the Trinity as a matter simply of three aspects of God, three ways in which God appears *to us*, as Sabellius is alleged to have taught, for essential to this whole teaching is that God turns only one aspect to us, "*opera ad extra sunt indivisa*"; it is in his immanent activity of self-understanding and self-love, delight, that the roles are generated.

These roles, firmly established in the life of the Godhead, are then reflected (I prefer the word "projected"—as on a cinema screen) in our history in the external missions of the Son and the Spirit by which we are taken up into that life of the Godhead. In this way the obedience of Jesus is the projection of his eternal sonship and the outpouring of the Spirit is the projection of his eternal procession from the Father through the Son. It is because of these missions in time that the life of the Trinity becomes available to us: I mean both in the sense that we know of it, believe in it, and in the sense that we belong to it. These are of course the same thing. It is because we share in the Holy Spirit through faith and charity and the other infused virtues that we are able to speak of the Trinity at all. It is not therefore adequate to speak of God's redemptive act as an *opus ad extra.* It is precisely the act by which we cease to be *extra* to God and come within his own life.

1 James Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, p. 186.

Coercion in Augustine and Disney

William T. Cavanaugh

"He's way into the merchandising. It makes me crazy because you can't escape it."[1] This is the way the mother of a four-year-old described herself faced with 1997's blitzkrieg of product tie-ins associated with Disney's movie *Hercules*. The same syndicated newspaper article from which the above quote is taken introduces a selection of this merchandise (which includes such must-haves as glow-in-the-dark Hercules shorts and an official Hercules silver coin) with the following: "OK, maybe you can't afford to shower your offspring with all 7,000 official 'Hercules' tie-in products. But here's a sample of the superhero merchandise that your kid's best friend soon will be bringing to show and tell. Not that you should feel guilty, of course..."

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1999.tb01678.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Wink wink, ha ha. Surely the woman who claims *Hercules* is inescapable is indulging in hyperbole, as am I when I tell my students that Disney merchandising is evidence that we do not live in a free country. Nevertheless, one can observe that the woman quoted above is not alone in feeling coerced by Disney magic. I was struck, for example, by the reaction of the press last year to the boycott of Disney launched by the Southern Baptist Convention. One article begins with a long list of Disney owned networks, publishers, sports franchises, music producers, etc., capped by the categorical statement from a Smith Barney analyst, "Disney blankets our culture, and it's impossible to avoid."[2] Even many of the Baptists interviewed acknowledged that they felt compelled to continue frequenting many of the heads of the Disney hydra. Though one might question the Baptists' reasons for boycotting Disney (Disney's decision to give benefits to same-sex couples), I find disquieting the consensus that you simply cannot refuse to buy Disney no matter what the reason. Resistance is futile. The article cited makes no attempt to vindicate Disney on the basis of the intrinsic goods served by their products. Dismissal of the Baptists' boycott is based on the sheer power of Disney to dictate patterns of consumption.

I want to use Disney to explore how coercion is produced in a supposedly free consumer economy. Max Weber and his followers have done a great deal to explain how the bifurcation of ends and means in modern capitalist economies effects coercion on the side of production, that is, how managers in bureaucracies manipulate their employees. Much less, it seems, has been written on how the privatization of ends as "values" produces coercion on the side of consumption. If Michel de Certeau, Daniel Miller and others are right to refocus our attention on consumption instead of production as the principal driving force in late capitalism, then we might do well to ask how supposedly free consumption produces a society of disciplined homogeneity and conformity, as well as how people can and do resist it. The first part of this essay will look to St. Augustine to provide us with a definition of coercion. The second part will then apply this definition to consumption in late capitalism in an attempt to puzzle out how conformity is produced in a "free" market economy.

I Augustine on coercion

Augustine is a classic Christian locus for discussion of coercion because he felt it necessary at various points in his career to work out a justification for the use of coercive measures to bring the Donatists back into the fold. Modern commentators on Augustine do a good bit of self-righteous clucking when the subject comes up, but as John Bowlin has recently argued, most moderns share Augustine's basic presuppositions about coercion as an ordinary means of structuring society, though we would

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prefer not to acknowledge it.[3] My immediate purpose is neither to defend nor attack Augustine's policies toward the Donatists. Rather, I find his distinctions between types of coercion useful in thinking about Disney.

Augustine assumes the loose definition of coercion as the bringing to bear of force against one's will. Augustine acknowledges that no one can be compelled to be good despite her own will.[4] Since he does not suppose that merely negative freedom of the will is a good and sufficient end in itself, however, it is possible that some coercion can be useful and in fact necessary to bring a recalcitrant will around to seeing the error of its ways, just as a parent must sometimes compel a child for its own good to do what the child does not want to do. What distinguishes good coercion from bad coercion is primarily the end to be pursued. As Augustine writes, "the thing to be considered when any one is coerced, is not the mere fact of the coercion, but the nature of that to which he is coerced, whether it be good or bad."[5] In the case of the Donatists, "the whole question, therefore, is whether schism be not an evil work."[6]

At times Augustine seems to emphasize ends to the exclusion of means, as when he contends "When good and bad do the same actions and suffer the same afflictions, they are to be distinguished not by what they do or suffer, but by the causes of each."[7] However, Augustine makes no separation of ends and means; for example, he refuses to justify torture to coerce the Donatists, advocating instead only the means available to schoolmasters—beating with canes. Furthermore, precisely because what is at issue is who is on the side of truth, Augustine rejects any form of deception in the pursuit of schismatics. Augustine makes clear that charity must temper coercion; the "benefit of discipline" is to counteract evil "not with the hatred which seeks to harm, but with the love that seeks to heal."[8] In Augustine's thought, ends and means are not separable. We might of course disagree with Augustine's choice of caning as such a means, but Augustine's hope is that those subjected will be forced to reexamine the truth, and that in time those coerced will overcome resentment and come retrospectively to consent with their wills to this discipline, appreciating it for the corrective fruits it has borne. Augustine writes lyrically, if vaguely, of the unnamed multitudes who now rejoice and praise God over having been forced back into the light, where they could once again see and freely assent to the truth.[9]

Clearly this view of coercion depends on a substantive account of the true goods of the human person, for without an account of ends which are objectively valid, coercion can only be an instance of the *libido dominandi*, the arbitrary assertion of one will over another through sheer power. This indeed is what distinguishes the earthly city from the city of God. The *civitas terrena* is violent precisely because it serves only mediate ends, and

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1999.tb01678.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

does not render due sacrifice to God. The *civitas dei*, although it can and must make use of the coercive means of the earthly city, does so only in service to an ultimate end, the true *telos* of human activity which is God. Coercion is sometimes justified because merely negative freedom of the will is not to be pursued as an end in itself. This is so because the human will, for Augustine, is truly free only when intentionally directed to its true *telos*, a *telos* which is never simply present but is a constantly arriving gift of God's grace.[10] That is, the human person is free only insofar as her will is wrapped up in God's. Conversely, the subject negates itself, and is therefore unfree, insofar as it mistakenly assumes itself to suffice as its own end.'[11]

II Disney magic

Now, if pressed, I personally might prefer being caned to spending a weekend at Disney World, but still we must be clear that capitalist marketing practices are of a different order than the beatings meted out to the Donatists. As Foucault might say, the new target is not the body but the "soul." As Foucault also might say, however, the soul becomes the prison of the body, and the person becomes self-disciplining in the modern technologies of desire.[12] Why some people experience this discipline as a bad form of coercion, I will argue in this second part of my essay, is, as Augustine noted, a matter of the ends to which desire is directed. At one level, people buy the same things because their choices are limited. The saturation of the market by enormous corporate entities such as Disney has the obvious effect of funneling their choices into service of these corporations. Smaller distributors of children's films, for example, are simply not represented in the range of choices which confront the consumer at Blockbuster Video. The Blockbuster Video empire is itself, of course, built on the bankruptcies of the many independent video stores that sprang up when the VCR became widely available, such that one's choices of video store in many areas begins and ends with Blockbuster or one or two other virtually identical competitor chains. Disney's version of liberating the imagination thus succeeds in confining it to a few well-worn channels. The imaginations of children magically alight on the same object; suburbia shudders with the thud of millions of prepubescent Hercules simultaneously jumping off the bed. Weber traced how bureaucratic rationalization succeeded in allowing less room for individual variation in the choice of means to ends, such that virtually anyone could make the "proper" decision. In late capitalism this rationalization applies not simply to the manager but to the consumer as well.

Spontaneity has been so ruthlessly cut out of this process that ironically it must be programmed back in to preserve the illusion of unlimited possibility. At Disney World, there are occasional planned breaks in what Bob Garfield calls the "Stepford Wives demeanour" of the

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employees.[13] The teasing and banter of the tour guides on Disney World's "Jungle Cruise" is scripted, such that the next group is treated magically to the same ad libs.[14] As choices are increasingly limited, advertising campaigns more stridently declare that their product offers real difference. Taco Bell asserts there's "nothing ordinary about it" in an attempt to mask the fact that there's *everything* ordinary about it. Disney's insistence on "magic" and "imagination" is of the same order.

Limitation of choices is not the key to the question of coercion, however, because one might argue that capitalism produces an overabundance of choices compared to a more traditional economy. More to the point, large masses of people do choose to consume the same products with what we are accustomed to calling "free will." Many people *like* Disney. Their desires correspond with what Disney has to offer. We might perhaps simply conclude that Disney and other large corporations tap into certain "natural" or "objective" desires that the majority of people have. Sprite advertisements argue this line when they make fun of advertising and command "Image is Nothing. Obey your Thirst." Of course, we might wonder why, if we have this natural, objective thirst, we must be commanded to obey it by advertising which claims to be anti-advertising. This sleight-of-hand would have us ignore the way that a capitalist economy constructs desire around the narrative of a *lack* of any such objective *telos* for desire. Capitalism is premised on the idea that the consumer is free to choose his or her own ends. Indeed, as Weber saw, values or ends are entirely subjective, the product of will. The adjudication of disagreements between values is beyond the scope of reason to intervene.[15]

Now, I have no doubt that some genuine goods are found in Disney entertainment, that Disney does animation very well and that under any circumstances some people would find it desirable. The question is why so many people find it desirable all at once. In a free consumer society one would expect a wide diversity of tastes and choices. Though Disney films are not without intrinsic merit, this merit is not sufficient to account for the phenomenon of conformity we are examining. The Big Mac is not entirely repulsive and is quite tasty to some, but McDonald's is not what it is because it serves an objectively superior hamburger.

Adam Smith accounts for conformity of consumption with an account of mimetic desire. Here is Smith's version of how desire works to produce necessity in a capitalist society:

> Consumable commodities are either necessaries or luxuries. By necessaries I understand, not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a

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> necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably, though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty, which, it is presumed, no body can well fall into without extreme bad conduct.[16]

Such "extreme bad conduct" today, tantamount to child abuse, might be represented by the inability or refusal to take one's kids on pilgrimage to Disney World at some point in their young lives. What is important to note about Smith's analysis is how necessity is subject to arbitrary construction through the mechanism of mimetic desire. Presumably food and shelter cannot become luxuries, but virtually *anything* can become a "necessary" if enough people are persuaded to desire it.

René Girard traces mimetic desire to the very origins of civilization. Girard argues that the social process is based on the fact that "*the subject desires the object because the rival desires it.* In desiring an object the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object."[17] As John Milbank argues, however, by claiming desire is mimetic in all societies, Girard projects a modern, liberal grid onto premodern societies that in fact assume a hierarchy of goods. Only in modern capitalist society does desire conform to Girard's view that desire is "never for the *objectively* desirable, but only for what others deem to be desirable."[18] Girard is right descriptively about a consumer society; when there are no objective goods, then desire is mimetic. I buy Disney because you buy Disney. Adam Smith may have been closer to the truth, however, when he saw that desire is produced not necessarily by rivalry over scarce goods but often by the sheer ubiquity of a commodity.

The construction of the self as a consumer implies the removal of ends which are held to be objectively more desirable than others. The individual consumer is to choose his or her own ends; desire itself is therefore the only proper end, the only thing which is inherently good. We are told to buy to keep the economy moving; what we buy makes no difference. The goal is not the promotion of the good, but only the making of profit. Dissociated from ends, consumption becomes a sheer arbitrary movement of the will. Where there are no true ends to move the will, the movement of the will is determined by power, that power which is most pervasive and most able to dominate the channels of persuasion.

Again, this is not to say (to stick with the example of Disney) that Disney films are contentless or without intrinsic merit. There are indeed many values covertly and overtly promoted by Disney films, and those who mine them for ideology are not wrong to do so. But all such values, good and bad, are driven by marketability, and all ultimately dissolve into the one overriding *telos* of profit. The only constant and unshakeable

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ideological message conveyed is "Consume!"

All of which brings us back to Augustine. For Augustine, our hearts are restless until they rest in God. God is our good, whether we recognize it or not, and the goal of all our desires and practices of consumption is God. If there are no objective goods, then every act of persuasion is an act of coercion of the negative kind. Persuasion can only be the domination of one will over another where there is no objectively good *telos* beyond the human will toward which to move and be moved. The fact that the discipline imposed on the Donatists was bodily and that exercised by the market is not is relevant, because the means must be congruent with the end. However, in deciding between good coercion and bad, the key question remains whether or not the will has been moved toward the good. By contrast, in Weber's world, as Alasdair MacIntyre has pointed out, the difference between authority and sheer power has been obliterated.[19] In the market, there is little chance that its subjects will come to see retrospectively that they were authoritatively persuaded to something for the sake of truth. What I believe explains the resentment of the woman quoted at the beginning is her feeling that her desires have been manipulated in the service of an arbitrary *désir-du-jour*, all for the purpose of consumption itself. She has the sinking feeling that six months later she will probably find herself buying whatever Disney coughs up next, no matter what it is.

The experience of coercion in a free market is not primarily a matter of too few choices, therefore, but the fact that what one chooses doesn't matter. There are, as Bruce Springsteen sings, "57 Channels and Nothin' On." Because choice itself is the primary good, because desire itself is the only thing desirable, desire becomes a desire for nothing as its positive object.[20] Susan Willis writes of encountering the bewildering variety of choices and prices in Disney World vacation packages, only to come away feeling that there is no way to beat Disney at its game. All combinations lead to the same profit for Disney. In this context Willis notes Benjamin's comparison of capitalism to gambling and lotteries; under the ruse of chance and choice, we are bent to instrumentalized purpose.[21]

There is a famous Bill Maudlin cartoon from the time of the opening of Communist China in the Nixon era which depicts two Chinese standing before a newly erected billboard that reads "Drink Coca-Cola." One of the Chinese is saying to the other, "We'd better do as it says." The joke, of course, is that the communists had so beaten the free spirit out of their people that they were unable to recognize freedom when it was offered them. The real joke is that "Drink Coca-Cola" has something like the force of an imperative in our society as well, especially when the Coca-Cola Company orders us to obey our thirst.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1999.tb01678.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

I do not wish to conclude having painted an overblown caricature of a mechanistic society of consumer robots. The point of this essay is not how we are all forced to do the same thing, but why some people *feel* coerced in a free economy. I believe that being able to feel coerced in this economy, like the woman at the beginning of the article, is a considerable moral achievement. This resentment is a sign of hope, an indication of attachment to certain true goods against which to judge the ersatz *telos* of consumption for its own sake and find it lacking. De Certeau argues that consumers are not simply prostrated to the dominant grid, but can and do subvert the panoptic by consuming things in ways which were not intended by the producer.[22] The ability to feel coerced is perhaps the beginning of resistance.

1 Janet Weeks, "Make no myth-stake: 'Hercules' means business," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 27, 1997, 9B.
2 John Horn, "Jousting with a Giant," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 19, 1997, section A.
3 John Bowlin, "Augustine on Justifying Coercion," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, vol. 17 (1997), 49–70.
4 St. Augustine, Letter 93, 16, in Henry Paolucci, ed., *The Political Writings of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Gateway Editions, 1962), 203.
5 Ibid., 202–3.
6 St. Augustine, *Letter* 87, in Paolucci, ed., 190.
7 St. Augustine, *Letter* 93, in Paolucci, ed. 195.
8 Ibid.
9 St. Augustine, Letter 93, in Paolucci, ed., 205; and *Treatise on the Correction of the Donatists*, in Paolucci, ed., 227.
10 See the "Introduction" in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, ed., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 9. In his letter to Vincentius, Augustine rejects the possibility that he could simply allow the Donatists to exercise their will perversely, "that the gift which the God of gods has bestowed upon His children, called from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, might become invalid"; St. Augustine, *Letter* 93, in Paolucci, ed., 206.
11 Michael Hanby, "Desire," in Milbank, Pickstock, Ward, ed., 116.
12 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 30.
13 Bob Garfield, "How I Spent (and Spent and Spent) My Disney Vacation," *Washington Post-Outlook*, July 7, 1991, B5.
14 Susan Willis, "Public Use/Private State" in *The Project on Disney, Inside the Mouse. Work and Play at Disney World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 184.
15 See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame,: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 26–30.
16 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), 821–2.
17 Rend Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 145.
18 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 394.
19 MacIntyre, 26.
20 Hanby, 116, 121.
21 Susan Willis, "The Family Vacation" in *The Project on Disney*, 37–9.
22 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xii–xxiv.

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