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Does economic Analysis need a Theory of Taste? What Philosophy of Taste teaches us

Christian BARRÈRE
OMI, University of Reims
christian.barrere@gmail.com

A growing number of goods can be today considered as taste goods: food processing goods, gastronomic services, fashion goods, wines, perfumes, cultural and artistic products. They contribute more and more to economic growth and command the attention of many economists. The "economics of quality" pointed out very special phenomena in the working of their markets and gave interesting results. Nevertheless, the consideration of quality is not enough to explain some observations. In many cases the quality of these goods is more subjective than objective and does not allow to rank the goods. As the assessments of consumers are very diverse, they regard tastes. Some people prefer this movie, this wine, this chef, this stylist, this spice to other ones when some other people make an opposite choice. In some cases, some people love goods that others hate. Taste goods have semiotic, cultural and relational characteristics. Thus, the economic analysis of quality may face some difficulties to interpret all these problems. Is then an economic theory of taste necessary?

To explore this question the paper considers the philosophy of taste. When is emerging a philosophy of taste? Why? How, why and when does evolve the notion of taste? What are the diverse conceptions of taste? Is the standard conception of tastes and preferences (Becker, 1996) compatible with these lessons?

The present outline is the following one:

- 1 The emergence of the notion of taste
 - 1.1 The absence of the notion of taste
 - 1.2 Two conditions for the emergence of the notion of taste
 - Recognizing the aesthetic characteristics of some things (pleasure and emotion vs. needs and reason)
 - Recognizing taste judgments related to individuality of people
- 2 The four paradigms of philosophy regarding tastes
 - 2.1 Taste into the things
Taste and beauty; taste and "good manners".
 - 2.2 Taste into the audience judgment
The kantian theory of taste
 - 2.3 Taste coming from creation
The nietzschean paradigm
 - 2.4 Taste into the commodities
From the Frankfurt school to the post-modernity
- 3 Some lessons for economic analysis of taste

Key words : tastes and preferences, philosophy of taste.

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