



How Markets Corrupt Children,
Infantilize Adults, and Swallow
Citizens Whole

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week vacations, and welfare-state benefits undermine the old Puritan ethos and give succor to a new and indulgent brand of European consumerism there as well.

The pervasive new ethos of infantilization is not, however, the only factor in our era's hyperconsumerism. It has both generated and been reinforced by affiliated ideologies including privatization, branding, and total marketing that buttress consumerism and contribute powerfully to the infantilizing project. Among these, none is more salient than the ideology of privatization, a fresh and vigorous expression of traditional *laissez-faire* philosophy that favors free markets over government regulation and associates liberty with personal choice of the kind possessed by consumers. In its latest guise, privatization ideology takes aim squarely at the public and those democratic philosophies that created the last century's prudent balancing of capitalism and popular sovereignty, with fateful consequences for citizens.

Privatization strategies have shaped the dominant political paradigm at least since the 1980s when President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher adopted them as the official political philosophy of conservatism. These strategies assail the idea of collective social entities even as they celebrate the private and the personal and have recently become dominant in Western Europe and Asia where communitarian and welfare-state models had long been popular. Long before Reagan and Thatcher, early social science critics of the public interest such as David B. Truman were insisting that "in developing a group interpretation of politics . . . we do not need to account for a totally inclusive interest, because one does not exist."⁵ There was no need to take account of the common good in discussing interest theory because there is no such thing. Politicians like Margaret Thatcher simply asserted that "there is no such thing as society."⁶ Skepticism about government and society accompanies a renewed and quite astonishing faith in the endless capacity of markets to "coordinate human behavior or activity with a range and a precision beyond that of any other system, institution, or social process."⁷ These market strategies reinvented classical *laissez-faire* economics and political

Privatizing Citizens: The Making of Civic Schizophrenia

Libertarianism is a political philosophy for Peter Pans, an outlook on the world premised on never growing up.

—Alan Wolfe¹

The distinction between private and public coincides with the opposition of necessity and freedom, of futility and permanence, and finally of shame and honor.

—Hannah Arendt²

AS THE PROTESTANT ethos once shaped a culture conducive to work and investment, the infantalist ethos today shapes a culture conducive to luxury, shopping, and spending. Where once Americans worked harder than almost any other people, today Tom Friedman worries about the "quiet crisis" in which the "tendency . . . to extol consumption over hard work, investment, and long-term thinking" creates an America whose vaunted productivity is in decline and where kids "get fat, dumb, and lazy," squandering the very moral capital the Protestant culture once promoted and sustained.³ As I wrote after 9/11, "President Bush squandered a unique opportunity [back then] when the nation cried out for engagement and the president . . . urged them to go shopping. . . . To relinquish fear people must step out of paralysis. The president suggested they step into the mall."⁴ Americans still work hard—harder than others in the industrialized world; but they also work harder to find time to shop than workers in, say, continental Europe where 35-hour workweeks, six

libertarianism (sometimes called neoliberalism in Europe), attacking large, bureaucratic government as an inflexible and inefficient adversary of the liberty in whose name it affects to operate.

Liberty here has a negative connotation: to be free *from*, not to be determined or controlled by someone else's power or will. As the feared seat of visible power in earlier centuries and more recently as the recognized locus of collective will, government has been the entity associated with power and will, the enemy of liberty and personal choice as seen from this libertarian perspective. Milton Friedman, the compelling libertarian economist, offers definitive language. Nearly a half century ago, he contested the prevailing social welfare (statist) ideology of the time by insisting that "every act of government intervention limits the area of individual freedom directly and threatens the preservation of freedom indirectly."⁸ Put into practice, this means, as Ronald Reagan was to argue, when it comes to liberty government is always part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This libertarian ideology rationalizes the privatization strategy that has become a crucial ally of infantilization in commercial society today.

Yet in the name of abstract personal liberty, libertarians and privatizers actually pervert and undermine real autonomy, because as Hannah Arendt has argued, "political freedom, generally speaking, means the right 'to be a participant in government,' or it means nothing."⁹ Although when Milton Friedman was first writing in the 1950s, *laissez-faire* liberalism was out of fashion and (coming out of World War II) the idea of benevolent government had few critics; today it is government that is out of fashion, and one can say (with Jedediah Purdy) that "in the wake of an era when it has been common to hope for too much from politics, the greater and more dangerous temptation is now to hope for too little from public life."¹⁰ The educator Maxine Greene, worth noting because she is an altogether practical person whose life has been spent in education and teacher training, is typical of those who, because they actually apply freedom as a tool in the setting of social change, challenge the abstract notion that freedom is always negative.¹¹ Instead, Greene argues, freedom needs to be addressed dialectically: for it always draws us into a moral and political nexus for

which thin "negative" constructions are simply insufficient. Freedom is not just about standing alone and saying no. As a usable ideal, it turns out to be a public rather than a private notion. The insistence that it is private has been the occasion for what in quite distinctive ways both Walter Lippmann and John Dewey termed a kind of "eclipse of the public."¹²

Dewey's and Lippmann's concern with the vanishing public (from differing political perspectives to be sure, Lippmann much more conservative than Dewey) made clear that liberty itself had evolving meanings that reflected changing social and political circumstances. There is no need to argue, as Isaiah Berlin did, about what freedom "actually" means in some abstract or essentialist way. The early English liberal idea of freedom was negative in the sense that it was oppositional: it faced a public sphere of church and government that was hierarchical, authoritarian, and in need of radical dissent. In associating liberty with the absence of external impediments on motion, Thomas Hobbes was offering a fitting rebuke to the tyrannical monarchies that obstructed potentially free citizens and constrained the free movement of people and goods. The early liberal notion of liberty enlisted a metaphor: the fiction of the unencumbered self understood as a bundle of desires and passions seeking to be left alone. It did so because it confronted actual political and religious autocracies that would not leave people alone. Its aim was to liberate "subjects of servitude" from the hold of tyrannical government. In the classical liberal construction, servitude was defined by manacles and muscles—the restraining of the body—so that liberty was necessarily construed as what Maxine Greene appropriately calls "old rebellions against mechanism, schedules, clocks, crowds."¹³ Liberty here becomes synonymous with revolution: overthrowing things and liberating people from the grip of tyrants.

In its time, this understanding of liberty helped establish free republics and tolerant societies. Construed in a narrow liberal fashion, the natural rights approach to liberty offered a powerful remonstrance against medieval tyranny and early modern ecclesiastic orthodoxy—the tyranny over the body and mind that defined traditional autocracy. The arbitrary rule of masters over slaves and of kings over subjects was broken by lib-

eral insistence (embodied in the American Declaration of Independence, for example) on the fiction that men were born free (were "naturally free") and could be "legitimately" constrained and coerced by others only with their own consent. Freedom experienced as resistance to impediments on motion captures both Hobbes's conception and more recent liberal understandings of liberty under duress from tyrannical modern regimes. Thus, Jean Paul Sartre wrote paradoxically that he had never felt more free than during the Nazi occupation of France, when his sense of liberty's meaning was enhanced by the climate of repression in which it could find expression as resistance. Still more recently, English playwright Tom Stoppard, reflecting on middle Europe under the communists, has observed that it was far easier to feel free in composing samizdat works of protest against a communist regime than in composing uncontested works of dissidence in a free bourgeois society where anything goes, praise or protest, as long as it earns a profit. Václav Havel, the Czech Republic's theater guru cum president, has drawn similar conclusions based on his experience as poet and politician.

Yet a historically appropriate theory of liberal rights useful in freeing men from tyranny is not so easily converted into a theory of civic participation useful in justifying democracy and grounding justice in societies that have long been free, at least in the formal legal sense. This has been the primary paradox of politics in the last century. Neoliberals, libertarians, and privatizers seem to be reverting to a notion of freedom useful in opposing tyranny—and perhaps useful in nurturing the emergence of democracy, say through doctrines of international human rights today—in order to challenge the legitimacy of democratic governance itself, that form of government the old negative liberty helped establish and legitimate. But nowadays, the idea that only private persons are free, and that only personal choices of the kind consumers make count as autonomous, turns out to be an assault not on tyranny but on democracy. It challenges not the illegitimate power by which tyrants once ruled us but the legitimate power by which we try to rule ourselves in common. Where once this notion of liberty challenged corrupt power, today it undermines legitimate power.

Liberty is a value conditioned by history. Freedom from constraint, so important in resisting tyranny, cannot be a formula for moral liberation or political engagement in more democratic times. Libertarians like Friedman and Reagan are political atavists wedded to conceptions of liberty and government dangerous to modern democracy. In the last one hundred years there has of course been a cycling and recycling of arguments about the proper balance between public and private. But from the time of Adam Smith, there have been those (Smith himself, a more nuanced thinker, not included) who have construed liberalism to mean that the social contract itself is suspect.

In the first half of the nineteenth century in England and on the Continent, and in the period after the Civil War in the United States, when government was puny and capitalism emerging as mighty, a kind of raw and brutal market ideology prevailed that was celebrated by some as social dynamics (Auguste Comte) and condemned by others as social Darwinism, but acknowledged by all as the central reality of the times. Paltry little government in that era could hardly dominate anything, let alone economic markets: America's fledgling federal government was portrayed dismissively as "the President plus the Post Office." But markets, especially as they grew dominant in Europe after the Congress of Vienna and after the Civil War in the United States, created an extraordinary productivity, yet rather than that competition and freedom promised by *laissez-faire* liberals, these same markets also produced cartels, monopoly, and inequality. Such anarchic forces ultimately endangered not only democracy but the capitalist system itself. Henry Ford had understood that the sort of capitalism that could not pay its own workers enough to buy the products it produced was likely to founder. Entrepreneurship could not flourish by creating monopoly conditions that crushed competition and market exchange. By the end of the nineteenth century, both the Europeans and the Americans came to understand that government's role was to secure the conditions that capitalism needed in order to flourish, but which left to its own devices it inevitably tended to erode (the famous contradictions of capitalism).

In the United States, Presidents Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wil-

son, and in Europe Prime Minister Gladstone and Chancellor Bismarck, took aim at market anarchy, reasserting sovereignty's prerogatives and rescuing capitalism from its contradictions through prudent antitrust legislation and ongoing monetary regulation. The 1920s saw another period of market exuberance where the new mass production yoked to colonial global trade allowed capitalism once again to outrun its democratic overseers, leading the great social theorist and philosophical pragmatist John Dewey to wonder whether the "great public" had gone missing altogether and to notice that politics was itself tending "to become just another 'business': the special concern of bosses and the managers of the machine."¹⁴

This era where private trumped public proved to be a brief and unstable interlude between the Progressive Era and the New Deal. Perhaps more compellingly, World War II allowed both the Allies, mostly democracies, and their enemies, nationalist dictatorships all, to renationalize large parts of their economies and reassert the power of government oversight over faltering market economies. National defense and social security were the twin public goods that emerged from the war as defining traits of the old and the new democracies and, in Europe, of the new European Community. These goods were left intact until recently when, in the story told here, they have been subjected to the antipolitics of privatization.

The seeds of this antagonism were planted earlier when in 1944 Friedrich Hayek published his influential *The Road to Serfdom*. One could have wondered then whether that dark road about which he worried was more likely to wind its way to doom through the newly intrusive impediments of the regulatory welfare state or through the market's frenzied anarchy. In any case, by the 1950s the New Deal and the war economy along with the counterparadigm of Soviet communism (and its vanquished totalitarian cousin fascism) had begun to spur laissez-faire liberals, long dormant, to reassert their penchant for markets. They busied themselves building an ideological movement on Hayek's market ideology that was to culminate in the policies of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. For most opinion leaders and intellectuals in that era, in the words of Milton Friedman's dissenting work *Capitalism and Freedom*, seemed "overwhelmingly per-

sued that capitalism was a defective system inhibiting well-being and thereby freedom." As a consequence, there was "a tendency to regard any existing government intervention as desirable, [and] to attribute all evils to the market."¹⁵

The wheel turns. Today laissez-faire liberalism is again triumphant and Friedman's text is no longer a radical and heretical sermon but the standard bible of the Washington (and global market) consensus. From where we stand now, social welfarism and its sources in the New Deal and the Great Society appear to have run their course and the ideology of markets is dominant. Yet this hardly means that neoliberalism's political theory, sundered from its justifying history of constitutional founding, is any more convincing today than it was during the Depression or in the cowboy climate after the Civil War. Or that it manages human welfare in the marketplace with any more efficiency or liberty than it did one hundred years ago. At war with the democratic history it once helped inaugurate, laissez-faire liberalism continues to mistake popular sovereignty for illegitimate coercion and to confound the public weal with the repression of liberty. It forgets the very meaning of the social contract, a covenant in which individuals agree to give up unsecured private liberty in exchange for the blessings of public liberty and common security.

The sanctity of the market means, in the description of David Harvey, a critic of neoliberalism, that "state interventions in markets [once created] must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals [price] and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions [particularly in democracies] for their own benefit."¹⁶ Market philosophy is more than a threat to democracy, it is the source of capitalism's most troubling problems today: its incapacity to satisfy the real needs of the poor and its tendency to try to substitute faux needs and manufactured wants for the missing real needs of consumers in developed societies. It is these issues that ultimately have put consumer capitalism in jeopardy.

Yet today's neoliberals—neither radical in the manner Milton Friedman and his liberal Chicago School allies once were, nor responsive to histori-

cal realities as the first English liberals of the seventeenth century were—seem uncomprehending in the face of such perils. They have apparently accepted that in its declining period of obligatory consumerism, the democratic state stands in the way of the infantlist ethos and the privatizing ideology necessary to keeping the consumer busily engaged. In good faith, they talk about liberty, but as realists their concern is with shopping. They appreciate, if perhaps only intuitively, that privatization ideology helps to rationalize and facilitate consumption by privileging personal choice. They oppose government regulation advanced in the name of equality, fairness, and justice because they are worried, as political scientist Robert Westbrook observes, about the “crisis of ‘overproduction’ in an economy no longer tested by the tasks of capital accumulation but by the challenges of finding markets for the prodigious output of its factories and farms”¹⁷—and nowadays of its service and information technology industries. Neoliberals know they make war not on illegitimate power (the old visible tyrannies) but on legitimate power (visible democratic citizenship) in order to privilege a market power that is both illegitimate and invisible, but crucial to the selling of goods, which they firmly believe is indispensable to the survival of capitalism. Their rhetoric focuses on the tyranny of the state, but they contest not public tyranny but the public good because the public good and the private goods of late consumer capitalism have contradictory purposes and stand in fundamental tension. Capitalism must come to terms with a system of overproduction that William Greider has described in his *One World, Ready or Not* as “an explosive cycle of renewal, migration and destruction that is typically ignited by human invention,” and seems poised in the name of its survival to put at risk the democratic system that bore and nurtured it.¹⁸

Times change, and with it the threats that democracies face. Tyranny is not what it once was in the parts of the world we now call free: it is not a matter of vicious tyrants and totalitarian parties and illegitimate states. At least since Alexis de Tocqueville toured the tumultuous America of Andrew Jackson in the 1830s, tyranny has exhibited to us moderns a deceptively fresh face. “Fetters and headsmen,” Tocqueville had already noticed, “were the coarse instruments that tyranny formerly employed, but

the civilization of our age has perfected despotism itself. . . . [M]onarchs had, so to speak, materialized oppression; the democratic republics of the present day have rendered it as entirely an affair of the mind.” Nowadays, it is not just the power of public opinion about which Tocqueville worried but of the marketplace itself that has created conditions under which, in Tocqueville’s phrase, “the body is left free, and the soul is enslaved.”¹⁹

Tocqueville was worried about a tyranny of the majority that could be associated with democracy, but the psychological reality he captured begins with the fact that constraint itself is aimed not at the free body but the liberated consciousness.²⁰ The modern tyrant hopes to impede our aims, divert our purposes, and reformulate our goals. He is not the democratic majority or the public good, he is the enforcer of consumer capitalism’s need to sell. His instrument is not the state but the very market about whose vaunted liberty he boasts. Can it be then that in the new battle for consciousness, the ideology of liberalism has as its true purpose the liberation of the body from public goods in the name of subordinating the soul to the selling of endless private commodities? Does the grinning postmodern Peter Pan who is the new boy hero of buzz marketing work to free the young from convention and deadweight adulthood? Or only to free them from the moral authority of gatekeeping parents and a watchful democratic state in order to indenture us to private consumerism?

To oppose this perverse use of liberty as a cudgel against our collective and moral will, against democracy itself, we need to recall and reaffirm the language of positive or moral liberty. That is to say, in the traditional language of Rousseau, Kant, and Dewey, we need to understand that there can be no viable idea of public liberty outside of the quest for a moral and a common life defined by purposes that are to some degree public in character. There can be no securing of liberty that is not also grounded in moral limits and hence in education and civic participation. In the current political climate of globalizing markets, free trade, and mandatory privatization, and under the sway of the infantlist ethos, this strong view of liberty is unpopular, maligned, permanently under siege. This is not to point to some conspiracy of boardroom managers manipulating political theory to the advantage of the bottom line. Marketers are not that smart. Nor

do they have to be. The emerging cultural ethos does the work for them. For when we deploy private liberty against public power in a democratic regime, even if we think we are upholding our "rights," what we are really doing is to assail not tyranny but democracy.

To be politically relevant, liberty in our era must be experienced as positive rather than negative, must be public rather than private. This means education for liberty must also be public rather than private. Citizens cannot be understood as mere consumers because individual desire is not the same thing as common ground and public goods are always something more than an aggregation of private wants. Champions of the idea that consumers are democratic citizens have tried to have their civic cake and consume it too by talking about consumer sovereignty and a "consumers republic."²¹ Yet a republic is defined by its public-ness (*yes publica* meaning "the things of the public"), and what is public cannot be determined by consulting or aggregating private desires.

The consumers' republic is quite simply an oxymoron. Consumers cannot be sovereign, only citizens can. Public liberty demands public institutions that permit citizens to address the public consequences of private market choices. Being permitted to choose among a plethora of automobile brands does not permit a choice in favor of public over private transportation or in favor of fuel-thrifty rather than fuel-wasting engines. Asking what "I want" and asking what "we as a community to which I belong need" are two different questions, though neither is altruistic and both involve "my" interests: the first is ideally answered by the market; the second must be answered by democratic politics. When the market is encouraged to do the work of democracy, our culture is perverted and the character of our commonwealth undermined. Moreover, my sense of self—me as a moral being embedded in a free community—is lost.

Liberty understood as the capacity to make public choices (in Rousseau's terms to engage in "general willing") is a potential faculty that must be learned rather than a natural one that is exercised from birth. Rights are certainly moral claims, but their effective exercise rests on competence and hence on learned skills of citizenship. That is why Tocqueville spoke of a necessary "apprenticeship of liberty" which he called the most arduous

of all apprenticeships. It points to the core meaning—now lost to most educational institutions in America—of *public* schooling in the "liberal arts." The liberal arts are the arts of liberty necessary to the exercise of citizenship in a free republic. Jefferson and John Adams were political adversaries, but they agreed with Madison that in the absence of competent citizens, bills of rights were but pieces of paper. If democracy was to live beyond the parchment of a written constitution, competent citizens had to be educated in common schools and public universities.

The logic of democracy may begin with the positing of rights and of a theoretical "natural condition" in which women and men are "born free," but it depends for its implementation on civic learning, public participation, and common consciousness that put flesh on the bones of our potential liberty. The new forms of tyranny we face today derive less from traditional modes of hard autocracy that enslave the body in the name of owning things than from new soft modes of merchandizing and entertaining aimed at manipulating the spirit in the name of selling things. Compulsive shopping speaks to new forms of market coercion that are difficult to discern, let alone contend with, because they allow us to "feel free" even as we yield gently to their subtle bottom-up compulsion. The market does not tell us what to do, it gives us what we want—once it gets through "telling" us what it is that we want and helping us to want it (that's marketing).

I cited Max Weber talking about the iron cage of modernity. He wrote over a century ago. For late consumer capitalism in crisis in a postmodern age, a different cage comes to mind, that of the African monkey trap I also described in chapter 2—the trap in which the monkey is caught only by its own unwillingness to let go of the nut it seeks to wrest from the trap. Is this coercion? Is the monkey free or not? The infantilist ethos does not manacle our hands, it encourage us to tightly grip the chains by which we are held fast. All we need do is let go. How much more fiendish is this box than Weber's iron cage?

Privatization is more than just an economic ideology. It acts in league with the ethos of infantilization to embrace and reinforce narcissism, personal preference, and puerility. It misconstrues liberty and thereby distorts how we understand civic freedom and citizenship, often ignoring and

sometimes undermining the very meaning of public goods and the public weal. To the degree Hannah Arendt is right in arguing that political freedom is defined by participation in government rather than freedom from its reach, privatization has not only diminished our capacity to shape our common lives and determine the character of the civilization in which we want to live; it has made us less free.

Civic Schizophrenia: The Psychopathology of Privatization

Why is freedom, when treated as wholly private, so unrewarding, even destructive? It is implicated in a disturbing paradox: it foments a kind of civic schizophrenia that divides the choosing self into opposing fragments and ultimately denies legitimacy to the fragment we understand to be "civic" or "public"—the self associated with our capacity to exercise public freedom. Privatization ideology treats choice as fundamentally private, a matter not of determining some deliberative "we should" (a kind of "general will" produced by citizens interacting democratically) but only of enumerating and aggregating all the "I want's" we hold as private consumers and creatures of personal desire. Yet private choices do inevitably have social consequences and public outcomes. When these derive from purely personal preferences, the results are often socially irrational and unintended: at wide variance with the kind of society we might choose through collective deliberation and democratic decision-making. Although they accurately reflect private wants and wishes—what philosophers call "first-order desires"—they are quite literally dysfunctional with respect to our common values and norms (expressed in what philosophers call "second-order desires" that reflect whether we really embrace our first-order desires as desirable).

Privatization turns the private, impulsive me lurking inside myself into an inadvertent enemy of the public, deliberative we that also is part of who I am. The private me screams "I want!" The privatization perspective legitimizes this scream, allowing it to trump the quieter "we need" that is the voice of the public me in which I participate and which is also an aspect

of my interests as a human being. All the choices we make one by one thereby come to determine the social outcomes we must suffer together, but which we never directly choose in common.

This explains how a society without villains or conspirators, composed of good-willed but self-seeking individuals, can produce a radically commercial culture which many of those same individuals despise and for which no one is directly responsible even though more than a few may be said to contribute to its making. Consumer capitalism does not operate by producing self-conscious advocates of duplicity who render consciousness false by getting individuals to establish an unjust society they do not really want. Rather, it generates an ethos of schizophrenia that helps condition the attitudes and behavior it requires for its own survival. It fosters "me" thinking on the model of the narcissistic child and discourages "we" thinking of the kind deliberative grown-up citizens recognize as wisdom and that constitutes what James Surowiecki (business columnist for *The New Yorker*) has called "the wisdom of crowds"—a wisdom that rests on "diversity and independence" that allow "disagreement and contest."²² Consumerism thus builds psychic monkey traps into its free-range marketplace. If the attitudes and behaviors that result turn out to undermine other important cultural values, which however are extraneous to capitalism's concerns—however deeply relevant they may be to moral and spiritual frameworks and to the shaping of an ideal public culture—too bad.

Freud gets at what appears as a version of the same paradox in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* where he observes that the adult ego, which is normally overseen and regulated by the mature superego acting as civilization's guardian against the impulsive id, is subject to a rear-guard action by the regressive id. Freud postulates an "antithesis between civilization and sexuality," whose consequence is that "civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration."²³ For "the original infantile stage of conscience . . . is not given up after the introjection into the super-ego, but persists alongside of it and behind it."²⁴ The id is impelled by its will to privatized or personal liberty to act against civility and hence against civilization.

In our era of late consumer capitalism, the infantilizing ethos works in

this very way to reverse the civilizational valence, encouraging a version of the communal id to displace the communal ego and in place of a civic commons establish an anarchic commercial playground. The ethos does not despise civilization, it is merely indifferent to it. It is single-mindedly devoted to consumer capitalism and so encourages id-driven individuals to indulge in behavior—however corrupting to civilization—that is useful to consumerism. Regression becomes a necessary tactic of the mandate to consume, infantilization a condition for capitalism's success. No one is to blame. There is no "false consciousness." The system cracks around fissures that have developed between the requirements of me and we, of id and ego, of its economic mandate and its civilizational value system. These pairs were once adjudicated and harmonized in our society by a Protestant ethos that encouraged civilizational norms useful both to culture and capitalism: this was Puritanism's virtue as an ethos.

Today, however, culture and capitalism are set asunder by an infantalist ethos made the more effective by its alliance with a privatization ideology corrosive to civilization in its own right. We are encouraged to withdraw from our public selves into the sanctuary of "I want," to secede from the public sector and fence ourselves in behind walled communities in which we deploy private resources to acquire what were once public goods such as garbage collection, police protection, and schooling by treating them as private commodities. President Bush was blamed by many for his market response to Hurricane Katrina in early autumn 2005, but only in an advanced market society already privileging private philanthropy and market voucher programs would his preference for religious philanthropy and housing voucher approaches have any legitimacy at all in responding to a public disaster on this scale. The market had already played a role in weakening New Orleans's defenses against category-five hurricanes: wetlands that once protected the city had been carved up and overdeveloped, safety standards for levees had been pushed aside as too expensive or circumvented by corruption, and the city itself had followed a path of urban development in which the safest land had been secured for commercial development while the lowest-lying, least-protected districts (like the Ninth Ward) had been left to the poor (those least likely to be able to flee a hurricane).

Philanthropy is a form of private capital aimed at achieving public outcomes, but it cannot substitute for public resources and public will in confronting public calamities. In the admirable private efforts of superwealthy American stars such as Oprah and Bill Gates to render assistance to the poor in New Orleans, there is also something dismaying. First a privatizing ideology rationalizes restricting public goods and public assets of the kind that might allow the public as a whole to rescue from their distress their fellow citizens who are in jeopardy; then the same privatizing ideology celebrates the wealthy philanthropists made possible by the market's inequalities who earnestly step in to spend some fragment of their market fortunes to do what the public can no longer do for itself. Better philanthropy than nothing, but far better than philanthropy is a democratic public capable of taking care of itself with its owned pooled resources and its own prudent planning. The private philanthropist does for others in the larger public what they have not been enabled to do for themselves, as a public; democracy, on the other hand, empowers the public to take care of itself.

The services we traditionally think of as public are not merely public in how they are paid for under democracy, but in how they operate. When garbage collection, health care, police protection, education, and disaster relief are privatized they actually are subverted. You cannot protect a few in the midst of general insecurity (ask those who fled urban drugs and crime to the suburbs); you cannot educate a few in the midst of societal ignorance (ask the corporations that turned their back on public education but are now looking for "educated workers"); you cannot collect garbage or preempt disease in one place and let it fester in another (ask the First World victims of diseases like SARS and the West Nile virus, hatched in faraway societies without adequate garbage collection or public health programs). Rescuing victims through individual philanthropy cannot be a substitute for helping citizens avoid victimization through effective public governance in which citizens share real power.

The paradox of public and private that sets capitalism against civilization works to defeat common aspirations by "empowering" private wants. We lose the capacity to shape our lives together because we are persuaded by the prevailing ethos that freedom means expressing our desires in iso-

lation. In the arena of education, for example (which I will examine more closely below), the defects of public schooling are thought to be remediable by the virtues of private parental choice. Through vouchers we are able as individuals, through private choosing, to shape institutions and policies that are useful to our own interests but corrupting to the public goods that give private choosing its meaning. I want a school system where my kid gets the very best; you want a school system where your kid is not slowed down by those less gifted or less adequately prepared; she wants a school system where children whose "disadvantaged backgrounds" (often kids of color) won't stand in the way of her daughter's learning; he (a person of color) wants a school system where he has maximum choice to move his kid out of "failing schools" and into successful ones.²⁵

What do we get? The incomplete satisfaction of those private wants through a fragmented system in which individuals secede from the public realm, undermining the public system to which we can subscribe in common. Of course no one really wants a country defined by deep educational injustice and the surrender of a public and civic pedagogy whose absence will ultimately impact even our own private choices. Certainly that is not what we opt for when we express our personal wants with respect to our own kids. Yet aggregating our private choices as educational consumers in fact yields an egalitarian and highly segmented society in which the least advantaged are further disadvantaged as the wealthy retreat ever further from the public sector. As citizens, we would never consciously select such an outcome, but in practice what is good for "me," the educational consumer, turns out to be a disaster for "us" as citizens and civic educators—and thus for me the denizen of an American commons (or what's left of it).

Robert Reich gives expression to this same paradox when he describes the Wal-Mart philosophy of low-priced goods and low-priced nonunion jobs in terms that show that consumers are complicit in the destruction of the very healthy communities and good jobs which, as citizens, they cherish. "Today's economy," says Reich, "offers us a Faustian bargain: it can give consumers deals largely because it hammers workers and communities. . . . The easier it is for us to find better professional services, the

harder professionals have to hustle to attract and keep clients. The more efficiently we can summon products from anywhere on the globe, the more stress we put on our own communities."²⁶

Wal-Mart (perfecting the strategy of earlier catalog and big-box retail giants like Sears, Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward) sets the consumer in us against the citizen in us, pitting our private interest in obtaining cheap goods against our public interest in having a just and community-sustaining capitalist economy that produces secure high-paying jobs and preserves local communities with robust retail sectors—sectors that are often at the heart of a local community's civic life.²⁷ Thus do the ethos of infantilism and the ideology of privatization privilege the consumer in us over the citizen in us. Thomas L. Friedman grasps what he calls this "multiple identity disorder," but, favoring market solutions, implicitly rejects the notion that civic identity with its public concerns trumps consumer identity with its private concerns. Hence all he can do is scratch his head over the "multiple identities—consumer, employee, citizen, taxpayer, shareholder"—that are called up by the dilemmas of Wal-Mart economics, without being able to prioritize them politically or recognize that the very meaning of political sovereignty is to establish the priority of public over private. As with so many modern commentators, Friedman simply omits these crucial political concepts from his discussion of modern markets in a globalized world, as if power was irrelevant in the marketplace, or there were no difference between legitimate public power and illegitimate private power.²⁸

What this blindness to power inspired by the convergence of privatization and infantilization does so effectively is to tilt the contest between public and private, guaranteeing that the private "me" will trump rival public goods, and that the consumer "me" that dwells ever more schizophrenically within each of us will triumph over the would-be citizen "we" dwelling nearby. For the dilemmas Friedman treats as neutral are in fact already skewed by the new ethos toward the private sector, suggesting not only that consumers are better defenders of liberty than citizens but that consumers are better citizens, that they do the work of citizens better than citizens do that work (a point of view that will be considered in detail in

the final chapter). This has been the well-intentioned but disastrous tactic of private-sector do-gooders from the time of the National Consumers League in the early twentieth century to today's advocates of the citizen consumer and the champions of corporate responsibility. It was President Bush's failed tactic in responding to Hurricane Katrina. Urge shoppers to lobby via their dollars and euros and yen to somehow spend their way to the better world that government is supposedly no longer fit to seek; urge managers to "do well by doing good" by being responsible and giving time off for workers who do community service, and by thinking about the needs of the communities in which they reside—right up to the moment the bottom line dictates that their do-good companies abandon them for more profitable climes abroad. Such approaches have an obvious appeal in their goodwill, philanthropic impulses, but they fall far short of either matching what democracy can do or even rescuing capitalism from what ails it. Capitalism has been crippled by the loss of its partnership with democracy, and cannot be restored to good health exclusively through internal civic goodwill or market-side reforms.

Infantilization acts to reinforce the preference for the private and the puerile by treating the impetuous, grasping child as the ideal shopper, and the shopper as the ideal citizen. It inculcates in adults an obligation to give free rein to the "I want!" and "Gimme that!" that both disclose and constitute the infantile id. More than simply an option, puerility is regarded as a necessity of capitalism's survival and hence a mandate of the zeitgeist—which is, of course, the ethos of infantilization. That ethos is thus endowed with a benevolent, even a sacred character, much as work and investment once had Protestantism's fervent blessings. The result is a veritable "cult of the child" widely recognized in the media as such.²⁸ There is to be sure much tut-tutting at Hollywood's celebration of comic book porn like *Sin City* and a good deal of oh-my-ing at the inanities of Howard Stern talk radio and gross winner-take-all, who-can-actually-eat-the-worms? reality television. But there is no serious resistance by consumers to a marketplace geared to children any more than there is resistance by consumers to a Wal-Mart geared to low-wage, minimal-health-insurance, no-future jobs. What resistance there is comes from what the market casts

as "special interest" groups such as parents' groups and unions. That such groups are regarded as "special interest" rather than public interest is itself a sign of the triumph of the market.

Indulging our civic schizophrenia, there is the quiet knowledge that what's bad for us in common is good for the bottom line and just fine for me, for my bottom line (the price I pay for goods), for my stock portfolio, and for the long-term value of my property (and, for that matter, for my church's property). We mutter our wan complaints about a violent and salacious pop culture, even as we count its economic blessings and (with a wink) enjoy its enticing products. We worry about corporations exploiting kid cravings for sugar, fat, and salt even as we welcome convenient medical studies "discovering" that fat is not really a health hazard after all, so that fast-food company stakeholders can satisfy themselves that selling pizza and burgers in schools does not really hurt anyone.³⁰

A new genre of books is emerging that—with a perverse if inadvertent nod to Nietzsche's transvaluation of all values—argues everything you thought was dumbing down the kids is instead making them brighter: that those inane video games actually make teenagers smarter and those multi-plotline television series geared to attention-deficit viewers actually encourage complexity of thinking and nonlinear logic. Steven Johnson for one does not beat around the bush: his book is called *Everything Bad Is Good for You*.³¹ As we have already seen, philosophers and religious leaders have always understood that generally speaking what feels "good" for you as a "first-order desire" you yourself often judge "bad" for you as reflected in your "second-order desires." It is via second-order desires that we second-guess our initial impulse, saying something like "I don't really want to want what I just wanted." Of course, as a child (first-order desire) I would like to have grown-ups tell me that everything bad for me is really good for me (smoking, drinking, drugs, laziness, aggression, affect-less sex, and violent video games), but as someone who wants in time to grow up (second-order desire) I am glad they do not.

Philosopher Harry Frankfurt puts it this way: "Besides wanting and choosing and being moved to do this or that, men may also want to have (or not to have) certain desires and motives. They are capable of wanting

41. Cited in Renwick McLean, "Spaniards Dare to Question the Way the Day Is Ordered," *New York Times*, January 12, 2005.

42. Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, pp. 128-129. No one knows how old a number of today's stars really are (El Duque of the New York Mets, Pedro Martinez, the former Boston Red Sox phenom who is now a Met, and Rey Ordóñez, also of the Mets, are all probably older than they admit), but everyone knows the prospects are getting younger and younger, that more and more high-school athletes are skipping college altogether, and rushing into professional baseball or basketball or soccer.

43. There is the story of Danny Almonte, the brilliant kid from the Dominican Republic who pitched a perfect baseball game (no hits, no walks, no runs) in the 2001 Little League World Series. Except that he wasn't really twelve, he was fourteen; he wasn't enrolled in school at all; and he was carrying a birth certificate falsified by a Dad hoping to win the kids sweepstakes. As sports columnist George Vecsey wrote with dismay at the time, "The age for exploitation gets younger and younger here in the El Dorado of American sports, where the streets are paved with long-term contracts" (George Vecsey, "Keeping Son from School Was Worse," *New York Times*, August 31, 2001).

44. Vecsey, "Keeping Son from School Was Worse."

45. National Basketball Association Commissioner David Stern called not so long ago for a minimum age of twenty for professional players, but in a field where high-school-freshmen ball players can land on the pages of *Sports Illustrated* and on cable television, Stern's rhetorical gesture resulted only in moving the age from eighteen to nineteen (as per the NBA collective bargaining agreement, available at nbpa.com). Again, it is not just pushy parents or ambitious coaches, but corporate players who underwrite the trend, sponsoring summer preprofessional basketball camps (as Nike and Reebok do) and providing gear for high schools around the nation, as many shoe and apparel companies do. Chris Rivers, a sports shoe company executive, complains that he's "got seventh-grade parents calling me asking if I can help get their kid on a traveling team. One parent whose son is in the third grade wants me to come watch his son play now" (Chris Broussard, "Still in High School, Certified Celebrities Look Toward N.B.A.," *New York Times*, December 11, 2003). There are dozens of basketball players in the NBA who have come directly from high school, including Kevin Garnett, Tracy McGrady, and Sebastian Telfair. Many professionally ambitious players on basketball, football, or baseball teams leave college well before they receive a degree to try out for professional teams or enter the draft. And of course many others, who never make the pros, fail to finish school and are fated to dismal lives in dead-end service jobs afterward.

Note too that where once only senior-high-school teams traveled to encounter competitors around the country, today traveling teams can be found that accept seventh graders.

46. Cited in Ian Fisher, "German Cardinal Is Chosen as Pope," *New York Times*, April 20, 2005.

47. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955; New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 12.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 13. See Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (edited and translated by J. Strachey; New York: W. W. Norton, 1961). Freud yearns for a condition where survival can be made consistent with the pleasure principle but concedes the need, short of this, for repression and taboo to play a role not merely in civilization but in human survival.

49. This is Milton Friedman, citing A. V. Dicey's indictment of democracy's dangers in *Dicey's Law and Public Opinion in England* (2d ed., London: MacMillan, 1914; pp. 257-258), in Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; new ed., 1982), p. 201.

4 Privatizing Citizens: The Making of Civic Schizophrenia

1. Alan Wolfe, "The Revolution That Never Was," *The New Republic*, June 7, 1999.

2. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958;

- Anchor Books ed., 1959), p. 27. Ever sensitive to nuance, Arendt adds that this does not mean that "only the necessary, the futile and the shameful have their proper place in the private realm."
3. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), p. 252. Friedman notes that outsourcing is not only about lower wages: "When [CEOs] send jobs abroad, they not only save 75 percent on wages, they get a 100 percent increase in productivity" (p. 260).
4. Benjamin R. Barber, *Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), p. 216.
5. David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. 51.
6. Thatcher's notorious quote, from an interview published in October 1987 in *Women's Own* magazine, is referenced in Alan Ryan, "Waiting for Gordon Brown," *New York Review of Books*, June 29, 2005, p. 35.
7. This concise formulation belongs to Charles E. Lindblom who, however, in his balanced presentation of the market system, also notes that "it is a harsh and often cruel coordinator . . . both an ally and enemy of personal freedom." While it "destroys many mammoth historical inequalities," it "then introduces inequalities of its own," and while "historically, it has supported democracy . . . it has sabotaged important democratized features of ostensibly democratic states" (*The Market System: What It Is, How It Works, and What to Make of It* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001], p. 14).
8. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; new ed., 1982), p. 33.
9. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963), p. 221.
10. Jedediah Purdy, *For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p. 125.
11. In his *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford, on 31 October 1958* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), written in the same period that Milton Friedman was resurrecting market thinking, the philosopher Isaiah Berlin offered a foundation for the renewal of nineteenth-century liberalism by arguing that liberty necessarily carried a negative meaning, and that attempts to treat it as positive could only have authoritarian and totalitarian consequences. I have criticized this view at length in my *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; 20th anniversary ed., 2004).
12. Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy* (New York: Mentor, 1955); John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927; reprint, Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1991).
13. Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), p. 20.
14. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 138. In keeping with my argument here, Dewey attributes the eclipse of the public in part to the diversions from political and public life made possible by "the movie, radio, cheap reading matter and motor car" and "all they stand for" (p. 139).
15. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, pp. 196-197.
16. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2. Harvey views neoliberalism as "a political project to reestablish the condition for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (p. 19). This may well be, but it is also important to understand that neoliberalism provides the conditions for an unregulated consumerism and hence nurtures the endless buying by children as well as adults necessary to capitalism's survival.
17. Robert Westbrook, "Consuming Citizens," in *The Responsive Community*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2003), p. 72.
18. William Greider, *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 26.

19. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 264.
20. Postwar Harvard political theorist Louis Hartz dismissed the Tocquevillian obsession with the tyranny of the majority by noting that the much maligned American majority "has been an amiable shepherd dog kept forever on a lion's leash" (Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1955], p. 129).
21. Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).
22. James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economics, Societies, and Nations* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. xix.
23. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (edited and translated by J. Strachey; New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), pp. 55, 59. Freud's grand schematic no longer has much credibility in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy, but it remains useful as a cultural metaphor for the impact of repression, guilt, regression, and infantilization in political culture; that is to say, it offers what Freud calls "a pathology of cultural communities" that illuminates what I here am calling the infantalist ethos.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
25. For a popular and polemical discussion of the impact of privatization on education, prisons, water, and other public goods, see Si Kahn and Elizabeth Minnich, *The Fox in the Henhouse: How Privatization Threatens Democracy* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005).
26. Robert B. Reich, "Don't Blame Wal-Mart," *New York Times*, February 28, 2005. That such policies are not indispensable to economic survival is evident from the fact that one of Wal-Mart's most successful competitors is Costco, a company that has combined lower price tags with better health insurance and wage policies for its workers.
27. In his *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), Michael Sandel looked at the same logic as it played out in the early days of catalog retailers such as Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck & Company which on the way to offering more goods at cheaper prices began the consumer movement that would first undermine the local retailers and downtown shopping areas as well as the communities they served.
28. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat*, pp. 214, 216. For a more political discussion, see Liza Featherstone, *Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers' Rights at Wal-Mart* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).
29. Thus, for example, Thomas de Zengotita entitles chapter 2 "The Cult of the Child" in his *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in It* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005).
30. Thus, Keith A. Scarborough, vice president for State Government Relations of the Association of National Advertisers, testified to the Health and Human Services Committee in Montgomery County, Maryland, that while advertisers recognize there is a "problem" with childhood obesity, the advertising industry's self-regulatory system protects children (no need for government regulation); moreover, while "much of the criticism of food advertising to children rests on a fundamentally flawed premise that demonizes certain food products," advertisers tend to "reject this type of governmental paternalism" and "the good food/bad food argument." Instead, they call for "moderation as part of a well-balanced diet"—something for which, however, no food advertiser for children has ever spent a penny (Association of National Advertisers, November 28, 2005, www.ana.net). For the complete testimony, see www.ftc.gov/oss/Comments/FoodMarketingtoKids/516960-00009.pdf.
31. Steven Johnson, *Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005). For a detailed discussion see chapter 7.
32. Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Phi-*