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Whither the Common Good? A Critique of Home Schooling

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This analysis shows home schooling to be part of a general trend of elevating private goods over public goods. The discourse around home schooling centers on issues of individual rights and private benefits, rather than the public good. Yet, the public has an interest in education because there are unavoidable aspects of education that make it a public good. However, home schooling denies this public interest. It undermines the common good in two ways. First, it withdraws not only children but also social capital from public schools, to the detriment of the students remaining behind. Second, as an exit strategy, home schooling undermines the ability of public education to improve and become more responsive as a democratic institution. Thus, home schooling is not only a reaction to, but also a cause of, declining public schools. Therefore, it diminishes the potential of public education to serve the common good in a vibrant democracy.

The discourse around home schooling often focuses on the rights of parents to educate at home, their responsibilities to their children, and the beneficial results. Those debating home schooling give much attention to the academic achievement of children educated at home and possible in-

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fringements on the right to choose that form of education. Here, however, I focus not only on the rights of those choosing home schooling, but also on the aggregate social effects of those individual choices. To that end, I examine the nature of home schooling as a reaction to the state of public education and consider the community's responsibilities to the individual. Conversely, I suggest that the individual has responsibilities regarding the education of the community and the sustenance of the common good. The elevation of individual choice epitomized by home schooling may be more than simply the reaction to institutional decline; it may be part of the problem as well. This has considerable implications for democracy and the common good.

This analysis begins by reviewing the relation of home schooling to public education, showing that it is largely a reaction to the perceived decline in the state of public schools. However, education has public effects—good or bad. Therefore, I argue that, in addition to its private benefits, education is a public good, and thus the public has an interest in how it is provided. However, home schooling effectively negates that interest. It undermines the common good in two related ways. First, because home school families tend to be articulate, active, and interested in their children's education, students in public schools could benefit from educational experiences that include the participation of such influences. Consequently, these students are deprived of access to social capital when families make the rational decision to remove their children from a common educational experience to home school, to the detriment of the greater good.

Second, this pattern of private decisions undermining the public good also happens on an institutional level. In that respect, I use Hirschman's (1970) framework of exit and voice to consider different options available for improving education. I conclude that the recognition of the public-good aspects of education can strengthen democratic channels and their ability to improve responsiveness to public preferences. On the other hand, continued use of the exit option through home schooling undermines deliberative democracy as well as public education as an institution with the potential to serve the common good.

Home Schooling and Public Education

Parents express different reasons for home schooling. Van Galen (1991) characterized the movement in terms of faith-driven "ideologues" and libertarian or practice-oriented "pedagogues." Virtually all observers see the movement as predominantly consisting of the former. People engaged in home education are overwhelmingly White, more often than not evangeli-

cal or fundamentalist Protestant Christians, relatively wealthy, and well educated (Rudner, 1999). Home-schooled children usually enjoy the benefits of stable, two-parent families that can afford to survive on one income so that one parent—almost always the mother—can stay home (Ray, 1997b; Rudner, 1999).

Nevertheless, people from a variety of backgrounds home school, and the decision to do so represents a significant sacrifice on the part of the parents in terms of time, energy, and (in many cases) the opportunity for a second income. Indeed, under present circumstances, home schooling represents a rational individual choice for these individuals from among several options. However, the ability to make such as choice is dependent on having the means—the time and resources—to sacrifice. In fact, that sacrifice can be seen as an investment in one's child. Thus, whether arising from a religious or libertarian mandate or an assertion of a preferred pedagogy, we can safely surmise that, in practice, the willingness to make such a sacrifice or investment arises from the decision to focus one's attention on one's own child. This is part of a general trend with active and affluent parents to pursue the best possible advantages for their own children—even if it means hurting other children's chances (Kohn, 1998). Even self-described liberal, middle-class mothers who profess a loyalty to the idea of equality of educational opportunity are willing to negate such ideals in practice if, by doing so, they can increase educational advantages for their own children (Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, & Guskin, 1996).

Home schooling epitomizes this trend. In that respect, home schooling is largely a reaction against the typical democratic means of educating our young people: public schooling. Lines (1991), for example, suggested that home schooling is, among other things, "a flight from modern American schools" (p. 9). Thus, people in the home schooling movement react explicitly to the perceived state of public education by asserting individual rights to educate their own child. For instance, home schoolers often express concern about leaving their child in an unsafe neighborhood school, surrounded by nefarious influences (e.g., Klicka, 1995). This is evident in the Florida Department of Education's survey of home schooling families, which found that respondents' primary reason for home schooling was the parents' perceptions of the public school environment (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998; Lyman, 1998). Other advocates of home schooling point to the perceived mediocrity of academic achievement in public schools (Finn & Gau, 1998; Whitehead & Crow, 1993). Still others (a) argue that public schools do not teach values, or do not teach the values the critics prefer; or (b) are concerned not just with what the institution teaches but with the values of other students (e.g., Ballmann, 1995; Klicka, 1995). Farris (1997) summarized these reasons for exiting neighborhood schools: "Most home

schooling families have chosen this form of education because of the dangers of the public school—academic failure, moral decay, and physical safety" (p. 5; see also Holt, 1981).

Therefore, the home schooling movement can be seen largely as a mass exodus from public education. It is not the intent of this article to defend the state of public education. Instead, this analysis of home schooling focuses on the aggregate effects of individual choices on the ability of public schools to support the public good. However, it would be a mistake to assume that home schooling is simply the result of individual decisions to leave public schools when, in fact, well-organized groups promote that flight from public institutions. Groups like the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, the Home School Legal Defense Association, and the Rutherford Institute not only protect the rights of home schoolers, but also, along with the Bradley Foundation, advance an agenda under the banner of "parental rights" (Miner, 1996). For example, writing in his *Focus on the Family* newsletter, home and Christian schooling advocate James Dobson (1994) quotes Cal Thomas in reacting to one recent effort to reform public education this way:

> "How should parents respond to this latest government power grab? Just as they would if they knew their children's school was on fire—they should get them out, fast." ... The National Education Association, which supports every anti-family cause from homosexual activism to abortion and condom-mania, has finally achieved the prize it has pursued for decades: control of the nation's children. (p. 1)

Dobson's organization has a mailing list with upwards of 4 million families, and his radio show reaches about 5 million listeners. Similarly, Citizens for Excellence in Education (CEE) sponsors "Rescue 2010" for the 20 million Christian children in public schools. CEE—claiming 350,000 parents across the United States, in 1,680 chapters—argued that "CHRISTIANS MUST EXIT THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS" (B. Simonds, 1998; see also R. Simonds, 1999). Likewise, home schooling pioneer Reverend Ray Moore promotes "Exodus 2000," under the belief that "*ALL Christians should immediately remove their children from the government schools*" (Dominick, n.d.; see also Moore, 1997).[1]

Hence, if home schooling is largely a reaction to the state of public education, it also reflects rational, individual decisions within a constrained set of circumstances. But, in view of the influential groups promoting

[1]For the CEE proposal, see http://www.webcom.com/webcee/strategy.html; for Moore's campaign, see http://exodus2000.org/.

moral mandates for home schooling, it would be inaccurate to suggest that it is simply the product of independent, individual choices. Therefore, although the present analysis does not defend the state of public education, neither does it intend to criticize the individual decisions of home schoolers. Instead, I explore the systemic context of home schooling as organized exit from public schools, which, I argue, undermines public education's singular potential to serve as a democratic institution promoting the common good.

Education as a Public Good

Traditionally, education has served both private and public ends. For example, schooling aids the individual in employment potential and provides private businesses with trained employees. But schools also embody democratic ideals of equality and are used to promote civic values, as well as to sort people in the interest of "social efficiency" (Labaree, 1997b). As people increasingly configure publicly funded education to meet the needs of their own children, home schoolers proceed from the insight that the institution of public education cannot adequately serve their children in the ways they want them served.

Yet, although it provides private benefits to students, schooling is also a public good—something we increasingly forget. This is not a new insight. For years, people have associated the wide distribution of schooling with progress, an informed citizenry, assimilation into shared values, lower birthrates, lower crime rates, and so forth—as well as (for better or for worse) AIDS prevention, abstinence, inculcation of entrepreneurial values, teaching a shared language, providing hot meals, and other social services and agendas. In view of wider effects, economists refer to the "externalities" of mass education to explain the general societal benefits that accrue from the wide diffusion of education. In an age in which we like to think of relations in economic, transactional terms, these externalities can be understood as benefits enjoyed by parties outside the immediate customer–provider arrangement of the student and the school. In this sense, "society" is a "consumer" of education, enjoying the benefits of an educated populace.

Although such externalities could be enjoyed regardless of whether education was provided through public or private means, the public-good aspect of education is most obviously evident in the area of public schools. Public schools are configured to serve more than simply the individual private interests of their immediate users (students and their families). Thus, governance and funding are shared throughout the community—by users

and nonusers, future employers, parents, nonparents, future parents, and parents whose children are no longer in school.

However, the private aspects of education are ascendant, as people increasingly view schooling as a means to individual social and economic advancement (Labaree, 1997a, 1997b). As a private good, consumers can seek what is best for them regardless of the effects their choices have on others. In elevating individual choice and widening the scope of decisions we make as individual private decisions, we increasingly neglect community considerations of how our actions affect others and deny their rights to voice their concerns. In schooling, it is important to consider the extent to which charter school, choice, and home schooling activists have created an atmosphere—through a rhetoric of education as a private good—in which parents feel the unconstrained freedom or even moral mandate to choose privatized education for their children. Typically, such activists do not publicly discuss the wider social consequences of individual choices. Thus, we have a system in which parents make a decision without considering the common good.

Yet, if we neglect the public-good aspects of education in pursuing education for our own children, we will still have to deal with the unavoidable negative impact of public education as a diminished public good—more poorly educated students, less social cohesion and tolerance, and other consequences of poor education. Thus, as Labaree (in press) notes, we can exit the public schools, but we cannot escape the positive or negative realities of public education as a public good.

Education and the Public Interest

Yet, if education is a public good, then the public also has an interest in its provision. We all have a right, indeed a responsibility, to demand some say in how any child is educated. This is true not just in cases in which our tax dollars are supporting that education. In a society that claims to be democratic, there is an inherent social interest in some degree of common education for tolerance, understanding, and exposure to difference, as well as to moderate secessionist and radical tendencies.

There is a long-standing recognition of the importance of the public interest in education. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the founder of England's first colony in North America, referred to Plato in arguing that "the educacion of children should not altogether be under the puissance of their fathers, but under the publique power and aucthority, becawse the publique have therein more Interests then their parentes" (as cited in Kaestle, 1973, p. 16). Indeed, the public concern not only with the wide diffusion but with the nature of education is also evident in the earlier colonial laws mandating schooling in the New England colonies. Leading up to the common school

reforms, this public interest was increasingly thought to be carried through public schools in the Republic, as Carter (1826/1969) argued: "Every private establishment ... detaches a portion of the community from the great mass, and weakens or destroys their interest in those means of education which are common to the whole people" (p. 24). Of course, the common school reformers institutionalized the public prerogatives in public education, largely by appealing to the need for sustaining the public good in a democracy, but also by appealing to the private interests of employers (when politically expedient). In doing so, they reinforced the legacy of competing public and private interests that has since driven public education. Various subsequent reforms and trends have tipped the scales toward the public or private good aspects of public schools, but both have survived to produce a creative tension in the purpose of schools.

Although the public interest in education underlies much of the way we think about schooling, it is often only an implicit consideration. On the other hand, recent reform efforts and movements such as home schooling explicitly focus on the private interest of students and their families. However, on reflection, the public interest is apparent to most people, including home schoolers. If parental control is good for one family because it removes them from the public-interest effects of other parents' choices, is it good for all? Subsequently, I argue that, on a practical level, it is not. However, on a more philosophical level, people agree that unregulated parental control is not an absolute right, because other people have to deal with the consequences of a parent's decisions. In one famous essay, Friedman (1955) reminded us that extremes allow us to test principles in their purest form. If we do that with home schooling, we could ask: Are most people—or even most home schoolers—prepared to forego public influence on the education of children if even one child is being instructed at home by Nazis, Shining Path guerrillas, advocates of race war, pedophiles, Satanists, or some other cultists? And what if the parents are just alcoholics, people caught in a cycle of poverty or a culture of dependency, or people in the chronic habit of making bad choices? We generally recognize a community sense of moral responsibility for the child, as well as the fact that we will have to deal with the fruits of that education when the child reaches adulthood in a democratic society. Home schoolers consistently argue against "state" or "government" involvement in their children's education. But, ideally, in a democracy the public is the state.

Perhaps two other examples from outside education help illustrate the public interest in a common good. Issues of public safety, justice, and punishment or correction of criminals are generally held to be a public good. There is an obvious public interest in how we pursue this good. If someone commits a publicly defined crime against another person, does the victim

personally get to decide on the punishment ? No. Because we recognize a general public interest in meting out justice—the public's safety has been injured. Other people also have a say in the type and severity of punishment because we believe that society in general should decide how to keep order, what is evil, what is forgivable, how to discipline, how to deter certain activities, what to forgive, and so forth. When people unilaterally "privatize" the administration of this public good, we call them "vigilantes."

Similarly, in health care, the "state" sometimes tries to assert a claim over medical decisions. For example, the state often attempts to intervene when sick children need medical attention. This conflicts with the beliefs of some people regarding medical practices. Yet, the public has an interest in preventing the spread of disease and in securing health care for minors unable to make their own decisions. For instance, people who are injured sometimes refuse blood transfusions due to religious beliefs. Generally, we recognize the right of an adult to make such a personal decision. However, when a child is injured and in need of a blood transfusion to survive, we see a gray area in which two sets of rights and responsibilities conflict—the right of the parents to raise a child in line with their personal beliefs and the public's responsibility to ensure that individuals do not die because of other people's choices. Likewise, some people claim that they have the individual right to choose when and how to end their lives. This is a hotly contested issue, and others seek to use the power of the state to prevent such decisions, seeing them as an affront to the public good. Often, the state asserts a right to make medical decisions in such cases. Does this conflict with the rights of some Christian Scientists or "right-to-die" advocates, for instance? Yes. Does it save some lives? Most likely. Do we, as a society, have an interest in violating people's rights to promote public health, individual life, and even public morality? Probably. However, unlike most medical practices, education policies can be influenced through voting. Some may call this "state intervention." Most people call it democracy.

But in education, home schooling, by its very nature, denies this public interest by acknowledging no mechanism, no legitimate public interest, in the education of "other people's children." This is ironic because education is arguably the institution most open to public input through traditions of local control, elections, millages, and school conferences. Furthermore, as a public good with the potential for vibrant democratic control, public schools are one of the last remaining means of resisting centrifugal social forces.

The Privatization of a Public Good

Thus, there is a chronic and often creative tension between private and public goals for education. Whereas the pursuit of education is often

driven by the desire for individual private benefits, those private interests are counterbalanced by the public interests, which can justify constraints on individual choices through the shaping of institutional options. Yet, home schooling denies the public's interest and responsibilities and privatizes the social aspect of education to the most atomistic level—as strictly a family concern. In focusing on individual rights to choose, home schooling demands all the advantages of education as a private good but nullifies the public good.

Hence, home schooling does not simply throw off balance the symbiosis between public and private interests in education. It throws it out. Perhaps that is why, despite the remarkable growth of home schooling and its forceful public advocacy by influential leaders, 57% of Americans still feel that home schooling is "a bad thing for the nation" (Rose, Gallup, & Elam, 1997, p. 50). By focusing only on the benefits for one's own children, home schooling represents a very radical form of privatization of a public good. Home schooling is both a more benign and more destructive form of privatization: benign because it does not put a claim on public resources (as do for-profit charter schools, for instance), and destructive in that it is a more fundamental form of privatization. It privatizes the means, control, and purpose of education and fragments the production of the common good not simply to the level of a locality or ethnic group, but to the atomized level of the nuclear family.

Obviously, some would see that as a good thing. One could argue that complete and radical privatization to its greatest degree—home schooling—is a better approximation of democracy because it removes statist bureaucracy and responds to citizens at the most local level. However, this ultra-individualistic conception is a very thin democracy indeed, inasmuch as it absolutely denies even the most minimal community interest in democratic schooling. Furthermore, advocates could contend that home schooling promotes the common good by cultivating future leaders for the benefit of all. This is a very elitist argument that identifies potential leaders on the basis of the fact that they happen to be one's own child, and it necessarily excludes others from that vision. Some, like Holt (1981), ask if it is so bad if the affluent remove their children from school, because, at least educators can attend to poor kids with "undivided attention" (p. 326). Of course, the common school reforms were largely a reaction to such a system, in which the children of the poor were often left to "public" and "charity" schools and others pursued private educational options according to their means. If such a situation were untenable then, we might want to consider how such a segregated system could be any more appropriate now.

Home schoolers could argue that (a) the strengths of their results contribute to the common good by providing a better-educated populace in

general, and (b) a wider acceptance of home schooling would increase overall academic achievement. Again, this argument turns its back on those left in the neighborhood schools. It assumes that the aggregate of individual choices automatically lead to the greatest good—that is, I can best help my neighbor by focusing on myself—an arguable proposition. Furthermore, it limits its definition of the purpose of schools to academic goals and denies the use of schools for other socially defined ends: assimilation, desegregation, cohesion, or whatever we collectively value.

Finally, home schoolers could argue that they are not undercutting the potential for the democratic production of the public good. They are only asking for classically liberal democratic rights to be free from interference, while not necessarily denying democratic responsibilities. For example, some critics of home schooling charge that, in focusing on their own, these parents are turning their backs on fellow citizens and denying the social contractual obligations of a republican conception of a democratic society. (After all, as Blakely & Snyder, 1997, perceptively asked in their analysis of gated communities, Can there be a social contract without social contact?) Yet, home schoolers argue that, by focusing on their own families, they are not turning their backs on the social contract (Ray, 1997b). Instead, they are reconstituting their rights at an individual and family level so that they may contribute to the community as autonomous individuals—as defined by those who founded the Republic (Lines, 1994; Williamson, 1989).

But this is a tenuous assertion, from both historical and libertarian perspectives. The antifederalist emphasis on civil liberties from government intervention, championed by home schooling, was not the only (much less dominant) view of the social contract at the beginning of the nation (Sandel, 1996). Classic debates over the social contract suggest that it was one of several competing understandings of the individual's role in society in the late 18th century. Leaders like Thomas Jefferson probably embraced a more republican–communitarian conception of social obligations—tied to the Scottish Enlightenment's focus on virtuous acts of benevolence toward others in the community—rather than the liberal Lockean conception of freedom from state interference (Matthews, 1984; Wills, 1978).

Second, it is debatable, even from a libertarian perspective (e.g., Holt, 1981), to claim that home schooling strengthens the common good by creating autonomous individuals. Home schooling defines liberty largely as freedom from other people's choices (in the form of the state) rather than freedom to make choices—an autonomy that is cultivated through critical thinking skills and independence from the coercion of others, including that of parents. Obviously, most people accept the notion that we do not hold children to be autonomous. However, they are also not their parents' property (Brighouse, 1997). To become truly autonomous individuals,

children's independence of views cannot be grounded in a unit as self-contained as the family but must be based in the larger community, which (for better or for worse) is more closely reflected in the classroom than the home (Durkheim, 1961).

The Price to Individuals of Maintaining Education as a Public Good

If, then, education is a public good, and the public has a consequent interest in the provision of that good, we might consider the distribution of costs for maintaining that public good. It is my contention that there are, indeed, real and opportunity costs associated with education as a public good. Although some of these are financial, the price of education as a public good also involves social costs. I outline these costs in this section, and I go on to argue that home schooling privatizes the personal benefits of education while asking others to disproportionately bear the social burdens of education as a public good. Thus, home schooling undermines the common good by distributing costs inequitably and, therefore (as I demonstrate later), it undermines the ability of society to pursue the common good through democratic channels.

In most conceptions of democracy, there are individual rights, accompanied by various civic responsibilities. That is, the idea of democracy becomes hollow and can collapse if individuals define democracy only in terms of their individual rights but neglect the public good—the prerequisite civil society of democratic discourse, community participation, voting, and other activities, that may have little individual payoff but can serve to strengthen the democratic polity.

Yet, increasingly, people are pursuing a consumer model of public life, withdrawing from areas that potentially represent social costs to them, while still pursuing public benefits—that is, we want to enjoy public goods but avoid private costs. This is the not in my backyard (NIMBY) ethic applied to democracy. We want better government but do not want to personally research the issues and take the time to vote. We want safe streets, but do not want to "get involved," serve on a jury, or pay taxes for public safety services, and we certainly do not want a prison in our neighborhood. We want a stable community but do not make the effort to talk with our neighbors.

As Olson (1965) and Hardin (1968) demonstrated, a resource or endeavor maintained as a common or collective good will deteriorate if based only on voluntary cooperation in a system of self-interest. If support is left up to individuals solely on a voluntary basis, although all can enjoy

the benefits, some will avoid paying their fair share. Therefore, we often decide to compel people who enjoy that good to share in the costs—opportunity or real costs. For the most part, the financial costs of public education are publicly distributed—that is, public authorities decide on the tax burdens for the support of mass education, and then, in the absence of voluntary support, compel payment through legal means. Similar systems are evident for other public goods such as roads, public and national security, and so forth.

However, in the case of education as a public good, there are other costs involved, and these are not distributed by a public authority so much as through private choices. Without requiring participation, social institutions such as public education require social and political capital to promote effectiveness and maintain consequent public support for their survival as public goods. These costs are less tangible than a tax bill but still very real. Such costs can include, for example, the time and effort spent advocating for one's child and hoping to make the school a better institution (to avoid the costs of an institution in a state of decline). There are opportunity costs involved with being around people of varied abilities, values, and backgrounds.

Peer Effects

These opportunity costs become apparent when we consider a child's classmates (and their families)—sometimes called "peer group effects." There is an established and rich research tradition, at least since the Coleman Report, that identifies the family background of an individual student and the family background of the other students in the school as the primary determinants of student achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Epple & Romano, 1998; Jencks, 1972). Although these influences may be suggested by the students' economic indicators, they are closely associated with the cultural characteristics and values students bring to the classroom—punctuality, respect for authority, persistence, delayed gratification, and other such attributes that are (for better or worse) valued and rewarded by the education system. This research indicates more than a singular link between the individual's socioeconomic status (SES) characteristics and his or her own academic achievement. It demonstrates the importance of the SES characteristics of the classmates on a student's achievement as well, and, conversely, the effects of an individual's SES on his or her classmates—that is, the positive values, abilities, skills, and preferences brought to school by a student also determine the likelihood of other students' academic success. The peer group informs a student's edu-

cational and career aspirations and sets patterns well into adult life (e.g., Wells & Crain, 1994).

According to Putnam (1996), education level is a proxy for SES factors but also the best predictor of civic engagement. Furthermore, more highly educated people are more likely to contribute to the community because of their economic position, but more so because of the skills, abilities, and values they have received from home and school. Although there are many indicators that researchers use to discern the background SES characteristics—family income, books in home, parental education levels, computer use, and so forth—much of the research returns to the value of parental involvement in education (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Lareau, 1989). "Parental involvement" speaks to how parents value schooling, participate in their child's schooling, and impart or model those values to their children. In schools, high levels of parental involvement are associated with the all-important social capital in and around schools that, for many researchers, explains the superior academic achievement of students in private schools over public schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996). As Ray (1999) noted, "Home schooling, generally speaking, is, de facto, parent involvement" (p. 34).

Opportunity Costs

However, if parental involvement and certain associated values lead to better education for the individual and immediate peers, those families choosing to school at home have both a definite advantage and potential responsibility. Yet, home schooling emphasizes the former and neglects the latter (Franzosa, 1991; see, e.g., Holt, 1981; Williamson, 1989)—NIMBY democracy, in which the benefits are privatized and the costs are transferred to those remaining in the public sphere.

Certainly, those bringing more cultural capital to the school are asked to bear a greater portion of the opportunity costs, when they could use their skills to obtain more private benefits from education elsewhere. The opportunity costs of foregoing other educational options are real enough to the parents. There is a price to pay in potential gain in leaving a child in a neighborhood school when a selective school would better advance the child's potential. Yet, as those with the most advantageous SES characteristics to cultivate for personal use, they also have the most to share. And the loss of their advocacy, skills, values, and cultural capital represents real—not just opportunity—costs to those remaining in the neighborhood school.

Hence, whereas financial costs often are distributed through publicly constituted democratic authority, social and political costs often are paid

or avoided because of private decisions. When parents make a decision regarding their child's education, they are doing so largely to avoid costs (or to take advantage of opportunities). Thus, the logical choice to remove a child from one school and place him or her in another district, a magnet school, a private school, or some other option is a private prerogative that is exercised to avoid costs and maximize opportunities. Home schooling clearly illustrates this phenomenon.

Individual and Shared Costs, Voluntary Cooperation, and Aggregate Consequences

The private decision to pursue a better educational experience for one's own child is a rational decision on an individual level in a system based on self-interest. However, the sum of these individual decisions, in the aggregate, can have negative consequences. Game theory offers insights into these dynamics and their consequences. The purpose of game theory is to provide models to predict human behavior in various circumstances, to discern likely outcomes. As with choosing an education for one's own child, we cannot assume simply that a choice is discrete and isolated, but instead that it is made (or not made) in response to what other "players" choose. Thus, for example, a parent probably would not decide to remove a child from a school if other people's choices had resulted in a school that exactly matched what that parent was looking for in terms of beliefs, parental participation, pedagogical preferences, and so on. So game theory analyzes rational, self-interested individual (and group) choices and patterns of choices in the context of what other people do or are expected to do.

One famous game, the Prisoners' Dilemma, can help us analyze the exercise of individual rights and responsibilities around a shared good such as public education—in this exercise, the "good" is to avoid prison time. It shows how outcomes are shaped not only by our actions but also by our actions in strategic interaction with the choices of others. In this game, two (or more) individuals are arrested and isolated in separate cells, unable to communicate. Assume that the prosecutor has enough physical evidence to put the prisoners away for only 1 year each. However, with testimony, a conviction for this crime carries up to 10 years in prison. Each prisoner has only two options: (a) admit guilt, and, in doing so, give evidence against the other; or (b) claim innocence. If a prisoner is willing to plead guilty and thereby testify against the other, the prosecutor will bargain: The prisoners will split the 10-year sentence if each pleads guilty; but, if one admits and the other denies, the one pleading guilty can go free, and the other will serve the full sentence. The prisoners know their options and the conse-

quences, but they cannot communicate. The possibilities are represented in Table 1.

Of course, in that scenario, the best overall outcome for the players (represented by the least amount of prison time) would be for each to serve only 1 year. However, to achieve this outcome, the prisoners must each, in isolation, forego the possibility of getting out of jail free, at the partner's great expense. Individually, the obvious strategy is to admit guilt, so that an individual serves no more than 5 years and possibly none at all. But, in the absence of cooperation, loyalty can carry a heavy cost. The players cannot communicate, but even if they could, there is an incentive to withdraw unilaterally from any agreement. Loyalty may lead to the greatest overall good, but only by assuring that each party shares part of the costs—if possible, some kind of binding contract between the players (e.g., Hardin, 1968; Olson, 1965). Played several times, strategies of betrayal and retaliation can serve an individual player. However, if the game is repeated indefinitely (which is more similar to social interaction), computer models show that voluntary cooperation emerges as the dominant strategy (Coulson, 1994).

What this exercise demonstrates in the context of education is that, when participating in a common good, individuals have a logical incentive to avoid costs, even at the expense of others. Even if voluntary cooperation is the best overall approach, there are individual incentives to pursue the best outcome for a given student, which can override the common good. In the current climate of treating education as a consumer good for its individual, private benefits, home schooling reflects this dynamic. Like the Prisoners' Dilemma, sharing the social costs of education—instruction in groups of varied abilities, values, and attributes (i.e., classrooms)—can lead to the general good of enhanced outcomes for the greater whole. Unlike the Prisoners' Dilemma, however, some people come to the decision with a greater share of potential benefits (in terms of SES) that can be realized both individually or collectively. Thus, they have an even greater incentive than is represented

Table 1
The Prisoners' Dilemma

	Options for Prisoner B	
	Admit	*Deny*
Options for Prisoner A		
Admit	–5, –5	0, –10
Deny	–10, –0	–1, –1

Note. Matrix represents outcomes for Prisoners A, B.

in the game to forego voluntary cooperation (or any social contract-type arrangement with others in the school), to more effectively pursue maximized opportunities—as any individual rational consumer should do. However, in doing so, the desirable attributes and skills exhibited by home schooling families are removed from the classroom where others may benefit, and, as with the Prisoners' Dilemma, the costs to those remaining in the shared arrangement are intensified in the form of declining social capital, diminished peer group effects, and so forth.

The Price of Exit for the Public Good

What, then, is the solution to this unwieldy entanglement of inequitably distributed private prerogatives and benefits and public costs? If we want to enjoy the public good aspects of education (and we all do) and not have to pay the high price for diminished or negative externalities of mass education, we need to guarantee a generally wide and adequate level of education across the population. The dilemma here is that the focus on private goods leads to more effective education for some, but it injures the opportunities for many others. Yet, because no one seems to be happy with the status quo, there are two obvious alternatives within the options outlined in this analysis: expand home schooling to more, if not all, people, or increase participation in the institution of public education to make it more effective.

More Participation in Home Schooling, or Public Schooling

Some home schooling advocates promote an even greater expansion of home schooling as an effective approach for education, to the point of questioning the legitimate need for public schools (e.g., Ray, 1997a). For example, Farris and Woodruff (1999) noted that, although home-schooled children tend to come from relatively affluent and well-educated families, even poorer and less-educated home schooling families appear to do quite well academically. Their success appears to contrast with the lower achievement of similarly situated students in the public schools. Indeed, Ray (1997a) suggested "the possibility that students 'left behind' in state schools might be better off if they were moved on to home or private education."

The anti-public school proposal is, in my view, inadequate, and such arguments miss a crucial point. There is an essential difference between home schooling parents engaging in home schooling and every family home schooling. Home school parents are self-selected, defined by the primary SES characteristic of interest and involvement in their child's educa-

tion. Although interest in education is unequally distributed across the public school population, virtually 100% of home schoolers, by definition, demonstrate an active interest in their child's education. So, when we look at high test scores for a home school student, we are seeing, among other things, the fruits of a highly motivated, active, and interested parent participating in the life of the child.

Thus, we need to be cautious in concluding on the basis of relatively high test scores for home school students that there is "something inherent to the modern practice of home education that could (or does) ameliorate the effect of background factors that are associated with lower academic achievement when students are placed in conventional public schools" (Ray, 1999, p. 36). The selection effects confound the treatment effects in a self-selected group necessarily defined by high parental involvement and desirable cultural capital.

Hence, home schooling cannot be expected to level inequities that arise from differences in home backgrounds, but instead is an indicator of those inequities. As the research on home backgrounds demonstrates, it would be sadly misguided to assume that all parents share those characteristics that account for academic success of home schoolers. "Treatments" external to the home (i.e., schools) have the potential to level the inequities arising from differentiated home backgrounds. Home schooling for all is unlikely to serve as a successful strategy, and it would appear that the continued growth of home schooling increasingly will erode the educational experiences for the vast majority of students. If applied on a broad scale, home schooling likely would exacerbate these inequities. Indeed, even if universal and academically beneficial, it likely would have detrimental effects on the vitality of democracy in pursuing the common good (as I argue in the conclusion).

Therefore, we need to refocus our attention on the institution of public education and its potential for serving the public good. To that end, Hirschman's organizational analysis is quite helpful. As a political economist, Hirschman is well positioned to offer useful insights into questions of public and private goods, individual and collective costs, and the confluence of such factors. Indeed, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Hirschman, 1970) is considered a classic in the field. In his analysis, when an institution such as public education fails to accommodate the views of those it is intended to serve, they have two options: exit or voice. Although both expressions of dissatisfaction have the potential to produce improvements in the organization, they are different in their essence. Hirschman saw voice as a political response—a willingness to remain in the organization and fight. Exit is associated with economic organizations. With exit, consumers have the power to force

changes on organizations by withdrawing their patronage and money—"voting with their feet" through flight. One response is messy, public, and confrontational. The other is clean and private, and it avoids nasty conflicts (Labaree, in press).

However, although these are the options that dissatisfied individuals have, organizations often are designed to be responsive to one or the other form of expression, which does not always match the individual's likely response. This is demonstrated in Table 2. In cases in which individual response matches institutional receptivity (Quadrants 1 and 4), there are effective patterns of responsiveness to expressed preferences. But in Hirschman's (1970) analysis, dysfunction can arise when dissatisfaction is likely to cause one response, but the organization is sensitive to the other (Quadrants 2 and 3). In those cases, responsiveness is ineffective, and the organization is likely to be inefficient. For example, a business enterprise is, by its nature, susceptible to exit, because losing customers to competitors hurts its relative market position, and its customers are most likely to respond with exit if they are not satisfied (Quadrant 1). However, in the event that a business has monopolistic control of a market, exit is less likely in view of lack of alternatives for consumers, and the business is not suited to respond effectively to voice. The result is an unresponsive and inefficient monopoly (Quadrant 2).

Table 2
Roles of Exit and Voice

	Decline Arouses Primarily	
	Exit	*Voice*
Organization is sensitive primarily to		
Exit	Competitive business enterprise #1	Organizations where dissent is allowed, but is "institutionalized" #2
Voice	Public enterprise subject to competition from an alternative mode, lazy oligopolist, etc. #3	Democratically responsive organizations commanding considerable loyalty from members #4

Note. From *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* by A. O. Hirschman. Copyright © 1970 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press. See also Larabee (in press).

Similarly, public organizations in the political sphere usually are intended to be responsive to voice. Democratic deliberation and the organized expression of views are ideally the means for changing political institutions (Quadrant 4). However, when an organization is designed to be responsive to voice but arouses exit, it is in a state of dysfunction (Quadrant 3).

Of course, public education is in such a position. Under Hirschman's (1970) framework, public education usually is located in Quadrant 3, because it is designed to respond to political pressure, but often it incites dissatisfied users to leave for private options such as home schooling. In inducing that type of response, education is provided as a public good but treated as a private good by those exiting. And indeed, as with other private goods (toothpaste, restaurants, cars, etc.) that provoke a consumer-type response, individuals exit for private reasons and do not typically need to consider the effects of their choice on other consumers.

However, as a public good, schools are designed to be responsive to voice through school board elections and meetings, parent advocacy, and even bond issues, as these provide the opportunity for citizen preferences to be heard. Public schools generally are not designed to be directly responsive to exit, because—as a public good—they have a semimonopoly status and are not immediately penalized in financial terms for the loss of a student. Thus, pathology results. Indeed, as Hirschman (1970) noted, under present conditions of semimonopoly status for public schools and partial escape options for some parents (at least for those with means), schools often fail to respond to consumer exit. In fact, being primarily responsive to political pressure, schools may prefer or even encourage dissatisfied and vocal parents to home school to get rid of "difficult" individuals.

More Exit, or Voice

If we characterize public education in Hirschman's (1970) description of a lazy public monopoly, a few possibilities are evident. The status quo of public education is inherently unsatisfying for many, because it reflects an unwieldy combination of an economic paradigm (for users) and a public-democratic paradigm (for the institution). Thus, there are basically two alternatives. Reform means moving the institution of public education in the direction of a purer economic paradigm, or a purer political paradigm.

Obviously, many reformers currently propose the former. Proponents of charter schools, vouchers, and other forms of school choice advocate making education more of a private good to be pursued individually. Consequently, they advocate making schools more like businesses, in which

each school succeeds or fails based on attracting and retaining students. Although this is not the time for a comprehensive discussion of such reform proposals, it is interesting to note that under Hirschman's (1970) framework, these plans would remove education from the democratic or political paradigm of voice to the economic sphere responsive to exit. Indeed, Hirschman worried that Americans traditionally elevate the exit option as the preferred approach almost by default (see chap. 8). This clearly is reflected in the predominance of economic values in school choice proposals, as reformers seek to depoliticize education—making it more efficient and responsive to exit. Yet, although economists see politics as a messy, indirect, and inefficient form of expression compared with voting with one's feet, Hirschman facetiously noted,

> A person less well trained in economics might naively suggest that the direct way of expressing views is to express them! ... But what else is the political, and indeed the democratic, process than the digging, the use, and hopefully the slow improvement of these very channels? (p. 17)

Therefore, one significant consequence of moving toward exit is that it undermines the democratic potential of the institution to respond to citizens' voices—and not just the preferences of immediate users. This is important if we are to sustain public education as a public good for each member of society and not just for parents with children of school age at any given time. When people exercise their exit option for individual advancement, they undercut the ability of the institution to improve as a democratic institution. Atrophy sets in on the institutional ability to respond to democratic voice. And public education is denied its role as one of the last remaining means with at least the potential to sustain the public good directly.

Coercion, or Voluntary Cooperation

What, then, are the possibilities for enhancing the ability of public education to respond to voice? The most obvious and untenable position is coerced participation. By requiring parents to send their children to public schools and, even more so, by controlling the distribution of desirable SES characteristics so as to more equitably benefit all children (i.e., busing), we can coerce parental involvement from the most active parents because their children would be captured by public schools. This, however, is unconstitutional, politically indefensible, and generally distasteful to many (Trotter, 1998; Tyack, 1968).

The other possibility is the voluntary cooperation suggested by game theory. If people were voluntarily to forego capitalizing on private advantages arising from family characteristics and agree to enrich the peer effects of others, the greater good could be enhanced, and an institution with the potential for promoting the common good could be reinvigorated through the strengthening of the voice mechanism. Of course, this is the scenario we have now, and people are largely dissatisfied with the current situation. The growth of home schooling demonstrates that increasing numbers of families are exercising the exit option and refusing to participate voluntarily in the shared costs of public education.

However, this is also the approach with the greatest possibilities for fulfilling the potential of public education in pursuing the common good. Home schoolers have demonstrated amazing energy and advocacy skills in pursuing education for their own children. They display a remarkable array of publications, newsletters, alerts, political advocacy, and networking to support and sustain their efforts. If such activism and resources were brought to bear on a public institution such as public schools, the general public good would benefit. Of course, some would say their substantive participation is not welcomed by the public schools (Ray, 1999). That may be so. Hirschman's (1970) model suggests that, inasmuch as that is the case, part of the reason for that is the preference for flight over staying and demanding to be heard. Schools are one of the most accessible institutions in a democratic society, found in almost every neighborhood, open to public scrutiny of their performance and mistakes, and designed to respond to multiple forms of democratic expression (although that responsiveness may be decaying from disuse). Indeed, people probably can have a much greater influence and an impact more immediate to their lives by voting in a school board election than in voting in elections for national offices.

Implications

Home schooling is largely a reaction against the perceived state of public schooling. This analysis defends not the status quo of public education but its singular potential, which is largely denied by the essence of home schooling.

Of course, much of the discussion around home schooling centers around competing conceptions of democracy (Welner, 1999). What is interesting here is that, for many, home schooling represents a retreat into individualism after unsuccessful efforts to reform public education more to their liking (Franzosa, 1991; see, e.g., Holt, 1981). However, in embracing the exit strategy, home schoolers indicate a preference for an economic-style approach to public life—one in which education is treated as a

private good and in which conflicts over the nature of that good are likewise privatized away from open conflict. Ironically, the flight from the coercive nature of public authority can precipitate greater state coercion. In lieu of a viable social contract, patterns of betrayal and retaliation require that the state apparatus is called in to mediate and suppress conflict in an increasingly fragmented society (Margolis, 1998). Furthermore, the elevation of economic over democratic models undermines not just public institutions such as schools but also vibrant, public democracy itself.

Ideally, democracy is the implicit agreement to mediate disputes without violence (Wink, 1992). Implicitly, but more important, it is the agreement to disagree, if necessary, but to remain party to the process. Democracy assumes a social contract between citizens, not necessarily to agree with each other, but to agree to disagree without threatening the integrity of the polity. At the very least, democracy is the implicit agreement to talk, not to flee or literally fight with other members of the democratic body; to carry on informative and meaningful debate; to tolerate difference in views of other members of the body; to employ established and previously agreed-on due processes for mediating conflicts; and to respect the will of the majority and the rights of the minority. Thus, under this conception, democracy is a form of conflict management—not the conflict avoidance that is evident with privatized education experiences. Conflicts are necessary and encouraged as healthy expressions of diversity, but constrained within previously agreed-on parameters.

Hence, home schooling is a flight from the public production of values in a pluralist society. Because we cannot reach a consensus about moral issues (which are reflected in how we educate), people tend to retreat from the idea of public production of civic virtue (Sandel, 1996). The classically liberal, negatively defined rights of individuals to be free from external interference have come to mean that individuals define their own "good" in private processes like home schooling, divorced from politics. According to Sandel (1996), if the discussion of what constitutes a public good is transferred from the public sphere to the private sphere—from the public space of schools to private decisions in homes—we promote a hollow political culture bereft of substantive deliberation. But it is undesirable, if not impossible, to remove the political aspects of public education if it is to be a publicly produced good, as Cremin (1990) noted,

> Aristotle explicated the relationship in the classic discussion of education he included in the *Politics*. ... It is impossible to talk about education apart from some conception of the good life; people will inevitably differ in their conceptions of the good life, and hence they will inevitably dis-

> agree on matters of education; therefore the discussion of education falls squarely within the domain of politics. (p. 85)

Home schooling is a relativistic retreat from the public discourse, which is bankrupted of its former role as the space where people had the right and civic responsibility to participate in the public–political production of conceptions of the "good life"—evident in the value of civic participation and virtue in early republicanism (Lasch, 1995; Sandel, 1996).

Thus, we might do well to consider more fully the wider consequences of multiple individual decisions in education based primarily on private interests. Indeed, in a research discourse primarily concerned with academic achievement and individual rights, there is relatively little recognition given to the idea of the common good. The common good becomes supplanted by the aggregate of our individual actions, which are directed only toward private, individual (or family) considerations. Therefore, it is difficult to demonstrate that such a system will enhance the common good when it is treated as nothing more than a hopefully positive byproduct of self-interested actions. Hence, we also might consider critically the roles of advocacy organizations in promoting these private decisions. In fact, the aggregate effects appear to supplant democratically constituted authority, not just with individual authority, but also with the might of private home schooling advocacy organizations based on membership rather than citizenship.

As an extreme form of privatizing the purpose of education, home schooling denies democratic accountability and disenfranchises the community from its legitimate interest in education. This denial of the public interest does not only affect the education of home schoolers, but it also erodes the ability of the community to express its interest in the education of those remaining in the public schools as well. Certainly, public schools fail often in many areas. But they fail publicly, as public institutions, and, in that, we at least have the potential to address the issue.

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