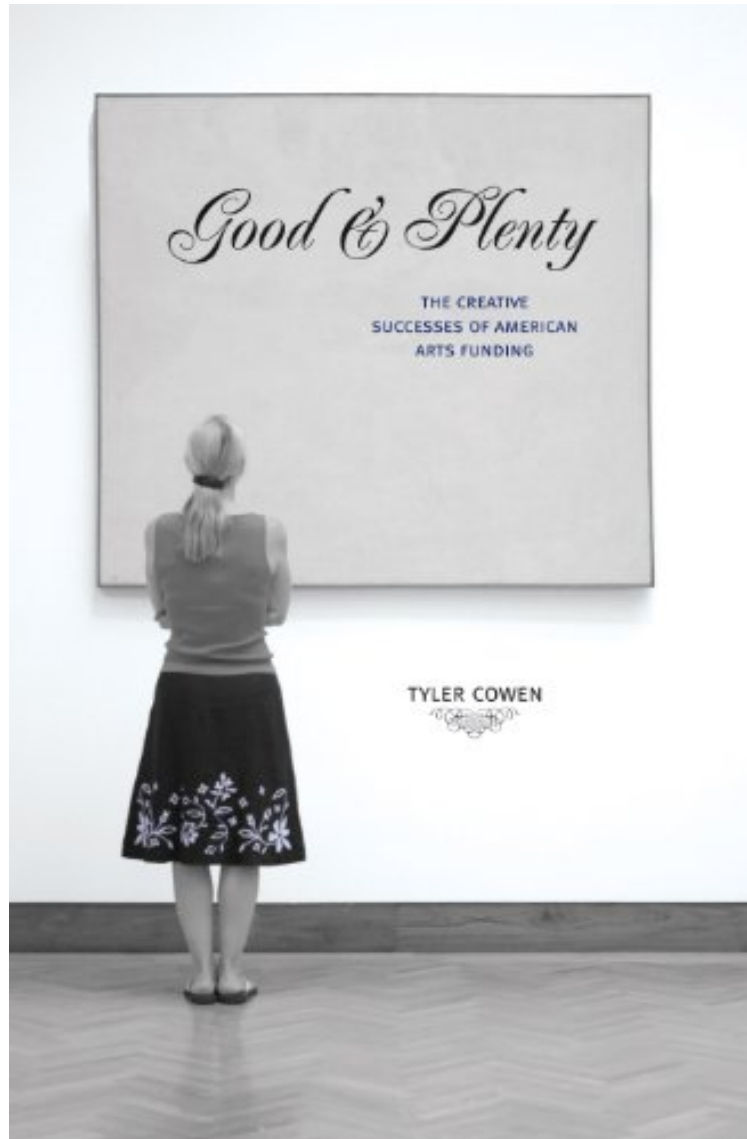


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## Good and Plenty: The Creative Successes of American Arts Funding

*Tyler Cowen*

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**Tyler Cowen : Good and Plenty: The Creative Successes of American Arts Funding** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Good and Plenty: The Creative Successes of American Arts Funding:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Text BookBy AnonymousThis was required reading on my doctoral program in Public Administration. Not my favorite but still a good book on funding.0 of 7 people found the following review helpful. great!By pokengurI recieved my book in the mail and didn't have to wait very long for it. the condition is not bad by anymeans. the book itself is full of wonderful conversation that I will no doubt be using

throughout my career. 23 of 26 people found the following review helpful. How the US by luck and cunning got public funding right

By Rafe Champion Good research and scholarship can change the way we see the world. Tyler Cowen achieved this with his study of the counterproductive impact of the Marshall Plan that delivered aid to Europe after WW2. This story can be found on his web site and it might have warned the West off the disastrous aid programs to the Third World that were partly inspired by the Marshall Plan. He has done it again in this book where his intention "to steer the arts policy debate away from its previous focus on the National Endowment for the Arts. More significant questions concern the use of our tax system to support nonprofits, creating a favourable climate for philanthropy, the legal treatment of the arts, the arts in the American university, and the evolution of copyright law. I also seek to recast the debate over direct funding of the arts...A more fruitful inquiry involves what general steps a government can take to promote a wide variety of healthy and diverse funding sources for the arts." Cowen is a professor of economics at the George Mason University (Virginia) and a daily contributor to the blog Marginal Revolution. He has a special interest in the economics and dynamics of the arts and culture, using culture in the broad sense employed by T S Eliot to include the preparation and consumption of food. Ironically (or appropriately) the most popular page on his personal web site is his ethnic eating guide to the Northern Virginia, Washington DC and Maryland area. He has previously challenged widespread views about the damaging influence of capitalism and mass consumer culture on the vitality and diversity of the arts. "In Praise of Commercial Culture" surveyed the last two or three centuries to show how the capitalist market economy provided a vital but underappreciated framework to support a wide range of artistic visions. In "Creative Destruction" he pursued the same theme to argue that international free trade in goods and ideas will alter or disrupt many particular cultures but the net result will be positive. In "Good and Plenty" Cowen is looking for some middle ground between libertarians who oppose any kind of government interference in the arts and others who think that the very survival of the creative instinct depends on the generosity of governments. The book is a remarkable contribution at the conceptual level and also with the mass of information that he has assembled on the diverse forms of direct and indirect assistance that US governments have provided. He set out to bridge the gap between economic and aesthetic perspectives because neither of these approaches can stand alone as a tool for evaluating policy. He explains how the US managed to combine luck and cunning to organise arts funding in a remarkably effective way, bearing in mind that the controversial NEA program accounts for less than 1% of public support for the arts. His chapter on "Indirect Subsidies: The Genius of the American System" catalogues the many forms of indirect support (from tax breaks to the universities) that represent the overwhelming majority of public funding for arts and culture. A chapter gives the history of direct funding, and he argues, contra received opinion, that direct funding is likely to be too conservative. The descriptive material in these two chapters conveys a surprising and counter-intuitive perception of the role of the US government in cultural affairs. Another chapter gives a somewhat disconcerting account of the mounting challenges from cyberspace to the benefits that creators and distributors of cultural have gained from traditional copyright laws. He ends his (possibly) somewhat rose-tinted account with suggestions for improvement of the system. To get straight on the figures, he reports that donations (from both individuals and corporations) listed as tax deductions for 'Arts, Culture and Humanities' amounted to \$30 billion in 2003. Compare this with NEA funding which peaked at \$175 million in 1992. He estimates that donations of time amount to some 390,000 volunteers with a dollar value in the order of \$20 billion. In contrast the French government limits tax deductions for the arts to 1% of taxable income for individuals and 0.1% for corporations. Germany allows deductions but bureaucratic restrictions make the scheme unworkable. Cowen casts his net wide for examples of indirect support such as the Government promotion of international free trade through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organisation. Imported artworks are exempt from duty and until recently we are advised that the US government turned a blind eye to imports of antiques from ancient civilisations that may have been stolen or acquired in black or grey markets. Yet another form of support is the higher education system which provides a niche for large numbers of writers, artists and musicians despite reservations by many creative people about academic influences. Direct funding commenced in a small way in 1817 with a commission of paintings to celebrate the Revolutionary War. The New Deal in the 1930s produced the first large-scale effort with assorted programs including the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) employing 5000 artists per year at the peak and 40,000 all told. The total cost of WPA programs through the New Deal to their close in 1943 ran to the vicinity of \$100 million, equivalent to \$2 billion today. The Cold War prompted government aid far in excess of the generosity of the New Deal, through such a wide range of agencies and programs (including comprehensive cultural control in Germany, Austria and Japan for several years) that the amount of money involved is very hard to estimate. Cowen estimated that cultural outreach peaked in 1953 at \$129 million, over \$700 million in current dollars and that was only a part of a much larger propaganda effort that spent up to \$2 billion per annum, employed over ten thousand people and reached 150 countries. As a wry aside, Cowen notes that the current allocation for military bands at \$200 million exceeds the funds dispensed by the NEA. Getting back to the domestic function of direct support for the arts, Cowen points out that agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts can either act as venture capitalists to simulate new artistic ideas (hopefully picking artistic winners) or they can focus on works of high culture that have stood the test of time. Their efforts tend to be split between these roles, trying to be all things to all people to ensure their political survival.

The sums of money distributed in direct support of the arts at home are negligible compared with the volume of indirect support and so the fuss about NEA funding is a storm in a teacup and it is most unhelpful that the debate on public funding for the arts is mostly about the use and abuse of these funds.

Americans agree about government arts funding in the way the women in the old joke agree about the food at the wedding: it's terrible--and such small portions! Americans typically either want to abolish the National Endowment for the Arts, or they believe that public arts funding should be dramatically increased because the arts cannot survive in the free market. It would take a lover of the arts who is also a libertarian economist to bridge such a gap. Enter Tyler Cowen. In this book he argues why the U.S. way of funding the arts, while largely indirect, results not in the terrible and the small but in Good and Plenty--and how it could result in even more and better. Few would deny that America produces and consumes art of a quantity and quality comparable to that of any country. But is this despite or because of America's meager direct funding of the arts relative to European countries? Overturning the conventional wisdom of this question, Cowen argues that American art thrives through an ingenious combination of small direct subsidies and immense indirect subsidies such as copyright law and tax policies that encourage nonprofits and charitable giving. This decentralized and even somewhat accidental--but decidedly not laissez-faire--system results in arts that are arguably more creative, diverse, abundant, and politically unencumbered than that of Europe. Bringing serious attention to the neglected issue of the American way of funding the arts, Good and Plenty is essential reading for anyone concerned about the arts or their funding.

From Publishers Weekly Arts funding policy has dropped off the national public affairs radar in recent years, and much of the remaining debate continues to take the form of knee-jerk pro and con positions. Economist Cowen (In Praise of Commercial Culture) dismisses such debates at the outset, and goes on to make a case for the current American system, which, unlike the European model, emphasizes indirect, rather than direct, subsidies. Cowen finds that indirect funding--funding arts organizations rather than giving stipends to artists or commissioning works directly--is ultimately beneficial to the development of new artistic forms, and to helping arts endeavors flourish. He devotes significant pages to the history of arts funding in the U.S., including the New Deal-era Works Progress Administration, and also devotes a chapter to copyright, in which he argues that the Internet won't make traditional media and cultural forms disappear. Cowen references a range of well-known performers and artists, from Marian Anderson to Metallica, but the book is written as an academic treatise, with all the form and content constraints that that implies. For those truly interested in the state of America's financial relationship to the arts scene, though, it's a fresh approach. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. A rare and much needed objective look at the topic of government funding for the arts. Avoiding the hyperbole often heard on both sides of the argument, Cowen offers a balanced overview of publicly-funded art. A must for the biased advocate. From the Back Cover "Taking up the question of how we think about policies toward goods that are both public symbols and economic products, Tyler Cowen's Good and Plenty demonstrates that the usual discussion of arts policy misses the point. If you focus obsessively on urine-dipped crucifixes subsidized by the NEA, you miss the government's role in encouraging many other symbols, from the Chicago Bears to Harvard. You miss the history of the WPA in the 1930s and the Voice of America in the 1950s, political art dwarfing the NEA. You will suppose mistakenly that arts policy in the United States is laissez-faire. Advancing economics into serious thinking about culture, Cowen's book is a pleasure and profit to read."--Deirdre McCloskey, University of Illinois, Chicago, author of How to Be Human (Though an Economist) "Nearly everything I have read on the government's involvement in the arts suffers from being little more than shrill advocacy. Tyler Cowen's Good and Plenty makes a refreshing departure by providing a calm and thorough analysis of the causes and consequences of government arts policy. The book offers a temperate, well-reasoned consideration of a broad range of related subjects, and is much more thorough than any other treatment I have read. It makes a very useful contribution."--David Galenson, University of Chicago, author of Painting Outside the Lines "Tyler Cowen is to be congratulated for tackling the bedeviled relation between 'art and beauty' as understood by the Western tradition and the 'liberal state' with its ethos, if not practice, of egalitarianism. As always, he delights in using hard data to prick the balloons of received opinion, especially the bad rap given to 'commercial culture.'"--Martha Bayles, arts journalist and professor at Boston College