

# BOSTON REVIEW

## The Privatization of Hope

Capitalism vs. solidarity, yesterday and today

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Hope is being privatized. Throughout the world, but especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, a seismic shift is underway, displacing aspirations and responsibilities from the larger society to our own individual universes. The detaching of personal expectations from the wider world transforms both.

The phenomenon is usually described as “individualization” resulting from broad trends of social evolution, leading as Thomas Edsall described it in the *New York Times*, to “an inexorable pressure on individuals to, in effect, fly solo.” This suggests that the individualized society is a normal phase of historical development. However, the privatization of hope is a more compelling framework by which to understand this moment. It refers to political, economic, and ideological projects of the past two generations, including the deliberate construction of the consumer economy and then the turn toward neoliberalism. We have not lost all hope over the past generation; there is a maddening profusion of personal hopes. Under attack has been the kind of hope that is social, the motivation behind movements to make the world freer, more equal, more democratic, and more livable.

Not only does this privatization weaken collective capacities to solve collective problems, but it also deadens the very sense that collectivity can or should exist, as the commons dissolves and social sources of problems become hidden. This leads to pathologies that, according to a sociologist Edsall cites, “undermine solidarity as the glue of social life.” Americans are less and less aware of how their paramount concern for their personal selves is intertwined with their social selves, indeed often unaware even of having a social self.

The most stunning instance of this shift is the eruption of the Tea Party in early 2009. By what political alchemy did the only movement generated during the first three years of the Great Recession demand more of the same policies that caused the crisis? The financial collapse of September 2008 refuted thirty years of deregulation and dismantling of the welfare state but provoked little action at the other end of the political spectrum, which was busy electing the new president and celebrating his victory but not pushing him on policy or giving him needed support. Still, wouldn't the next activist wave—after thirty-five years

of top-down class struggle and increasing inequality—be a movement of the unemployed and foreclosed demanding collective action for jobs, relief, and punishment of the business executives and regulators behind the financial collapse?

Instead, the most successful activists to emerge from the recession called for even less regulation, even lower taxes, and an even flimsier safety net. Were these self-styled patriots wearing three-cornered hats out of touch with reality? Not their reality: the Tea Party is a sour, middle- and upper-middle-class wave of resentment, comprising mostly college-educated white males over forty-five years old, one-fifth of whom earn more than \$100,000 per year. We must take stock of the ironies of history that brought us to this point, where the first mass mobilization with teeth since the New Left turned out to be the “libertarian mob.”

Attending to this history reveals an unmistakable irony. That mob is in important ways fueled by the spread of freedom and equality since the 1960s, often reckoned a progressive undertaking. Since the social revolutions of that era, the individual and his or her rights and responsibilities have come to count for far more than collective tasks such as combating global warming and eliminating poverty. With social revolution has come economic: the expansion of consumer society, the proliferation of personal electronic devices, the growth of free-market ideology, the defeat of alternatives to unregulated capitalism. All foster a scenario of detachment, in which each of us is free to ignore our sense of belonging to a larger society. Citizenship is being reduced to participation in regular elections that rarely offer genuine alternatives to the prevailing system, to moments of cheering for our side and honoring “our heroes.” Even such collective action as exists is increasingly pitched in terms of the self-interest of millions of *mes*.

The privatization of hope, then, is not simply a matter of focusing energy and attention on oneself and one’s family. It is the withdrawal of personal expectation from the wider world, the rejection of even a possible democratic solidarity on behalf of a collective life encompassing and fit for all.

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The privatization of hope is rooted in deep and wide processes of change since World War II. These changes are visible in landscapes and technologies, in work and leisure, and in people themselves. There has been a transformation of how and what people think, do, and feel.

One might object that in fact the changes I ascribe to the postwar era just continue an age-old trend. Indeed, as much of the history of Christianity demonstrates, rulers and their functionaries seek to divert people from the political and social conditions of their daily lives by encouraging them to assume personal responsibility for these. A focus on personal responsibility, as Adam Smith and Karl Marx both knew, has been built into capitalism since its earliest moments.

But today this focus takes hypertrophied forms. As our culture grows more heavily influenced by psychology and therapy, personal demands and technologies explode, and

individuals are increasingly fated to take control of their lives. Bounded by few traditional roles and customs, one is required to make endless decisions about one's education, job, place of residence, lifestyle, and family. "In the individualized society," sociologist Ulrich Beck writes, "the individual must . . . learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the center of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on."

Of course the theme of being on one's own is deeply rooted in the history of a nation of immigrants. The uprooting processes that led to creating Americans and the fact that the United States was the first entirely modern society have always fostered a stronger sense of self-reliance here than in the societies most Americans emigrated from. This entailed a fierce American commitment to individual freedom, including freedom from government interference but not necessarily from government support and protection.

Yet American individualism did not rule out the brief flourishing of a mass socialist party nor, during the 1930s and after, major steps toward the creation of a social democratic welfare state. Both the socialist and social democratic movements were weaker in the United States than in other advanced societies, but during the civil rights years, President Lyndon Johnson declared a War on Poverty, Martin Luther King evolved toward embracing socialist ideas, and Republican presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon fully endorsed the welfare state—strong signs that, as late as the 1970s, there was bipartisan room for collective solutions to collective problems.

In spite of Alexis de Tocqueville's concern that "individualism . . . disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends"—that the individualist "gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself"—during the century and a half after his visit to the United States, American citizenship flourished and expanded. A public-spirited citizenry pushed for emancipation, a massive trade union movement, civil rights for African Americans, expanded civil liberties, the separation of church and state, and two waves of a feminist revolution. A vast range of public projects took shape, including all the business of federal, state, and local governments, such as the provision of parks, schools, universities, libraries, health care, public welfare, recreation, and even art. However individualist the society was, the production, preservation, and expansion of these public goods came to be seen as collective goals—sources of pride that expressed shared social values.

Granted that the collective was dominated by its wealthiest and most powerful members, that within it corporate interests came to be more or less sacrosanct, and that the "common good" has been marked by inequality and class, race, and gender domination, often bitterly contested. Granted that even as these projects were underway, a strong streak of American mythology was celebrating the lone individual taking a dramatic stand against conformity, compromise, and corruption and often setting off westward, alone. But Hollywood films and their escapist temptations aside, it was generally understood that the society's limitations would be corrected not by withdrawal but by investment: what was needed was a fairer and more just community, a New Deal, a Great Society, or even, as King suggested, a "better distribution of wealth," which in his view meant moving "toward a Democratic Socialism."

It shows how far we have come, not only in the United States but also in other advanced societies, that such confidence appears unthinkable today, a naive relic of a bygone era. As David Whitman reported in *The Optimism Gap* (1998), between 1959 and 1997, Americans' positive evaluation of their own present and future remained virtually unchanged, while their assessment of their society and its future, initially almost equal to the self-assessment, declined by approximately 20 percentage points. That this portended a long-term, society-wide retreat into self and family is reinforced by studies of entering college freshmen between 1997 and 2009: the share of students interested in politics and the environment dropped by more than twenty percentage points in each case. The question is, what changed? What caused the depletion not only of social goods but also social energy? Of not only the will to work together but even the sense that togetherness could be politically useful?

## **Origins of Privatized Hope**

### *The New Left and the 1960s*

Whereas today society is besieged by individuals, in the 1950s and early '60s, individuals felt besieged by society. For the generation coming to consciousness in the '60s, Allen Ginsburg's *Howl* (1955) reflected the oppressed individual, as did Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Each author described a social system that stifled any alternatives to its values and dominant practices, and each gave ammunition to those seeking ways out.

The early New Left—as exemplified by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Free Speech Movement, Students for a Democratic Society, and the women's movement—was in many ways a response to the situation Ginsburg and Marcuse described. Convinced that the personal was political, many in the New Left placed individual needs and experience at the center of their activism and emphasized participatory democracy. These projects—along with casual dress, drug experimentation, long hair, sexual freedom, and an explosion of new music—militated against the dominant culture. Even as the wave of the '60s separated into two currents—one more political and the other more countercultural—it never stopped pushing individual liberation. This feature of the New Left has led otherwise astute observers such as Mark Lilla and the late Tony Judt to ignore the movement's organized and disciplined commitment to social justice and to reduce the '60s to an era of do-your-own-thing individualism.

The political activism of the New Left accelerated revolutionary, if unfinished, change: women's liberation, gay liberation, the overthrow of segregation in the South, and the broader attack on racism in the advanced world. But there is another side to these changes, which points to the paradox of the New Left. These movements of emancipation have had an individualizing and privatizing effect. In making the personal political and pushing self-esteem—e.g., “black is beautiful”—they have heightened the personal, while distancing people from the political.

## *Flexible Capitalism and the World of Work*

The theme of individual freedom has accompanied a dramatic shift in political and economic power. Since the 1970s advanced societies have promoted the globalized, information-driven capitalist offensive known as neoliberalism. It is a new social model based on what historian Steve Fraser describes as “the heroism of risk.” The daring of entrepreneurs and Wall Street—the latter often false because underwritten by the government—gilds them with a special glow of boldness, such that these forces of the status quo become, ironically, models of rebellion: “Entrepreneurs are rule-breakers by nature,” an editorial in a recent issue of *Entrepreneur* magazine avers. “They disrupt, innovate and feel damn good about it.”

Never mind that the true revolution is in the lives of average workers who find they can no longer count on job stability. Hallmarks of the new capitalism, insecure working conditions place a premium on preparing oneself for the next move and the move after that, rather than allowing workers to settle into long-term relationships that might enable group protection against employers. In Fraser’s words, the neoliberal economy allows corporations to “nourish a lively sense that work is undertaken at will by free agents,” making it seem as if “the world as reconstituted by flexible capitalism has given birth to the free-floating individual: unmoored from all those ties of kin, home, locale, race, ethnicity, church, craft, and fixed moral order, her only home is the marketplace furnished in unforgiving arithmetic. Her selfhood is that of the abstract, depersonalized fungible commodity, a homunculus of rationalizing self-interest.”

Today, less work is conducted alongside others, a condition that once produced a sense of solidarity. Labor is instead individualized, compensated by the “freedom” to change jobs frequently, be responsible for oneself, and work at home. Flexible capitalism has created the temporary work world of the “precariat,” whose freedom lacks what painfully and over time had become the customary working conditions: health care benefits, pensions, vacation and sick days, and, to quote Fraser, “any possibility of effectively voicing [one’s] displeasure in the workplace.”

Thrown on the market as isolated individuals without collective support from unions or government, fated to “move on” and “reinvent” themselves frequently during their lifetimes, workers face the constant need to market and package their labor by developing salable qualifications through training. At one time, workers understood that they could improve their conditions by collectively asserting themselves; now workers understand that their best option is to protect themselves *by themselves*. Among self-seekers, experiences of class and solidarity are impossible and irrelevant. As Fraser says, when the self is the only viable site of betterment, when there is no possible gain from collective action, collective consciousness seems “foolish, naive, woolly-headed or, on the contrary, sinful and seditious.”

## *Consumerism*

Alongside changing cultural politics and the erosion of workplace stability, consumerism has been a principal source of the postwar privatization of hope.

Suburbanization and the boom in private automobile travel brought a new level of comfort to Americans' lives in the late 1940s and '50s. With these came a strong orientation toward material possessions—purchased to fill those homes, easily shuttled from distant shops—fostered more successfully than ever by their manufacturers. As John Kenneth Galbraith argued in *The Affluent Society* (1958), consumers needs no longer drive production but rather are created in the process of production: the producer has the “function both of making the goods and of making the desires for them.” Desire is “synthesized by advertising, catalyzed by salesmanship, and shaped by the discreet manipulations of the persuaders.”

While these wants are not needs, the purchase and consumption of ever more goods and services are themselves essential. The endless and intensive stimulation of individual “needs” cannot help but divert the individual's focus from collective needs and aspirations. And the increasing cultural priority given to the consumer role cannot help but turn one away from seeing and experiencing oneself collectively. The social role of the consumer does entail collective belonging and participation, but only insofar as one is exposed to advertising as the others are, one compares one's own acquisitions with others', and one joins others in purchasing new goods. “Consumer sovereignty,” Galbraith insisted, is a myth that hides the absence of control over the most basic conditions of one's life. Choosing consumer goods is structurally different from the role of union member or citizen in that the social energies of consumer society, and the wealth it produces and consumes, are destined for individuals *as* individuals, whose primary function is to shop for themselves.

To better understand the role of the consumer *as a distinctive way of being*, consider the example of a professional baseball game of today, as opposed to that of fifty years ago. On the field, the sport appears roughly the same as ever, yet to witness it is to become part of the spectacle of consumer society in a way that was not always the case. The stadium itself has become a paradise of consumerism, which much of the audience enters wearing the specially purchased clothes of the home team. They have been prepared for the game by endless newspaper, online, radio, and television coverage of every aspect of the team's ups and downs, including unenlightening interviews with the players and coaches and vocal fan participation and commentary on websites and via talk shows. Nearly all of the players, especially the “free agents,” make obscene salaries; many sign lucrative endorsement contracts; and almost none have local roots. Nevertheless, from the fans' standpoint, they are “our” team. During the game itself, the fans are subjected to hundreds of advertisements, both fixed and changing, mounted everywhere one turns; videos and live promotions flashing on the scoreboard; and inane, sponsored contests between innings. The walk to the concessioners and toilets is a tour through an immense shopping mall. Amid all of this commercialism, the active, collective aspect of watching a ball game—spontaneously mounting group cheers for one's team during exciting moments—has been virtually eliminated by programmed cheers as instructed from the scoreboard and speaker system.

Attending a baseball game reveals that consumer society has not developed new social and political forms, and many of its activities remain continuous with what came before. The

game, after all, is the reason why people go to the stadium. But in key respects, its content is strikingly different: activities, values, attitudes, priorities—all are subsumed by the consumer-oriented media spectacle. Whatever the game's earlier and even continuing functions, it more and more takes place within the mass society of nonstop marketing and shopping.

Galbraith suggested that the main force behind this kind of transformation is the need of corporations to stimulate demand. How did this come about historically? In one step after another, consumers were asked to choose, by the tens and eventually hundreds of millions, to purchase the expanding range of available goods. Achieving popular acquiescence meant, first of all, overcoming longstanding desire among workers to work less rather than consume more. In ostensibly democratic societies, this decision in favor of more consumption rather than less work was never made democratically. Certainly from the '50s on, there was much discussion of automation, including its promise of a shorter workweek. But such proposals received little support in Congress and never became part of a broad public discussion about alternatives to postwar capitalism. Instead, the logic of consumer society prevailed: greater productivity meant expanding consumer goods and no decrease in working hours. Today even that promise seems all but gone, as managers have made it their goal to increase worker productivity without sharing the increased profit. The dominant social reality of our time, the consumer society, was not so much chosen as imposed by the logic of the capitalist economy.

It is understandable that masses of people who had endured grating poverty since time immemorial would want to enjoy the available plenty and its convenience, comfort, and luxury. But, in the long run, consumerism could never have developed to its essential place in advanced societies without negotiating two other zones of resistance. In the first were the traditional values of moderation and postponement of gratification, hallmarks of scarcity supported throughout history by religious and cultural values. The consumer society transformed the culture by reversing all such injunctions and instead promoting hedonism and instant gratification.

The other barrier to expanding consumerism was consumers' limited income. This wall came down thanks to the unrestrained expansion of credit, especially in North America. With credit cards in the purse or wallet, freed from old-fashioned inhibitions, living in a brilliant world of media brought to us by corporate sponsors, why not indulge desires, which in this environment have become needs?

### *Inventing Oneself*

A striking aspect of the privatization of hope is the growing tendency for individuals to see themselves entrepreneurially, as agglomerations of social capital. In *Undoing the Demos*(2015), political theorist Wendy Brown describes this as an aspect of neoliberalism's wholesale reshaping of life in economic terms. Related to this is the encouragement and pressure for individuals to construct their lives consciously and deliberately in the form of a biography. I have suggested that the process of self-invention

and reinvention is drawn in the first place from conditions prevailing in the workplace and its demand for constant self-marketing. Another source is psychotherapy and its injunction to take command of our lives and become the active subjects of our own stories.

Privatization of the social is an essential part of this process. It would be hard to disagree with Marx that one's story is never wholly one's own, that lives are not made "under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." But we can, and do, ardently pretend. As the social theorist Zygmunt Bauman describes:

The distinctive feature of the stories told in our times is that they articulate individual lives in a way that excludes or suppresses (prevents from articulation) the possibility of tracking down the links connecting individual fate to the ways and means by which society as a whole operates; more to the point, it precludes the questioning of such ways and means by relegating them to the unexamined background of individual life pursuits and casting them as 'brute facts' which the story-tellers can neither challenge nor negotiate, whether singly, severally or collectively.

Bauman continues:

With the supra-individual factors shaping the course of an individual life out of sight and out of thought, the added value of 'joining forces' and 'standing arm in arm' is difficult to spot, and the impulse to engage (let alone engage critically) with the way the human condition, or the shared human predicament, is shaped is weak or non-existent.

Taking control of one's life contributes to the process of de-socialization and de-solidarization. It also points toward the displacement of hope. Something strange and remarkable happens as energies that once belonged to the social sphere are transferred from there to one's personal life. Not only are collective capacities to solve collective problems weakened, but also the very sense that these problems are *collective* disappears. When individuals become personally responsible for these problems, social pain and its causes are conjured away. The energy to resolve them remains, though, and a peculiar and misplaced sense of empowerment results, one that is bound to be frustrated without our understanding why. Displaced onto individuals, hope takes on the aspect of an addiction that can never be satisfied.

In becoming fated to seek, in Beck's words, "biographic solutions for systemic contradictions," people lose track of their social being. "As a result," Beck says, "the floodgates are opened wide for the subjectivization and individualization of risks and contradictions produced by institutions and society."

To be sure, one does become increasingly aware of living one's biography in world society, and active "thinking individuals" who have "to take a continual stand" are increasingly in demand. Ironically, as the individual becomes more and more insignificant, his or her sense of self expands, and, from the biographical point of view, "he or she is elevated to the apparent throne of a world-shaper." World society enters biography, but "this continual excessive demand can only be tolerated through the opposite reaction of not listening, simplifying, and apathy." And so the focus on oneself deepens further.

Paradoxically, this expanded self-as-entrepreneur is an impoverished self, less and less concerned with the development of knowledge, interests, and capacities and more obsessed,



as Brown describes, with “maximiz[ing] competitiveness.” Education, once “sought for developing the capacities of citizens, sustaining culture, knowing the world, or envisioning and crafting different ways of life in common,” has given way almost completely to “capital appreciation.” If neoliberalism encourages the privatization of hope, the individual thereby produced is a narrowly constructed one.

## **Leaving Detroit**

Such narrowing of horizons is apparent in, for instance, the past fifty years of mass, which has depopulated some American cities while creating others. Of course, migration is one of the major themes of history—of groups large and small, of families and individuals, seeking food and land, fleeing from war, escaping oppression, running from threatening people, hoping to overcome deprivation, seeking opportunity. And motivations for leaving places such as Detroit have been very much the same: insecurity, discomfort at being in the minority, dwindling property values, deteriorating neighborhoods and schools, high levels of crime, lack of economic opportunity following the flight or collapse of industry. This migration was also underpinned by Americans’ nomadic disposition, which, from the beginning, led to formulating one’s hopes in individual terms and then moving on as a location became played out.

Still, it is hard to avoid the sense that something novel is happening when driving past mile after ghastly mile of empty storefronts and vacant lots, block after block with one or two occupied houses separated by wild grass and weeds and an occasional garden, when stable neighborhoods celebrate their “stayers.” More than a million people have left Detroit for the suburbs and at least that many have left the metropolitan area and Michigan for newer cities and sunnier places. They have been pursuing their personal hopes. Their hundreds of thousands of individual decisions to give up on Detroit have added up to a collective abandonment, worsening the city’s problems, driving it into bankruptcy, and decimating its schools. Are not the desultory public efforts at renewal, rebuilding, and revitalization in the face of Detroit’s hemorrhaging testimony that, in twenty-first century America, only the private matters?

## **Privatization and Power**

What a spectacle is offered by the privatization of hope: the displacement from the social to the individual, the growth of the personal at the expense of the social, and the remaking of the social into the biographical. These are driven, among other things, by relations of power and domination and by the overwhelming force exerted on every aspect of our beings by the economy and its priorities. Under these conditions, basic social impulses such as the need to contribute to a wider community become other than themselves without completely losing their original character, which abides in a repressed form. We can imagine a rebalancing of the social and the personal as a kind of “return of the repressed” but only through a transformation of the economic order that has been driving it.

That order has imposed a deliberate ideological and political project aiming to erode social connectedness and conviction. The first politician who sought to implement this revived Hobbesianism was British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher: “There is no such thing as society, only individuals and families,” she famously declared, which turned out to prophesy this transformation. Economics was a method whose “object is to change the soul.” A generation later in the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere, that object appears to have been realized.

We have witnessed an immensely effective, well organized, and lavishly funded effort to reshape values, ideas, and attitudes. Writers working for right-wing think tanks such as the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation have implored us to turn away from treating the public realm as a terrain for improvement and change. They have been teaching cynicism about collective action and encouraging instead individual responsibility, personal initiative, and the centrality of private activities.

The influence these cynical messages enjoy may, perversely, have been a product of the well-being temporarily supported by the Western welfare states. In *Ill Fares the Land*(2010), Judt writes:

The success of the mixed economies of the past half century has led a younger generation to take stability for granted and to demand the elimination of the ‘impediment’ of the taxing, regulating, and generally interfering state. This discounting of the public sector has become the default political language in much of the developed world.

The comfortable citizens of these welfare states proved easy prey to “rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility and the virtues of privatization, the free market and free trade,” David Harvey writes—rhetoric that legitimizes “draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power” that waned during the three and half decades of social democracy.

Following Michel Foucault rather than Harvey, Brown depicts these shifts in wider and deeper terms, although still inseparable from the evolution of capitalism:

In letting markets decide our present and future, neoliberalism wholly abandons the project of individual or collective mastery of existence. The neoliberal solution to problems is always more markets, more complete markets, more perfect markets, more financialization, new technologies, new ways to monetize. Anything but collaborative and contestatory human decision making, control over the conditions of existence, planning for the future; anything but deliberate constructions of existence through democratic discussion, law, policy. Anything but the human knowledge, deliberation, judgment, and action classically associated with *homo politicus*.

As economic logic becomes the dominant—indeed, the only—social logic, collective power, collective decision-making, the public, and the community all become privatized. In the world of privatized hope, “the individual,” “choice,” “economic freedom,” and “individual liberty” are proclaimed clear and self-evident truths. The fetish for market solutions to all social problems is based on the belief, as outlined by Cato’s David Boaz, that “order in society arises spontaneously, out of the actions of thousands or millions of

individuals who coordinate their actions with those of others in order to achieve their purposes.” Is this an unconscious appeal to a higher power? Or a confession of despair about conscious and collective human capacities? In any case, it is a posture of denial, which ignores the inequalities within this free play of individual actions, the role governments do play in coordinating action, and the crying need for yet more collective action on behalf of the common good.

Today what must command our attention is not the radical falsity of the privatization of hope, which denies everyone’s deep social being, but its debilitating consequences. We are collectively losing the ability to cope with the most urgent problems. People who experience themselves as random, isolated individuals will never find the wherewithal to understand or agree upon, let alone master, the reality of climate change. The increasingly dangerous effect of two centuries of uncoordinated actions and dangers blurred by self-interest can be brought under control only if we accept that there is an *us* that has transformed nature and our relationship to it. To protect our common home from disaster, humans must form a responsive global collective. We must recover and enlarge social hope in the name of survival. But how to do this if a critical mass is in denial about the problem and lacks the ability to form a consensus and act together?

Our need, according to French social theorist Francis Jeanson, is for “citoyennisation”—the transformation of isolated and impotent individuals into active, militant citizens who experience their fate collectively and are willing to act on it democratically. Those trying to make this happen will have to negotiate not only the privatization of hope, but also the widespread acceptance of the maelstrom of progress and the pervasive cynicism of today’s advanced societies. Those who are already invested in political struggle will have to work their way beyond the boundaries inherent in identity politics and the thousands of other good causes clamoring for attention.

But no matter how privatized or narrowly focused we become, our latent capacity for generosity and need for connection remain only a tragedy or a disaster away from activation. In *A Paradise Built in Hell* (2009), Rebecca Solnit describes those utopian moments of hope, few and far between, when catastrophes lead to the breakdown of normal order and thereby demand that people collectively take control of their lives. Her examples reach from the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 to Hurricane Katrina. Let us hope other collective challenges—from the Syrian refugee crisis to global climate change—do not have to reach disastrous proportions before we overcome our passivity and isolation and recover our capacity to act together.