
Semiotic Arguments and Markets in Votes: A Comment on Sparks

James Stacey Taylor¹

A COMMENTARY ON Jacob Sparks (2017), “Can’t Buy Me Love: A Reply to Brennan and Jaworski,” *J Philos Res* (Online First): <https://doi.org/10.5840/jpr2017425101>

ABSTRACT

Jacob Sparks has developed a semiotic critique of markets that is based on the fact that “market exchanges express preferences.” He argues that some market transactions will reveal that the purchaser of a market good inappropriately prefers it to a similar non-market good. This avoids Brennan and Jaworski’s criticism that semiotic objections to markets fail as the meaning of market transactions are contingent social facts. I argue that Sparks’ argument is both incomplete and doomed to fail. It can only show that some preferences are morally problematic, not that the transactions that they lead to are immoral.

IN A RECENT and important paper Jacob Sparks argues that Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski are mistaken to hold that all semiotic critiques of markets (the claim that the commodification of some good communicates an inappropriate attitude towards it) fail. Against such criticisms Brennan and Jaworski have offered an argument from di-

¹ The College of New Jersey. Email: jtaylor@tcnj.edu