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Scientific social responsibility and happiness

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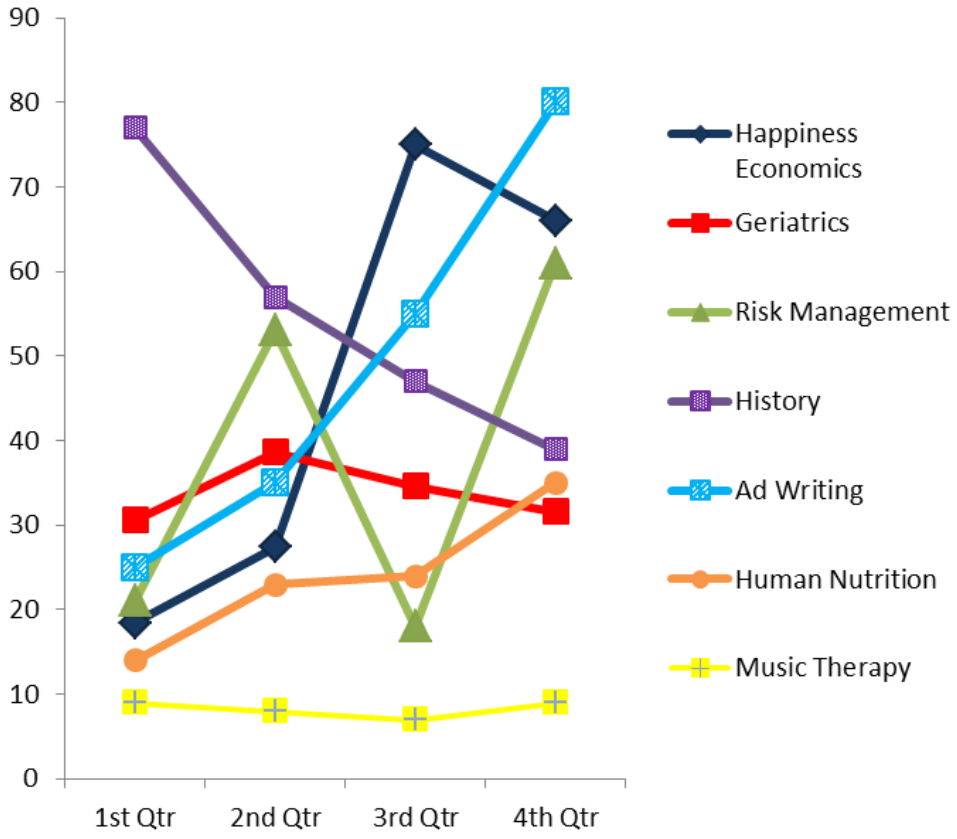

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Science
Marketing 101

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Introduction

This paper presents an argument against submitting to market forces in scientific research. It discusses science as an activity that plays an important role in the process of social reproduction, raising the question of how the objects of inquiry, methods and theories should be determined so as to serve the public good. The scientific study of happiness is adduced as an illustration of contradictions that arise between the imperatives of freedom of science and the free market.

The Werner Reimers Foundation whose 50th anniversary we celebrate today is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge in the humanities. I have known the Foundation and benefitted from its generosity many years ago when I was for about a decade a member of an interdisciplinary research team that met here twice a year. At the time, it was very nice that they paid my way and accommodated me here in the beautiful villa. No reason to ask questions. It was self-evident that what we were doing was good – furthering knowledge by means of interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration as stipulated in the mission statement of the foundation – and it was equally self-evident that what the foundation was doing was good – supporting us. Thus two of the issues to be addressed in this conference were there: A non-state actor, the Werner Reimers Foundation, representing civil society engendered happiness on our part. I didn't see it that way then, but it's not a misleading description.

In retrospect some more reflection is warranted. What I did not think about much then is (1) why the Foundation was or should have been in a position to make us happy and (2) why I should be among those the Foundation wanted to make happy. To me it was basically enough to know that I was working hard on certain theories and methods. Somebody should pay for it, and if they threw in a glass of wine in the evening in the library, well, why shouldn't scientists be treated well once in a while?! I did not care much

about where the money came from. Yes, we all knew that this was a private foundation rather than tax money, but it didn't matter much for our activities. It was a nice ivory tower. I did not spend much thought on how privileged I was.

Responsibility of Privilege

However, when we think about social awareness, participation and happiness from the point of view of science, this shall be the point of departure. Two questions, thus:

1 Whose happiness is at issue?

2 What should Scientific Social Responsibility consist of?

The first question is easy. Clearly, while it is legitimate to keep one's own wellbeing in mind, the overarching purpose of science cannot be to advance the scientists' happiness, but must be to contribute to the wellbeing of society at large. The general purpose of science is to contribute to the betterment of human life by explaining the forces of nature and finding ways of using them for human benefit (natural sciences); by furthering human understanding of self and others (humanities); and by advancing the comprehension of human action through the analysis of social relations and institutions (social sciences). All the while we must not forget that our knowledge is limited and fallible, or, as Karl Popper put it, 'our aim as scientists is objective truth; more truth, more interesting truth, more intelligible truth. We cannot reasonably aim at certainty' (Popper 1944: 12).

With the second question things become more complicated. Scientists are in a privileged position. They enjoy prestige, deserved or not, authority, and power (Chomsky 1967). We look at scientists for valid answers to complex problems of the day, for science has permeated virtually every sphere of our life. This implies responsibilities, and not only this. Responsibilities also arise out of the nature of what scientists do. It is hardly necessary to point out

that science (and technology) are double-edged swords, solving problems and creating new ones, alleviating ills and creating terrible threats. In the humanities and social sciences there is a temptation to believe that our explorations are less consequential than research on germs, toxic substances and nuclear fission that can have beneficial or deadly effects. However, 'the pen is mightier than the sword' is more than a nice phrase. Even rather innocuous methods such as Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2003), designed to expose misconceptions and ideologically tinted language, can be turned around. How language is used and abused, how brains are washed (Taylor 2006), how people are indoctrinated (Moore 1996), how their wants are stimulated or created (Bornstein, Pittman 1992), how crowds are controlled (Olson 1965), how social networks are formed or disrupted (Christakis and Fowler 2011); these are problems that fall squarely within our fields of expertise.

The general problem is that of Pandora's Box: Results of scientific research no matter in which field often have unanticipated consequences (Merton 1976). Since nowadays humanity devotes an unprecedented amount of energy to research and the risks involved seem greater than ever before, it is not surprising that many voices are raised demanding greater accountability on the part of scientists, as the knowledge society is taking shape. At the same time, Kant's dictum, *Sapere audé!* 'Dare to use your own intelligence!', the battle-cry of the European Enlightenment, implies as the precondition of its realization a maximum of freedom to do research. This has been taken to heart widely and turned science into the formidable force it is today.

In this country and in many others scientists enjoy a high level of freedom to do research (although we should not be oblivious to the fact that much money is spent on research carried out shrouded in secrecy, by companies that do not want to forego their business advantage, and governments that commission research for military purposes). For all of us who are active in

scientific research the freedom we are granted is essential; and sanctuaries where it can be acted out such as the Werner Reimers Foundation are much appreciated. By creating this foundation Werner Reimers set an admirable example as it were of ***Corporate*** *Social Responsibility – avant la lettre*. For us as scientists defending the freedom of research is an important task for ***Scientific*** *Social Responsibility*, although not the only one. It is useful to this end to ask ourselves why CSR became an issue in public discourse in recent years. By way of a hypothesis to be discussed I propose the following answer: CSR has become an issue because markets do not engender socially responsible behaviour.

Scientific Social Responsibility

Science is not static or isolated from society. It is part of the process of social reproduction, changing as society changes, responding to the needs of society and transforming society by satisfying these needs or producing knowledge that affects them in other ways. In general, the ideal of enlightenment implies that scientific research should and does produce knowledge that is needed for the public good. However, the public good is nothing specific, but is itself variable. Thus, while at one time research with military applications is seen as an irrefutable social need, at others anti-ageing products are perceived as serving the common good. Who is to be the judge? Since science is a highly specialized field of knowledge and practice working within more or less hermetic networks and using forms of language that outsiders do not understand (Martin, Veel 1998), only science itself can assess the internal quality of research, but it cannot set priorities. Since science lives of resources provided by society, society has a legitimate interest not just to know, but to control what science does, that is, what kind of knowledge it produces.

Today, the educated public is able to voice its own expectations of scientific research and enter into a dialogue with the exponents of science,

represented, for instance, by media that specialise on popularizing the findings and desiderata of future research. Science, while ever more specialized and inaccessible without proper qualification, is, therefore, also less isolated from the rest of society than it was at the time when scientists felt compelled to assert their independence from government and church. This seeming contradiction is part of the frame condition of doing science in our day, and it implies a greater degree of social responsibility than under conditions of 'pure science and disinterested curiosity'. The boundary between science and society has become more porous (Novotny 2006).

This contradiction is only partly resolved by the system of peer review; only partly because the scientific peers, too, are not isolated from society, its norms, demands, and rewards (Smith 2006).

A fundamental problem is that of unanticipated consequences of scientific research mentioned earlier. The Enlightenment commitment to knowledge presupposes self-determined autonomous individuals who are responsible for the consequences of their actions. Should this include unanticipated consequences? If not, shall no one be responsible for them? Or shall society at large be made accountable for every conceivable fallout from scientific research? In effect this is what happens, certainly where major consequences are at issue. Since inventions and discoveries, new theories and insights can change the world and not necessarily for the better, some scientists argue: Theories and results are produced in the abstract, freely and without pressure, they are published in accordance with the requirement of science to progress in an open and disinterested way, and applications are thus taken out of the hands of individual scientists.

In some countries, the freedom of science enjoys constitutional protection. For instance, article 5 of the German Fundamental Law states that "Art and science, research and teaching are free", and article 33 of the Italian Constitution likewise affirms that "The arts and sciences as well as their

teaching are free." This does not mean that 'anything goes', although Feyerabend's (1975) anarchistic theory of knowledge is right to assert that science cannot be run according to a fixed canon of universal rules. Still, scientists have to abide by the law, like everybody else, and act according to ethical standards which, however, once again are not immutable. At the present time, many researchers will interpret the requirement of the freedom of science in the service of the betterment of humanity in such a way that scientific research should

— be conducted without interference by political or business interest;

— make its results public;

— procure data and other relevant information by means of ethical methods only;

— submit proposals and results to scientific peers.

This raises the question of standards. In the introduction to the Chinese edition of *Against Method* Feyerabend made the following pertinent observation about the history of science.

> Successful research does not obey general standards; it relies now on one trick, now on another; the moves that advance it and the standards that define what counts as an advance are not always known to the movers. Far-reaching changes of outlook, such as the so-called 'Copernican Revolution' or the 'Darwinian Revolution', affect different areas of research in different ways and receive different impulses from them. A theory of science that devises standards and structural elements for *all* scientific activities and authorizes them by reference to 'Reason' or 'Rationality' may impress outsiders – but it is much too crude an instrument for the people on the spot, that is, for scientists facing some concrete research problem. (Feyerabend 1993: 1)

If Feyerabend is right, it is problematic to rely on rationality alone as a guide to setting standards of what scientific research should and shouldn't be allowed to do in pursuit of the common good. But what else is there? As more elaborately and profoundly than anyone else Habermas (1968) has discussed, there is interest. Science, being a social subsystem, is subject to various requirements, incentives and demands other than the pursuit of

truth. In modern society the autonomy and freedom of science, although widely acknowledged as the most important prerequisite of advancing knowledge, seems to be breaking down and is, maybe, obsolete already (Bok 2003). Government and business have a stake in science in that by the logic of capitalism they must maximise the return on their investment. This is a contradiction that, perhaps, can be tempered (by the peer review system), but never completely overcome. Research on a topic that for a long time did not seem amenable to scientific research at all furnishes an instructive example, that is, research on happiness.

Science and the Study of Happiness

The scientific study of happiness is an outgrowth of the enlightened conviction that everything can be made an object of scientific study, be it by means of empirical investigation, be it by introspective reasoning. Proper analysis of data obtained from people's reports on their *subjective* experience yields a measure of *objective* wellbeing, in spite of the fact that serious doubts have been cast on the validity of theories that assume that society is composed of rational utility maximising actors. Even irrational behaviour and decisions, it is argued, can be studied rationally. The following quote from one of the texts that paved the way for the scientification of happiness exemplifies well the high expectations we have come to set into science as a means of problem solving:

> A combination of methods will eventually be available to characterize the objective well-being of individuals and groups, to determine the true nature of adaptation to new circumstances, to assess enjoyment and suffering in different settings, and to provide a criterion for the evaluation of economic and social policy. (Kahneman 1999: 22)

However, the scientific study of happiness can also be considered an epiphenomenon of the crisis of capitalism that is evident as soon as we open the newspaper. It grew out of and has underscored the insight that markets are not the solution to all problems and may, indeed, aggravate certain

problems. It is an irony of history, or at least of the history of science, that at the very time when the insight is gaining ground that the free market as an action field of equal, fully informed rational beings is a fiction far removed from reality (Sen 2008), that at this very time science itself is being made to submit to market forces to an ever greater extent. Put differently, scientists behave more and more as producers, distributors, sellers and consumers of marketable cognitive contents rather than as inquisitive seekers of knowledge. I consider this a contradiction of mature capitalism.

For lack of a better solution to the problem of determining what the actual contents of scientific research should be, what objects should be studied, what methods applied, what kind of knowledge produced, many applaud this development and support market-conform and market-driven behaviour in scientific research. Not only that; that scholarly pursuits should be organized like a market appears as the natural order of things. It seems almost forgotten that the market has not always been the arbiter of science. In the Western world people have become accustomed to the marketization of many domains of life – cult, art, education, sports, health, wellness, ageing – to the extent that this is no longer questioned as the proper ordering principle for these spheres of life.

The marketization of science, too, has progressed significantly over the past several decades (Mok and Lo 2002). Is this problematic? Upon reflection it is clear that in other periods of history science was much less exposed to what nowadays are called market forces, in other words that the commodification and commercialization of scientific research is contingent upon our time and a particular form of social organization. The point at issue is not turning back the clock. To think that this were possible would just be a gross misunderstanding of how science and society evolve. It must also be acknowledged that in many respects the market of knowledge has been spectacularly successful, certainly in economic terms. However, as scientists we have an obligation to reflect on what we are doing, and this includes the

obligation to try to understand the forces and structures that influence our behaviour, and to take note of the fact that reasons for doing science that cannot be reduced to cost and benefit, such as curiosity, the desire to help others, and to make the world a better place, are being marginalized, if not corrupted, by the profit motive.

Freedom of scientific research under market conditions

One important question is how the freedom of science, which is held to be crucially important for the advancement of knowledge, fares under the conditions of mature capitalism. First, funding. No funding agency, private or public, commits any financial resources to research without condition. The peer review system is designed to ensure that the distribution of funds for research is based on criteria of scientific merit alone; however, the history of science teaches us that this is an ideal at best approximated. Scientists have often been unable or unwilling to recognize the merits of methods, theories and objectives that deviate too far from what they have learned and internalized as 'the rules of the game'. And competition between rivals for the better truth which, supposedly, guarantees that superior products will prevail, is no panacea. Quoting Julian Huxley, (Barber 1961: 601) points out that '"authorities," "disciplines," and "schools" […] do more to interfere with the work of the scientific spirit than all its enemies.'

Next, results. The free use of research results is curtailed in many ways, by copyright, patents and other laws regulating intellectual property rights, not to mention researchers' self-interest. What is more, research that is owned by industry is often biased. How the tobacco industry withheld information regarding health effects of its products is one well-known example (Advocacy Institute 1998). That medical tests sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry 'are more likely to produce results that flatter the sponsor's drug' (Goldacre 2012: x) is another. Since in both cases research has been carried out by parties with a stake in the results this should,

perhaps, not surprise us; however, it should alert us to the risks involved in making scholarly activities subservient to the logic of capital. The ideal of advancing wisdom for the sake of humanity is not easily reconcilable with the market as an ordering principle and the question of whether or not or to what extent market-driven behaviour should determine scientific research has no easy answer. However, one powerful argument against the free reign of market principles in science is as follows.

Market apologists, ever since Adam Smith, argue that under conditions of complete freedom markets would lead to complete equality and no profit. With regard to access to scientific knowledge this is an attractive argument, but it is not borne out in reality. For one thing, there are no free markets and, for another, the most market-oriented societies are also the most unequal ones.

The ideal market presupposes the same self-determined rational individuals who make informed choices with their own self-interest in mind that Kant urged to step out of their self-caused ignorance and 'dare to think'. However, much ink has been spilt to demonstrate that people, even if they think, do not only think, but are also moved by passion, have values, traditions and irrational beliefs. What is more, markets do not work like that. Ideally market participants would act rationally on the basis of objective and exhaustive information about the products that are being traded; but in the real world market choices are based on fantasy, allusion and misrepresentation. Business does not want consumers to make the best choice, but to buy their products. This does not mean that market participants are bent on deceiving others, but that markets are a mechanism that generates profit (even if it is win-win) rather than truth. This is one reason why markets predicated on rational choice cannot be relied upon for the solutions of all problems, but not the only one. Another reason is that there are important choices that markets do not offer, such as,

— a public health insurance system;
— public transport;
— public pension funds;
— a public education system, including higher education and scientific research.

In short, markets do not produce common goods, and in the event that they do, they do not allocate them evenly. Moreover, markets are not disinterested and never were. They are biased to certain outcomes and, therefore, unsuited for determining scientific agendas and what happens with scientific results once they have been published. Yet, it is in the direction of market forces that many scientists, research institutes and science management agencies are moving, as contributing to economic growth seems to be replacing the quest for truth as the primary purpose of institutions of higher learning. The dangers are obvious, or are they not?

Resist the marketization of science!

The marketization of science is a reality. There is a premium on research that sells. Not only do scientists who compete for funding think about their 'sales points' – 'Don't be shy, if you don't say that you're brilliant, nobody else will!' – they will likely also shift their attention, however unwittingly, to research projects that have a potential in the competitive market of science. In this way, Kant's plea 'Dare to think!' is being disfigured to a more prosaic 'Dare to think marketing!' There is a real danger that the relationship between knowledge and publicity gets perverted. To be sure, great discoveries and theoretical breakthroughs should be made public and get recognition, but attracting recognition by means of good publicity must not be the goal.

The new media are luring scholars into paying attention and trying to attract attention to stylishly packed research projects that may turn out not to be

so sensational after all. Even though the pace of progress in science is no more measured in minutes today than it was in Kant's day, scientists are encouraged to twitter and update their Facebook pages daily, and many need no encouragement. The peer review system, it is argued, will ensure that quality is not undermined by focussing too much attention on glamorous presentation. But if this is really so, why bother with glitzy PR in the first place!

Does reason need persuasion? Or, conversely, does persuasion need reason? The logic of consumer capitalism is marketing (Bauman 2007). Should this be the logic of science, too? I think not, and not just because it is frivolous, but because it is potentially dangerous. Markets respond to the demand of the moment and, if unchecked by anti-trust laws, tend to produce dominant market players or monopolies. Markets don't think. No market tells us, for example, that we had better not overfish the oceans. It only tells us that, if we continue to do so, prices for blue-fin will go up. The risks involved are systematically underestimated. The problem is, again, with unanticipated consequences. Our knowledge is limited. If only for that reason we should resist the marketization of science, because we know that markets are not free but biased by vested interest as well as ignorance.

Because science produces its own problems, that is, challenges and risks brought about by the solutions to other problems, control mechanisms to reduce negative effects of research on the common good are difficult to design. However, scientists should resist the temptation to leave this to the market, for markets do not guarantee that the best product succeeds or that negative developments are corrected. The underlying logics of markets and science are not just different but opposed to each other. By way of conclusion, let me summarize the main points that argue against the marketization of research as five, admittedly crude opposites:

Market	**Science**
1 Markets have no morality.	Science should serve the public good.
2 Markets permit deception .	Science wants to reduce deception.
3 There are no free markets.	Science strives for freedom (from ignorance).
4 Markets reward appearance.	Science puts a premium on truth.
5 Markets lead to domination.	Science thrives on enabling different paths to knowledge.

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