Current issues and attitudes within the field of marketing are discussed, particularly the general stigma attached to marketing, the territorial conflicts in defining marketing, and the tension between theory and practice. These problems are seen as deriving partly from the confusions among ideas about marketing as a commercial activity, a universal phenomenon of exchange, and a field of study without adequate terminological distinctions. The situation might be improved by distinguishing a field of study, hence termed the science of marxology.

INTRODUCTION

There seems to be a great amount of conflict and brooding going on over the whole of marketing, reflecting both old problems and new ones. Discerning a crisis in one’s field is a common ploy, but some times do appear to be more critical than others, and the recent agitation is unusually lively. It may help in the search for clarity to discuss some main controversial ideas. There are three central issues that are here cast in the form of three major criticisms of marketing.

1. Marketing is a general evil.
2. Marketing trespasses on other fields.
3. Marketing theory is irrelevant.

These three negative ideas generate a noticeable degree of heat, and challenge all marketing educators to examine their field and its basic nature, and to clarify response to these criticisms. The endeavor may be foolish—perhaps unnecessary for thoughtful and reasonable people and futile for others. Still, these ideas have repercussions, they repel good students, affect the support of marketing scholars, and hamper the free expression of inquiry seeking to understand the human actions, structures, and processes called marketing. These three problems radiate in many directions and involve numerous sub-issues and segments of society. They indicate that marketing is a controversial subject and source of conflict between marketers and non-marketers, among marketing thinkers, and between marketing thinkers and marketing doers.

The first proposition affects marketing in all its relations, stigmatizing it for existing in society; the second restricts its definition and application in a mean-minded and territorial fashion; and the third complaint denies the value of serious advanced study of marketing. The conflicts entailed are perhaps so deep and encompassing that they are ultimately irreconcilable, but they will probably gain from airing and dialogue, as Boris Becker [7] has pointed out, in our search for truth. Differences due to real opposed interests will undoubtedly continue, but those due to misunderstanding or confusion might be outlawed. It is not the purpose of this discussion to defend specific marketing actions against all comers, but to explore the issues and to suggest an ameliorative approach.

MARKETING STIGMATIZED

The general understanding of what constitutes marketing is both self-confident and negative. That is, most people do not doubt they know that marketing is the selling of goods and that the selling is conducted in a manner deserving of censure. This knowledge is ancient, going back to traditional attitudes toward those who sell. The root ideas of mercari, to trade, merere, to earn, may seem neutral enough (or even positive, as in merit), but the use of these roots to form words such as mercerious, meaning like a prostitute, and mercenary, to indicate one who will do anything for money, shows the crude attachment of negative value judgments to ideas of selling. Aristotle agreed with the opinion of the day when he wrote that "retail trade is justly censured; for it is unnatural, and a mode by which men gain from one another."

Basic Motives

It is interesting to speculate on the sources of the degradation of marketing. They are presumably deep-rooted in being so pervasive and enduring. A common assumption in condemning marketing is that the buyer is taken advantage of by the seller. Even when the marketing exchange is supposed to be equal in value to both participants, dissatisfaction often remains. The many reasons for this go on at various levels. One problem is that the equation is comprised of units whose values are either not easily determined or compared. If the buyer receives the product and satisfaction of his need and the seller receives the payment for his cost and mark-up (P + S = C + N), how can the two sides of the equation be judged truly equal? Even in a trade of goods where both parties are clearly buyer and seller, mutual suspicion may arise that one has yielded up a greater value than that received.

A second great source of difficulty relates to the perceived purposes of the seller, especially when a middleman exists and when money is involved. The distributor becomes divorced from basic production and is associated more narrowly with the goals of gaining and accumulating money, supposedly as much as possible. This motive is taken as unusually egocentric and damaging to other people, and therefore deserving of less admiration than other vocational aims. Those who grow or craft goods, whose work is healing, study, salvation, artistry, appear to have a commitment that is direct and socially valuable—although they, too, become suspect if money looms too large in their aims. Because the professions are supposedly self-denying in this respect, they have been ennobled. If the merchant, the paradigm of the marketer, sought only to provide, to be the selfless, dedicated quartermaster to the community, then his endeavor too might be excused.
come possible, as well as intellectual recognition of economic necessities relating to profit and accumulation of capital.

The Synecdochic Mechanism

Learning to adapt to the requirements of an elaborate system of giving and receiving, as society demands [9], leads to many complexities of outlook. In given economies, haggling may come to be admired, and bribery a way of life. In attempts to deny their own persistent desire to get, people do much blaming of others. Marketing is blamed for fostering materialism; and in case consumers seem overly fertile ground for its attractions and too eager to embrace it, the products are deemed shoddy, and the seduction credited to lies and aggressive selling. Implying that in some state of nature (sans marketing) one would have only virtuous spontaneous needs and wants, marketing is accused of brainwashing, forcing, and manipulating people to want things they do not need and to buy things they do not want.

Certainly, there are marketers who make inferior goods, sell aggressively, and tell lies in their advertising. And it is no defense of them to cite equally culpable quack physicians, destructive politicians, cheating customers, faithless ministers, and ignorant teachers. But it is worth noting the overgeneralizing that occurs when all marketing is stigmatized and the term becomes synonymous with doing bad things. All group prejudice is a form of this overgeneralizing, or fallacy of composition. To identify it here, the way a part of marketing is taken for the whole is called the synecdochic mechanism. A synecdochic is a rhetorical device wherein the singular is substituted for the plural: here the disaggreed marketer is being used to define the category, substituted for those others who strive to make a fine product, offer an excellent service, price fairly, sell helpfully, and communicate honestly.

To refer to such positive marketing probably arouses cynical reactions even in an audience identified with marketing. It illustrates the deep-rooted nature of the problem to observe within the marketing professions signs of self-hatred, acceptance of the stigma, and casual use of the rhetoric that makes marketing a bad word. For example, H. T. Tucker cites criticism of the marketing viewpoint, who equate marketing activities with exploiting motives, and "more gimmicky and packaging than substantive change." He seems to accept their criticism and the verbalized negative one when he says that the student is a special person who must not be marketed into doing what the organizations want" [16].

Thus, it is that marketing is stigmatized because it is associated with the many frustrations of wanting and giving--with material things and guilt over the desire for them, with money and its deflection of direct interest in providing goods and services--leading to the projection of these frustrations onto marketing and marketers, and to the synecdochic equation of the whole field with its worst manifestations.

THE DOMAIN OF MARKETING

Another level of explanation of marketing's poor reputation may lie in confusion or misunderstanding as to what marketing actually is. Perhaps the conventional notion of marketing is not a good or accurate one, and re-definition could assist in making some useful distinctions. Partly, this is an academic exercise. As Robert Oliver says, in trying to offer a definition of the field of speech, knowledge does not lend itself readily to agumentalization. Departmentalization is deemed on our campuses not for investigative, but administrative, convenience. The boundaries established around the various academic specialties are not strong enough to contain human curiosity [12].

In the field of speech, Oliver finds the heart of the matter in one purpose: to deal with influence as exerted through oral discourse. He clingts to this, despite his qualms.

Like other professions, ours has been highly introspective, defensive, self-critical, and uncertain of its goals, its methods, and its boundaries... when we replace the term "language" with the much more inclusive term "speech," the boundaries of our field tend to disappear. Yet within this complexity we must somehow establish our own identity of goals and methods. The task is appalling [13].

Territoriality

The marketing literature shows that marketing thinkers have trouble with finding their consistent locus, also, because their subject matter radiates so readily into and across other disciplines, and of thinking about human behavior. In his discussion of "the identity crisis in marketing," Bartels raises this basic question:

The crux of the issue is this: is the identity of marketing determined by the subject matter dealt with or by the technology with which the subject is handled? ... Marketing has initially and generally been associated exclusively with the distributive part of the economic institution and function. In this capacity, marketing is identified by the substance and the subject of its area of concern [5].

Bartels seems open-minded about the issue, perhaps preferring the substantive definition rather than the methodological application one. He thinks the fresh interest in physical distribution, or logistics, may allow the word marketing to go on to refer to both economic and non-economic fields of application. Still, he sees marketing as but a species of general behavioral activity, and one that is trying to clean up on someone else's territory: "From this standpoint, too, the idea that the fields of political campaigns, religious evangelism, or Red Cross solicitation are the province of marketers rather than of social scientists, may be questionable" [6].

David Luck also expresses his concern over the confusion of terminology and conceptualization created by the idea that "every sort of organization is engaged in marketing" [11], and hopes that an authoritative definition of marketing might come from a commission created for the purpose.

These territorial considerations are probably basically irrelevant. As Karl Popper says,

All this classification and distinction is a comparatively unimportant and superficial affair. We are not students of some subject matter but students of problems. And problems may cut right across the borders of any subject matter or discipline [13].

That is, no one has any special right to a problem. Intellectual territoriality is not like the ownership of a piece of physical geography. Voting behavior may seem
the province of political scientists, but that does not prevent sociologists from studying the behavior and need not inhibit marketers. That people like a particular food can be studied by biologists as a process of osmosis or hormonal secretions, by psychologists as a conditioned response or fixation, due to trauma, by anthropologists as a cultural imperative, and by speech scholars as a reaction to the oral discourse, "Come and get it!" What makes sex political and politics sexual is the determined attack on the analysis and actions of feminists. To dismiss this as a "Feminist supremacy syndrome" (a la Lukes's reference to those with a sort of marketing supremacy syndrome) seems pointless and ostrich-like. To perceive or study the marketing content of a problem is not to say that it is the marketer's province rather than the social scientist's, but that it is also the marketer's province.

Tucker implies that Kotler and Levy sought to broaden the boundaries of marketing in 1969 [10] in a desire to follow the action of important problems growing elsewhere [16]; but Levy studied such problems at Social Research, Inc., since starting his marketing research career in 1948. It may not properly be said that the action came to marketing for help rather than the other way around, as non-business managers recognized that the marketing point of view might be useful with their problems. In some ways, to resist or resent this fact, is further agreement that marketing is an evil that socially virtuous causes ought not turn to for help.

Exchange

It has been suggested above that the core issues in marketing arise from the coming together of providing and needing or wanting. That is, exchange comes about because one must always give something to get something one wants. The paradigm is the infant, reaching for anything available and trying to incorporate it. But experience soon teaches two conditions: one can't have everything, and one must give something in return. The first is the condition for making choices, and the second creates exchanges.

The issue of exchange has been much discussed—views have been presented by many, including Alderson, Kotler, Levy, and Zaltman [2], and two excellent recent articles by Bagozzi [3]. These will not be gone into here, except to reiterate and emphasize the latter's statement that marketing is "a general function of universal applicability. This is the exchange role, and it deals with problems related to this behavior" [4].

It seems important to insist on the issue of universal applicability, mainly because there seems no adequately consistent way to define marketing exchange that limits it short of universality. What is a marketing exchange as different from any other exchange? Some try to restrict marketing to the exchange of money for products, a distinction that fails immediately with consideration of markets in which money is exchanged for money, products for products, and money or product are exchanged for services. Then is there any way to limit which money, products, or services will be considered elements of marketing exchange, and which not? Some use the word economic as the limiting adjective, but what is economic and what is non-economic? Economics texts wrestle with such definitions and mainly retreat to notions of scarce resources, utilities, production, consumption, usually trying to stay as close to money as possible. But again, universality of reference is hard to avoid; as what is not a scarce resource, what is not a utility? These concepts are all interwoven. Money is a measure and surrogate for value, for one's labor; labor is a form of energy, while service anything can be a commodity. All "utility" is a form of satisfaction. In a world in which there is no truly free air (although optimistically cited by Samuelson as a non-economic good in his classic test on economics), in which all exchanges are economic choices and all are exchanges of satisfactions, there can be no non-marketing exchanges. What is being exchanged may sometimes be hard to analyze, but marketing cannot be limited to being the science of simple exchanges.

It may be convenient, of course, to make distinctions between marketing exchanges that are culturally defined as commercial or economic, and other types. Some educators and most marketing practitioners in everyday business are more comfortable than. But that should not lead to the exclusion from marketing theory of the exchanges of goods and services in marriages, churches, politics, aesthetics, schools, government, and social causes.

MARKETING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Theorists and practitioners often develop tensions due to conflict of aims, procedures, concepts of scientific and professional standards, relevance, etc. Academic psychologists and clinical psychologists show this tension, and its recent flare-up in the marketing field is notable. For some time, marketing people have thought about the development of marketing as a science. In particular, that ultimate state has not fully arrived; but various workers have been striving in that direction. The establishment of the Marketing Science Institute is one indication, as well as numerous conferences, symposia, and articles, fracturing over marketing as a science, an art, a pseudo-science, as having theory, metatheory, etc. [17].

In the classical extreme, practitioners see theorists (viz., academicians) as ivory tower thinkers, impractical people who do not know the realities of the marketplace, who have "never met a payroll," who teach because they can't do. The theorists return the compliment by regarding practitioners as concrete-minded people who are overly specialized and vocational, unable to generalize their experience, who want to know how-to-do-it rather than to understand why it works as it does. If a science is to work toward understanding, predicting, and controlling, the researcher and teacher tends to emphasize the first two aims, and the practitioner the last two.

The extremists write accusations about the uselessness of academic research or defend the validity and importance of the intellectual enterprise. Outstanding examples from the Marketing News are Newton Frank's rude and vituperative letter (March 14, 1975) on the uselessness of academic research, the letter (12/1/76) from James F. Engel in which he says that marketing is not a pure science, that publications should face this fact and judge their content only by their practical value to the applied marketer. He defines marketing as an interdisciplinary discipline that draws upon several underlying disciplines; and regards the proposal of Randall Schultz (11/1/74) that there be separate journals of study and practice as a perpetuation of the treachery of educators talking to themselves. Between the extremes are such moderating, judicious suggestions as a broader dialogue, by Professor Becker (3/31/75) who, however, also believes that if practitioners are determined to be so ignorant, then it is time to go our separate ways. Richard E. Romans (8/15/75) offers an accommodating discussion explaining the benefits of academic research. Thomas Lee Davidson's article shows alarm.

A schism exists today within the marketing community—with marketing academicians lined up on one side and marketing practitioners on
the other. The continued growth of that schism--and it is growing--can only be detrimental to both sides.

His solution is indicated in the headline above his article:

One businessman's comments on marketing educators.

EDUCATORS MUST SEE MARKETING AS A 'DOING PROFESSION' AND ADD 'CLINICAL EXPERIENCE' TO 'CLASSROOM VACUUM.'

The pressure is to get more practice into the classroom by inviting businessmen to talk to classes, by urging practitioners to write for the Journal of Marketing.

THE SCIENCE OF MARCROLOGY

It is evident that many of the problems discussed above are real ones that will not easily be solved. Marketing will always be regarded as an evil by those who refuse to recognize its universality or do not want to countenance its demands for a return and often a profit. There are manipulative marketers, deceptive ads, and high pressure salesmen. There are sincere disagreements about discipline boundaries and preferred definitions, and about the form of theory. A partial--the calls for dialogue, a commission to define marketing, an article giving business persons 10 guidelines to follow when invited to speak to students, and another by a young man exhorting marketers to be honest.

One source of these problems and the struggles with them lies in the idea of marketing as an activity. It is not surprising that educators are urged to see marketing as a "doing profession," when marketing is a doing. When one is a seller and markets, one is a marketer who does marketing; and a buyer goes marketing. Thus, if educators teach marketing, they should teach how to do it and how to go to it; then no wonder Engel says they are acting as engineers of the marketplace. Then it is reasonable that textbooks tend to be prescriptive writing, oriented to helping students to be profitable, successful marketers, good marketers who apply the marketing concept or virtuous marketers who consider their social responsibility in accordance with the latest ideas of how marketing ought to be done. Such prescriptions and applications are indeed not a "pure science," but the teaching of particular sets of marketing values, and they produce the faddishness and biases that Robert F. Agne deplores [1].

A marketing science should be demarcated that does not do marketing research but that does research into marketing. It should be a pursuit of knowledge, as distinguished from its application, candidly and proudly. It should exist in relation to marketing as physics or chemistry are to their respective engineering disciplines, as psychology is to counselling. Some have thought that marketing is applied economics, but economics shows little interest in marketing and marketing draws on economics mainly as it might on any other discipline--as sociology and economics draw on psychology and mathematics.

Marketing needs its own parent discipline and theoretical roots, its area of basic study. Despite being hampered by the confusions of being called marketers when they are trying to be teachers and researchers into marketing, such professionals have nevertheless been developing concepts, models, and a theoretical literature, and have doctoral students carrying out theoretical inquiries.

The name of such a science might draw on some appropriate linguistic roots and be called MARCROLOGY. Marcrology could be the discipline of exchanges, operating at various levels of abstraction and in whatever contexts are of interest to the scholars. It could have its own focus and its interdisciplinary character, as all the behavioral sciences do. Marcrology could study the history of exchanges, why marketing is evil, the various types of exchange, and such divisions of activity as commercial marketing, family or intimate marketing, social and political marketing--or their various marcoologies. Abnormal or deviant marcrology might study "unusual payments," as a study group recently called large-scale foreign bribery, without having to moralize about them. As scientists, marcrologists should not teach their opinions about whether television or consumerism or emotional appeals or premiums or unit pricing are good or bad, but rather what these are, how and why they affect which participants in the exchange. They can study what is exchanged, by whom, where, when, and why, with what consequences personally, socially, nationally. They can do this like other scientists, just to know, and for the sake of that wish, in order to share that knowledge without being condemned for having a journal that is not practical in character. And if they wish, like other scientists, marcrologists can try to say what is likely to happen under given circumstances, so that practical people can learn from that and apply it as physics is applied to manufacturing and biology to medicine.

If there is to be a commission, let it convene marcrologists to define their discipline and its curriculum. In this way, both marcrology and the engineering activity that is marketing could be clarified, as well as the role identities that accompany the distinctions between research, teaching, and application.

REFERENCES


6. Ibid., 76


