“Public choice”
and
public spirit

STEVEN KELMAN

JAMES BUCHANAN has been awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Economics. In one sense, the prize is richly deserved. Buchanan has pioneered a new way of thinking about the political process that now comes naturally to academic economists and has made important converts among political scientists. Among his pupils and disciples in government he can count Senator Phil Gramm and Office of Management and Budget director James C. Miller III. In another sense, though, the award is a sad event. It features economists themselves applauding efforts to extend the reach of economic analysis far beyond the area where it is useful—in the analysis of the economy—into areas where the marketplace paradigm is inapposite and pernicious.

Some economists, such as Gary Becker of the University of Chicago (who may himself be up for a Nobel Prize soon), have specialized in escapades such as the economic analysis of romantic love. Others, like Buchanan and his followers, have specialized in economic analysis of the operation of the political process, an approach known within academia as “public choice.” These efforts have one thing in common: They all start with the assumption that there is no difference between economic man and romantic man or political man. People act everywhere as they do in the marketplace. They
are out only for themselves, and typically in relatively gross, money-seeking ways like the "pigs at the trough" David Stockman once talked about. Do you want to understand why government officials behave the ways they do? All you need to know is that they are trying to maximize the budgets of their agencies. Do you want to understand what drives politicians? All you need to know is that they want to be reelected. Do you want to understand legislation? Just see it as a sale of the coercive power of government to the highest bidder, like a cattle auction.

My own view is that this account of the operation of the political process is a terrible caricature of reality. It ignores the ability of ideas to defeat interests, and the role that public spirit plays in motivating the behavior of participants in the political process. (By "public spirit," a somewhat old-fashioned term that I consciously choose to use, I mean behavior motivated by the desire to choose good public policy.)

The "public choice" argument is far worse than simply descriptively inaccurate. Achieving good public policy, I believe, requires the presence of a significant public spirit in the veins of the body politic. Furthermore, one of the roles of government, separate from any specific substantive policies it produces, is to provide people with a forum where they may display a concern that they want to show for others. In addition, if the political process functions as it should, the process will serve as a school that helps mold character. For all these things to happen, a norm of public spiritedness in political action—a view that people should not simply be selfish in their political behavior—is crucial. The public choice school is part of the assault on that norm.

The self-interest view

The view that political behavior is dominated by self-interest has come to achieve prevalence in academic discussions through the extension of the assumptions of microeconomic theory into the analysis of the political process. Beginning with the assumption that people's choices are motivated by self-interested maximization (the effort to get as much as one can of the things one wants for oneself), economics has, in the centuries since Adam Smith, developed a remarkable body of theoretical propositions about the production and exchange of goods in the marketplace. These propositions have been powerful enough and (not unimportantly for scholars) often counterintuitive enough to earn economics the title of "queen of the social sciences"—and to generate a powerful urge among econo-
mists to apply the tools of economics to the analysis of institutions outside the marketplace. Thus “public choice” was born.

These efforts emerged with the publication in 1957 of An Economic Theory of Democracy by Anthony Downs and of The Calculus of Consent by James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock in 1962. Downs began his account with what he called “the self-interest axiom,” that is, the view that political behavior is “directed primarily toward selfish ends.” Following this general axiom, politicians, Downs assumed,

act solely in order to attain the income, prestige, and power which come from being in office. . . . [They] never seek office as a means of carrying out particular policies; their only goal is to reap the rewards of holding office per se. They treat policies purely as a means to the attainment of their private ends.

Buchanan and Tullock began with the same behavioral assumptions as Downs. “The average individual,” they wrote, “acts on the basis of the same overall value scale when he participates in a market activity and in political activity.”

Common to all public choice writing is the important conclusion that, while pursuit of self-interest in the marketplace maximizes social welfare, pursuit of self-interest in the political process creates catastrophe. Different public-choice scholars have reached this common conclusion in different ways. Buchanan and Tullock, in The Calculus of Consent, argue that problems arise from simple majority rule, where the majority often gangs up on the minority to steal its property.

Another strand within public choice theory has emphasized the baleful effect of interest groups. The Chicago economist George Stigler argued that the propensity to organize will increase the greater the benefit each member has at stake and the smaller the size of the group. Producer interests, for example, which are often rather small in size and in a position to capture enormous benefits from government, will generally be better organized than consumer interests, since the number of consumers is enormous and the loss per consumer resulting from government policies aiding producers is generally tiny. A benefit of one hundred thousand dollars a year to a producer, if divided among one hundred thousand consumers, will cost each consumer only a dollar. The specific interest will thus win out in the political process over the general interest, even though it may be smaller in numbers.

The force of Stigler’s argument applies to the influence of special interests, compared with the more diffuse interests of citizens or consumers. For earlier political science critics of pluralism, “special
interests" generally meant the wealthy. The public choice analysis, emphasizing the benefits and costs of organization rather than the sociological status of the rich or the poor, sees the danger of special interests winning out over the public at large in many contexts, and not only when the special interests are wealthy. Special interests may include auto workers winning restrictions on foreign cars or even rifle enthusiasts winning relaxation of gun control. In all these cases, though, the political process will tend to produce inefficient subsidies for the organized at the expense of individually small (but cumulatively large) costs to the unorganized. In the jargon this is often called "rent-seeking" behavior.

Public choice scholars have also applied the self-interest assumption to the behavior of bureaucrats working for government, with similarly grim results. In his book *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*, William Niskanen saw bureaucrats as "budget maximizers." Niskanen argued that bureaucrats are in a good position to obtain large budgets. They are monopoly suppliers of public services that people want, and they have much more information than their legislative overseers about how much it really costs to supply those services. This allows them to claim they need a larger budget than they in fact do. The result of all this is that "all bureaus are too large." Buchanan and Tullock, in separate writings, have followed a somewhat different tack regarding bureaucrats and the size of government. Government grows, writes Tullock, "to a very large extent because the factor suppliers"—that is, people who work for the government—"are permitted to vote." They are a constituency for larger government and will inevitably elect politicians supporting a government that is larger than the median nonbureaucrat citizen would want.

Our "single-minded" congressmen?

The public choice approach to the study of the political process began to migrate in a serious way from economics into political science during the 1970s with the publication of two of the most widely praised and influential political science books of the decade, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* by David Mayhew and *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment* by Morris Fiorina.

Mayhew began with the view that members of Congress are "single-minded seekers of reelection." In a world where the connection between the behavior of individual congressmen and final legislative results is difficult to pin down, and where voters generally have little information about the behavior of their representatives,
the single-minded concern with reelection produces two kinds of behaviors. One is what Mayhew called “credit claiming,” which he defined as “acting so as to generate a belief” among voters that “one is personally responsible for causing the government” to do something voters like. A second is what Mayhew called “position taking,” which he defined as “the public enunciation of a judgmental statement” on issues voters care about.

Both these behaviors have negative consequences for the results of the political process. First, it is easier to take credit for obtaining particularized benefits for one's district, such as a new federal building, since the claim that a congressman is responsible for, say, beating back inflation lacks plausibility. Second, congressmen suffer little disadvantage electorally if what legislation constituents want fails to pass, as long as the member is clearly identified in public with its support. This produces a government that is not necessarily too big or too small, but ill-proportioned. There is too much particularized legislation and too few laws dealing with general problems. Meanwhile, congressmen themselves are windbags, making impassioned statements in order to demonstrate to constituents that they “care” about issues important to them, while displaying an utter lack of interest in actually accomplishing anything.

Fiorina's book presented a portrait of politicians that is even more devastating, if that is possible. Central to Fiorina's argument was the view that congressmen can turn unhappiness with government programs to their own advantage by servicing the problems constituents have with the bureaucracy. Members of Congress have increased their ability to get reelected, Fiorina argued, by voting new government programs that created bureaucratic nightmares—and then helping constituents deal with those problems! Fiorina's analysis, unlike Mayhew's, does produce a government that is too large, for an activist government is required to generate the complaints from constituents that congressmen can then deal with and use for reelection advantage.

It is interesting to note the progression of brazenness that occurs from *The Calculus of Consent* in 1962 to *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment* in 1977. Buchanan and Tullock, in their first book together, adopted a tone that was almost apologetic about their use of the self-interest assumption for the political process. Certainly, they regarded themselves as idiosyncratic; earlier theorists, they noted, had generally assumed that the average political participant “seeks not to maximize his own utility, but to find the ‘public interest’ or ‘common good.’” This tone of humbleness, how-
ever, disappeared in later works. In an article published in 1979, Gordon Tullock noted that "the traditional view of government has always been that it sought something called 'the public interest'" but that, "with public choice, all of this has changed." (Tullock adds, with a bit of contempt, that "the public interest point of view still informs many statements by public figures and the more old-fashioned students of politics.") By the time Fiorina writes, what might have once been seen as conspiratorial speculation had become scholarship that is not only respectable but highly acclaimed. Times, and academic fashions, have changed.

In arguing for the extension of the self-interest assumption from the marketplace to political behavior, James Buchanan notes that otherwise man must be assumed to shift his psychological and moral gears when he moves from the realm of organized market activity to that of organized political activity. . . . [One must demonstrate that there is] something in the nature of market organization, as such, that brings out the selfish motives in man, and something in the political organization, as such, which in turn suppresses these motives and brings out the more "noble" ones. . . .

This is exactly what an alternate view of the wellsprings of political behavior maintains: There are features of public life that make it an appropriate forum for public spirit. In this alternate view, self-interest does not by any means disappear from political life—it is a far too powerful motivating force in human behavior for that. But public spirit has a pride of place that translates into an important role in the political process.

Public spirit and political behavior

The best test of the importance of public spirit in the political process is the ability of ideas to overcome interests in determining political outcomes. If self-interested behavior, whether of popular majorities or of interest groups, would have dictated one kind of outcome, and general ideas about good public policy another, then the extent to which political choices reflect the ideas rather than the interests will constitute a strong test of the importance of public spirit.

Does self-interest in fact turn out to dominate the political process? It is no trick to come up with countless specific examples of situations where political choices have been crucially determined by participants furthering quite narrow selfish interests. Everyone has a favorite story of the highway that got built because a powerful member of Congress wanted it in his district or of a tax loophole an interest group sneaked through with few in Congress knowing any-
thing about it. Certainly there is no lack of straightforward self-interested behavior in the political process.

As a general rule, however, the more important a policy is, the less important self-interest is in determining the policies we get. Self-interest helps explain the location of a new federal building in Missoula. When all is said and done, however, it does little to help us understand the major policy upheavals of the past decades.

How could a self-interest account of the political process explain, except through the grossest of contortions, the vast increases in spending for the poor that occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s? The poor were not an electoral majority, nor were they well organized into interest groups. (Public choice theorists sometimes point to the power of interest groups representing providers of services to the poor. The hypothesis that an invincible lobby of social workers overwhelmed a defenseless political system is, to put it diplomatically, idiosyncratic.) What about the growth of health, safety, and environmental regulation during the late 1960s and early 1970s? These programs were adopted against the wishes of well-organized producers. They were intended for the benefit of poorly organized consumers and environmentalists. (Much of the organization of environmentalists into interest groups followed environmental legislation, rather than preceded it.)

In addition, biases in the political process that public choice advocates believe produce a bloated government can hardly explain the growth of government in the 1960s and 1970s unless one can successfully argue that the level of bias increased during the period when the growth took place. Otherwise, the bias should have already produced larger government in the earlier period. Furthermore, the big increases in government spending since the 1950s have not been in grants to localities, which provide particularistic constituency benefits for members of Congress, but in various general transfer programs that do not allow members to demonstrate that they have gotten something special for their districts.

The self-interest model of politics does equally poorly in accounting for rollbacks in government programs during the late 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1970s, the greatest victories for industry deregulation were won in exactly those industries, such as trucking and airlines, where well-organized producers benefited from regulation and the consumers who would benefit from deregulation were largely unorganized. By contrast, little occurred in areas such as environmental policy where well-organized producers supported deregulation. In other words, the pattern of deregulation was exactly the opposite of that predicted by the self-interest model.
It is, furthermore, hard to see any one-to-one correspondence between the economic difficulties the country faced during the 1970s and the program of reduced government intervention adopted to deal with these problems. Economic difficulties in the 1930s had produced a growth in the role of government in managing the economy, not a rollback. Economic distress itself neither made government grow nor shrink. What made it grow or shrink was the force of ideas linking the problems everyone perceived with solutions that government could adopt. Furthermore, well-entrenched interest groups fought to retain each government program President Reagan sought to cut. Often only the diffuse interest of taxpayers in general stood on the other side. And, of course, President Reagan’s success with tax reform is the latest example of the ability of ideas to overcome even the most entrenched of special interests.

The story of government growth in the 1960s and of its limitation in the 1980s, then, are both stories of the power of ideas. They powerfully reinforce the message that ideas have consequences and that persuasiveness is the most underrated political resource.

**Between cynicism and Pollyanism**

The self-interest theories not only have a difficult time explaining most of what has been important in American politics over the past twenty years, they also give, at best, an incomplete feel for the process itself.

To be sure, the naive observer expecting public-spirited deliberation unsullied by parochial perspectives and even by some dirty trickery would hardly be prepared for Washington. But neither would the hard-boiled, street-wise cynic or his public-choice counterpart in academia. The self-interest view has no sense for the importance of being able to make a good argument, of having the facts on one’s side, of being able to present an appealing public vision, or of having a reputation for seriousness and commitment. Yet all this clearly appears in descriptions of the process by close observers. For example, two journalists spent significant time following Senators Edmund Muskie and John Culver in the late 1970s, each to observe what the life of a senator was like. What is especially significant about their accounts is that journalists normally are inclined to expect sleaziness from politicians, and yet both these accounts found mostly substance. (Bernard Ashball, who wrote the book on Muskie, was apparently surprised enough by what he saw to title his book *The Senate Nobody Knows*.) Both volumes are filled with accounts of senators, mostly in committee settings and hence
on issues about which they are knowledgeable, seriously debating the merits of proposed legislation. The accounts of committee mark-up sessions (where committee members craft actual legislative language) on Clean Air Act amendments, which take up much of Ashball's account, include surprisingly sophisticated arguments about philosophical and practical questions involved in the design of environmental policy.

The books both emphasize how important the ability to make a credible and convincing argument is for congressmen. "Real power" in the Senate, Muskie is quoted as saying, "comes from doing your work and knowing what you're taking about. . . . The most important thing in the Senate is credibility." Along similar lines, a group of freshmen congressmen, discussing their experiences for political scientists in the book Congress Off the Record, "made frequent allusions to the importance of knowledge and expertise" in determining "who wielded real power in committee and in the House."

The view that self-interest is key to understanding how the political process works is also belied by the influence of the media. On superficial examination, the influence of the media might be seen as consistent with the view that people in government are out only for adulation or reelection, since the way one is treated in the media certainly has an impact on attaining either goal. It is necessary to remember, however, that what generates good (or bad) attention in the media are generally actions where one either has sought to do the right thing or instead acted selfishly. If neither people in government themselves nor the voters who select elected officials thought that it was important to try to do the right thing in politics, media brickbats would be a matter of indifference to their intended victims. Sticks and stones could break their bones but names would never hurt them. The great influence of the media suggests, however, that failure to show public spirit indeed can hurt these people, in their own eyes and in those of others.

The pocketbook and the ballot box

Moving now from the level of the system as a whole to the behavior of individual citizens and government professionals, how important is self-interest and how important is public spirit in describing their actions? The classic view in the early empirical voting studies of the 1950s was that the voting behavior of individual citizens was mostly guided by self-interest. This view was developed in works appearing in the 1970s on the link between economic conditions and election results. With the modern techniques of social science, these
studies confirmed something most politicians already knew intuitively, namely, that incumbents do well in times of economic prosperity and poorly during times of economic distress.

In what has probably been the most interesting body of empirical political science research done in the last decade, extensive evidence has now been uncovered that questions this view. The connection between economic conditions and overall electoral results is indeed a very clear one. What scholars have now done is to move from the aggregate level of overall economic conditions and overall electoral results to the level of individual economic conditions and individual voting decisions. When they do so, the results are surprising. If voters vote their personal pocketbooks, one would expect those who have themselves become better off to favor the incumbents. Those not personally sharing in the prosperity would not be expected to display such a tendency. Likewise, in times of economic distress one would expect the individual victims of bad times to punish the incumbents. However, a series of tests by the political scientists Donald Kinder and Roderick Kiewiet, using individual-level survey data, has devastatingly shattered this hypothesis. Respondents' answers to a question about whether their personal financial situation has improved, worsened, or stayed the same over the previous year show essentially no connection to changes in voting behavior. By contrast, though, there are substantial correlations between a voters' view of economic conditions in society as a whole and the individual's voting behavior. This relationship holds even when one controls the effects of a personal economic situation on the ability to judge the overall economic condition. The observed connection at the aggregate level between the economy and the electoral success of incumbents results not from self-interested rewards or punishments from voters who have personally done well or poorly. The connection comes instead from judgments by voters about whether the economy as a whole is doing well, independent of how the voter is doing personally.

A conceptually similar body of research has been conducted by the political scientist David Sears and his colleagues at UCLA who have investigated how personal self-interest in a political issue accounts for attitudes on the issue. Thus, for example, these scholars have examined the extent to which attitudes towards the war in Vietnam were influenced by whether one had family or close friends fighting there. The findings are dramatic. Regarding attitudes on Vietnam, having a relative or close friend actually fighting in Vietnam had far less effect on views of what American policy should be
than the respondent’s self-anchoring on a liberal-conservative scale or his attitudes toward communism. Likewise, in another study, liberal or conservative ideology did a considerably better job predicting a respondent’s views on government national health insurance or guaranteed jobs programs than whether the respondent himself was covered by health insurance or had recently been unemployed. In other words, conservatives who themselves had no health insurance protection were less likely to favor national health insurance than liberals who had coverage of their own. As part of a study on business and American foreign policy, the political scientists Bruce Russett and Elizabeth Hanson did a survey of the attitudes of corporate executives on foreign policy issues. They found that respondents’ views on domestic liberal-conservative issues such as civil rights did a far better job predicting their foreign policy views than whether their company had lots of defense contracts or investments overseas.

One possible response to these data would be to suggest that politics is not crucially important for most people and that, therefore, it’s easy to display public spirit in one’s political attitudes because it doesn’t cost much. On issues that really are important to people, including political issues, one might, according to this view, expect self-interest to hold sway.

I don’t think this argument is incorrect, but I do think it is somewhat off the point. Certainly the evidence is overwhelming that most people are far less than obsessively interested in politics. Significant numbers of citizens have weakly held opinions, or no opinions at all, on many political issues. The point is not that people are saints, willing to sacrifice all for the sake of others. Having political opinions based on general views about the best public policies may indeed often be a low-cost form of altruism (although the cost in taxes may not be insignificant at least in the case where such views lead to government programs that cost money). Nor are most people philosophers or professional policy analysts. Views can be based on general conceptions of right and wrong without being particularly sophisticated. Nonetheless, in a world of many political issues and of an overall modest level of interest in politics, one can expect to find a strong reservoir of political input based on general ideas of what policy would be right. Such input is likely to be an important factor in the process.

I also agree that in situations where people have substantial personal interests at stake, interests that can be perceived fairly clearly and directly, and where some clear government policy will affect
those interests, the role of self-interest in the political behavior of individuals is likely to increase. Interests groups such as the Synthetic Organic Chemicals Manufacturing Association, the National Association of Dredging Contractors, the Society of American Travel Writers, or the National Association of Scissors and Shears Manufacturers, which are everywhere in Washington, would hardly seem to have been brought into existence by public spirit. Their behavior can be held in check by public-spirited norms in the system, which affect the way interest groups present their demands and the nature of the demands they can make on the political system. Certainly, the political behavior of many interest groups constitutes the most important exception to the argument that public spirit is important in accounting for the viewpoints that citizens take in the political process.

Why public servants serve

Turning to the behavior of professional participants in government—elected officials, officials of government agencies, judges—a number of comments are in order. These people receive rewards and bear costs far more significant than those of individual citizens casually participating in politics. For example, politicians get their names in the newspapers and on television. They may frequently be the objects of deference and adulation. And all those who possess formal political authority experience some of the feeling of power that comes from the ability to establish public policies with the force of law. But politicians also work very long hours, much of it on the road away from their families, for salaries that are relatively low for work with the responsibilities and time demands their jobs make.

What are the distinctive advantages that might draw people to government? It is hard to see the lust for power, in a general sense, as a distinctive advantage of a career in government. Business leaders, within their own firms, doubtless exercise greater power, with fewer checks, than do participants in the political process of a democratic society. "The search for the jugular of power," notes the Yale political scientist Robert Lane, "may very likely lead to the world of finance, journalism, or industry instead of politics." This does not mean that the power-hungry will avoid politics, only that there is no reason to expect that a particularly disproportionate number of such people will participate.

There are two motivations that are, I think, relatively distinctive to government. One (much more so for elected officials than for civil servants or even political appointees) is the desire for attention
and adulation. Anyone who has dealt with politicians knows how important media attention can be to them. A second motivation is the desire to participate in the formulation of good public policy. People who go into politics for this reason may be seen as "seeking power," but of a special sort—fluence over public choices.

The sparse literature on the topic of why people go into careers in government is not very enlightening, both because of the problems of relying on the self-reports of respondents and because of a tendency on the part of many authors to psychoanalyze their subjects. But the literature does at least suggest that public spirit is an important reason many people go into politics. The largest group in Duke political scientist James David Barber's sample of Connecticut legislators fits into the category he calls "lawmakers"—those who derive satisfaction from producing good legislation. The reasons top federal appointed officials give for going into government heavily emphasize the unique vantage point government service gives for making the world a better place. In a 1984 survey of senior civil service managers in the federal government, respondents were asked, "To what extent are the following reasons to continue working for the government?" Only 18 percent said that their salary was a strong reason for staying (or more of a reason to stay than leave), and only 10 percent said that about their promotional opportunities. Seventy-six percent, however, responded that the "opportunity to have an impact on public affairs" was a reason to stay. A study by Edward Lawler III, a professor of management, comparing the importance of pay for different kinds of managers concluded that "managers in industrial organizations place the most importance on pay; people who work in government agencies place less emphasis on pay; and people who work in hospitals and social service organizations place the least emphasis on pay." The political scientists Dean Mann and Jameson Doig report that recruiters trying to persuade people to take jobs as assistant secretaries, many of whom would be serving at considerable financial sacrifice, make heavy use of arguments about serving one's country. Likewise, they report that the ability to influence policy in the direction of one's policy views was a strong reason why candidates offered these positions accepted them.

Vocational guidance tests provide some interesting insights here. These help young people determine what careers might be appropriate for them through a battery of questions that test their interests and inclinations. The most widely used test does not include "politician" as a possible occupation, but it does include "public
administrator." The cluster of occupations in which public administration is included, based on similar responses to the battery of questions, also includes the occupations of rehabilitation counselor, YMCA general secretary, social worker, and minister.

Also, it is worthwhile to note that the desire for adulation and attention does not necessarily work against public spirit, and, in fact, it often works in the same direction. Certainly, people driven by their self-interest are not likely to get far in the estimation of others, who have no particular reason to value the self-interest of another person. Indeed, the type of person who seeks the admiration of others to an unusual degree is one who is unusually likely to realize that others are important.

Nurturing public spirit

Clearly, government has become, for many, an appropriate forum to display their concerns for others. Why? That political decisions involve the community as a whole—and often future generations as well—encourages people to think about others when taking a stand. This is in contrast to personal decisions involving mainly oneself, which encourage people to think mainly of themselves when making them. Furthermore, political choices in a democratic society do not only involve others, they also require the consent and participation of others in order to get made in the first place. This requirement for cooperation reminds people of the need to involve others if they want to achieve their goals. Also, the requirement for the consent of others means that political argument inevitably must be formulated in terms broader than that of the self-interest of the individual or the group making the claim, since there is no reason for others to support a claim simply based on my self-interest. Even when making a claim that asks for something one personally wants (such as, say, a poor person demanding increased welfare payments or a journalist demanding freedom from censorship), the claims must be formulated in terms of general ethical arguments.

It is hard, however, to imagine that public spirit could be sustained simply by an accidental agglomeration of individual decisions to regard public spirit as the appropriate motivation for political action. Crucial to any ability to maintain public spirit is the continuing existence of a social norm that declares it appropriate for people to try to do the right thing in public behavior and inappropriate for them simply to seek to advance their personal interests.

Norms are crucial. They can also be fragile. Cynical descriptive conclusions about behavior in government threaten to undermine
the norm prescribing public spirit. The cynicism of journalists—and even the writings of professors—can decrease public spirit simply by describing what they claim to be its absence. Cynics are therefore in the business of making prophecies that threaten to become self-fulfilling. If the norm of public spirit dies, our society would look bleaker and our lives as individuals would be more impoverished. That is the tragedy of "public choice."