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## An Oasis of Service: A National Service Proposal in the Spirit of Strong Democracy

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# AN OASIS OF SERVICE

*A National Service Proposal in the Spirit of Strong Democracy*

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Government

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfilment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

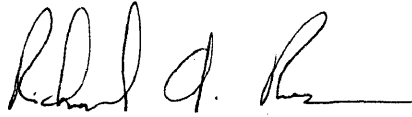
Richard Arthur Rose

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
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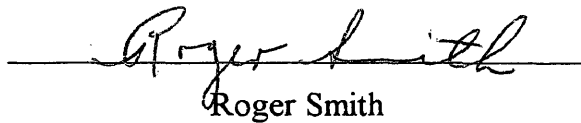
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Approved, August 1994

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Joel Schwartz

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Roger Smith

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David Dessler

## AN OASIS OF SERVICE:

### A NATIONAL SERVICE PROPOSAL IN THE SPIRIT OF STRONG DEMOCRACY

#### ABSTRACT

The author develops a position in favor of an American national service system as a strong democratic institution. In developing this position, the author considers arguments for a universal conscription system posited by Benjamin Barber and arguments against any and all national service proposals posited by Bruce Chapman. By comparing these arguments, the author concludes that two major pitfalls of contemporary debate over national service are encountered when the argument is either cast in economic terms of dollar cost versus benefit to society or when "service" is misconstrued as indoctrination into a preconceived belief system or mindset. As an alternative to these two conceptions of service, the author points to the notion of the parallel polis, the oasis in the desert, as envisioned by Hannah Arendt. In accordance with this notion, the service environment could provide an oasis for the exercise of strong democratic "other-interest" in the desert of self-interest that is market society. Service in such an oasis, the author concludes, should not be compulsory; rather, it should be available as a respite from otherwise compulsory engagement in market activities.

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# **AN OASIS OF SERVICE**

*A National Service Proposal in the Spirit of Strong Democracy*

The lesson of our whole history is that honoring service and rewarding responsibility is the best investment America can make...National service recognizes a simple but powerful truth, that we make progress not by governmental action alone, but we do best when the people and their government work at the grass roots in genuine partnership.

--Bill Clinton<sup>1</sup>

National service is a vital constituent in the relationship between rights and duties under a strong democratic regime.

-- Benjamin Barber<sup>2</sup>

In *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, Benjamin Barber claims that civic spirit has suffered under liberal institutions to the point where democracy today is "thin democracy," or "politics as zookeeping." Voting is a poor excuse for participation, he says, and "representative democracy" is an oxymoron. A key facet of Barber's twelve-point program for the revitalization of citizenship and strong democracy is a system of universal citizen service, or national conscription into a choice of military or nonmilitary service branches.<sup>3</sup>

The national service program sponsored by Clinton is a far cry from a universal citizen service, but it brings this facet of the strong democratic program closer to realization than any other is likely to be in the foreseeable future. The political will exists among the public: in his study of national opinion polls dealing with national service conducted from 1936 to 1988, Tom W. Smith concludes that large majorities of Americans support voluntary programs and smaller majorities favor mandatory programs.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Clinton. Excerpted from address on national service delivered at Rutgers University March 1, 1993. (*CQ Researcher*, Vol. 3, Iss. 24, 1993), 569.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 298.

<sup>3</sup> Barber, 307.

<sup>4</sup> Tom W. Smith, "The Polls--A Report: National Service," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 54, 1990.

the political arena, however, the idea is attacked by interest groups as diverse as the United Negro College Fund and the American Legion.<sup>5</sup> For the scaled-down, pilot version of the Clinton plan that emerged to survive in the political arena and, ultimately, for it to grow any larger, a strong case will have to be constructed and laid before the decision-making powers. This paper is an attempt to build such a case drawing upon the concepts of strong democracy as developed by Benjamin Barber, Hannah Arendt, and other critics of mass society.

The argument will consist of three parts. In part one, I will outline a sort of pro and con treatment of national service; I will list Barber's arguments for universal citizen service and then Bruce Chapman's arguments against government-influenced service programs of any kind. All national service proposals are not created equal, and the point of part two is to develop a conception of a national service system that is consistent with the strong democratic outlook. Toward this end, I will develop the strong democratic position from four key points derived from Barber's formal definition: "participatory politics," "absence of independent ground," "proximate self-legislation," and "democratic transformation." As each point is discussed, its relationship to the arguments for and against citizen service will be considered. The final component to be considered, "democratic transformation," will receive special emphasis as an argument for citizen service. In part three, I will develop a model of a citizen service program in keeping with the conception developed in part two, drawing heavily upon the Arendtian concept of the "parallel polis" as developed by Jeffrey C. Isaac.<sup>6</sup> It is also in part three that I will address a

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Waldman, "'Ask Not'--'90s Style," *Newsweek* (September 20, 1993), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Oases in the Desert: Hannah Arendt on Democratic Politics," *American Political Science Review* (Vol. 88, No. 1, March 1994), 156-168.

fundamental question surrounding the national service debate: should service be compulsory?

### **Part I: A Pro and Con Treatment of Citizen Service**

Barber presents multiple arguments for a compulsory national service program.<sup>7</sup> Since this paper will deal with two facets of the national service question, the first being whether a national service program should be implemented and the second being whether such a service program should be universal, Barber's arguments will be divided accordingly.

Barber's first reason for advocating a citizen service program is that it will provide job training and employment opportunities. "[A]lthough the federal government has taken a certain responsibility for job training and public employment since the Manpower Training Act of 1963 helped to usher in the Great Society," he says, "there has been no single governmental source of training and jobs." The second reason is that the national infrastructure is in jeopardy and yet remains without a "constituency"--a citizen service program would provide such a constituency. In other words, it would provide labor for crucial projects that have gone neglected. Urban redevelopment and rural conservation projects also recommend themselves by this logic, as do the sort of international projects currently undertaken under the auspices of the Peace Corps.

Barber provides additional arguments for making the national service program universal. The first is that service addresses an obligation owed by the citizen to the polis as part of the "relationship between rights and duties under a strong democratic regime;" since this obligation is universal, so should be the service program. The second reason

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<sup>7</sup> See Barber, 298-303.



has to do specifically with military service, which assumes a mercenary character, Barber says, under any sort of "voluntary" or "professional" status. In short, an army of the people will be more democratic; it will be less liable to being turned against the people or to being sent abroad on adventures in which the people have no interest. He points out that, had a "professional" army been employed in Vietnam, that war may have been prosecuted further. The third reason is that universal service would "help to overcome divisions of class, wealth, and race." Obviously the program would have to draw participants from all classes, races, and levels of affluence in order to overcome these divisions.

The final argument for citizen service is that which Barber claims to be most important: "The greatest advantages of...citizen service would be civic, however. It could offer many of the undisputed virtues of military service: fellowship and camaraderie, common activity, teamwork, service for and with others, and a sense of community. Yet in place of military hierarchy, it could offer equality; in place of obedience, cooperation; and in place of us/them conflict of the kind generated by parochial participation, a sense of mutuality and national interdependence." For William James, the grandfather of the national service concept, civic service provided both an alternative conduit for and an environment for developing a virtuous impulse that previously found expression only in military pursuits; thus it became the "moral equivalent of war."<sup>8</sup> These civic advantages all coincide with the transformation thesis of strong democracy, which will assume a central role as the argument presented here progresses. For example, my position on the

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<sup>8</sup> William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," in Curti, Thorp, and Baker, eds., *American Issues: The Social Record* (Chicago: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1960), 916.

issue of whether or not a service program should be universal will hinge upon whether it must necessarily be so to effect democratic transformation.

In short, then, the six arguments Barber provides for universal citizen service can be broken into two which advocate national service *per se* (job training and employment, and maintenance of public goods and services), three which call for such service being universal (citizen responsibility, democratization of the military, and overcoming class and other social divisions), and one whose placement in either category will be left for later discussion (democratic transformation).

Against these arguments for citizen service, we will consider arguments presented by Bruce Chapman.<sup>9</sup> Again, we will divide them into arguments dealing with national service *per se* and those dealing with compulsory service, but we will reverse the order of appearance.

Chapman's single objection to compulsory service is simple; an obligation to government "is a tax on time or money," he says, and requirements for such amount to "coercive utopianism." His objections against national service in itself begin with the charge that true service can be neither induced nor compelled. "Personal service is a freewill offering to God," he says, and, "when coercion or inducements are provided...the spirit of service is corrupted." Americans already contribute many hours in volunteer work and many dollars to charity, and thus the true spirit of service is alive and well. His second objection is that the free market is best able to direct citizen effort, whether for training, employment, maintenance of the national infrastructure, or anything else. "In practice,"

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce Chapman, "Politics and National Service: A Virus Attacks the Volunteer Sector," in Barber and Richard M. Battistoni, eds., *Education for Democracy* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1993), 438-442.

he says, "the service in a federal program of national service would be contaminated by government determination of goals, bureaucratization of procedures, and, inevitably, government insistence on further regulating the independent sector with which it contracted." His third objection is that it is misleading to claim that a citizen service program provides any benefits to society without cost, since "the labor of national service volunteers represents an opportunity cost, a hidden expenditure of time that could be used in other ways more beneficial to society, as well as to the national service volunteers themselves." His fourth and final objection is that it is wrong to attempt to equate nonmilitary service with military service, since "serving in the library at home" is not the same as "getting shot at overseas."

In short, then, Chapman's single argument against universal national service is that government compulsion is wrong; his four arguments against national service itself are that: true service is offered without inducement, market forces are more efficient than government direction, government service programs entail hidden opportunity costs, and nonmilitary service does not compare with military service.

In part two of our discussion, we will bear these alleged advantages and shortcomings of national service, both voluntary and compulsory, in mind as we develop the strong democratic position from Barber's formal definition.

## **Part II - Strong Democracy and National Service**

If "thin democracy" is the term used to describe the present American political system, in which democratic participation is limited to voting for representatives who perform actual decision making, there is an opposite extreme. Barber calls this opposite

extreme "unitary democracy." Unitary democracy is the Burkean ideal, the "traditionalist's consensual community," in which a social hierarchy imposes order upon individuals such that they can cooperate in pseudo-democratic fashion.<sup>10</sup> We recognize in the two terms "thin democracy" and "unitary democracy" a strong resemblance to the traditions of libertarian political thought, which is at the root of thin democracy, and communitarian political thought, which is a recurring backlash. Libertarian political thought places the rights of the individual as the paramount objective. This strain of thought has coexisted with and assimilated free-market economic tenets in their purest social Darwinistic form, though the logical consistency between advocacy of individual rights and these other credos is debatable. It is purported that each individual, given his or her right to freedom, will rationally pursue self-interested objectives and thereby find his or her proper niche in society. Some will naturally thrive; others will naturally suffer. In the natural division of labor that ensues, some will naturally lead; others will naturally follow. As William Graham Sumner said, only those who have tended their own business well will presume to mind other people's business.<sup>11</sup> We see that the public sphere is downplayed in favor of the private, and that private interests are best regulated by market forces. The communitarian backlash against these libertarian tenets recognizes the historical shortcomings of *laissez-faire* government, holding that national interests call for curtailment of self-interested behavior at some point, a point which communitarians

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<sup>10</sup> Barber, 230.

<sup>11</sup> Sumner writes, "The danger of minding other people's business is twofold. First, there is the danger that a man may leave his own business unattended to; and, second, there is the danger of an impertinent interference with another's affairs." William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1989), 99.

define as the threshold of "shared American values."<sup>12</sup> Thus drug use is held to have such a detrimental effect upon society that society should be able to deny it from individuals. Business monopolies make such a mockery of free-market ideals that government is justified in interfering with the marketplace. Against the libertarian's concern over individual rights, the overriding concern of the communitarian is the community.

To some extent the strong democrat agrees with the communitarian; the community must be protected if the individual is ultimately to enjoy rights.<sup>13</sup> However, the communitarian chooses to protect community through an imposed uniformity, and the strong democrat shares the libertarian's repugnance toward such a solution. Strong democracy shows sympathy to both viewpoints but finds adherence to either doctrine in its extreme form problematic, necessitating the formulation of a middle-ground standpoint.

Barber's formal definition of strong democracy is "*politics in the participatory mode where conflict is resolved in the absence of an independent ground through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent, private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods.*"<sup>14</sup> Careful consideration of this definition will reveal the parameters of the middle-ground conceptualization of political community. To highlight these parameters, we will proceed with an explication of the definition

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<sup>12</sup> Amatai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 256.

<sup>13</sup> Here we see an alliance of the strong democratic platform with another classical strain of political thought, i.e. realism. The realist holds that the state is the fundamental condition of value. We are considering the state as the political community. Neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz travel a different road by setting the state up as a "unit of analysis" and applying game-theoretical parameters to its study, but the classical realist's position is not so far removed from the strong democrat's on this point. Maintenance of the state as the condition of value is not the same as endorsing nationalistic excesses perpetrated in the name of "state's interests," however.

<sup>14</sup> Barber, 132.

by focusing on four key points: "participatory politics," "absence of independent ground," "proximate self-legislation," and "democratic transformation." As we examine each of these four points, we will bring the principles derived to bear upon our arguments for and against national service.

"Participatory politics" refers of course to a politics of direct democratic participation rather than the current representative system. The portrayal of representative democracy as "thin democracy" is a denial of the notion that government is a form of labor to be divided among others in a market scenario. In a strong democracy, government is the right and responsibility of everyone, and neither the right nor the responsibility can be borne by a "representative."

Although Barber says, "The theory of strong democracy ... has no share in the republican nostalgia of such commentators as Hannah Arendt,"<sup>15</sup> we see a remarkable similarity here between strong democratic principles and those espoused by Arendt. Strong democracy's idealization of the directly engaged citizenry harkens to what Arendt calls the *vita activa*, the life characterized by significant speech and action. Arendt distinguishes speech and action from two other spheres of activity: labor, the province of *animal laborans*; and work, the province of *homo faber*. Labor is effort expended in activities which do not result in durable contributions to the "human artifice;" it is toil, pure and simple. Work does contribute to the human artifice and builds upon itself, creating things that improve the human condition through their aesthetic appeal, their

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<sup>15</sup> Barber, 118.

contribution to comfort, and/or their labor-saving capability. Though labor and work are necessary in a society, neither constitute a human existence.<sup>16</sup>

The idea that significant speech and action is the highest form of human activity is consistent with the ancient Greek concept of *telos*, the highest natural potential of everything in existence. The *telos* of man (and it was only men for the Greeks) was active participation in the *agora*, the arena of *logos*, or political speech. Arendt states that, in the labor-intensive society of the Greeks, it was the infrastructure of slavery and female subordination that supported the male citizen in his bid to achieve *telos*--others performed labor and work while the citizen engaged in the *vita activa*. Strong democracy calls for a resurrection of the concept of a human *telos* in the *vita activa*, an alternative to a grasping existence, without the reliance upon a slave class to achieve it. The strong democrat argues that society should admit of an "aristocracy of everyone" (the title of Barber's latest book).

In his way, Kenneth Galbraith prophesizes the advent of an aristocracy of everyone in his "new class." The new class, he says, will take advantage of technological progress to focus less on productivity and more on activities that utilize higher human potential. Productivity was, he states, the concern of a primitive species hovering perpetually on the brink of famine. Since we have conquered famine, productivity has lost its claim to being the measure of our activity's worth. Instead, our greatest prospect is "to

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<sup>16</sup> "Men can very well live without laboring, they can force others to labor for them, and they can very well decide merely to use and enjoy the world of things without themselves adding a single useful object to it; the life of an exploiter or slaveholder and the life of a parasite may be unjust, but they certainly are human. A life without speech and without action, on the other hand...is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 172-173.

eliminate toil as a required economic institution."<sup>17</sup> We should need less factory labor and should develop appreciation for activities that are more rewarding in themselves, such as academics, science, and art. We see that what he predicts is, in Arendtian terminology, a shift of emphasis from labor and work into the *vita activa*, or what the strong democrat calls a participatory culture. Contrary to his prediction of 40 years ago, however, humanity has not shifted smoothly into higher pursuits even though productivity has indeed eclipsed the need for much human labor. For example, in the past 40 years, American manufacturing productivity has increased while labor requirements have shrunk; thus we have abundant resources and massive unemployment.<sup>18</sup> The good news to the strong democrat is that there is human capital available that need no longer be devoted to toil, that human beings are not "too busy" for the *vita activa*; the problem, it seems, is that we are unable to recognize as legitimate any pursuits other than those traditionally referred to as "productive." The "service sector" jobs that are purported to replace the lost manufacturing jobs have little resemblance to "new class" pursuits or the *vita activa* because those pursuits are deemed "unproductive."

Strong democracy's idealization of participatory politics goes far beyond the notion of widening the sphere of influence upon government, of enlarging the net in which "interests" are "aggregated;" participation is seen as a good in itself, similar to the way productivity has been seen as a good in itself but challenging the former paradigm. To Arendt, the "liberty" espoused by the libertarian, unrestricted movement, is but one

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<sup>17</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), 340.

<sup>18</sup> Peter F. Drucker refers to this trend as the "uncoupling" of production from employment. Peter F. Drucker, "The Changed World Economy," in Nico Stehr and Richard V. Ericson, eds., *The Culture and Power of Knowledge: Inquiries into Contemporary Societies* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 251.



component of true freedom; true freedom requires admission into the *agora* as well--it requires opportunity for participation.<sup>19</sup>

If we now have an understanding of what "participatory politics" implies, how does this concept relate to our arguments for and against national service?

The main impact of strong democracy's advocacy of participatory politics on the debate over universal citizen service is that neither the "free market" position of the libertarian nor the "citizen obligation" position of the communitarian is applicable, since each reduces to a particular conception of the proper terms of the social contract. By rejecting representative government (conducted by elites) in favor of discursive participation (of the citizenry as a whole), strong democracy rejects contractual notions of government/citizen relations. There is no need of a "contract" between the citizenry and the government because the citizenry *is* the government (as it is the "society," the "state," the "community," and so on). There is no magic line which "they" cannot cross against "us" because they *are* us. If we decide service is something we ought to provide ourselves (and, according to Smith's surveys, we have so decided), then contracts be damned. We see Barber recognizing these distinctions when he criticizes not only liberal, thin democratic ideals but also those of "bogus communitarians who appeal to the human need for communion and for a purpose higher than private, material interests only in order to enslave humankind."<sup>20</sup> But by appealing in his advocacy of universal service to a notion of rights balanced against responsibilities, he relinquishes the defensible, middle-

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<sup>19</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 31-32.

<sup>20</sup> Barber, 120.

ground standpoint and enters the communitarian/libertarian field of argument, on the side of the communitarian.

As for how the participatory ideal affects our vision of the service program properly conceived, the connection between national service and participatory politics can be drawn in either, or both, of the following ways: the service program can itself provide a venue for participation; and/or the service program can somehow prepare the citizen for participation in the larger political society. The position presented here is that it should do both. National service should be envisioned as participation, and participation in the service program should help prepare the individual for participation in the larger community.

On the one hand, military service may seem to provide a participatory experience. Military service involves teamwork and shared goals, often among groups of individuals that would otherwise never find themselves in a cooperative endeavor. The difficulty the strong democrat perceives with the military model, however, is that it is a rigidly hierarchical system, and in a rigidly hierarchical system, participation is construed as dissent. In Arendtian terms, the soldier is expected to do without knowing. Barber hints that a strong democratic service program would offer an alternative relationship; in place of hierarchy and obedience, it would, he says, offer equality and cooperation.<sup>21</sup> For service

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<sup>21</sup> I perceive a problem with Barber's formulation, however. Barber envisions separate service corps, with a military corps as one of the options. Barber does not address the problem of how the military corps would be organized to reflect equality and cooperation. Can a military corps do without a hierarchical structure? If not, then a definite distinctive feature of military service exists. Would not a logical requirement then be to have military service part of every participant's program? Can one have a "democratized military" with separate service branches?

Also, another of Barber's separate corps, his "special corps," strikes me as an elite institution. How can this be reconciled with the spirit of "equality and cooperation?"

to be participatory, members must have a hand in choosing which projects ought to be pursued and in deciding how they ought to be pursued.

National service, whatever projects may be undertaken under its auspices, is almost certain to entail labor and work. In an aristocracy of everyone, not only work and labor but speech and action must be shared as well. Adding the opportunity for speech and action to the requirement for labor and work connects knowing with doing, something Arendt considered a necessary condition of freedom. For the strong democrat, true participation is a necessary component of a national service system.

To return to our second participatory goal, how does participation in a service program prepare the individual for participation in the larger political community? That question will be addressed during the forthcoming discussion of "democratic transformation."

The second point to be considered in the explication of the formal definition of strong democracy is "absence of independent ground." This concept lies at the heart of the strong democratic distinction between politics and science--with an independent ground, a set of universal truths to which to appeal, there is no need for politics. Barber underlines the distinction: "Politics concerns itself only with those realms where truth is not--or is not *yet*--known. We do not vote for the best polio vaccine or conduct surveys on the ideal space shuttle, nor has Boolean algebra been subjected to electoral testing...Where consensus stops, politics starts."<sup>22</sup> Strong democracy, then, acknowledges

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<sup>22</sup> Barber, 129. Though his point is valid, I can imagine value to be found in more public participation in the space program. What is the ideal space shuttle? A weapon deployment device? A research station? A tour bus? Similarly, are our research and development efforts in the field of medicine to be conducted without public input? Our present dilemma, in which "orphan drugs" are known but unavailable for lack of funding, would seem to indicate otherwise.

the futility of construing human affairs as laboratory experiments, subject to a science of reductionism. According to Stephen Toulmin, strong democracy thus avoids one of the principal mistakes of modernity.<sup>23</sup>

Conceiving politics in the absence of independent ground provides another important distinction between strong democratic and communitarian ideals. Rejecting abstract principles and placing our problems in the concrete and complex framework of the human realm, the realm of significant participation, nullifies argumentation based upon any notion of "shared American values," or upon any predetermined set of absolutes.<sup>24</sup>

An immediate criticism springs to mind: Is not the absence of independent ground the same as moral relativism? To do without an independent ground is to do without a strict formulation of human rights. Ironically, it is also to be unable to refer to any standard such as "participatory politics," "individual autonomy," or even "absence of an independent ground." Perceived in this fashion, the argument becomes nonsensical. I will attempt to make sense of the distinction.

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<sup>23</sup> "The axioms of Modernity assumed that the surface complexity of nature and humanity distracts us from an underlying Order, which is intrinsically simple and permanent. By now, however, physical scientists recognize as well as anyone that natural phenomena *in fact* embody an "intrinsically simple" order only to a limited degree: novel theories of physical, biological, or social *disorder* (or "chaos") allow us to balance the intellectual books. We may temporarily ("for the purpose of calculation") shelve the contexts of our problems, but, eventually, their complete resolution obliges us to put these calculations back into their larger human frame, with all its concrete features and complexities." Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 201.

<sup>24</sup> According to Amatai Etzioni, however, "Communal values must be judged by external and overriding criteria, based on shared human experience." Some specific policy measures he believes will meet these criteria include: seatbelt laws, sobriety roadblocks, anti-loitering laws (to curb drug traffic), tougher divorce laws, drug testing, flexible work schedules (for family care purposes), moral education at school, reducing the role of private money in elections, and banning firearms ("civil disarmament"). Obviously, these sorts of policy matters engender significant debate today, but Etzioni assumes they will not be debatable in communitarian society. In the end, then, he has preordained the outcome of participation--the antithesis of strong democracy. Etzioni, 256.

In truth, the strong democrat cannot hold up concepts of autonomy or rights as moral baselines to counter the charge of moral relativism. The strong democrat has neither a set of commandments nor a bill of rights to fall back upon. The full faith of the strong democrat resides in the democratic community's ability to deal with its dilemmas pragmatically.<sup>25</sup>

But not just any collection of individuals thrown together will form a strong democratic community. The strong democrat believes that the democratic community is strengthened by individual autonomy within it, more so, in fact, than it could be strengthened by any set of contractual parameters. Witness the fate of the German republic's social contract after the rise of fascism--when autonomy is lost, "contracts" are revealed as the paper fantasies they are. Only strong, autonomous individuals can protect the autonomy of the community (or, to use other terminology, the solvency of the state), and strong, autonomous individuals are created neither in market societies nor in unitary ones.

So then, the strong democrat advocates individual autonomy as something to be encouraged and nurtured in the interests of the community, and it encourages a strong community to foster and protect individual autonomy. The relationship is reciprocal, circular, with neither the individual nor the community held as a baseline consideration. The strong democratic community is a hermeneutical construct, and within this construct a body of values, continually evolving, will be held. That the evolution of values will be

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<sup>25</sup> Arendt was a stout defender of constitutional rights. I imagine, however, she would envision them as pragmatic instruments, being as subject to revision in practice as ours is in theory. Indeed, there is nothing in the strong democratic viewpoint to contradict the notion of a constitution in the sense of a living document.

continual is not the same as "anything goes" in the sense of moral relativism, since no community ever lets "anything go." The community will deal with dilemmas pragmatically as they arise.

Dilemmas *will* arise, the strong democrat holds, since no set of strictures can ever be laid out to deal with all future contingencies. Through its adherence to liberal democracy, America has striven to maintain a patchwork set of strictures through a process of "balancing rights," and contradictions have inevitably ensued.<sup>26</sup> In a sense, then, strong democracy recognizes explicitly what liberal society recognizes implicitly as we engage in our "balancing act," only it does so without a sense of moral vertigo.

Let us now apply our understanding of "absence of independent ground" to our discussion of national service.

Bruce Chapman criticizes comparison of nonmilitary service to military service, saying that "serving in the library at home" is far different from "getting shot at overseas." The American Legion and other military veteran's groups oppose the Clinton plan on similar grounds, with one representative asserting that "it was unfair to provide better benefits to those who took community-service jobs than to those who volunteer for potentially dangerous military service."<sup>27</sup> The complaint is not new; when John F. Kennedy sought establishment of the Peace Corps, Richard Nixon said he proposed "to send as America's representatives to other nations young men [whom] he calls volunteers but

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<sup>26</sup> Does the "right" to free speech extend to yelling "fire!" in a crowded theater? Does the "right" to bear arms extend to nuclear weapons? Whose "rights" prevail in the case of abortion, the mother's or those of the fetus?

<sup>27</sup> Ruth Marcus, "Clinton Presents National Service Plan," *The Washington Post* (May 1, 1993), A1.

who in truth in many instances would be trying to escape the draft."<sup>28</sup> Though the relative utility of military ventures compared to nonmilitary ones is debatable, the logic being employed maintains that military service is more legitimate simply because participants face physical danger in its prosecution.<sup>29</sup> Carrying the logic further, what is being asserted is that violent, male modalities of service entail greater sacrifice and thus are of greater value to a society than any other (the word is *patriotism*, not *matriotism*).

What is evident is a strongly-held preconception of what constitutes true service, in this case a bias toward a military conception. A truly participatory service program, conceived in the absence of independent ground, cannot begin with such a preconception. Nor can it begin with preconceptions of particular service benefits such as job training and employment, or with particular services such as maintenance of public works. It most certainly cannot begin with a notion of a "true spirit of service" having to do with volunteerism, charity, or a "freewill offering to God." By accepting the notion of politics in the absence of independent ground one therefore dismisses much of the national service debate as irrelevant.

The implications of the "absence of independent ground" criterion for the structure of the strong democratic service program are primarily by way of reinforcing the point already made about the need for true participation within the program--rather than beginning with preconceived notions of what goals participants will set and how they

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<sup>28</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 606, as cited in T. Zane Reeves, *The Politics of the Peace Corps & VISTA* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1988), 20.

<sup>29</sup> I would point out that physical risk is not confined to the military arena. A community service worker in East Los Angeles may be as likely to "hear a shot fired in anger" as the average member of the armed services. The teacher (or library worker!) in the average high school today faces a significant threat of violence, and the modern health care provider enters a workplace fraught with potential harm, including infection with the HIV or hepatitis viruses.

will accomplish them, such determinations should be left to the participants themselves. Participants should be allowed to participate. Arguably, even the service models provided by VISTA and Peace Corps programs fail by this criterion. As T. Zane Reeves explains, the service programs founded under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations conceived of service as social and political activism:

VISTA and Peace Corps volunteers were expected to work toward the same result: liberation of the poor from poverty. Antipoverty volunteers in both programs were required to...be a change-agent resource for the community. Thus antipoverty and Peace Corps programming was intended to change the lot of the poor via a strategy of planned social intervention. The catalyst for change was the full-time volunteer.<sup>30</sup>

The distinction I perceive is this: Service in the strong democratic sense is not accomplished by participation in an elite corps whose members venture out among the masses with a preconceived agenda of enlightening them through planned social intervention. It is accomplished when the elite/mass mentality is overcome and citizens work together on an equal basis toward common goals.<sup>31</sup>

The third point to consider in the explication of the formal definition of strong democracy is "proximate self-legislation." The importance of legislative proximity to the democratic participant invokes the issue of democratic scale. How large can a political community be and still allow for meaningful participation of all of its members? It is a common assertion that true democracy is impracticable beyond a very small population--

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<sup>30</sup> T. Zane Reeves, *The Politics of the Peace Corps and VISTA* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1988), 15.

<sup>31</sup> I realize I may be doing a disservice to the thousands of volunteers who have participated in these programs by characterizing their motives too harshly; I feel the need to distinguish the philosophical foundations of the different types of programs, however.



Aristotle remarked that, "In order to give decisions on matters of justice, and for the purpose of distributing offices on merit, it is necessary that the citizens should know each other and know what kind of people they are."<sup>32</sup> If the population is too large, "Who will be their crier unless he has the voice of a Stentor?"<sup>33</sup> It is true that technology has permitted instantaneous, widespread communication, expanding the range of voice, but this does not solve all of the difficulties inherent in large-scale discursive participation. Simple time considerations demonstrate the impossibility of all-inclusive participation in a debate among a population the size of the modern nation-state, or even among a population the size of many modern cities.<sup>34</sup> Here the strong democrat adopts a position that is tenable from the communitarian and the libertarian standpoint--for self-legislation (direct participation) to exist in a political community the size of the United States, decision making must be decentralized where possible to locate decisions within the domain of the affected citizenry. Proximate self-legislation provides an environment in which the citizen is affected by legislation he or she participates in creating, is likely to be familiar with pertinent considerations surrounding it, and is less likely to be daunted by the scale of the debate and more likely to believe participation is meaningful.<sup>35</sup>

How, then, does the concept of proximate self-legislation bear on our arguments concerning national service?

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair (St. Ives Place, England: Clays Ltd., 1992), 405.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, 404.

<sup>34</sup> Mancur Olsen is criticized elsewhere in this paper for his adoption of the self-interest paradigm, but he does make a valid point in "The Logic" in this regard--with the effort required to participate in such a large-scale debate balanced against the relative impact, or *significance*, of that participation, simple frustration will ensue and the citizen will rationally opt out. Mancur Olsen, "The Logic," chapter 2 in *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation and Social Rigidities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 17-35.

<sup>35</sup> This argument may be construed to indicate that there will always be a role for representation, since there will always be national concerns that lie outside the scale of direct participatory government.

When Chapman complains that a national service program would impinge upon the "independent sector," we are able to dismiss his argument for its contractual implications and its bias toward the free-market ideal. When he speaks of the program being "contaminated by government determination of goals" and "bureaucratization of procedures," we again see shades of an us/them concept of government, but we are somewhat more sympathetic. It is easy to conceive of government as "them" when decisions are removed from their domain of effect and one must live with the effects within that domain--this is why the strong democrat advocates proximate self-legislation. But how can one argue for legislative proximity and then argue for a "national" service program? Only if the program is implemented such that true participation is allowed within it, such that decisions remain within their context. In this sense, the service program is not an imposition of centralized authority but a guarantee of space in which authority can be exercised locally.

The final point which will be considered in the explication of the formal definition of strong democracy is "democratic transformation." This concept may be the most important divergence of strong democracy from the traditional parameters of debate. It will be the most important point of consideration in the discussion of national service in the strong democratic vein.

If government is the right and responsibility of every citizen, every citizen must be prepared to exercise this right and bear this responsibility. Yet to envision such a citizenry is to contradict the fundamental "independent ground" of modern political science--the Hobbesian conceptualization of human nature as a fixed, prepolitical quantity,

characterized by "rational self-interest." This conceptualization is the cornerstone of Madisonian democracy and remains virtually unchanged in the liberal theories of Anthony Downs, Mancur Olsen and the present-day "science" of game theory.

We see that in rejecting reductionism, the strong democratic perspective denounces not only present-day politics, but the "ontological presuppositions" of present-day liberal political science as well.<sup>36</sup> Political science applied to current, thin democratic systems fails to account for the effect these systems have on the citizens they contain. It is assumed that human "preferences" are independent variables related to human nature, and the bulk of contemporary writing deals with questions of how well or poorly these preferences are "aggregated" through institutions of elections, laws, interest groups, the press, and so on. The strong democrat presupposes first that these preferences cannot be truly "aggregated" without direct participation on the part of the citizenry and, second, that human preferences, or human natures, are not independent of the means of expression available to them, their opportunities for significant participation. If significant speech and action make up the *telos* of a human existence, and the modern human is thwarted in his or her quest for *telos*, that human's observed behaviors are more likely pathological deviances than universally applicable preference patterns. These pathological deviances characterize mass society, and mass society is not a reliable indicator of political potential. "Masses make noise, citizens deliberate; masses behave, citizens act;

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<sup>36</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Terence Ball, who points out, "A positivistically conceived science of politics applies not to just any world, but to one in which political activity is understood in instrumental terms as the pursuit of interests of a broadly economic kind." Terence Ball, "The Ontological Presuppositions and Political Consequences of a Social Science," in Daniel R. Sabia, Jr. and Jerald Wallulis, eds., *Changing Social Science: Critical Theory and Other Critical Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 31.

masses collide and intersect, citizens engage, share, and contribute," Barber says. "At the moment when 'masses' start deliberating, acting, sharing, and contributing, they cease to be masses and become citizens. Only then do they 'participate.'"<sup>37</sup>

How, then, is mass society transformed into strong democratic community? To Galbraith, the "open sesame" to the new class was to be education. We see now that a new class education does not lead directly to a new class occupation. What is required is a more fundamental transformation than that afforded through education (as that term is currently applied) but which avoids relying upon the type of indoctrination espoused by the communitarian, a democratic self-transformation that respects and preserves individual autonomy. What are required are democratic skills combined with trust in a system that will respect those skills to produce a strong public orientation among private individuals. These skills are developed only through practice, and the trust is developed only over time. Thus the skills required for successful strong democratic participation are developed only in strong democratic community. As Barber says, "Only in strong democratic community are individuals transformed. Their autonomy is preserved because their vision of their own freedom and interest has been enlarged to include others; and their obedience to the common force is rendered legitimate because their enlarged vision enables them to perceive in the common force the working of their own wills."<sup>38</sup> This is the middle-ground viewpoint from which strong democracy observes human nature--human nature is not a fixed, prepolitical quantity, yet neither need it be pounded into conformity in order for a democratic community to thrive.

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<sup>37</sup> Barber, 154-155.

<sup>38</sup> Barber, 232.

These are the goals of democratic transformation, and that these goals are attainable, that democratic transformation is possible, is supported by the observation of a similar transformation which has already taken place and is ongoing--in the reverse direction.

Alexis de Tocqueville warned in the nineteenth century that liberal institutions tended to direct citizens' energies inward toward private, family affairs, and that this would ultimately prove disastrous for democratic society. Arendt makes a similar distinction; a society which values work and labor above the *vita activa* is prioritizing the private sphere, and she argues that there can be no satisfactory substitute in private life for the public experience of the *vita activa*. Arendt shows that the modern focus upon the private is an inversion of the classical conception of the term, the negative connotations of which are still evident in the word's etymological cousin, *privation*. "To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an 'objective' relationship with them...to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself."<sup>39</sup> By Arendt's logic, we have been transformed on a societal level with respect toward our conceptions of "public" and "private," and that transformation is effected on an individual level through "participation" in liberal society. On a related theme is Albert Hirschman's outline of the evolution of the conception of *interest* (*self-interest*) from that of a vice, a societal evil, to that of a "countervailing passion," a societal good.<sup>40</sup> I would argue that it was the employment of this

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<sup>39</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 54.

<sup>40</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 28 *et passim*.

countervailing passion "as an important intellectual tool for the purposes of constitutional engineering" that has elevated the private sphere at the expense of the public.

Our faith in the constitutional, engineered society can itself be characterized as the result of transformation. Toulmin, along with Thomas Kuhn, pioneered the notion of paradigm shift in the sciences, the notion that scientific knowledge is less evolutionary than revolutionary, that, rather than exhibiting a steady progress toward perfect understanding of universal truths, science progresses through series of belief systems that do not necessarily improve in validity. Each paradigm shift therefore entails a transformation of belief systems, thought patterns, and rhetorical understanding. The modern paradigm, Toulmin says, has its roots in the scientific, rationalistic response to the chaos of the Thirty Years War. Our terrified flight from chaos precipitated our "quest for certainty," our unthinking faith in the reductionist science of Descartes and his progeny; we rashly abandoned the practical wisdom of Montaigne in the process.<sup>41</sup> Nowhere, Toulmin says, is this reductionist tendency more apparent than in the political science of Descartes' contemporary, Thomas Hobbes.

Without being framed as such, other observations have been made that support the notion of our society being transformative. For instance, Robert Dahl, in reducing "Madisonian Democracy" to a set of hypotheses, lists as Hypothesis 1: "If unrestrained by external checks, any given individual or group of individuals will tyrannize over others." This hypothesis, he continues, is founded upon the Hobbesian principle that "Men are instruments of their desires."<sup>42</sup> Thus we see Dahl inadvertently supporting Toulmin's

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<sup>41</sup> It is ironic that the natural heirs of Descartes, the practitioners of the hard sciences whom social scientists have tried so hard to emulate, now find themselves confronted by a new incarnation of chaos.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

assertion that Hobbes (with his cohorts) represents the fountainhead of modern political thought; we also recall Hirschman's charge of self-interested behavior being constitutionally engineered. Dahl also asserts that the attempt to employ interest as a societal good has been prematurely judged a success. "To assume that this country has remained democratic because of its Constitution seems to me an obvious reversal of the relation; it is much more plausible to suppose that the Constitution has remained because our society is essentially democratic."<sup>43</sup> Dahl maintains that it is the presence of "social prerequisites," the antithesis of pure self-interestedness, among the citizenry that makes democratic institutions viable.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba note, "A democratic form of participatory political system requires as well a political culture consistent with it."<sup>45</sup> In a more recent comparative analysis of the theme, Robert Putnam shows that the history of Northern Italy, with its traditions of "'tower societies' and other self-help associations," in contrast to that of Southern Italy, fostered the development of a civic culture and explains the relative success of that region in adapting to democratic institutions.<sup>46</sup> In explaining the roots of this phenomenon in Northern Italy, Putnam alludes to Hirschman's "economics of love and public spirit." "[T]hese are resources whose supply may well increase rather than decrease through use," Hirschman says, and "these resources do not remain intact if they stay unused--like the ability to speak a foreign language or to

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1956), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Dahl, 83.

<sup>44</sup> I say Dahl "inadvertently" supports these notions because he elsewhere contradicts them. As Terence Ball points out, Dahl claims that observation of modern human behavior "disproves" Aristotle's characterization of the human as *zoon politikon*, showing instead a self-interested nature. Ball, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 172.

play the piano, these moral resources are likely to become depleted and to atrophy if not used."<sup>47</sup>

The phrases "social prerequisites," "civic culture," and "public spirit" describe a similar phenomenon, a phenomenon in decline, the strong democrat would argue, in the unhealthy climate of thin democracy. If we understand the complementary concepts of private orientation and self-interest, not as prepolitical universals but as paradigmatic constructs, we see that our present political culture is the result of a transformation process, that transformation is inevitable. If a culture can be transformed in one direction, it can be transformed in another, and this is the fundamental claim of strong democracy.

How then does the concept of democratic transformation relate to our arguments for and against national service?

In our previous discussion, the principles of market economics were considered as spurious distractions, irrelevant to the topic of national service in the strong democratic sense. When we consider the transformative effects of existence within market society, these principles assume a more insidious aspect and demand our attention. In order for opportunity for democratic transformation to exist, space must be preserved in the midst of a strong transformative influence in the opposite direction.

Preserving such a space is not a simple matter. Though Bruce Chapman criticizes the concept of universal service as "coercive utopianism," the strong democrat may well reply that market society has coercive features of its own. Chapman's implicit assertion is that, were the individual not compelled to enter a service program, the individual would

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<sup>47</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, "Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse," *Rival Views of Market Society and Other Recent Essays* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986), 155.



be free to choose his or her own occupation in the free market of labor. The individual might very well choose a voluntary, service-oriented occupation, such as the military, but it is not government's business to compel the individual toward any such choice. The strong democrat responds that few individuals enjoy the freedom envisioned in this scenario, that the marketplace hands rather dismal prospects to a great many of the newly majoritized.

The market determines value through a calculus completely at odds with the strong democratic vision of human *telos*. Consider the implications of the commonly applied terms, "overeducated" or "overqualified." An individual can aspire to the new class, display all the true grit the market is supposed to reward toward qualifying for his or her ascension, and find that the market has provided space for more fry cooks than philosophers. The individual has no choice, however; he or she is "compelled" into the occupation the market has determined to be of value.<sup>48</sup>

The market, as it exists, is compulsory, and so the individual is at present compelled into a transformative environment at odds with democratic ideals. In order for democratic participation to be possible, individuals must be provided a space free of the market. It shall be argued here that a national service program, conceived in the sense of Arendt's parallel polis, can provide such a space for democratic participation and transformation.

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<sup>48</sup> Under these conditions, it is difficult to conceive of enlistment into any service program, or any occupation, being truly "voluntary." In fact, enlistment figures for the modern military service show that selection occurs on a basis that is primarily economic. If we realize that the freedom of the marketplace is mythological, we cannot condemn a compulsory service system for delaying the individual's entrance into it. In fact, a service program which maintains individual autonomy as of primary value, as would a strong democratic service program, will provide far more freedom for far more individuals than the modern market.

### Part III - An Oasis of Service

Before proceeding further and adopting yet another of Arendt's concepts as part of our understanding of strong democracy, we should address the criticism Barber and others have levied upon her. Arendt is charged as being antidemocratic and elitist, or at least contradictory in her ideals. Indeed, it may be confusing to consider that the same person who speaks of the European working class writing "one of the most glorious and probably the most promising chapter of recent history"<sup>49</sup> speaks later of an "aristocratic form of government [that] would spell the end of general suffrage as we understand it today."<sup>50</sup> Isaac reconciles the two strains of thought by pointing out that Arendt's aristocracy is non-exclusive; it would admit everyone were they interested. And it is precisely the capacity to generate such interest that Arendt admires in the revolutionary moment, in the elementary republic, in the parallel polis. By providing attractive "islands in a sea or oases in a desert," elementary republics serve as instruments to regenerate democracy. Arendt is merely recognizing the impossibility of converting mass society *en masse*; rather than proposing to replace institutions of liberal democracy, she proposes to emplace transformative, democratic institutions that can coexist with them.<sup>51</sup>

Mark Warren, in defending the viability of strong ("expansive") democratic politics in modern American society, requires that we as political scientists recognize the shifting boundaries of political space. Politics is no longer merely conducted within constitutionally-proscribed parameters through traditional institutions, and its

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<sup>49</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 193.

<sup>50</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, cited in Isaac, 157.

<sup>51</sup> "It is only with great circumspection, she held, that we can undertake to construct political institutions, and even then we cannot proceed *ex nihilo*. The problem with modern ideologues is precisely their unbridled confidence in themselves and in their projects of wholesale transformation." Isaac, 159.

practitioners may have no aims for infiltrating or usurping traditional institutions.

"[P]olitical movements," he says, "are increasingly taking on what Cohen and Arato call a 'self-limiting' form: with some exceptions, they do not aim for power within or control over the state, but rather at protecting domains of decision-making within civil society."<sup>52</sup>

In a similar vein, Toulmin speaks of a postmodern transition "from Leviathan to Lilliput." On one level, he says, Western history may be read as reversing its tracks; whereas the Peace of Westphalia stripped the pope of power and inaugurated the nation-state, the nation-state is once again subject to central authority in forms such as the United Nations and the European Community. Actually, such is not the case, since the authority of modern supranational institutions does not approximate the authority wielded by medieval popes. "In apparent paradox, that external authority today belongs to other, *non-governmental* institutions...The only institutions whose moral opinions command general respect and are generally heard as stating 'the decent opinion of Humankind' are Amnesty International, the World Psychiatric Association, and similar organizations, which are devoid of physical power or 'armed force.'"<sup>53</sup>

Without tackling the state head-on, but by worrying it at its flanks, these self-limiting, Lilliputian organizations are carving out a political space for themselves.<sup>54</sup> In the Arendtian sense, these organizations are revolutionary; they are elementary republics,

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<sup>52</sup> Mark Warren, "New Patterns of Politicization: Implications for Participatory Democratic Theory," paper delivered at 1993 meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA, 1993), 27.

<sup>53</sup> Toulmin, 197.

<sup>54</sup> The impulse to categorize these organizations as "interest groups" may be difficult for the conventional political scientist to resist. I would ask such a skeptic to explain how self-interest is served by participation in such groups.

and those who choose to participate in them are elites by her definition. Surely for Ar-  
endt to argue on their behalf cannot be rightfully characterized as antidemocratic.

But how can a national service program be characterized as a parallel polis? How  
can Leviathan spawn Lilliput? It can do so only through adherence to the strong demo-  
cratic principles outlined here, through creating a space for participatory politics, by fore-  
going preordained goals and preconceived conceptions of service, and by permitting  
self-administration.

Admittedly, this stance must suffer some compromise to be made realistic--  
citizens today, in their role of governmental clients ("taxpayers"), will require some form  
of guidelines. "Protection from the market" sounds a little too much like a "free ride,"  
and self-administration sounds a little too much like a license to "do your own thing,"  
'60s-style. And given the fact that participants will be drawn from our market society,  
these objections are quite warranted. A society that has successfully bred a population of  
free-riders does indeed have to deal with the free-rider problem.

It is no wonder that proponents of national service succumb to the temptation to  
cast their argument in terms familiar to the market society: participants will "pay" with  
labor for "benefits" such as college funding. Succumbing to this temptation inevitably  
leads to a quagmire of counterclaims by free-market advocates, however, and these coun-  
terclaims are quite justified from their paradigmatic perspective: "We already have a  
market to handle such transactions. Never mind that many needs are going unmet; the  
market will correct itself over time." One simply cannot argue against an opponent that

has the internal logic of the paradigm as an ally, an opponent that stands within a familiar hall of mirrors.

A compromise is in order, but we must beware: compromise too far, cast the service program in terms of a market transaction, and one will achieve exactly that. Would anything be accomplished by such a program? Actually, it might.

A significant amount of progress toward strong democratic transformation might be achieved simply through a successful challenge to existing notions of service. Many suggestions are offered in the contemporary national service debate as to what sort of service participants might provide. For instance, a selling point during the Clinton campaign was that the national service initiative combined with the retooling of the defense industry would free resources for the repair and maintenance of the national infrastructure--a perfect echo of Barber's proposition. Other suggestions include having participants work in education and health care.<sup>55</sup> Though incorporating these specific propositions into the initial service program legislation would rob the citizenry of participation in a significant decision, incorporating any of them would be a step in the direction of a more pluralistic conception of service; it would be a step toward a *transformation* that recognizes brands of service outside the realm of traditional "patriotism." We witnessed Clinton appealing to this sort of transformation when he attempted to define nonmilitary domestic issues, both issues of nurture such as education and health care and issues of *faber* such as the maintenance of the physical infrastructure, in terms of national security. Among other things, this new conception would recognize

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<sup>55</sup> Having service participants work in health care would seem a natural complement to the proposed national health plan.

contributions traditionally relegated to the female in society, the contributions of Antigone as much as those of Creon.<sup>56</sup> How might a community service "veteran" come to be perceived after such a transformation?

As I said, even a simple tit-for-tat, transaction-based service program such as the Clinton initiative could have significant transformative effects. But I would like to propose a more ambitious program. Before discussing my proposition, however, we must deal with the nagging question of whether the service program ought to be compulsory.

We will recall that Barber presents three arguments in favor of universal service, to which Chapman offers a single objection: governmental compulsion is wrong, period. We will consider Chapman's objection first.

Actually, we have already discussed several grounds upon which to reject Chapman's response. His flat denial of governmental compulsion is based upon a contractual conception of government, which strong democracy rejects. Any constitution must be considered as a living document that must evolve with the population it serves.

Ironically enough, this rejection of a permanent contract, binding through generations, is in complete accordance with a fundamental tradition of liberal democratic thought. To quote Thomas Paine:

There never did, there never will, and there never can exist a Parliament, or any description of men, or any generation of men, in any country, possessed of the right or the power of binding and controlling posterity to the "end of time," or of commanding forever how the world shall be governed or who shall govern it; and therefore all such clauses, acts, or declarations, by which the makers of them attempt to do what they have neither the right nor the power to do, nor the power to execute, are in themselves null and void.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> This formulation was provided to me courtesy of Joel Schwartz, professor of government at the College of William and Mary in Virginia.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and Other Political Writings* (New York: Macmillan Publishing

Quite a forceful passage, and one I believe quite correct in its sentiment. Its implication for Chapman's argument is rather clear; whatever contract the founders may have drawn up, we are free to revise it.

Another approach to Chapman's objection has also already been covered. We do not perceive the dichotomy of compulsion versus freedom in the way he does. The service program is envisioned as an environment of democratic participation, and thus an environment that is truly free in a way market liberty, liberty of locomotion, cannot approximate; we have also identified a compulsory nature inherent in the allegedly "free" market. In a sense, then, we have completely reversed his categorization of free and compulsory environments.

An additional argument can be made against Chapman's objection to governmental compulsion. It is the argument provided by precedent. Consider just one aspect of current conventions: We require that citizens attend schools, public or private, until they reach the "age of majority." We consider education to be important preparation for majority status, so much so as to justify a roughly 12-year infringement upon individual liberties. If we consider the transformative experience to be had within the service environment as important as education toward preparation for citizenship, how can compulsory service be denied while compulsory education is allowed? How are the two differentiated?

The liberal democrat may point out that, when we enforce compulsory education, we are dictating behavior to minors; once they reach adulthood, we allow them "freedom." Our "age of majority" is a nebulous concept, though. Ostensibly, one reaches

majority at age 18, when one acquires the right to vote and to own real property, when one is considered financially independent from one's parents, when one can be held accountable for criminal actions, when one can be required to serve jury duty, and when the male citizen can be drafted into military service. But consider the numerous contradictions we permit with respect to our majority concept: Increasingly, our courts treat adolescents as adults. Conversely, one cannot purchase alcoholic beverages until the age of 21. An individual must reach age 20 to enter the foreign service, age 35 to run for president. When applying for federal loans and grants, the "adult" student is qualified on the basis of his or her parents' income, as though he or she were still a dependent. We see that the "age of majority" is another abstract concept which liberal society has found it necessary to "balance" against other considerations. Again, the strong democrat does not necessarily find fault with such "balancing" but does demand explicit recognition of the failure of the abstract principle to be applied in practice. And we return to the question, how is compulsory service differentiated from compulsory education?<sup>58</sup>

In dealing with Chapman's objection to compulsory service, we have basically constructed a negative argument: we see now why compulsory service *should not* be ruled out. We will turn now to the more positive arguments of Barber, concerning why compulsory service *should* be implemented.

Barber's three arguments for compulsory service, we will recall, are as follows: first, service is an obligation, and that obligation is universal; second, only universal service will guarantee a democratic military, and only a democratic military will be able

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<sup>58</sup> Of course, the radical libertarian response would be to denounce compulsory education as well. The radical libertarian carries faith in the marketplace to the extreme, and the strong democratic position in this regard has been made clear.



to resist mercenary deployment; and third, universal service will help to overcome class and other social divisions.

As we have recently discussed, Barber succumbs in his first argument in favor of compulsory service to the temptation to frame the argument in contractual, or transactual terms. We reject these terms.

Barber's second argument, dealing with the military, is problematic. His point about the democratized military being the best protection against despotism and military foolhardiness is well-taken, recalling the fears of a standing army felt by the Founders. By Barber's logic, we do best at either extreme, either going without a standing army or making military service compulsory. Having an army of some of the people, as we do, is the most dangerous option to exercise. Thus we do see a distinctive feature of military service after all, not in the sense that military service is more legitimate, but in the sense that the military corps itself can be dangerous to the polis. Yet when Barber outlines his ideas for a set of service corps, his military corps is but one of a set of options--his is not really a democratic army either. The question would seem to be, do we need a standing army? If so, we need universal conscription into the military service, or into a service program that includes military training and readiness as part of a larger service mission.

I question the logic that leads to consideration of our options in these extremes, however. Regardless of whether participation in the military is compulsory and universal, it is the control over the military that must be made more democratic. As long as our government is representative, composed of "them," rather than democratic, composed of "us," it will always be possible for "them" to use military power in ways of which we do

not approve. A hawkish government could always conduct small-scale operations such as we have witnessed in Grenada, Libya, Somalia, and now Rwanda and Haiti through deployment of secretive, elite corps, even if the main body of the military service is universally representative. Even a full-blown war, such as we witnessed in the Persian Gulf, can be engineered as a gradually escalating situation through initial deployment of such elite corps (as was done in Vietnam, our "undeclared" war). Truly then, the issue of military control reverts to the larger issue of democratic transformation of the society as a whole. Democratization of the military is not a sufficiently compelling reason to require universal service.

Barber's final reason for advocating universal service, having to do with overcoming social barriers, is admirable in its intentions, and not without logical merit. Bill Ford (D-Mich), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, claims his decision to support the Clinton initiative was directly related to his navy experiences during World War II. He met people of many different backgrounds who were brought together by universal conscription; he later went to college on the GI Bill and discovered, "Christ, I'm just as smart as these rich guys. It changed my whole life."<sup>59</sup> The reasoning seems sound, and I am not about to contradict it. Making national service compulsory on the basis of this reasoning is a large, ambitious leap, however, and smacks of the sort of "project of wholesale transformation" of which Arendt was rightfully suspicious.

I have other misgivings about making national service compulsory. For one, I perceive an "opportunity cost" inherent in a compulsory system of a type different from that imagined by Chapman. A compulsory service would necessarily have an age

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<sup>59</sup> Waldman, 49.

requirement; service would have to be completed before, say, age 25. Two opportunities are sacrificed by this requirement: the opportunity to have different age groups participate together, and the opportunity for an individual to enter the program at the moment most propitious to the individual *and* to the program by dint of his or her maturity and personal circumstances. I question whether a young adult bred on market culture can be dragged kicking and screaming into a service environment and then be successfully "transformed;" transformation in this sense would bear a closer resemblance to the communitarian goal of socialization, or indoctrination. That same individual, however, having slain enough corporate dragons (or flipped enough burgers), may suddenly discover an interest in a voluntary service program, truly perceiving it as an oasis in the desert of market morality. At that point in time, the individual will be a greater asset to the program, and the program will be of greater service to the individual.

Having developed my argument in favor of a voluntary national service program, I will now outline some suggestions for a compromise proposal for a service system closer to the strong democratic ideal than the sort of transaction-based system, with nationally mandated performance requirements, represented by the Clinton proposal.

I would suggest a state-run system of service programs. States would be induced through a fund-matching incentive to implement a network of programs conforming only to very broad guidelines; specifics of design details would be left for states to work out themselves (in the interest of proximate self-legislation). Funding requirements should be minimal; health care, room, and board for the duration of service are all that are required to create an oasis. If a national health plan is implemented, the requirements would be

reduced to room and board. States could be very creative in supplying these needs; the first few rounds of participants might be given the task of building or renovating their own housing. Of course, there will be administrative costs, but these costs should be an inducement for states gradually to turn over administration to service participants (assuming they balk at doing so initially), perhaps as an option for a second "tour of duty."

A national menu of service programs will provide access to a plurality of service conceptions; an individual who is uninterested or even opposed to, say, wetlands reclamation in his or her home state might be highly motivated to serve in a program of, say, adult literacy instruction offered elsewhere.

Admission to programs should be by lottery rather than by some preconceived criteria held for the "ideal" service candidate. I perceive three benefits stemming from this requirement: First, this requirement is conducive to the strong democratic principle of an aristocracy of everyone; the democratic elite is characterized only by interest in participation. Second, and related to the first point, a membership of all-comers will more likely create an environment capable of overcoming social barriers. Third, this requirement will obviate the need for a large bureaucratic machine dedicated to processing applications.

These are all of my details and requirements for a voluntary national service program. Conspicuously absent is any schema for tying educational aid or other inducements to the service program; states may decide upon such inducements if they wish, but I believe they are beside the point. All that is relevant to the point of providing a transformative, democratic oasis is present: Opportunity for significant participation, absence of

independent ground (or, at least, a broader ground than a nationally-mandated program would provide), and proximate self-legislation. Judging by my knowledge of my own peers, I believe such a system would not want for participants, and providing this much opportunity to harness participatory "other-interest" would work significant democratic transformation upon our privatized society.

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## VITA

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