possibly disruptive to economic or any other activity. Any clash with the market, simply put, is viewed as indicative of irrationality or misplaced idealism and must be minimized.

One of the key tasks of creating a post-capitalist logic, for example, is to illustrate this bias. The problem is that many socialists and others on the Left have begun to entertain the idea that markets are a necessary core of any viable economy. If markets epitomize reason and thus are indispensable, how can socialism expect to succeed without their use? In this regard, perhaps “market socialism” would have some appeal to the public, following the socialist debacle in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. What some Leftists seem to

be thinking is that through the addition of markets, socialism might become more effective and palatable to persons.

Nonetheless, the central theme of this paper is that such a strategy is wrong. The general idea is that accompanying the market is social imagery that is antagonistic to socialism, or any humane model of social order, and should be eschewed. Any society that wants to foster true solidarity, and the daily interaction that is consistent with this ideal, should not give any serious consideration to markets. For in the end, the fundamental products of markets are social fragmentation and alienation.

Market Imagery

Central to the market is the principle of competition. For example, those who design the best products and make sound financial decisions will be rewarded, while the rest are purged from the marketplace. In this sense, the market provides a filtering process that benefits everyone in a society. As the best products or proposals survive, progress is made and society in general improves. The market, accordingly, operates on the basis of neo-Darwinian logic.

In order to thrive at the marketplace, persons must out maneuver all other competitors. Traders are not rewarded, except in rare circumstances, for cooperating with one another. Herbert Spencer, for example, described such interaction as indicative of a “tooth and claw” morality. At best, cooperation is momentary and tactical, designed as a delaying strategy until the next gambit can be made.

Effective traders are not burdened with responsibilities for others. In a strange way, Talcott Parsons recognized this issue as early as the 1950s. (Parsons 1951). His point is that success at the market requires flexibility and the ability to respond rapidly to any changes in the business environment. Those who must act in tandem with others are at a serious disadvantage in this context. A successful competitor is mobile and unrestricted with respect to making choices. Stated simply, victorious traders are predators.

In terms of social philosophy, atomism is at the root of the market. Persons are not only individuals but have no meaningful connection to anyone else. They focus on market signals and formulate responses that will enable them to achieve their personal goals, often described benignly as their preferences. Other persons are merely obstacles, rather than community members, that must be overcome. Traders come into contact with others in a very perverse way – that is, as things that impede personal freedom. Persons clash with one another, only until a new, more effective trading strategy is discovered.

The type of person who inhabits markets is described regularly as a customer (Murphy 2004: 21–28). But what should be noted at this juncture, however, is that a customer is not necessarily a citizen, although these terms are often used interchangeably. Furthermore, a customer is not consistent with the image of social life that socialists strive to foster.

Fundamentally, customers are adversaries who search for the best deal. They are bound together simply in the hope that they will be left alone, so that they can maximize their respective gains. In this way, customers work to enhance themselves with little regard for others, and often at their expense.

This zero-sum game requires that customers try to make their environments stable and unambiguous. The best economic decisions, in other words, are not made when conditions are uncertain. Therefore, everything in the social world is transformed into a commodity, given a set value, and evaluated by a very restricted logic or algorithm. Those who can operate in this manner have the best prospects of constructing a successfully trading strategy.

But citizens, particularly in a democratic society, are expected to behave in a very different way. They are supposed to be members of a community, and thus understand, encourage, and support their neighbors. Community members are assumed to share a common destiny that is not always clearly delineated or free of uncertainty. Citizens, accordingly, are united with others, work within the

implied diversity, and open themselves to the unknown choices that could be made by their neighbors. And as a result of this community involvement, citizens are hopelessly inefficient and often troubled by moral considerations that are dysfunctional at the marketplace.

Customers, in this regard, are basically alienated from what Marx calls their species-being. They see no connection among themselves, except that they might share some natural propensities. These traits, sometimes identified as part of human nature, usually relate to avarice or some other characteristic that justifies internecine rivalry. As a result, persons are led to believe that they are destined to make life difficult for one another. The message that is instilled in everyone is that the world is a hostile and awful place, which can be saved from chaos only by markets. Accordingly, any alternative vision is criticized as merely a utopian dream.

The Function of Markets

Within the capitalist framework, the balkanization that is encouraged by the market is functional. There is little doubt, however, that sooner or later there will be a high price paid for this fragmentation. For after all, how long can a society operate with any sense of humanity that is devoid of solidarity? Moral platitudes, faux patriotism, and the desire to be left alone are hardly sufficient to create a reasonable social order. In the short term, however, the absence of any meaningful connection among persons has advantages.

This lack of cohesion, stated simply, promotes the individualism necessary to thwart any significant or structural social change. As C. Wright Mills described some time ago, when persons view social problems to be merely personal troubles, collective demands for change are unlikely (Mills 1959). Persons will often begin to blame themselves, or be identified as the sole culprits, for any social difficulties that may arise. For example, poor people are nowadays stigmatized as lazy or immoral, while corporate criminals simply make lousy choices. In each case, attention is diverted away from structural

factors that contribute to the impoverishment of most persons.

At the marketplace, persons are responsible for themselves and no-one else. Those who are intelligent, diligent, and perhaps lucky make profitable decisions, while those who fail are cast as losers. They are stupid, likely immoral, and clearly unable to take advantage of the considerable opportunities are supposedly available to all persons, regardless of their social position. Accordingly, why is anyone obligated to care for these misfits or investigate seriously their misfortune? Indeed, either they do not know how or refuse to play by the rules of the economic game. And given this conclusion, widespread interventions or proposals for assistance are devalued.

Additionally, there is nothing diabolical about any resulting social hierarchy. Those who make good decisions become part of the elite, while the underclass represents those who could not compete effectively at the marketplace. Failure is individual, and indicative of a lack of social capital or motivation, and does not reflect class conflict, any type of exploitation, discrimination, or other mistreatment. The market, therefore, serves to draw attention away from the social relationships that are at the heart of the economy. Viewed through the prism of the market, no class is responsible for either the failures or successes of a particular segment of society.

As Hugo Assmann contends, the market serves as a “rational” means of social control (Assmann 1975). Within this context, the term rational means that control appears to be disinterested and universal. That is, an explanation is provided for social hierarchies that sounds objective – divorced from politics and other self-serving means – and beneficial to everyone. Specifically important is that the market filters all phenomena, including entire classes of persons, and supplies them with an appropriate identity and proper social placement. Society benefits from such efficiency, because social positions are presumed to be occupied by the most talented persons. In effect, personal success is thought to raise an entire society.

What is important to note, however, is that the market offers an extremely condensed image of economic life. In many ways, the thrust of Marx’s work is to overcome this reductionism. He acknowledged readily that many traditional economists had described quite adequately the operation of the capitalist economy. In his opinion, however, what they had overlooked are the social relationships that are at the basis of the market. And the perversion of these relationships, claimed Marx, is what is going to bring about the demise of capitalism, rather than some anomaly at the market.

To paraphrase Marx, the market alienates persons from themselves and their fellow human beings. Transformed into customers, they become merely an element of a thoroughly commodified world, and thus become isolated from others and lose control of their lives. As Marx predicted, persons lose their sense of humanity, or their species-being, once they begin to identify with the indicators of success or failure at the marketplace. In short, they become things and imagine others to be objects. At best, interaction represents the cash nexus of merchandise.

Market Failure

The objections to the market offered above are different from those associated with traditional critiques. Most often, for example, the point is made that traders never have complete information and cannot optimize their choices. Additionally, persons are sometimes recognized to be human, and thus often act on the basis of emotion and cannot realize the benefits provided by reason. Any problems that arise at the marketplace, accordingly, are attributed to personal foibles, rather than fundamental problems with the market as an ordering mechanism.

Others claim that critiques similar to the one provided in this paper are basically misguided. They argue that markets have always existed, and that this mechanism represents nothing more than persons exchanging information, goods, or services. The market, therefore, cannot be alienating, simply

because this mode of regulation reflects simply what people desire.

Based on the work of writers such as Hinkelammert, Serrano, and Cox, however, this image of the market is outmoded. These and other writers claim that the market represents a particular mode of metaphysics, usually called “first philosophy.” Their idea is that the market is part of a long history of philosophy that has tried to establish an absolute foundation for knowledge and moral principles. The assumption is that such a base can supply the framework necessary to regulate society in a disciplined and objective way.

In fact, Adam Smith argues that, in an uncanny way, the market transforms personal motives into behavior that fosters the common weal. And Hayek contends that those who are arrogant enough to think they can intervene directly and plan an economy are fools and dangerous. Their point is that the market exists *sui generis*, and thus has the ability to change motives and behavior. Accordingly, interaction is subservient to the market, and, for the benefit of everyone, should not deviate from this position.

In this sense, the market has an ontological status similar to Plato’s Ideas. In the end, therefore, the market may inculcate a particular image of social life that is detrimental, but cannot be challenged by mere mortals. So long as the market is maintained as the basis for order, fragmentation and social irresponsibility are assumed to be normal. Maintaining this mechanism to sustain order, accordingly, cannot promote the solidarity that some economists and conservative politicians want to promote. Because of the ontology that accompanies the market, this device has little utility in societies where a premium is placed on solidarity. The market, in fine, is basically problematic.

Becoming more rational or attaining perfect knowledge will not improve the social outcomes of the market. All that will happen, instead, is that solidarity will be disrupted in a very effective manner. Traders will behave as atoms, and not deviate at all from this *modus operandi*. Any compassion that they might otherwise exhibit will be understood, finally, as socially detrimental. And

as the market approaches perfection conflict will likely increase rather than abate, as social responsibility is reduced. In this regard, as Margaret Thatcher once indicated, society does not exist at the marketplace.

Order without Abstraction

Once the market is accepted as the only rational method to secure social order, the search for alternatives is seriously curtailed. After all, atomized individuals require the presence of an abstract universal to regulate economic and all other forms of interaction. The problem with this solution, however, is that social life becomes a simulation, devoid of any real people, classes, or collective dynamics. Abstract traders are presumed to be involved in equally vague interaction.

What such a portrayal ignores is that persons are not atoms. They are not solipsistic, basically severed from others, and guided simply by idiosyncratic concerns. Nevertheless, in view of the obvious fact that persons are open to others, share an existential space, and make history together, this myth prevails. But clearly relationships to others are not optional or ephemeral, despite what advocates of the market proclaim. Persons exist in the world, instead of their own universes. In the words of Leonardo Boff, “persons are care” (Boff 2002: 71). In a similar way, Emmanuel Lévinas declares that ethics precedes ontology (Levinas 1969). His argument is that persons are basically united at the level of experience, and that abstractions are neither available nor necessary to join them together. Abstractions are unavailable because their usual ontological status is undermined; these alleged universals cannot, in other words, be categorically removed from daily interaction and have any significant meaning. Furthermore, they are not needed because interaction does not require outside mediation. Persons are present to one another, even when they are trying to rationalize their separation and differential treatment. Stated simply, those who advocate for solipsism or atomism presuppose an awareness of others.

So, what is important about this fundamental connectedness with respect to establishing economic order? Indeed, much of traditional economic thinking would have to be reassessed. Only a few ideas, however, can be mentioned at this time.

Most obvious is that economic actors are not simply individual agents, who may or may not choose to acknowledge the plight of others. In the absence of atomism, individual behavior always has broader implications that must be taken into account, but not merely as an afterthought. Actions that were originally thought to be a personal right may now be considered illegitimate, because the lives of others are directly diminished by such behavior. For example, a particular mode of personal gain, which at this moment may be perfectly rational or legal, may be discredited because such advancement is predicated on exploitation or the cultural inferiorization of persons.

The key issue is that persons are not necessarily acting rationally or morally by conforming to abstract imperatives. Instead, morality is exhibited by directly consulting others. Others, therefore, are not ancillary but vital to any sound judgment about a rational or ethical act. Rationality, in short, is not an *a priori* determination, but is based on social relationships. Economic decisions, likewise, are not rational or irrational *a priori*, but should be evaluated in terms of their social context. All decisions, in sum, are socially embedded.

When regulated through direct discourse, instead of the market, persons have to go beyond considering primarily their own preferences. Now broader impacts have to be negotiated, particularly the just, and not simply the equitable, reconciliation of different perspectives. Now policies must be understood as possibly impeding others, rather than simply clarifying or explaining the success or failure of different groups.

And rather than trying to neutralize others through legal or political maneuvering, as is often the case, real dialogue is necessary for a policy to be considered rational. The point may be illustrated, for example, that poverty in one sector of society is tied closely to the advancement of other classes. In

other words, poverty exists precisely because of the gains of specific classes of persons. Clearly atomism prevents the acquisition of this sort of insight.

And because the resulting order is an outgrowth of direct action, rather than an abstract mechanism, there is no ultimate justification for social disparities. Persons do not have recourse to so-called higher or value-free principles, like the market, to rationalize their domination of entire segments of society or the world. All they have are spurious arguments about their natural superiority, or the absence of politics or other biases at the marketplace. All that remains for supremacists is their raw desire for domination, and their willingness to ruin others in their pursuit of wealth and power. But as Sartre points out in his discussion of anti-Semitism, such crass motives must be concealed from the public, if discrimination is going to be successfully executed (Sartre 1969). Even the most barbaric societies do not like to have their inhumanity on public display.

Crucial to this shift in thinking about social order is that all persons are in a position to specify a course of action. Whereas the market is indifferent about access to interaction, at the marketplace or elsewhere, this issue is paramount to the community of actors who negotiate a polity or practice. As should be noted, and is discussed by Dussel, this community is not ethereal, like to the rendition discussed by Habermas or Apel (Dussel 1996). Central to this version of solidarity is the understanding that barriers to participation, such as institutionalized poverty or racism, must be eradicated in order for a community to exist; simply talking about discourse is different from attacking directly societal impediments to inclusion. Again, these sources of discrimination cannot be allowed to lurk behind supposedly neutral abstractions such as the market.

Conclusion

The market contributes significantly to the alienation that is ubiquitous to modern societies. In the end, persons are manipulated by forces that they do not control, because the market and the

accompanying social order are believed to be the product of economic and logical imperatives that rational or informed persons cannot ignore. As Fukuyama maintains, the market embodies the most progressive elements of historical development (Fukuyama 1992). But as a consequence of atomism, and the associated rivalries, solidarity is at a minimum. Persons stand alone while others suffers, knowing all the time that a collective effort might solve most problems. The resources are available, but most persons feel no compunction to promote the common good.

Many critics, especially in Latin America, recognize that the response by Lévinas, however inspirational and valid, is insufficient. A special type of community, in other words, must be erected, instead of merely talking about the unity of persons. Specifically important, recognizing that persons are linked together is no guarantee that all groups will receive humane treatment. Some could be treated as absolute others, for example, and become isolated and marginalized. For this reason, some Latin writers have opted for a unique strategy to end the estrangement caused by the market.

What they have proposed is the ideal of a Christian community as a supplement to Lévinas' proposal (Dussel 1988a). As a result, not only are persons united at the fundamental level of existence, but they have an obligation to protect one another. Members of such a community, for example, do not cheat or exploit one another. In fact, they serve as public witnesses to insure that no-one is mistreated and marginalized.

The market, accordingly, is recognized to be an ideology that conceals the social relationships that comprise an economy. But despite the abstract character of this device, there is nothing imperative about the market or atomism. The philosophical work has been done, in other words, that is required to rethink and remake social life. The social bond has been illustrated to exist, for example, that both creates the market and is basic to a commodious order.

With persons able to approach one another directly, without the usual abstract props used to maintain supremacy, the stage is set for social development with justice. Specifically, they can begin to appreciate that the common weal is not served when personal gain is achieved at the expense of others, or when societal gain masks the degradation of certain groups. When acting as a community, such a policy is inappropriate in theory and practice. Therefore, no person or group is permitted to pursue a course of action that supports the underdevelopment of others. No-one in a true community has the lowly status traditionally invoked to legitimize such mistreatment.

The goal of this philosophical maneuver, accordingly, is to resurrect what Marx calls the species-being of persons. And as solidarity increases, alienation begins to abate because persons are no longer alone in an overwhelming system. They collaborate, instead, in a collective project that is obscured by the market. Therefore, if a new image of collective responsibility is desired, along with a less exploitative style of interaction, the market is not the means to bring about this end.

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VISUOMENĖ BE RINKOS

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje apmąstoma rinkos reikšmė šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje. Autorius laikosi tam tikros moralizuojančios pozicijos, esą rinka skatina visuotinį susvetimėjimą ir vis labiau besiplėtojantį socioumo narių išsiskaidymą. Remiamasi Karlo Marxo mintimi, esą individas rinkos sąlygomis tampa vienu iš gamybinės jėgos atomų ir todėl praranda savąją tapatybę. Pokapitalistinėmis rinkos visuomenės sąlygomis Marxo pastebėtos išnaudotojiškos tendencijos dar labiau sustiprėja. Rinka čia apibrėžiama kaip savarankiška ir autonomiška deterministinė būtis, kuri gali būti lengvai atskirta nuo bet kokių socialinių atsitiktinumų ir nenumatytų atvejų socialiniame kontekste. Straipsnio autorius teigia, kad rinkos visuomenėje skatinama ne tik socialinė fragmentacija, visuotinis susvetimėjimas, bet

ir kurtomas totalus neatsakingumas, prieštaraujantis krikščionybės dogmoms ir kristocentrizmui bei jais sekančio Emmanuelio Levino filosofinėms pažiūroms. Pažymima, kad poindustrinės gamybinės jėgos manipuluoja individualiais ir kartu su jų gaminamais produktais paverčia juos ekonominiais loginiais imperatyvais, reproduktivimo aparatų varžteliais. Tokiu būdu eliminuojama bet kokia socialinio solidarumo galimybė ir įsigali „nesaikingas vartotojiškumas“. Būtent tokio pobūdžio šiuolaikinis vartotojiškumas skatina sociumą deorganizuojančias jėgas ir veda link Margaret Thatcher įvardytos situacijos: ten, kur egzistuoja rinka, neegzistuoja visuomenė.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: rinka, Karlas Marxas, susvetimėjimas, socialinis neatsakingumas.

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