

common legacy to unseemly speculation by competing individuals.

In one sense, this is an old story, this comparison between Old World and New. Where Germans see Americans atomizing themselves in an orgy of personal getting and spending, Americans see Germans courting national bankruptcy and, in response, another fit of lethal nationalism. Where Germans see Americans gating the commons and obsessing over equities, Americans see Germans backing the dead horse of "welfarism" and wallowing in *gemütlichkeit*.

In another sense, though, it's a new story. Germany, like the rest of the world,

is changing. More or less painfully, with more or less danger of reactionary spasms revolving around *Blut und Boden*, Germany is privatizing its common goods in the name of individual differences, individual desires. The transition will not be smooth or speedy, which is just as well; by the time it is complete, the Germans will have learned to live with dismemberment, if not to love it quite as much as Americans do. Meanwhile, sensible observers should take their stand somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, probably shading a little closer to the American coast.

vision of the good life as being set loose in a superstore: Most of us, as we begin to fashion our life plans, want some things that can't be had off the shelves. We want to roam in our imaginations and to create things that don't yet exist. We want connectedness as well as autonomy. We want to love and be loved. We want understanding, loyalty, and compassion. We want the pleasures of working with others on some larger project. No one—least of all the market or anyone in it—can produce and package any of these things for us. These aren't things we can choose. We have to make them, and we can't make them alone.

Why can't we make these things in markets? Because markets are designed to disconnect people at the first sign of trouble. When we're disappointed with something we purchase in the market, we don't go back. We don't bother to tell anyone why we're unhappy. We find another supplier. Like a child with her toys, when we get tired of something or it fails to please us, we up and leave. In the world's best essay on how markets work, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, economist Albert O. Hirschman memorably termed this behavior "exit." Freedom to choose is ultimately the freedom to walk away from any commitment, the freedom to extricate one's money and one's energies from common ventures, the freedom not to have to care about anybody else.

There is a better response to disappointment, but it's one that markets don't foster. Hirschman called it "voice," a lovely shorthand for democracy. Instead of leaving, we can speak up. We can reason, persuade, cajole, and negotiate. We can, in short, seek others' cooperation in our journey.

Compared to having voice, having choice turns out to be a pale freedom. If we choose, then leave when we're unhappy, we have no control over what's on offer. Worse, when our concept of freedom is having lots of choices, we look on others as temporary suppliers—hardly a satisfying and fulfilling relationship with our fellow citizens.

Voice is paradoxically a more robust freedom. Voice is a commitment, a choice to lock ourselves in, to tie our fate to someone else's. It's a risky choice. We don't know how well we'll do, or even what kind of world we'll end up with. But it's a glorious, wide-open choice. If we commit ourselves to working together and to speaking up for our visions, we stand a chance of realizing our dreams. And we stand a chance of growing into love and loyalty. ■

DEBORAH STONE

The People Who Won't Commit

OPTING OUT—AND COPPING OUT

> A friend of mine once volunteered to teach his daughter's preschool class about Passover. To tell the story of the Jews' liberation from Egypt, he needed to explain slavery to three- and four-year-olds. He came up with this: Slavery is what it would be like if somebody told you what to do every single minute. A little girl piped up, "I am a slave. My mommy tells me what to do all the time."

It would be some years before this little girl might understand that true freedom is something more than no one interfering with her personal will—that it is a hard practice of social commitments, freely offered, fairly negotiated, faithfully engaged, and persistently pursued.

And for good reason. Americans have long subscribed to a version of freedom that reads like a preschoolers' manifesto: Nobody can tell me what to do or stop me from doing whatever I want. Freedom means the right to use your property however you wish (once, this property included other people). Freedom means the right to contract however you please (once, this freedom meant workers could "choose" 16-hour work days). Freedom means weak federal government (once, we had a government that couldn't operate a bank, regulate commerce, tax income, or tell the states what to do). Freedom in the American lexicon has come to mean the unfettered expression of individual desire.

Lately, freedom has taken on a new consumerist cast: being able to choose from an array of goods in every aspect of our lives. We are not free, we are told, unless we can

choose our health plan, our long-distance carrier, our electricity supplier, and our Internet provider (not to mention our browser). Anything so standardized as universal health insurance, public transportation, or a public school system hems us in.

Freedom means we get to choose how to invest our retirement money; somehow, the principle of mutuality is fine for private investors but is a form of coercion when government tries to pool our money and guarantee us some security against the vicissitudes of the market. And speaking of security, freedom means we get to choose the instruments of our own safety—handguns, rifles, assault weapons, whatever.

Freedom means we get complete choice regarding whether or how to help the unfortunate and the rising generations with our charitable donations. Away with taxation, the argument goes, for it's just compulsory charity, government taking your hard-earned money and giving it to someone else. Compelling people to help others, even in dire emergencies, is "involuntary servitude," writes David Kelley in a textbook currently being touted to political science professors. Kelley would have trouble with my friend's Passover lesson, too.

Government, in this view, can best enhance our freedom by letting markets operate in as many spheres as possible. And why not? Aren't we more free the more options we have? This Toys 'R' Us freedom is definitely something a preschooler can grasp. There's only one problem with this