Preference Pollution
Economics, Cognition, and Society

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To my father and to the memory of my mother
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Acknowledgments

My interest in the market’s influence on tastes has a considerable history, fast approaching thirty years. To step back and give deserved recognition to those who have helped along the way is thus all the more daunting.

I am extraordinarily grateful to series editor Timur Kuran for the care and frank criticism he has provided, and to social science editor Ellen McCarthy for her support above and beyond the call of duty. And the editors were not alone in such support. The task of reading works-in-progress, like dieting and exercising, can be something that one intends to do but fails to carry out. Those who came through and offered important comments include Robert Goldfarb, Doug Porpora, Tim Brennan, Tyler Cowen, and Steven Worland, and I wish to thank them all.

In the incubation stage of developing ideas the loneliness can at times be excruciating. There are several scholars who during the 1980s expressed enough interest or offered enough advice to keep the project moving and by so doing indirectly helped to make this book a reality. I wish to thank, in particular, Lynn Holmes, Tucker Taylor, Amartya Sen, Mark Lutz, Albert Hirschman, Claus Offe, Martha Nussbaum, and Michael S. McPherson. I also wish to recognize the encouraging comments of the late Kenneth Boulding. Over the last decade, the comments, criticisms, and support offered by Roger McCain, David Colander, Vivian Walsh, Herbert Gintis, and the late Richard Herrnstein have been of enormous help as well.

Within the workplace and the home are those whom we naturally are with more often and whose contributions are more apt to get lost in the noise of everyday events. At La Salle University, several people stand out. Professor Emeritus Joseph Flubacher created an atmosphere in our department appreciative of moral inquiry that mainstream departments have been slower to embrace. While all colleagues in my department have offered words of encouragement, I owe special thanks to Richard Mshomba for advice on clearing the publication hurdles and to David Robison, John Grady, and Joe Cairo for their helpful advice. Thanks are also due to other colleagues at La Salle. Michael Kerlin and Mark Moreau of philosophy, David Falcone of psychology, and Walt Schubert of finance provided other disciplinary perspectives. Rita Mall offered plenty
of emotional support and along with Richard DiDio and Elaine Mshombi assisted in the crafting of a title. Student support was provided by Marc Santugini, Robert Scheible, and Danica Andrews. Thanks as well to La Salle University for offering a semester’s leave that provided the critical time needed in the project’s early stages.

As one greatly concerned about contemporary trends toward overwork, I like to view myself as a relatively slow writer by design and one who has managed to avoid the dreaded disease of workaholism. Family members of most any writer can probably attest to the naiveté of any such characterization of one engaged in the writing of a book, and my family is no exception. My deepest thanks to my wife, Patty, for her indulgence and support when indulgence and support were what I so desperately needed. Thanks to Rebecca and Alexander for adjusting gracefully to a writer’s deadlines as well.

Let me end with some thanks to those whose contributions predate the first time I committed to paper a thought about preferences. Extended conversations with my late uncle, L. J. George, a conservative defender of the marketplace, taught me at a fairly early age the art of good argumentation. That we each heard the other and modified our positions in consequence I am certain. That I learned to take more time to develop my arguments with care I am equally certain.


There are two other individuals whose help preceded my first work on preferences. Well after my first paper had been written I turned to the philosophy literature and repeatedly came across the names of two scholars whose classes I had had the privilege of taking while an undergraduate at the University of Michigan. Richard Brandt taught the introductory philosophy class that I took in 1967. Richard Hare (a visiting professor at Michigan) taught the moral philosophy course I enrolled in a year later. I
have little doubt that their utilitarian leanings planted the seeds of my later ideas, for as the years have passed I have ever more often come across references to their work in the philosophical writings on rational choice.

Finally, I am grateful to “an unknown economist.” While working on a paper on visual perception with a faculty member at UCLA in 1972 I first started thinking about “preferences for preferences.” As a means of determining whether my ideas were indeed fresh and worth pursuing, I went to the economics department and started knocking on doors to see if the criticisms of the market that I was formulating had already been made. I must thank a professor whose name I cannot recall (I never introduced myself to him nor did he to me). He let me know in no uncertain terms that the very notion of a “preference for a preference” was unheard of within economics. For the frankness of this response I must thank him. Its strength was enough to convince me to pursue a graduate degree and career in economics.