NEEDS AND WANTS: THE CASE OF BROADCASTING POLICY

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Abstract

In this paper I identify two broad perspectives on broadcasting policy each deploying very different assumptions regarding the role of policy in facilitating human well-being. I argue that an increasingly influential wants-based position draws upon an impoverished social ontology which is unable to sustain the distinction between wants and underlying needs. I also argue that the previously dominant beyond-wants perspective failed to elaborate its own contrasting presuppositions sufficiently. Drawing upon a perspective developed within economics under the heading of *critical realism*, I emphasise that needs can be formulated as goals only under definite historical conditions. As such they may be poorly and even misleadingly formulated. Specifically real needs can be manifest in a variety of historically contingent wants, which may then be met by any of a multitude of potential satisfiers. The point insisted upon here is that the two, real needs and expressed wants, should not be conflated. By maintaining this distinction it is possible to evaluate broadcasting systems not simply in terms of their ability to match outputs to wants but in terms of criteria beyond wants.

Acknowledgements.

NEEDS AND WANTS: THE CASE OF BROADCASTING POLICY

"He who prides himself on giving what he thinks the public wants is often creating a fictitious demand for lower standards which he himself will then satisfy" (Reith, 1925 quoted in Scannell, 1990: 13).

"Those who say they give the public what it wants begin by underestimating public taste, and end by debauching it"(Submission quoted in Pilkington Report:1962:19)

"Much of what is claimed to be quality television here is no more than the parading of the prejudices and interests of the like-minded people who currently control British television" (Rupert Murdoch, 1989).

"anybody who, within the law of the land, provides a service which the public wants at a price it can afford is providing a public service" (Rupert Murdoch, 1989).

1. Introduction

Until recently a broad consensus existed amongst commentators on UK broadcasting. This consensus view was that the purposes and organisation of broadcasting should be assessed not entirely, or even primarily, on the basis of whether it catered for people's subjective wants (preferences/tastes). Rather, conceptions of quality, public service, or diversity were typically invoked to underwrite broadcasting policy. Up until the 1980s the commitment to the idea of broadcasting being orientated to something beyond wants could be readily discerned in both the reports of successive parliamentary committees investigating the state/future of British Broadcasting[1] and the comments of many of those involved in interpreting and fulfilling the public service remit at a practical level.[2] While there certainly existed dissenters from this conventional view it is only

relatively recently that the latter has come under sustained attack. However, once attacked this long standing consensus has rapidly given way to a new orthodoxy, one linked by some to the increased influence of economists as advisors in this field.[3] This new orthodoxy insists that the adequacy of broadcasting systems must be assessed first and foremost in terms of their ability to match the subjective wants of consumers to the outputs produced. Typically a further step is taken; a particular conceptualisation of the market is drawn upon, one which insists that it is the market that best guarantees that agents' preferences are satisfied. The emergence of this new orthodoxy has given rise to a sense of disorientation amongst those who retain the view that broadcasting must aim at more than the satisfaction of subjective wants.[4] And it has led those who embrace the new mainstream to attempt to re-conceptualise quality, public service and diversity in a manner consistent with it.

In this paper I identify these two broad positions within the broadcasting policy debate, providing examples of each, and note how their respective influence has recently changed. I argue that while the 'wants-based' position appears increasingly to be taken for granted within the broadcasting sphere this victory rests on a misconception of the 'beyond-wants' alternative. This misconception I claim has been facilitated by a failure of the traditional proponents of the latter view to elaborate the presuppositions of their position adequately.

2. The Pilkington Report on the Purposes of Broadcasting

It is possible to draw upon numerous statements, stretching back to Reith,[5] illustrating the traditional insistence that the institutions of broadcasting be assessed by criteria beyond agents' preferences. I shall refer here only to one of the more sophisticated expressions of this argument namely that found in the Pilkington Report published in 1962. The Committee is explicit about the strategy to be followed and accepts that in the first instance it is necessary to operate at a

fairly abstract level. Richard Hoggart, a key member of the Committee, later wrote: "the Committee had realised soon in the inquiry that, whatever else it did, it had to write a kind of essay in social philosophy - on the place of mass communications in a democracy, before it could begin to make sense of the conflicting evidence. People could disagree, but at least they would know the assumption behind the recommendations" (1970a). In this section I draw out these assumptions and identify certain gaps in the report's elaboration of the beyond-wants perspective it explicitly endorses.

The Pilkington Report first attempts to identify the distinct *purposes of broadcasting* as an activity and only then considers specific organisational/institutional issues. That is, it is only after the intrinsic purposes of broadcasting have been elaborated that the Report turns to consider the impact of competition or assess the likely consequences of the introduction of subscription services. Moreover, in confronting these questions the criterion adopted is whether the actual or proposed changes facilitate or constrain the fulfilment of the stated purposes of broadcasting. The Report notes that those submissions critical of programme content typically argue:

> "that programme items were far too often devised with the object of seeking, at whatever cost in quality or variety, the largest possible audience; and that, to attain this object, the items nearly always appealed to a low level of public taste. This was not, of course, to say that all items which attracted large audiences were poor. There was a lack of variety and originality, an adherence to what was "safe"; and an unwillingness to try challenging, demanding, and still less, uncomfortable subject matter. It was put to us that, in television as elsewhere, one man's meat ought to be another man's poison; that too often viewers were offered neither meat nor poison but pap - because, presumably, though no-one much likes it, at least no-one will get indigestion" (1962:17).

The Report quickly identifies the counter argument:

> "Against this, it has been said that in fact people watch these items; that the justification lies precisely in the fact that they are mass appeal items. In a free society, this is what people freely choose; they do not have to watch; they can switch off. In short by these tests, these items are "what the public wants", and to provide anything else is to impose on people what someone thinks they ought to like. Indeed, it has been held that, for this reason, it is not of great relevance to criticise television at all. We found this last a deflating thought" (1962:17).

The Report insists that neither quality in, nor the purposes of, broadcasting should be confused with the search for the largest possible audience.[6]

> "To give the public what it wants" seems at first sight unexceptionable. But when applied to broadcasting it is difficult to analyse ..... No one can say he is giving the public what it wants, unless the public knows the whole range of possibilities which television can offer and, from this range, chooses what it wants to see. *For a choice is only free if the field of choice is not unnecessarily restricted.* The subject matter of television is to be found in the whole scope and variety of human awareness and experience. If viewers - the public - are thought of as "the mass audience", or "the majority", they will be offered only the average of common experience and awareness the "ordinary"; the commonplace - for what all know and do is, by definition, commonplace. They will be kept unaware of what lies beyond the average of experience; their field of choice will be limited. In time they may come to like only what they know. But it will always be true that had they been offered a wider range from which to choose, they might and often would have chosen otherwise, and with greater enjoyment." (1962:19)

Here Pilkington appears to be arguing that there may exist a conflict between the wants that are actually experienced and the wants that agents might have had or could have - the immediate wants of agents can frustrate or get in the way of their real interests. Wants are conditioned in a particular social context and are dependent on subjective experience and beliefs. Consequently an agent's wants, preferences, tastes may rest on false beliefs about what is available and what they actually need or desire. Hoggart, in a later paper notes: "The existing tastes of most of us are a product not simply of irremovable hereditary factors; they are to a large extent a product of our opportunities, education, social class, available money, and where we happen to be born. It seems reasonable to ask whether broadcasters should simply reflect those average ranges of interests which a great number of other environmental forces have together produced at any particular time. If they decide to do this they should realise that their role only appears to be passive. They will, in fact, be harnessed to the services of, and made to pull in the same direction as, many other forces whose natural aim - in commercial democracies - is to exploit the existing range of tastes and interests. In that apparently passive role, television will therefore not be passive at all; it will reinforce the existing limits in range of taste" (1970b:167).[7] The argument Pilkington develops is that if we have no knowledge or control over the formation, and development, of wants, then action motivated by these wants cannot be free activity even if we are free to pursue and satisfy the wants so formed and developed. Where individuals have little or no control over the determination of wants they are denied freedom. Thus, if broadcasting systems were to deliver the programmes people want in conditions where these wants themselves have not been freely formulated, then it is apparent that such want satisfaction cannot be seen as necessarily preserving or guaranteeing freedom.

For many of the advocates of a beyond-wants position the major problem is how to maintain a critical distance from the prevailing pattern of wants, preferences and consequent choices and yet

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simultaneously avoid the claim to know the interests/needs of others better than these others know their own interests/needs. Pilkington appears committed to the claim that the real interests or needs of agents may be quite distinct from their currently experienced wants. On this basis policy prescription could be anticipated which was ostensibly on behalf of and in the interests of agents, but against their express wishes.[8] The Pilkington Report attempts to resolve this dilemma by insisting that agents remain the *ultimate* arbiters of their real interests or needs but are not regarded as the *immediate* arbiters of those interests/needs. According to the Pilkington Report it is only under conditions of free choice, that is, choice from the widest possible range of programme matter, that agents are likely to choose what is in their real interests:

> "it seems to us that to give the public what it wants is a misleading phrase: misleading because as commonly used it has the appearance of an appeal to democratic principle but the appearance is deceptive. It is in fact patronising and arrogant, in that it claims to know what the public is, but defines it as no more than the mass audience; and in that it claims to know what it wants, but limits its choice to the average of experience. In this sense we reject it utterly. If there is a sense in which it should be used, it is this: what the public wants and what it has the right to get is the freedom to choose from the widest possible range of programme matter. Anything less is a deprivation. The alternative is often presented as this; that the broadcaster should 'give the public what he thinks is good for it'. This philosophy too we would reject as patronising and arrogant. But it was never advanced to us in evidence; and is not, as is sometimes suggested the only alternative. The choice is not between either 'giving the public what it wants' or 'giving the public what someone thinks is good for it', and nothing else. There is an area of possibility between the two; and it is within this area that the choice lies" (1962: 19).

An implicit assumption here is that human agents are mistaken about their interests/needs largely as a consequence of a lack of experience, and that greater experience is likely to correct these mistakes. While I would wish to support the idea that real interests can be identified correctly it is unlikely that this task will usually be a simple matter. The Report merely suggests that it is the broadcasting authorities who must ensure that a sufficient range of material is available:

> "The broadcasting authorities have certainly a duty to keep sensitively aware of the public's tastes and attitudes as they now are and in all their variety; and to care about them. But if they do more than that, this is not to give the public 'what someone thinks is good for it'. It is to respect the public's right to choose from the widest possible range of subject matter and so to enlarge worthwhile experience. Because, in principle, the possible range of subject matter is inexhaustible, all of it can never be presented, nor can the public know what the range is. So the broadcaster must explore it, and choose from it first. This might be called 'giving a lead': but it is not the lead of the autocratic or arrogant. It is the proper exercise of responsibility by public authorities duly constituted as trustees for the public interest." (1962: 19).

In conceiving of the role of the authorities explicitly in terms of going beyond agents' immediate wants and providing an adequate range of programming, a key issue which remains is on what basis the limits of such a range are to be determined. That is, on the basis of what criteria is it to be decided what is left out? It is possible to identify a significant gap at this point in the argument. The Report provides little guidance, simply identifying the Governors and the members of the ITA as those ultimately responsible for securing the public interest:

"The Governors' [of the BBC] and members [of the ITA] concern is to represent and secure the public interest in broadcasting. It is for them to judge what the public interest is, and it is for this they are answerable. They must not do so by assessing the balance of opinion on this or that element of programme content, and then adopting the majority view as their own; for ... this would be to mistake "what the public wants" - in the misleading sense implied when the phrase is used as a slogan - for the public interest. Their task is ... to be thoroughly aware of public opinion in all its variety, to care about it and to take proper and full account of it. Having done so, they must then identify the public interest in broadcasting, defined as the fullest possible realisation of the purposes broadcasting, and secure it through control of the executive arm" (1962: 122)[9]

The report fails to specify in any detail how such agencies are to fulfil their task. This perhaps reflects the Committee's view that: "no written formula for good broadcasting is possible. Good broadcasting is a practice, not a prescription" (1962: 12). Whatever the reason, the failure to consider the institutional requirements for a broadcasting system orientated beyond wants left the Report open to misinterpretation. Hoggart seems to acknowledge this when he later writes: "Below the government level, it is important that broadcasters are kept responsive to public need. But public need is not easy to define and some quite large bodies which claim to speak for 'ordinary opinion' are philistine and restrictive. There seems to be a need for a range of responsive and well informed bodies which would form links between the producers and their audiences; not pressure groups in a political or economic sense, but interest groups, specialist groups, professional groups - all helping to form a web of relevant understanding, of challenge and response between the two sides of the operation" (1970b: 174).[10]

Despite this deficiency in the content of the argument its structure is clear. It is only after the Report has set out its views on the purposes of broadcasting that it turns to more specific institutional issues. With regard to competition the Report is explicit that it is not against competition on any *a priori* grounds. Rather it insists that competition must be assessed on the basis of whether or not it facilitates the purposes of broadcasting.

"Given that there are the two television services, independent of one another, then either they must compete or come to an accommodation. But in general the intention is that they should compete. The question is: in what are they to compete? Evidently, in good broadcasting, by each providing a service which fully realises the purposes of broadcasting. To the extent that the challenge presented to the BBC by the competition of independent televisions' service is a challenge of good broadcasting, as, for example, in religious broadcasting or news bulletins, the tendency will be to prompt a widening, rather than a narrowing, of the range of programmes, to urge a greater realisation of the possibilities of the medium. But independent television's challenge is presented essentially as one of audience ratings and it cannot be ignored. Such a challenge must so much the sooner pose the question whether it is expedient to satisfy this or that minority's need, or break this or that problematic new ground in programming. Nor will the influence operate only in one direction. So long as the BBC's service continues more fully to realise the purposes of broadcasting, and is recognised as doing so, it will thereby set the standard of public service. Independent television's service will be measured by it, and to that extent will react to it. (1962: 137)

The Report maintains that the same criterion must be used to assess both the BBC and the commercial companies. According to the Pilkington Report the notion that public service broadcasting could be defined on the basis of what a market system failed to provide made little sense:

> "It is sometimes suggested that the BBC should not compete on this basis. Rather, it is said, the Corporation should concentrate on the educative and educational aspects of television. This idea we regard as thoroughly misconceived on a number of counts. First, it must lead to a segregation of programme material into exclusive classes - what we have called "classification by height of brow". Second it would represent, in effect, an accommodation between two organisations which are intended to compete. Third it invites a public service, publicly financed, to abandon a large part of its responsibilities. *The solution is certainly not to abandon both the idea of competition and the purposes of broadcasting. It must be to ensure that there is competition in good broadcasting"* Italics added (1962: 137-8).

A similar approach is adopted when considering the merits of pay TV. Here the Report emphasises not only that different forms of finance must be considered in relation to the purposes of broadcasting but also suggests that the introduction of new forms of finance may have the effect of distorting the intrinsic defining ends of broadcasting. It is argued that with the introduction of subscription TV broadcasting activities are provided with alternative ends which may potentially conflict with the purposes of broadcasting.

> "We noted above that subscription television is essentially a method of paying for a service. As a method, it has been made possible, or is likely shortly to become possible, because the means of metering and of access barring are now becoming available. But it does not of course follow

from this that it is a desirable method of paying. We have already observed ... that the method of financing broadcasting is not a matter of indifference, nor is it merely a means to an end. It is of constitutional significance because it affects the end; that is, because it affects the nature and character of the service provided. Further, if two or more services are competing, the method and character of one is likely to affect those of the others. As a method of payment subscription must be judged, therefore, not only by its effect on the character of the service it is meant to pay for, but also by its effect upon the existing services to the public.

The essential criterion by which to consider the proposals put to us is whether services paid for in this way will, in themselves and in their effect on existing services, naturally make for the realisation of the purposes of broadcasting; or, if not naturally, can be so controlled as to ensure that those purposes will be realised. There are other and secondary criteria: but this is the first. Italics added (1962: 264).[11]

The Pilkington Report represents one attempt to set out the presuppositions of a beyond-wants position on broadcasting policy. In particular it identifies a role for authorities/experts in terms of specifying and facilitating an appropriate range of programming. To the extent, however, that it does not elaborate fully on the criteria by which the appropriate range could be delineated it must be seen as only partially succeeding in its endeavour.

3. Peacock, Wants and the Market

As Collins et al (1988:114) note it was the Pilkington Report's conception of the role and purposes of broadcasting which dominated broadcasting policy in the UK up to the mid 1980s. If the Pilkington Report provided a coherent, if limited, set of arguments

for the proposition that broadcasting should be geared to criteria beyond the satisfaction of subjective wants/tastes/preferences then the Peacock Committee (1986) has often been interpreted as arguing that broadcasting systems must first and foremost be assessed by their ability to match outputs to agents' preferences. In this section I suggest that while it is indeed possible to discern a wants-based conception of broadcasting policy within the Peacock Report certain traces of a beyond-wants perspective can also be identified.

The Report acknowledges that its perspective on broadcasting policy revolves around the acceptance of the primacy of agents' preferences. It suggests that some argue:

> "that even if consumers are freely acting agents who are aware of what they are doing, they do not automatically choose the pattern of goods and services which is in their best interests. The argument carries the implication that, if this is true of broadcasting services, the government must identify or have identified by some broadcasting authority the programmes which are in the best interests of viewers other than those which would be chosen by consumers in a free market. The principle behind this argument clearly appeals to those who regard broadcasting as a public service designed to influence and not, merely reflect the public's preferences for programming. Its acceptance would clearly mean that a free market in broadcasting services, if technically possible, should not be encouraged. It brings out very clearly the point that any decision on how broadcasting services should be financed must employ value judgements. The Committee cannot avoid taking a position on this important matter" (1986: 28).

The position they take is seemingly clear cut:

> "British broadcasting should move towards a sophisticated system based on consumer sovereignty. That is a system

which recognises that viewers and listeners are the best ultimate judges of their own interests, which they can best satisfy if they have the option of purchasing the broadcasting services they require from as many alternative sources of supply as possible" (1986: para 592).

Within the Peacock Report the satisfaction of people's wants is taken to be intrinsically desirable and the match between programming and agents' wants regarded as the primary, though not exclusive, criterion by which broadcasting systems are to be judged. The assumption underpinning the Report is that whatever the nature or content of agents' wants it is not possible or advisable for any body of experts or designated authority to discriminate between more or less valuable, desirable or acceptable forms of satisfaction.[12] Sam Brittan, an influential member of the Committee, reflecting on the Report emphasises: "there is no need to enter into a metaphysical debate whether the consumer is the best judge of artistic quality or the best judge of which programmes will benefit him, or his capacity for citizenship. The point is that no one person or group, or committee, or 'establishment' can be trusted to make a superior choice" (1989: 28). Sir Allan Peacock, the chairman of the committee, remarks with regard to consumer sovereignty: "This view implicitly rejects any notion that there is a hierarchy of tastes and preferences however this could be decided. It explicitly rejects the idea that the creative artist, or the informed aesthete can ... have any special status in the community when it comes to the allocation of resources to the arts" (Peacock 1987:3). Typically those championing the sovereignty of the consumer assume the existence of autonomous individuals who are the sole generators of their own wants and preferences and the best judges of their own interests. While a static conception of wants/preferences is not necessarily implied, such a model does obscure the social, economic, political and commercial forces which determine our wants. Prevailing wants are not spontaneously self generating, but always exist in the context of a particular socio-economic organisation and specific set of

institutions. They are thus necessarily subject to and moulded by coercion and constraints.

The Report ties the idea that broadcasting systems should be geared to the preferences of consumers to a particular characterisation of the market. While the theory of competitive markets underpinning the Peacock report is never explicitly elaborated upon Coffey et al (1996:7-8) summarise these presuppositions relating to the television industry in the following manner: "There are barriers to entry into the television industry, many of which have been created by government actions. These barriers have created a 'cosy duopoly' which led to considerable X-inefficiency, excessive wages, restrictive labour practices. Entry into programme making is limited by the vertically integrated nature of broadcasting which is 'an historical accident'. Changes in the regulatory structure of the television industry should focus on removing unnecessary barriers to entry, and the consequence of that would be an industry that is more efficient and responsive to consumers than to producers".

The Report recognises that before the market can be assumed to guarantee the satisfaction of consumer preferences certain important conditions have to be satisfied and which include:

"(i)   Viewers must be able to register their preferences directly and register the intensity of their preference. The only system which will fulfil these conditions is 'pay per view'.

(ii) Effective provision of services presupposes freedom of entry for any programme maker who can cover his costs or otherwise finance his or her production.

(iii) Operators of transmission equipment, where monopoly elements are likely to prevail, must have common carrier obligations to transmit programmes at prices regulated on public utility lines, perhaps by a body such as OFTEL" (1986: para 547-8).

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The Report suggests that technological developments hold out the promise of 'liberation from these constraints'. The change in emphasis is transparent. Rather than the purposes of broadcasting being explicitly elaborated and conceived of in terms of going beyond agents' preferences, as in the Pilkington Report, the initial starting point for Peacock (1987:53) is that the purpose of "a broadcasting service, like any other service, is to maximise the satisfaction of the consumer". When combined with its particular conception of the market process the touchstone by which proposed changes are assessed becomes the degree to which a competitive market could be achieved.

It is worth observing that there is a certain ambiguity within the Peacock Report on these issues. According to Peacock the promotion of a full consumer market does not rule out the possibility of going beyond tastes/wants/preferences. The Report suggests that the benefits of a market based system can be enhanced by supplementing it with 'public service broadcasting' of a reformed kind.

> "The fundamental aim of broadcasting policy should, in our view, be to enlarge both the freedom of choice of the consumer and the opportunities available to programme makers to offer alternative wares to the public. The fulfilment of this goal, so far from being incompatible with public service activities, positively requires them in a sense of 'public service' which we shall explain" (1986: para 547).

If the dominant theme within the Report is that wants/preferences are the appropriate focus for broadcasting systems and the creation of a market system the most effective way of ensuring a match between wants and output then what can be left for public service broadcasting? The report insists that it is possible to combine the benefits of a market based system primarily orientated to agents

preferences, not necessarily those presently expressed, with the benefits of public service orientated beyond wants:

> "We are clear that the component in consumer welfare which represents exposure to programmes which expanded their range of tastes and preferences is of major importance. Our society will be the richer if it offers artists, teachers, entertainers, politicians and news gatherers, as well as producers of material goods, an opportunity both to stimulate and satisfy desires of which people were not previously conscious. The crucial question arising from this statement of values is to what extent, if at all, public intervention is required and in what form. Would it be sufficient, in this context, to confine government activity in the broadcasting market to regulation designed to enforce the law of the land with respect to matters such as public decency, defamation, sedition and blasphemy and with respect to the prevention of monopoly?

> The answer to the question is 'no', if for no other reason than that viewers and listeners themselves may be willing to provide public finance for broadcasting activities in their capacity as voting taxpayers .... A simple illustration makes our point. Many citizens who never go near our National Galleries value their existence and are prepared to contribute as taxpayers to their upkeep. Public patronage has long been a source of support for Arts, alongside direct consumer support, since the time of Classical Greece or earlier" (1986: para 550-1).

The Report argues that retaining a place for public service broadcasting is not incompatible with the position that agents are the best *ultimate* judges of their own interests:

"The case for public support of programmes of this type can be accepted by those who believe that viewers and listeners are *in the last analysis the best judges of their own interest*, because: (i) Some people may come to enjoy what they do not already as a result of new opportunities being presented.(ii) Some people will accept guidance or stimulus from others on matters where they perceive that their knowledge or taste is limited. (iii) Many people would like high quality material to be available even though they would not willingly watch or listen to it themselves in large enough numbers for it to be paid for directly ... Public patronage of broadcasting can go further. There may be a case for experimenting with types of entertainment or popular programmes of different standards to the ones which viewers and listeners would have demanded unprompted" (1986: para 552).

Clearly there are certain echoes of the Pilkington Report here. The Peacock Report seems to be suggesting that certain types of programming should be promoted on the basis of criteria beyond agents' immediate wants, suggesting in particular that such material may enlarge the range from which agents choose. While the Report goes on to consider the content of those programmes appropriate for public service transmission it fails to provide any general criteria with which to ground its notion of public service broadcasting:

"The Committee has its own views on the types of programme suitable for public patronage, and which form a large part of its concept of Public Service Broadcasting. Four key words we would suggest here are knowledge, Culture, criticism and experiment. To be more specific: (i) there should be news, current affairs, documentaries, programmes about science, nature and other parts of the world, as well as avowedly educational programmes, all of which require active and not passive attention and

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which may also contribute to responsible citizenship. (ii)There should be high quality programmes on the Arts (music, drama, literature, etc) covering not only performance but also presentation of and comment on the process of artistic creation. (iii) There should be critical controversial programmes covering everything from appraisal of commercial products to politics, ideology, philosophy and religion" (1986: para 551)

The difference with the Pilkington Report, then, relates to the range over which a beyond-wants criterion applies. Whereas, for the Pilkington Report, a beyond-wants criterion is applied to all broadcasters, for the Peacock committee such a criterion is appropriate only for public service broadcasters. And, for Peacock, as the consumer market in broadcasting developed public service provision would account for only a small proportion of broadcasting: "The best operational definition of public service is simply any major modification of purely commercial provision resulting from public policy. Defined in this way the scope of public service will vary with the state of broadcasting. If a full broadcasting market is eventually achieved, in which viewers and listeners can express preferences directly, the main role of public service could turn out to be the collective provision ... of programmes which viewers and listeners are willing to support in their capacity of taxpayer and voters, but not directly as consumers" (1986:para 561).[13]

The way in which the Peacock Committee recommendations were channelled into broadcasting policy was interpreted as an uneasy compromise by those who suspected any attempt to retain a space for a beyond-wants orientation. Thus Cento Veljanovski (1989:17) reflecting on the 1988 White Paper *Broadcasting in the '90's: Competition, Choice and Quality* writes "A major gap in the White Paper is its refusal to define public service broadcasting. It side-steps the issue by outlining a set of positive programme regulations which will ensure the maintenance of standards and the preservation of the

BBC and Channel 4. Yet nowhere does the White Paper state why competition and commercialism will lead to a fall in programme standards, or what are good programmes. If, as the White Paper accepts, the object of broadcasting is to give viewers what they want, and if it claims that competition and more choice will achieve this result - then the question can fairly be asked: What is public service broadcasting? Unless the Government provides a clear answer to this question, then it will be impossible to assess to what extent the White Paper is consistent with a free market in broadcasting."[14] More recently Sawers (1996:87-88) writes:

> "The advocates of public service broadcasting attribute superhuman abilities to the producers of public broadcasting services: they are expected to provide programmes which make their viewers socially more responsible, intellectually more demanding, and politically more inquisitive; and to entertain their audiences whilst inculcating these qualities. It seems implausible that such powers could be possessed by any group of human beings, however talented and high minded; in practice their productions are bound to be influenced by their personal opinions and prejudices. The opposition to change in broadcasting - and to changing the BBC in particular - may well reflect the producers' fear that they will lose some of their freedom to produce what they like, rather than what the viewer wants or what the management thinks is affordable... A consumer-driven system has the advantage that it is known to work; it is what supplies consumer goods and services. Now that it has become technically possible for viewers to pay directly for the services they view, and for a multiplicity of services to be supplied ... the market system has become equally suitable for broadcasting. The first and most fundamental justification for this approach is that consumers are the best judges of what they want to watch".

4. Beyond Wants-Based Broadcasting Policy

It is possible, then, to discern two broad positions within the debate about UK broadcasting policy. According to one perspective broadcasting systems should be assessed in terms that go beyond wants - this position constituted the established view until the 1980s. A competing tradition insists that the system must be orientated first and foremost (and more or less exclusively) to the wants/tastes/ preferences of consumers. In recent years those who advocate that broadcasting systems should focus primarily upon the satisfaction of subjective wants have become increasingly influential, indeed can be seen as representing a new orthodoxy against which public service broadcasters have had to defend themselves.[15] I wish to suggest in this section that this 'victory' rests on a misconception of the 'beyond-wants' alternative. This misconception I further claim has been facilitated by a failure of the proponents of the latter view to elaborate (the presuppositions) of their position adequately.

Competing assumptions about human nature/well-being and the role of policy are implicit in the different perspectives on broadcasting identified above. More specifically, the wants-based or wants-sensitive position can be understood as coherent only once its failure to sustain the distinction between manifest preferences and deeper underlying needs is recognised. Without a conception of needs existing beyond or behind preferences the economic task must essentially be to match wants to the outputs of the system of production. This means ensuring either that products are designed in response to actual or anticipated wants (i.e. wants that would be expressed if the product was recognised and available),[16] or, that wants are manipulated to match those products which are available or which could be produced.

In the debate about broadcasting policy, as elsewhere, the fusion of needs and wants is often accompanied by a particular conceptualisation of the market as the best guarantor that agents,

constrained only by their assets and their subjective preferences, will have their wants satisfied. On this view of the market, one adopted most enthusiastically by strands of Austrian economics, everyone is better off the less 'outside', including governmental, 'interference' that there is in the market process. In the extreme, no one knows better than the individual himself or herself what is in his or her interest, for there is simply no criterion other than what that individual prefers. On this view, the competitive market and the pursuit of wants satisfaction are fundamental. From this viewpoint wants are essentially democratic since everyone is assumed to be an authority on what he or she wants. Any attempt to go beyond wants becomes mistaken for a dictatorial solution wherein the preferences/ wants of the few dominate those of the many.

An example of the characteristic (mis)interpretations of the beyond-wants position that commentators who privilege the satisfaction of wants are liable to make is provided by the Nobel laureate in economics Ronald Coase. Commenting explicitly upon the Pilkington Report Coase suggests:

> "It is easy to talk about 'the widest possible range of programme matter' but there is surely some point at which, as more and more resources are devoted to increasing the supply of programs, the gain from additional broadcast programs is of less value than the loss of value elsewhere. And if the resources devoted to broadcasting are limited in this way, it follows that the provision of programs which are liked by one group will have deprived some other group of programs that they would have liked. According to what principles is it to be decided which demands are to be satisfied? The [Pilkington] Committee never tells us this.... *The Committee avoids the question of how it should be decided which programs to transmit and for the phrase 'what the public wants' they substitute another and better*

'what the public authority wants'. What the public authority should want, how it would get the information which would enable it to do what it should and how in practice it would be likely to act are questions which disappear in a cloud of pious platitudes" (Coase, 1966).

Meanwhile, concluding his 1950 study of the BBC monopoly, Coase suggests that the most important arguments in favour of the monopoly are not technical but hinge upon the acceptance of an ultimately dangerous philosophy. Specifically he suggests that underpinning the BBC monopoly is a philosophy which consciously attempts to go beyond agents' subjective wants/tastes. In his commentary it becomes clear that for Coase any attempt to defend a system on the basis of criteria beyond wants necessarily carries certain 'totalitarian' implications: "...the really important argument [in favour of monopoly] has been that a monopoly was required in order that there should be a unified programme policy. This argument is powerful and on its assumptions it is no doubt logical. Its main disadvantage is that to accept its assumptions it is necessary first to adopt a totalitarian philosophy or at any rate something verging on it" (Coase 1950: 191).[17] In a further paper considering the development of television in the UK Coase (1954:219) interprets those against the introduction of commercial services as fearing "that the wants of the educated minority would tend to be ignored, and that the wants of the uneducated majority would be catered for, which would lead to a debasement of standards. It needs to be emphasised that the case against commercial broadcasting is for many people based on the belief both that certain wants would not be satisfied and that others would be".

Now, support for this wants-based position rests on the assumption that either wants/preferences/tastes are all there are or that wants, etc., are all we can know. As we have seen, those who insist that broadcasting systems must be orientated toward agents' wants express scepticism about the possibility of moving behind agents'

preferences. To the extent that attempts are made to justify these claims, the argument would seem to be that wants are facts; they can be identified from subjective avowals, or from reading them off from what people actually consume or use. Human agents simply have the desires they can demonstrably be seen to have and these are sovereign. Often it is implied that the concept of wants requires no metaphysical assumptions regarding need. It is suggested that to go beyond wants is to rest the case on *merely* metaphysical constructs. Needs, for example, are not directly observable and their existence cannot be proven. Some economists go so far as to suggest that wants are the only real needs people have: human needs are just what individuals believe they are, in effect, merely subjective preferences. Thus, for Hayek (1952:52), when other 'objectivist' economists make their 'frequent statements about the objective needs of the people ... [the term] ... objective, is merely a name for somebody's views about what the people ought to want". Defending the prioritisation of wants on such a basis ultimately means drawing upon a highly impoverished social ontology. The focus upon wants leads to the suppression of those needs not expressed, demanded or satisfied but which are nonetheless real. The partial manifestation of certain needs through wants is taken here to exhaust human needs.

Against this position we should acknowledge that manifest wants cannot be seen as autonomous and unanalysable givens. Real needs also exist. And these can be manifest in a variety of historically contingent wants, which may then be met by any of perhaps a multitude of potential satisfiers. Human well-being cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of human wants. Behind manifest wants are the more basic needs of individuals. These needs may 'appear' in such wants as are expressed, but usually are so only impartially and obscurely. This conception, explicitly theorised within a project recently systematised in economics as *critical realism* (Lawson, 1997), is, at some level, and in some form, accepted by most people. As Bhaskar notes "although it is a necessary truth that people act on their wants, it is not a necessary truth - but on the contrary plainly

false - that they always act on their interests and needs" (1986: 203). Most obviously, parents resist giving their children everything they want. Requests for sweets may reveal a need for food, but parents often decide that something more nourishing is required, even where the children disagree. We might also note that children at an early age often express the desire to go anywhere but to school. However, parents, and society more widely, ensure that it is their conception of the child's needs, rather than immediate requests, that are attended to. Nor is this distinction between, and perceived divergence of, needs and wants restricted to children. The adult population (or members of it) are regularly advised to eat less, to adopt a 'balanced' diet, not to smoke, to drink less (or more), to exercise, and so forth. The basis of such recommendations can only be a recognition of human needs. The fact that the information given takes the form of advice indicates an awareness that needs are not always met, that the satisfaction of wants may get in the way.

It is not being suggested here that wants as expressed in action bear no relation to underlying needs, they may under certain conditions correspond to wants, demands or actual consumption but they are distinct from these.[18] That is, needs may persist and prevail whether or not their subject experiences them as wants, demands them or fulfils them in consumption. Wants are dependent upon subjective experiences and beliefs about what is thought to be desirable and available. Wants may be affected by deliberate attempts to manipulate people's beliefs. Moreover, many people seem to experience ambivalence and confusion over what they want and what will satisfy the wants they do have. It follows that wants may rest on mistaken beliefs about what will satisfy and thus wants and satisfiers can be out of phase. Moreover, prevailing wants themselves are not spontaneously self generating, but always exist in a particular social context. That is, wants are the effects of social determinants. Wants and satisfiers always refer us to the network of social relations which operate in any given context. More or less persistent forms of social relationships, and the social practices they sustain, tend to structure

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and constrain the pattern of wants which social actors are able to recognise and articulate. It may be possible for certain actors, or groups of actors, in virtue of their social position to sustain or modify these social forms and practices in such a way that the resulting pattern of wants in actors subject to them favours the non-conflictual realisation of their own wants. Once such a possibility is acknowledged it follows that to restrict policy to the satisfaction of wants represents a failure to register unarticulated wants, potential aspirations, possible preferences, which might have been formed, articulated, etc., were it not for the persistent relationships which socially shape wants and preferences. Manifest wants may not express real needs. That is, wants and needs may be out of phase. To assume that either actual satisfiers or expressed objectives are defining of human needs is to reduce needs to wants and wants to the conditions of their being satisfied or expressed. And to follow that path is to abrogate the possibility of explaining why parents give children things other than those they want or account for the persistent attempts of medical and dietary councillors to recommend courses of action other than those widely followed.

Hoggart in his defence of the Pilkington Report concludes:

> "In all its recommendations the Report sought to extend intellectual and imaginative freedom, to give more room for variety and dissent. Its view of society was based on the idea of change and possibility, on the view that there are within the huge majorities lots of overlapping minorities, on thinking not only about what we are but of what we might become if we were given more varied chances. By contrast, many of the Report's critics - for all their claims to be smarter and more progressive - had, below the obvious debating levels, deeply static and conservative attitudes" (1970a: 200)

If the wants-based position can be seen as being ultimately rooted within an impoverished social ontology an effective defence of the beyond-wants perspective must start by setting out its contrasting presuppositions at this level. While within traditional accounts of a beyond-wants position these assumptions have remained implicit, critical realism provides a coherent framework from which such an elaboration could be undertaken. Human nature, on this critical realist account, when viewed from one aspect, or at a high level of abstraction, can be accepted as a common human attribute, one grounded in our genetic constitution and manifest in certain species-wide needs (e.g. control of anxiety) and capacities or powers (e.g., language use). While critical realists wish to retain the notion of a common human nature they acknowledge that any such nature common to all human beings can only ever be expressed in inherently socialised, more or less historically, geographically and culturally specific and very highly differentiated forms. Human nature, viewed under a different aspect, or a lower level of abstraction, can be recognised also as a historically specific nature, the development of which has its origin at the time, place and conditions of birth, and which is substantially influenced by the class, gender, occupational positions etc., in which the individual stands along with his or her experiences generally. For example we cannot speak in the abstract, we have to speak a specific geo-historically located language. To the extent that numerous people throughout their lives are subject to identical or similar forms of determination a historically quite determinate nature may thus be held in common. In the limit, though, any individual will always be subject to a unique combination of experiences and modes of determination producing a specific personality - so that, from a specific perspective, or yet a lower level of abstraction, the nature of any given human being must be seen as a more or less unique individuality.[19] It is towards some such layered conception of human need that the Pilkington Report appears at times to be groping:

"The public is not an amorphous uniform mass; however much it is counted and classified under this or that heading, it is composed of individual people and "what the public wants" is what individual people want. They share some of their wants and interests with all or most of their fellows; and it is necessary that a service of broadcasting should cater for these wants and interests. There is in short a considerable place for items which all or most enjoy. To say, however, that the only way of giving people what they want is to give them these items is to imply that all individuals are alike. But no two are. Each is composed of a different pattern of tastes, abilities and possibilities; and even within each person the emphasis on this or that part of the pattern is not always the same. *Some of our tastes and needs we share with virtually everyone; but most - and they are often those which engage us most intensely - we share with different minorities. A service which caters only for majorities can never satisfy all, or even most, of the needs of any individual. It cannot therefore satisfy all the needs of the public.*"(1962: 17-19).

Now once an objective realm of real or basic needs is recognised it is possible to make a case for facilitating a process whereby 1) real needs as opposed to mere wants are researched and reported in the public domain, and 2) it becomes possible for these needs as opposed to mere wants to be satisfied. At the very least this scenario requires a relatively autonomous agency investigating these matters, one that is not undermined by powerful vested interests determined to ensure that the public wants, and gets, only its products. It is in this sense that we can understand Hoggart's call, noted earlier, for the establishment of a set of mediating institutions between producers and their audiences. In the limit case science (or some responsible investigatory body) may be given the task of uncovering human needs and indicating various (cost efficient) means of their

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satisfaction, and the public at large, in some democratic forum, enabled to choose how the available means are allocated to the end of servicing real human well-being. However, it is not the case that the emancipatory effects of a needs-based orientation must await the complete transformation of society. As noted, a guidance system based on a conception of needs is (already) in force, in sites like the home, the doctor's surgery and the school.

Once the distinction between wants and needs is accepted, it does not take much to see that it is meaningful and legitimate to investigate and challenge the manner in which society, sectors of economy or particular institutions are organised. At an abstract level by accepting a stratified ontology and the reality of underlying human needs it becomes possible, of course, to question the uncritical celebration of the market economy. The market is often portrayed as the most efficient mechanism available for responding to human wants and preferences. However, in a market economy because of social conditioning and structural inequalities in access to resources, wants may only very poorly reflect, and sometimes actually contradict, real needs: needs may not be converted into demands (and demands may remain unfulfilled). Claims that an emphasis upon wants and the promotion of the market preserves freedom can also be questioned. If conditions for freedom include the absence of negative constraints, wants and preferences are not expressions of free choice where they are coercively conditioned by an existing pattern of social relations. Even if the market delivered the goods people want, these wants are not themselves free. It is only when the existence of basic needs are acknowledged that the opportunity for real human freedom arises.[20] At a more concrete level it is only with the acceptance of this distinction between wants and needs that meaningful reformulations of such notions as public service, quality and diversity become possible. If a wants-regarding position is adopted elaborating upon the notion of public service broadcasting, for example, remains a rather fruitless exercise. Sam Brittan openly acknowledges that 'public service' represent "puzzling and embarrassing words for

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liberal economists who assume that all provision for the consumer on a competitive basis in a non-distorted market is a public service" (1989:30). In a similar fashion Rupert Murdoch suggests "anyone who, within the law of the land, provides a service which the public wants at a price it can afford is providing a public service" (1989).

5. Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have suggested that it is possible to distinguish between two broad perspectives on broadcasting policy each deploying very different assumptions regarding the role of policy in facilitating human well-being. I have argued that an increasingly influential wants-based position draws upon an impoverished social ontology which is unable to sustain the distinction between wants and underlying needs. I have also argued that the previously dominant beyond-wants perspective failed to elaborate its own contrasting presuppositions sufficiently. Drawing upon a perspective developed within economics under the heading of critical realism, I have emphasised that needs can be formulated as goals only under definite historical conditions. As such they may be poorly and even misleadingly formulated. Specifically real needs can be manifest in a variety of historically contingent wants, which may then be met by any of a multitude of potential satisfiers. The point insisted upon here is that the two, real needs and expressed wants, should not be conflated. By maintaining this distinction it is possible to evaluate broadcasting systems not simply in terms of their ability to match outputs to wants but in terms of criteria beyond wants. While neither denying a role for wants satisfaction nor the possibility of a number of beyond-wants criteria being referred to, it nevertheless seems reasonable to suppose that a conception of needs and interests grounded in the more generalised features of our social and historical experience and make up is most likely to support fruitful conceptions of public service, quality and diversity.

Tom Burns (1977:296) reaches a somewhat similar conclusion in his study of the BBC, at least as regards public service broadcasting: "Misguided and intolerant though he may have been, Reith's conception of broadcasting as a public service, of a BBC imbued with a sense of mission, of people who worked in it as a community dedicated to the public good was, I believe, wholly appropriate. It is also the only conception which makes political and economic sense, perhaps especially in the present situation of this country. It is also the only conception which has a hope of superseding the miscellany of values and purposes compounded of individual commitments to professionalism, to careers, to managerial efficiency, to saving money or making money, which are the prevailing currency. Potentially the BBC still represents an enormously effective agency of political, cultural and social enlightenment". Of course to outline the presuppositions of a beyond-wants perspective is no more than a starting point for the detailed evaluation of its full implications. However, without these presuppositions clearly stated this formerly dominant position is all too likely to be misinterpreted and thereby to lose ground for no good reason.

Notes

1. From its earliest days broadcasting was seen as a legitimate field for public policy and its development was shaped by periodic government inquiries. Pre-war there were the Sykes (1923), Crawford (1926) and Ullswater (1936) Committees. Post war came the Beveridge (1951), Pilkington (1962), Annan (1977) and Peacock Committees (1986).

2. Typically Director Generals of the BBC have expressed their intent to service not simply consumer wants but to go beyond wants. Sir Ian Jacobs, Director General in the 1950s, writes: "the Corporation must try to satisfy the needs and tastes of the full range of listeners and viewers. It is often said that 'the public' wants this, or doesn't want that. In broadcasting terms there is no such thing as 'the public' as some kind of solid block. There are 50,000,000 people with an immense variety of interests, capabilities, tastes and perceptions ... the full range of listeners and viewers can only be satisfied by having a choice of radio programmes in sound and television, comprehensively planned to serve their varied interests" (quoted in McDonnel: 35-6). Alistair Milne (1989:171), Director General in the 1980s writes: "If you address yourself to the nation as a whole, you must appeal to the nation as a whole, in all its diversity. This appeal has never rested on giving people merely more of what they have experienced already. The drive has been to stimulate and satisfy latent interests in the viewer and listener. In this way, the choices offered to the public are true choices between programmes that are different and not simply other versions of the same". Such sentiments were not only expressed at the level of Director General. More recently public service has been defined by one BBC programme controller as "the broad commitment to provide and to protect mixed and complementary programming schedules. It includes a commitment to certain minority programmes and to covering,

as far as possible, different genres of programme making. Within each genre - whether within drama, current affairs, comedy, children's programmes or continuing education - there is a full range of programming, a demonstrably broad church. Public service broadcasting is driven by higher aspirations than solely to provide entertainment. Public service broadcasting is the attempt to make quality popular programmes. It does justice to human experience. It deals in more than stereotypes. It adds to the quality of people's lives. Its programme genres reflect the complexity of human beings" (Jonathan Powell, Programme Controller, BBC 1, quoted in Keane 1991: 117). Moreover similar comments have been expressed by figures at Channel Four. For example, consider the comments of two Channel Four commissioning editors: "By and large, what television should do - and that is why you require an editorial mind to do it - is to make a very humble judgement of what the country needs and do that " (Farruk Dhondy, Commissioning Editor for Multi-Cultural programmes, quoted in Docherty, 58); "people don't know that they have a need for the arts until they start to taste them and acquire the appetite" (Michael Kustow, Commissioning Editor for Arts Programmes, quoted in Docherty).

3. Thus O'Malley (1994:88), reflecting on the Peacock Committee Report, writes "In focusing on the economic aspects of broadcasting policy Peacock broke from previous post-war committees of inquiry into broadcasting. Although interested in finance these committees had been more concerned with the social purpose and organisation of broadcasting. The new focus on economics reflected the agenda of a government that wished to see market disciplines imposed on public services, including health, education and broadcasting".

4. Thus, John Ellis (1990:33) notes that whereas under the previous understanding of Public Service Broadcasting the aim

was to "give the public what was seen as the best mix for the public: not necessarily what they wanted, but what they ought to have wanted", he continues "Nowadays, if you are a programme-maker as I am, the market theory appears to tell me that I must respond ... to what the public demands. Services will stand or fall on the financial mechanisms. These will ensure that adequate choices and the correct choices are offered to consumers."

5. Reith, of course, provides a forceful argument to the effect that broadcasting activities should undertake certain specific functions which include the creation of an informed and educated democracy, the promotion of moral and cultural standards and the generation of a sense of national unity. According to Reith (1927, quoted in *Into the Wind*) broadcasting should be pursued in order to fulfil these functions: "That broadcasting should be merely a vehicle of light entertainment was a limitation of its functions which we declined to accept. It has been our endeavour to give a conscious, social purpose to the exploitation of this medium. Not that we underrated the importance of wholesome entertainment or failed to give it due place; but that we realised in the stewardship vested in us the responsibility of contributing consistently and cumulatively to the intellectual and moral happiness of the community. We have broadcast systematically and increasingly good music; we have developed educational courses for school children and for adults; we have broadcast the Christian religion and tried to reflect that spirit of common-sense Christian ethics which we believe to be a necessary component of citizenship and culture. We have endeavoured to exclude anything that might, directly or indirectly, be harmful. We have proved, as expected, that the supply of good things creates the demand for more. We have tried to found a tradition of public service, and to dedicate the service of broadcasting to the service of humanity in its fullest

sense. We believe that a new national asset has been created; not that kind of asset which brings credit entries to the books of the Exchequer, though it happens to be that kind of asset too and to a much greater extent than we had imagined or thought right; the asset referred to is of the moral and not the material order - that which, down the years, brings the compound interest of happier homes, broader culture and truer citizenship". At least at times, Reith himself appears to have recognised that his argument for public service broadcasting depends upon a distinction between wants and needs. In a famous passage (1949:99-101) he notes: "So the responsibility as at the outset conceived, and despite all discouragements pursued, was to carry into the greatest number of homes everything that was best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement; and to avoid whatever was or might be hurtful. In earliest years accused of setting out to give the public not what it wanted but what the BBC thought it should have, the answer was that few knew what they wanted, fewer what they needed. In any event, it was better to overestimate than to underestimate. If another policy had been adopted - that of the lowest common denominator - what then ? Probably nobody would have protested; it would have been quite natural". However, Reith is not always consistent over the wants/needs distinction. In his original statement in favour of public service broadcasting (Reith, 1924:34, italics added) he writes: "As we conceive it, our responsibility is to carry into the greatest possible number of homes everything that is best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour, and achievement, and to avoid the things which are, or may be, hurtful. It is occasionally indicated to us that we are apparently setting out to give the public what they need - and not what they want, but few know what they want and very few what they need. *There is often no difference.* One wonders to which section of the public such criticism refers. In any case it is

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better to over-estimate the mentality of the public, than to under-estimate it". Here the distinction appears to collapse.

6. With regard to quality the Report (1962:65) notes "Quality cannot properly be equated with box-office success, nor lack of quality with a box-office "flop"; we use the phrase "lack of quality" to mean something very close to "triviality". And elsewhere the Report (1962:34) suggests: "a trivial approach can consist in a failure to respect the potentialities of the subject matter, no matter what it be, or in a too ready reliance on well tried themes, or in a habit of conforming to established patterns, or in a reluctance to be imaginatively adventurous. A trivial presentation may consist in a failure to take full and disciplined advantage of the artistic and technical facilities which are relevant to a particular subject or in an excessive interest in smart "packaging" at the expense of the contents of the package, or in a reliance on "gimmicks" so as to give a spurious interest to a programme at the cost of its imaginative integrity, or in too great a dependence on hackneyed devices for creating suspense or raising a laugh or evoking tears".

7. Compare these comments with those of a long standing proponent of a wants regarding orientation to broadcasting; Ronald Coase (1988:4) writes: "I believe that human preferences came to be what they are in those millions of years in which our ancestors (whether or not they can be classified as human) lived in hunting bands and were those preferences which, in such conditions, were conducive to survival".

8. See Benton, 1982, for discussion of this issue at a more abstract level.

9. In evaluating the proposal that *Consumer Councils* be established to report on the output of the Broadcasting organisations, the Report reiterates this point. The Pilkington

Committee (1962:127) found that the idea of such a council "not without immediate attractions. But on closer inspection it reveals irremediable disadvantages. First, it would reduce the status of the public corporations. Second, it would again raise doubts as to where the responsibility lay - which, the public corporation or the council, would be the guardian of the public interest in broadcasting ? In fact, the task envisaged for it is part of what the Governors and Members are themselves appointed to undertake ...".

10. In this respect Garnham argues that the Beveridge Report can be seen as more interesting. The Beveridge Report posed as one of its 'fundamental questions': "What alternatives are there to competition and to Parliamentary control as a means of preventing broadcasting from falling into the hands of an uncontrolled bureaucracy?". The Beveridge Committee had three broad responses to this problem. It argued for much greater internal devolution of power, in particular, to the regions, but also to staff in general through a proper system of staff representation. Second, it argued for the clear separation of the governors, with their own budget and secretariat and direct access to research, from the Board of management. Third, it argued for the creation of a Public Representation Service (PRS) to take over all audience research. The PRS would be a permanent committee of inquiry responsible for channelling public views on the broadcasting services and the widest possible range of research findings into a permanent review of the BBC's performance and future direction. See Garnham, 1993, for details and discussion.

11. Elsewhere the Report (1962:271) argues: "Subscription television is necessarily much the dearest way of providing a service. If the case for introducing it is to be made out its supporters have therefore, to show that the service would bring marked increases in the range and quality of programming.

They have also to show that these advantages would not be offset by a decrease in the range and quality of the existing services. In our view, it is highly unlikely that a service of subscription television would significantly increase the range and quality of programming. If it were commercially successful, it would certainly and significantly reduce the value to viewers of the present services. Some viewers would if the service did not have national coverage be unable to make this reduction good by paying for the subscription service; others would not be able to afford to; the rest would pay where now they do not".

12. For further discussion of these issues see Keat, 1991.

13. The Report (1986, para 561) acknowledges that: "in the highly imperfect broadcasting market we have known, and which still exists, the role of public service is much wider. So long as the number of television channels is severely limited by spectrum shortage, and there is no direct payment by viewers and listeners, an unregulated advertising-financed broadcasting system, so far from satisfying consumer demand can actually distort it. In particular it provides an inadequate supply of medium appeal and 'minority programmes', which most people want to see or hear some of the time ... In these circumstances - quite apart from their role in stimulating a taste for demanding programmes - the Public Service institutions have been necessary to provide the viewer and listener with what he or she wants as a consumer. The BBC and the regulated ITV system have done far better, in mimicking the effects of a true consumer market, than any purely *laissez faire* system, financed by advertising, could have done under conditions of spectrum shortage. To aid them in their task they have established systematic and frequent market research, covering audience appreciation as well as ratings, of a kind that no newspaper has available on a regular basis. In addition they

have provided more demanding programmes (for instance in the arts), which viewers and listeners might have been willing to pay for in their capacity as taxpayers and voters, but not as consumers ...Tributes to the success of publicly regulated broadcasting cannot absolve policy makers from permitting and encouraging technological developments which may eventually make a fully developed consumer market possible.... In many walks of life it is possible to accept that earlier constraints and restrictions may have had beneficial side effects, while insisting that consumers should be regarded as the best judges of their own welfare in formulating future policy. (An historical analogy may be helpful: a social critic in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries could pay sincere and generous tribute to aristocratic patronage in forming tastes in painting, music and literature, while welcoming the greater freedom of choice offered both to artists and patrons by the wider bourgeois market that was beginning to develop)".

14. Elsewhere the same author (BFI, 1993:94-96) notes: "I would define public service broadcasting as complementary to those types of programmes shown in the marketplace ... All those areas that traditionally have been the province of the public service broadcaster are now being provided commercially and will increasingly be provided commercially at a profitable level. So the question arises, what unique set of programmes or genre of programming is the BBC providing ... Ultimately we are interested in whether there is a type of programming that will not be provided by commercial forces at that stage of development and should the licence fee be used cost-effectively to provide a complementary type of programming".

15. In certain documents produced by the BBC itself there seems to be an acceptance that the challenge it now faces is to specify precisely the gaps in provision which a market system will leave and constitute its own appropriate field of operation.

Thus in *Extending Choice* the BBC's own document it is stated that "in future it [the BBC] will have an obligation to focus on performing a set of clearly defined roles that best complement the enlarged commercial sector".

16. For example the Peacock Report (1986:127) argues that "In expounding how the direct purchase of broadcasting services promotes the interests of viewers and listeners we do not stop at the idea of "providing the consumer with what he wants". However going beyond wants is viewed primarily as anticipating future wants: "There is a bad tradition in analytical economics of presenting the model of 'consumer sovereignty' as if consumers had only known and static wants. This ignores the important feature of the competitive market as a 'discovery mechanism' for finding out by trial and error what the consumer might be enticed to accept (as well as the least costly method of supplying it) and for trying out new and challenging ideas".

17. Coase's early work on broadcasting can in fact be seen as a reaction against the then prevailing orthodox view that broadcasting systems should be assessed in terms of criteria beyond agents' preferences. In his 1950 study Coase (1950:190) writes: "While others see the concentration of power in the hands of the broadcasting monopoly as a threat to freedom of speech, supporters of the monopoly see in any dispersal of this power a threat to the programme policy of the Corporation ...How is this attitude, with its brusque rejection of the appeal to freedom of speech and thought justified in detail ? The appeal to the principle of freedom of speech has been met by arguments which stressed the need for impartiality, the maintenance of standards and a balance of programmes". With regard the second argument Coase (1950:191) suggests that it can itself be broken down into three subsidiary arguments: "The first is that the ordinary laws against slander, obscenity

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and blasphemy are not appropriate to broadcast matter. The second is that the demands of some people, although not of themselves objectionable or harmful, are unworthy of being met. As it was expressed by the reviewer of Mr Reith's book in *The Times Literary Supplement*, to employ broadcasting for "the dissemination of the shoddy, the vulgar and the sensational would be blasphemy against human nature." The third is that a monopoly is needed in order to raise standards - in this context the standards of taste of the listeners. The first reason appears to assume that a code for broadcast matter could not be devised which could be applied if there were independent broadcasting systems. It is perhaps true, as Lord Reith has argued that a monopoly would be more efficient in enforcing a uniform policy but a highly efficient application of such a code contains within itself a threat to liberty of thought and expression and to artistic development. *The second argument - that certain demands are unworthy of being met - implies a philosophy which we now call totalitarian. It implies a State with ends other than the welfare of the citizens as they conceive it.* The third argument is that a monopoly is required to raise the standard of taste of listeners. The argument is simple. It would nullify the policy if some stations provided the programmes which raised standards of taste but on others programmes were available which many listeners preferred but which did not contribute to the raising of their standards of taste. The logic of this argument is admirable; doubts emerge only when one considers its assumptions and its implications. *It assumes that a central body can distinguish between good and bad taste and will continue to do so as our notions of what constitutes good and bad taste change through time.* It also assumes that control of individual activities is desirable in order to raise standards of taste. Its implications are far reaching. This argument would justify and may in fact require a monopoly in a far wider field than broadcasting if its purpose is to be fulfilled... But even if this argument in favour of the

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monopoly is accepted in its entirety, such improvement as occurred in our taste in music, literature and the arts would have to be weighed against the threat inherent in such a monopoly to our freedom of speech and ultimately even to the springs of artistic activity." (Italics added) According to Coase the final defence against the criticism that the monopoly is a danger to freedom of speech carries similar problems: "The third reason for supporting a monopoly on grounds of public policy was that it was necessary to bring about a balance of programmes. This could be taken to mean that programmes should not be all of one kind ... In the early days of broadcasting it may have been interpreted in this sense. But later it acquired a new meaning. The balance of programmes became the right amount of different kinds of programme which the listener should hear. Wire broadcasting and foreign commercial broadcasting threatened the balance of programmes because they provided something which some listeners preferred to hear - and which the British Broadcasting Corporation thought they either should not have or already have in sufficient quantity. *This argument involves a claim to determine on behalf of the listener which broadcast material he should hear"*.

18. Indeed even where certain activities appear quite undesirable from the point of view of facilitating human development and potential, it is often easy enough to see how they are nevertheless motivated by various real needs on the part of the perpetrators - for example to obtain respect from others, inner security or simply a release of frustration.

19. See Lawson, 1997, chapter 13.

20. At the very least freedom requires knowing real interests, being in a position to act to realise them, and being disposed to do so. See Lawson, 1997, chapter 19.

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