



Let Them Eat TVs

How we traded away our democracy for cheap stuff

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JUNE 2023

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does your job permit you to engage in the kind of “meaningful activity” that Munch argues is so essential? Why, or why not? What qualities characterize jobs that secure the dignity of work? What kinds of jobs contribute most to the common good?
2. What dispositions, values, and habits of mind emerge when most of our public activity is reduced to consumption? What dispositions emerge when we act as producers? Why does Munch think the latter prepare us better for the demands of democratic citizenship? Do you agree?
3. Munch argues that reversing corporate consolidation could represent an initial step toward democratizing the economy. What is the connection between, say, robust antitrust enforcement and economic democracy? Would an economy made up of many small for-profit firms contribute more to the common good than an economy consisting of fewer large for-profit firms? Why, or why not?
4. How should we think about the pursuit of economic efficiency? Should the achievement of efficiency be a central aim of economic policymaking? Or should efficiency be subordinated to other ends? If so, what ends are more important? Under what conditions should we be willing to accept losses to economic efficiency?
5. Munch refers to the tradition of “political economy” and criticizes the way in which the “political” aspect fell out of favor during the neoliberal era. But how should these two spheres of activity interact? Should all economic activity be subject to democratic deliberation? If not, what economic activities should be shielded from political interference?
6. Why does Munch argue that corporate consolidation leaves working people with less freedom? What understanding of freedom is she working with here? How is her account of freedom different from those who celebrate the “freedom” of consumer choice?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

George Scialabba, “What Were We Thinking?,” January 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/what-were-we-thinking>

Daniel A. Hanley, “Putting Antitrust to Work,” April 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/anti-trust-labor-biden-economy-khan-ftc-google>

Meghan J. Clark, “Grace over Greed,” October 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/grace-over-greed>

Regina Munch, “Things Fall Apart,” October 2018: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/things-fall-apart-0>

Griffin Oleynick, “I’ll Take New York,” November 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/remote-work-covid-new-york-vocation>

Matt Mazewski, “Bringing the Workers on Board,” March 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/bringing-workers-board>