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A CASE FOR STRONG DEMOCRACY

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## Abstract

This series of essays is divided into four parts and explores Benjamin Barber's theory of strong democracy as presented in his work *Strong Democracy*. Pursuant to Barber's idea of strong democracy, this series of essays connects the idea of deliberative democracy with the idea of participatory democracy. Toward this end, in Part 1 I explore idea of deliberative democracy, specifically the three dispositions of liberal democracy; in Part 2, I explore the foil to the three dispositions of liberal democracy, namely strong democracy; in Part 3, I link the idea of deliberative democracy with the idea of participatory democracy through the use of interviews with prominent practitioners of civic and community engagement and corresponding commentary; and in Part 4, I provide a personal narrative focusing on my own experiences with the discipline of philosophy, and the relationship of such experiences with the ideas of deliberative and participatory democracy.

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## Part 1. Three Dispositions in Liberal Democracy: The Anarchist, The Realist, and The Minimalist

### *The Anarchist, the Realist, and the Minimalist*

“Liberal democracy is based on premises about human nature, knowledge, and politics that are genuinely liberal but not intrinsically democratic. Its conception of the individual and of individual interest undermines the democratic practices upon which both individuals and their interests depend.”

–Barber, *Strong Democracy*

In *Strong Democracy* Benjamin Barber presents three dispositions of liberal democracy: (1) the anarchist, (2) the realist, and (3) the minimalist. Each of these dispositions entails “a distinctive set of attitudes, inclinations, and political values” toward liberal democracy: the anarchist endorses individualism, privacy, and rights; the realist endorses power, law, and coercive mediation; and the minimalist endorses tolerance, wariness of government, and pluralism (Barber 5). How these dispositions view the individual, Barber’s thesis argues, is liberal but not intrinsically democratic. It will be the goal of this essay to examine this thesis in regard to the three dispositions of liberal democracy.

Nearly all political theories (including the three dispositions of liberal democracy) are grounded in a state of nature, or as Locke states in his *Second Treatise of Government*: “[the] state men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature; without asking leave, or depending on the will of any other man” (Locke 101). The state of nature, which attempts to trace the origins of political foundation, and in which human beings are considered in their beginnings, consistently results in conflict among human beings (e.g., the ideas of “scarce resources, insatiable appetites, or a natural lust for power and glory” among human beings). Accordingly, in order to attempt to resolve this conflict so that each human being can secure survival, a political foundation is formed.

Each of the three dispositions of liberal democracy presents a unique state of nature, a unique conflict that arises in that state of nature, and a unique remedy in order to resolve such a conflict.

The anarchist disposition imagines a state of nature where individuals are free, autonomous, and distinct from one another. In this framework, individuals live in isolation, distanced from others, and, because they possess the intellectual and physical wherewithal in a fruitful state of nature, can successfully survive. The state of nature thereby becomes a place where individuals can “satisfy their hunger under an oak tree, quench their thirst at the first stream, find their foot at the foot of the same stream that supplied, and thus all their needs are satisfied” (Rousseau 19).

Because the anarchist believes individuals can fulfill their needs in the state of nature, the anarchist views the conflict that arises in the state of nature as “a problem created by political interaction rather than the condition that gives rise to politics” (Barber 6). That is to say, for the anarchist, a political foundation, by intervening in a state of nature where human beings can already fulfill their needs, is the source societal conflict, not the solution to such a conflict. In theory, then, the anarchist possesses a strong dislike of a political foundation.

To illustrate this strong dislike of a political foundation, by way of example, consider the response of the anarchist to what are “the nature and the limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised over the individual” (Mill 63). In response to this query, the anarchist seeks the end of negative freedom, namely the absence of external coercion, as negative freedom limits the strength of a political foundation through circumscribing the amount of power a political foundation wields over its constituency. And, according to anarchist, insofar that a political foundations lacks strength, do individuals possess freedom within a society.

While in the purest sense the anarchist desires the complete absence of a political foundation, the reality of this desire is not always plausible. Pragmatically speaking, the anarchist realizes that the state of nature, while able to provide for the needs of individuals, can be a dangerous, unlawful place, a place where, because of the possibility of one group of savages overtaking others through the use of force, individual freedom can be limited.

In order to address the limitation of freedom that might occur in the state of nature, the anarchist seeks “some form of association that will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate” in order to secure individual freedom (Barber 10). Yet this statement begs the question of how an individual, “while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before” (Barber 10).

The anarchist thus reaches a paradox in attempting to obtain individual freedom: If individuals live in a state of nature, others may be able to suppress their individual freedom; and, oppositely, if individuals live under a political system, the political system may be able to suppress their individual freedom.

The premises of the realist begin in the same vein as the anarchist: individuals are free in a state of nature that produces conflict. Where these two dispositions differ, however, is how each responds to such conflict: an anarchist, who wishes to secure individual freedom, responds in a way that minimizes a political foundation; conversely, the realist, who also wishes to secure individual freedom, responds in a way that embraces a political foundation. The realist understands that political associations, through uniting individuals under a common political banner and an established set of rules, provide considerable protection against the abuses of others. This considerable protection thereby suggests a greater amount of individual freedom through a political system than the amount of individual freedom in a state absent a political system, such as in the anarchist state.

To illustrate the view of the realist (as Barber also does in *Strong Democracy*) consider Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* where individuals are equally created in a state of nature “without a common power to keep them all in awe” (Hobbes 185). In *Leviathan* individuals initially like the anarchist avoid a political foundation and attempt to pursue their own ends. When this occurs, however, individuals discover they have ironically limited the ability to achieve their ends. For absent a political system “one man’s freedom” has the ability to become “the next man’s bondage”; and “man’s natural right to power” can “enslave others” (Barber 11). Hobbes aptly labels this as “that condition which is warre, as is every man against every man” (Hobbes 185).

In order to remediate this condition of “warre,” Hobbes creates a political foundation grounded in a strong statehood, law, and the rule of law. His rationale for such a creation, which is the same as the realist, is that individuals under a political system have greater potential to maintain their freedom and to achieve their ends than they would possess in an unlawful state of nature fighting among one another.

Toward the end of individual freedom through individual protection under a political system, politics for the realist becomes intimately connected with power and in turn with fear. The realist, who places a heavy emphasis on a strong statehood, law, and the rule of law, maintains a powerful state that legislates and enacts a working set of rules (e.g., laws, agreements, and regulations). The individuals who comprise the realist society are then left to live within the context of these rules; however, just as the state of nature can produce a “state of war” where individuals fight among one another, so too can individuals fight among one another in the realist state.

For to the extent individuals in a realist state understand the working set of rules that guide society, can they use those rules; to the extent they can use those rules, can they obtain power; to the extent they can obtain power, can they obtain their desired ends. Therefore, to the extent that individuals

understand how to use the working set of rules in a realist society, can they obtain their desired ends. The realist, then, has created a society with the same potential as the anarchist society for individuals to limit individual freedom: for just as the anarchist state can allow individuals to fight among one another in which physical force can suppress individual freedom, the realist state can allow individuals to fight among one another in which an understanding of the law can suppress individual freedom. An understanding of the law is thus tantamount to power.

The minimalist, whose concept of the individual and whose state of nature follows a similar pattern to the anarchist and the realist, is somewhere in between the absolute freedom of the anarchist and the extreme struggle for power of the realist. The minimalist wonders: If there is no political foundation, a state in which individuals are completely free, like the anarchist state, how can individuals protect themselves from the natural abuses of others? Likewise, if there is a political foundation, a state in which politics is intimately connected with power, like the realist state, how can individuals protect themselves from the abuses of this power? The minimalist therefore seeks a middle ground and “promotes a politics of toleration in which every interaction is hedged with temperance, every abdication of personal liberty is circumscribed by reservations, every grant of authority is hemmed in with guaranteed rights, and every surrender of privacy is safeguarded with limits” (Barber 16).

The minimalist understands that in anarchist state and in the realist state the will of the majority is particularly likely to suppress individual freedom: in the anarchist state a group of individuals can use physical force to control others and in the realist state a group of individuals can use the law to control others. Recognizing the power of the majority, the minimalist endorses a middle ground of toleration, diversity, and pluralism where a balance of power is struck between the people and the state. In this framework, individuals come to identify themselves within certain categories, societal groups, and roles that determine the way in which they act. While at first blush tolerance among groups is accepted ideal, groups nonetheless support action that is self-beneficial.

While the minimalist continually seeks “to reduce the friction that occurs when individual and statist power, when the anarchists and realists dispositions, touch,” it in itself can also be ironically limit individual freedom (Barber 17). For in a minimalist state, where the idea of pluralism allows the formation of groups and group identity, the “virtues of the pluralist society are ultimately to be assessed by how exclusively they promote enlightened self-interest: by how free the individual is and how well his interests are maintained and advanced” (Barber 18). That is, groups acting in self-interest can limit the freedom of other groups.

To illustrate this point (as used by Barber in *Strong Democracy*) consider the problems of disenfranchisement and racism in America. America is a pluralistic society in which many different groups exist. Of these existing groups, the white population constitutes a majority and the nonwhite population constitutes a minority. Now the white majority, according to the minimalist, is ostensibly tolerant to the idea of other, nonwhite groups. Yet when these other, nonwhite groups attempt to secure freedom that may in turn take power from the white majority, the white majority acts in its self-interest, namely, it attempts to continue to limit the freedom of other, nonwhite groups. In America, of course, this can be seen in the struggle for equal rights among minorities.

After tracing the routes of the anarchist, the realist, and the minimalist, it can be concluded that none of the dispositions provides a successful solution to the conflict that arises in the state of nature and that when any of these dispositions attempts to secure individual freedom, the result ironically leads to the suppression of individual freedom. Therefore, because these dispositions do not achieve their desired ends, Barber labels them as notions of “thin democracy.”

## *Scientific Preconceptions*

“In liberal thought, theory has too often been a function of the past rather than of the future, moving reductively backward through time and argument to starting points, forging chains of reason that lead back to first links and thence back to inertial frames.”

– Barber, *Strong Democracy*

In order to discover a successful solution to the conflict that arises in the state of nature, something the anarchist, the realist, and the minimalist (ideas of thin democracy) cannot generate, Barber considers the frameworks from which the three dispositions of liberal democracy produce their views. Here, Barber argues that certain preconceptions present mankind as a naturally selfish being who cannot successfully live with others and that political foundations are not primarily constructed for the advancement of humanity as a whole but, rather, are created as an “alternative to the jungle” that is the state of nature (Barber 20).

Barber argues that before the anarchist, the realist, and the minimalist present their views regarding the type of liberal democracy to espouse, they hold particular preconceptions, namely modes of reasoning, that give rise to their views. One of these preconceptions is that of science. Scientific preconceptions use precepts of scientific investigation and apply them to the study of human beings. The first notion of the scientific preconception, which creates the first link among other links, is materialism.

All three dispositions of liberal democracy begin with a scientific preconception of materialism. Materialism, which posits that human beings are material creatures who obey laws within a mechanical system of nature, is the naturally where to begin such a preconception. From materialism, then, the idea individual, atomic agents is produced: for in this material world individuals are separate, independent atoms of material. Because atomism has individuals existing as separate, independent atoms of material, the idea of commensurability, namely that individuals are equal and distinct within time and space, is produced; and, because individuals are separate from one another, individuals find themselves as mutually exclusive from one another, exclusive “not merely as bodies, but in any relevant political, social, or psychological sense” (Barber 33). Accordingly, in all three dispositions of liberal democracy the primary mode of interaction among mutually exclusive beings is that of conflict, collision among individual, atomic agents.

While each disposition of liberal democracy possesses the same scientific preconception of materialism and its corollaries, how these dispositions interpret and then apply this scientific preconception of materialism leads to their unique views. The anarchist interprets and applies the scientific preconception of materialism such to promote freedom and to maintain individual, atomic identity; the realist interprets and applies the scientific preconception of materialism such to promote the use of power to maintain individual, atomic identity; and the minimalist interprets and applies the scientific preconception of materialism such to promote a view in between that of freedom and power toward individual, atomic identity.

For the anarchist the scientific preconception of materialism presents the state of nature as an infinite, physical landscape with a finite number of atomic agents contained within this landscape. This setting thereby suggests that each atomic agent, by virtue of the unlimited space allotted, can successfully satisfy their needs in a way that does not interact with other atomic agents. As Barber notes: “[The anarchist] conceives human desires as moderate, as human aggression as unlikely, of human conflict as improbable, and human relations as relatively contact-free and consequently harmonious” (Barber 37).

The physical landscape generated from scientific preconceptions of the anarchist, a setting in which atomic agents are separated from one another, helps to enhance the idea of the individual (that is,

the concept of “I”) for the anarchist. Because atomic agents live alone and becomes conditioned to living alone, the world for each atomic agent becomes a construct of his or her consciousness. And in the rare event when one atomic agent comes in contact with another atomic agent, their individual identities are ironically affirmed rather than denied: for when two atomic agents meet, the rarity of such an event confirms the unique identity of each being (Barber 39).

The realist possesses the same scientific preconception of materialism as the anarchist but interprets and applies the scientific preconception of materialism differently. For the realist, materialism presents the state of nature that is a finite landscape with numerous atomic agents saturating the finite landscape. Because atomic agents are so closely found within this framework, atomic agents impede upon the shared land of space and in turn atomic agents collide. In this process the world “ceases to be the world of the One and becomes the realm of Many Ones” (Barber 39).

In order to organize this scientific landscape of colliding atomic agents so that each atomic agent can successfully exist in such a setting, the realist creates a political foundation to provide stability. In this endeavor, a strong state is constructed in order to create and enforce “traffic rules” that guide the flow of atomic agents (Barber 40). These “traffic rules,” by virtue of their inherent power to control the flow of society, possess a connection with power. For atomic agents who understands “traffic rules” can use these rules to their advantage, not only to secure particular ends but to create “traffic rules” that guide the flow of other atomic agents.

The scientific preconception of the minimalist is similar to the view of the realist: both dispositions agree that materialism presents a state of nature that is a finite landscape with numerous atomic agents saturating the finite landscape; however, the minimalist disagrees with the realist notion of a strong state with “traffic rules.” The minimalist understands that if “traffic rules” are adopted, then the natural rules that originally guided society, namely the idea of individuals colliding with one another by virtue of natural conditions, are simply replaced with rules created by individuals. And rules created by individuals, much like the natural laws that guide society, can limit individual freedom: atomic agents can manipulate the “traffic laws” to their advantage, and in turn leave others at disadvantage.

In search of a middle ground, the minimalist attempts to organize atomic agents through the use of pluralistic groups, tolerance, and wariness of external control. Still, these groups are centered in self-interest and perform actions on a self-beneficial scale: If performing a potential action would in some way help a group, then the group should perform that action; conversely, if performing a potential action would not help a group, then the group should not perform that action. This design can also limit individual freedom: majority groups seeking self-interest have the ability to suppress minority groups.

While Barber acknowledges there are different preconceptions, one of these being that of science, that give rise to the views of the anarchist, the realist, and the minimalist, he argues that these preconceptions are the reasons for the failures of these views. The rationale for this is that these preconceptions limit “other possible frames for a political theory of democracy that are more convincingly rooted in psychology, sociology, and history” (Barber 42). Additionally, Barber believes there “is one model for political theory that eschews inertial frames altogether, instead attempting to develop an autonomous theory of political democracy that does not depend on chain reasoning or the inertial position to which chain reasoning inevitably returns” (Barber 42). This view Barber calls “strong democracy.”

## Part 2. Strong Democracy: A New Disposition of Liberal Democracy

### *The Necessary Conditions for the Possibility of Politics*

“Strong democracy envisions politics not as a way of life but as a way of living—as, namely, the way that human beings with variable but malleable natures and with competing but overlapping interests can contrive to live together communally not only to their mutual advantage but also the advantage of their mutuality.”

– Barber, *Strong Democracy*

Just as thin views of democracy, namely the anarchist, the realist, and the minimalist, provide solutions to conflict that arises to that the state of nature, so does the view of strong democracy; however, strong democracy, instead of providing a solution that denies conflict (the anarchist), that represses conflict (the realist), or that tolerates conflict (the minimalist), provides a solution that “transforms conflict through a politics of distinctive inventiveness and discovery” (Barber 119). In this endeavor, strong democracy aims at “understanding individuals not as abstract persons but as citizens, so that commonality and equality rather than separateness are the defining traits of human society” (Barber 119).

The idea of strong democracy begins by considering the necessary conditions for the possibility of politics. (This is unlike thin democracy, for thin democracy, instead of commencing an investigation into the conditions for the possibility of politics, presents a course for political action based upon certain preconceptions that give rise to a state of nature and a corresponding conflict.) Barber summarizes the necessary conditions for the possibility of politics when he asserts that “one can understand the realm of politics as being circumscribed by conditions that impose a *necessity for public action, and thus for reasonable public choice, in the presence of conflict and in the absence of private or independent grounds for judgment*” (Barber 120). How each of these conditions is explained lays the groundwork for strong democracy.

Above all else, politics is about *action*. For example, in a political foundation laws are created, taxes are levied, roads are constructed, and buildings are built; many forms of actions take place. As Barber states: “[Action is about] doing (or not doing), making (or not making) something in the physical world that limits human behavior, changes the environment, or affects the world in some material way” (Barber 122). This concept seems simple enough. Indeed, the impact of a political foundation can be seen and felt throughout society on many different levels.

Yet, action, in regard to the necessary conditions for the possibility of politics, has a deeper meaning than simply a political foundation taking action within society: for Barber, the term action entails action among the constituency of a political foundation.

By way of example, in many liberal democracies a constituency delegates the responsibility of action to a political foundation they believe will make choices that are in the best interest of the constituency. Yet because this political foundation is distanced from the constituency, it does not consistently make the best choices for the constituency; sometimes, in fact, choices are made that negatively impact the constituency. To address this issue, Barber believes politics should endorse a shared role between the political foundation and its constituents in taking action. In this design, for the possibility of true politics, the constituency is involved in the decision making process, as well as the forthcoming action from such decisions, in order to help ensure the best choices are made.

Because politics is about action, it *concerns the public*. After all, the action taken by a political foundation is on behalf of the public. As previously stated, some of the actions taken by a political foundation may be in the interest of the public and some of the actions taken may not be in the interest of the public. But, when a political foundation and its constituents are considering a certain form of action,

why is one action a better choice than another action? For example, why should a political foundation make *choice X* instead of *choice Y*, with both choices affecting the public at large?

Thus, the *public must make choices*, which in turn produce action, for the possibility of politics. If, using the aforementioned example, *choice X* should be selected, then the public should adopt that choice and the action it entails upon the community. Likewise, if *choice Y* should be selected, then the public should adopt that choice and the action it entails upon the community. But it is not as simple as selecting one choice from another choice. Surely, there are many factors that enter when making choices.

For Barber, politics are only possible when choices made by the public derive from deliberation and debate; from push and pull; from a continual and creative process wherein the public has considered and selected from all possible choices. If a choice is selected, there has to be a reason why that choice is selected; arbitrariness is not permitted. And the reason why a choice is selected, for Barber, must be grounded in reason.

“The word *reasonable* bespeaks practicality” (Barber 127). When choices are selected that affect the public, they have to be thoroughly considered, discussed among individuals, planned, and then enacted in a manner that endorses common rationality and in an environment that is both open and tolerant to the ideas of others. With this openness in the decision making process, individuals can discuss possible decisions without bias and without fear. Decisions, then, can be made from a pragmatic vantage point and why a decision is made can be justified from other decisions on rational grounds collectively understood.

Furthermore, for the possibility of politics, the most fundamental choice of the public must be addressed: namely, how to respond to *conflict*. No matter what disposition of liberal democracy, indeed no matter what type of political foundation imagined, the fundamental choice of a political foundation is how to respond to conflict that derives in the state of nature. As seen in the three dispositions of democracy previously discussed, the decision how to respond to this original conflict affects the way in which later decisions are made.

Lastly, for the possibility of politics, politics must start from the *absence of an independent ground*. That is to say, instead of generating and interpreting ideas through the lens of an inertial framework or a preconception to imagine a state of nature and respective political foundation, something that derives from opinion instead of belief (e.g., why should the disposition of the anarchist be adopted instead of say the disposition of the realist? – outside of personal opinion, there is no inherent reason why one disposition is better than another disposition), politics must start from a position absent of an independent ground.

In order to fulfill the necessary conditions for the possibility of politics, the idea of strong democracy provides the following response: 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*” (Barber 132). Each of the words in this definition plays an important part in responding to the necessary conditions for the possibility of politics.

The idea of strong democracy is grounded in *action*. In strong democracy, as in Aristotle, man is defined by action, and the political foundation of a community is rich in participation (unlike modern democracies, for example the United States, where participation is considered a chore). Men do not live in a community founded upon a political foundation that takes action; rather, a political foundation is founded upon a community of men who, collectively, take action. As Barber notes: “In strong democracy, politics is something done by, not to, citizens. Activity is its chief virtue, and involvement, commitment,

obligation, and service—common deliberation, common decision, and common work—are its hallmarks” (Barber 133).

The action within strong democracy derives from the *public*. To encourage such action from the public, a strong democracy provides the outlets conducive to participation and accordingly toward this end public forums, town meetings, city council are commonplace in such a framework. In essence, the idea is to make, as much as possible, politics a part of everyday life for the everyday man. Politics, therefore, cannot be an esoteric sphere of interest only accessible to, and understood by, the few; in the same vein, political action cannot be a haphazard, insignificant event. Instead, politics and political action must be so engrained, must be so integral, to the life of the constituency that one could not imagine themselves absent such characteristics.

The public in strong democracy makes many *choices*. In a strong democracy, choices presuppose a defining trait of the constituency: individual volition toward meaningful civic participation. While many democratic theories espouse a view of a citizenry capable of participating, they fail to recognize the need for the desire of a citizenry to participate. For instance, in the United States many citizens are capable of participating in political functions; yet, for many reasons, the citizens do not continually participate. The reason for this lack of continual participation is the absence of a compelling desire to participate: civic life has not reached the level of importance to warrant continual participation.

How the choices are made by the public within a strong democracy are grounded in *reasonableness*. Reasonableness, in this definition, is an attitude than a specific process: that is, through mutual dialogue, through tolerance, and through openness to others, individuals in a strong democracy take a broad approach to decision making. Barber summarizes this attitude when he states: [Strong democracy] develop[s] a form of political consciousness that will enlarge the understanding and the sympathies of interest-motivated individuals and transform them into citizens capable of reassessing themselves and their interests of the newly invented communal norms and the newly imagined public goods (Barber 173). The goal of decision making in a strong democracy, then, is to make carefully considered decisions that have emerged from the collective voice of the citizenry.

The public in a strong democracy responds to *conflict* through transformation of “conflict into cooperation through citizen participation, public deliberation, and civic education (Barber 135). Although strong democracy is not grounded in the idea of response to conflict (it first defines the conditions necessary for the possibility of politics and then satisfies these conditions), it does recognize conflict as a relevant concern. To address this concern, it seeks to unite individuals in an active political system where both individual education and participation are encouraged.

#### *Politics in the Participatory Mode and the Idea of Political Talk*

“At the heart of strong democracy is talk.”

—Barber, *Strong Democracy*

The most common form of action within liberal democracy is the idea of suffrage within a representative system. Individuals cast their votes, which in turn elect others who make decisions. The idea of strong democracy, however, does not endorse the idea of participation via suffrage within a representative system; this design, strong democracy believes, alienates the constituency of their authentic possibilities in the decision making process and forfeits such an ability to a small group of individuals .

Differing from this traditional view of action, then, strong democracy relies on a form of continual expression and deliberation in the form of political talk. Political talk, therefore, serves as the chief form (and impetus for forthcoming) action in strong democracy. Political talk has three important

components: (1) the idea that listening is equally as important as speaking; (2) the use of affective as well as cognitive capabilities; and (3) the transformation of reflection into action (Barber 174).

First, in strong democracy listening is equally important to speaking. The idea of listening having equal weight to speaking is unfamiliar in many liberal democracies; many times speaking holds greater weight than listening. For instance, in the United States, speech is associated with power and listening is associated with weakness, things that take place within a “political game.” He who wields the word, has the ability to control. And she who listens, is subject to command. As Barber notes: “The aim in adversarial proceedings is to prevail—to score verbal points and to overcome one’s interlocutors. In fact, speech in adversary systems is a form of power. It is the war of all against all carried on by other means” (Barber 175).

The design of speech and listening with respectively power and weakness is not the case in strong democracy. For in strong democracy the aim is not to “win” against a competitor but, rather, to understand the viewpoint of the other in order to reach a collective decision understood by, and in the best interest of, all. Therefore, in order to effectively communicate as to understand the views of others and to collectively make the decisions best for all, listening is an important component.

Listening, however, is not a passive experience where one simply hears another. It is much deeper than that, for it involves the component of empathy, that is, trying to emotionally understand the view of the other. Empathy can be described as the following outlook: “I will put myself in his place, I will try to understand, I will strain to hear what makes us alike, I will listen for a common rhetoric evocative of a common purpose or a common good” (Barber 175). The idea is to “step out” of your own view and then “step into” the view of another, so that, together, a decision can be made.

Moreover, and often forget, listening allows the opportunity for deliberation and thoughtful contemplation. Many times, decisions are made in a hasty manner where all possible options have not been considered. Because all possible options have not been considered, the best possible option may not be chosen. In a strong democracy this is not the case. In a strong democracy individuals take the time to listen, to thoroughly consider the other side, and, due to this, the opportunity is afforded to thoroughly deliberate about what is the best interest of all parties. Listening is able to “bridge the differences between [individuals] by conversation and mutual understanding,” which in turn makes decisions toward the ends of all (Barber 175).

Second, political talk uses both affective and cognitive abilities. Just as Nietzsche presents the idea of the human as that of “Dionysian” and “Apollonian,” Barber believes individuals, in their entirety, are both emotional and rational beings. Recognizing the importance of both of these components, Barber asserts that each should play an important role in speech: emotion, through the use of listening, allows for empathy, which in turn permits mutual understanding; and rationality, through critical and thoughtful examination, provides the technical abilities to discover and enact different possibilities regarding decisions.

As already discussed, affective abilities are used in speech through the use of empathy. Empathy allows individuals within strong democracy the chance to feel what others feel; to see what others see; to think how others think. It creates a link between parties, a link that engenders a deeper, more collaborative decision making process and decisions than that which is present at first blush among individuals.

To underscore the idea of empathy, by way of example, imagine two neighbors within a strong democracy: one is an old man, possesses many years of work experience, and has traveled throughout world; the other is young woman, has recently graduated college, and has never left her local community. Seemingly there is not much in common between these two individuals. Indeed, many differences

separate one from understanding the other. However, empathy, a mutual understanding, can provide the link.

With the use of empathy, through listening to the speech of the young woman, the old man can picture what it is like to be young again. He can see himself graduating college and entering the workforce. He can imagine the outlook of the young woman, having never left the local community. He can envision her wants, her needs, her fears as a young woman. Likewise, the young woman, through listening to the speech of the old man, can picture herself at an older age. She can imagine the years of her life passed. She can think of the experiences of seeing the world. She can reflect on the concerns of an individual in this condition. And when this empathy occurs, when each individual can connect with the other, decisions can be made from a wider perspective taking in both viewpoints.

Cognitive abilities are not to be ignored however. They, too, play a great role in the decision making process. For while affective abilities allow individuals to understand the outlooks of others and then make decisions accordingly, cognitive abilities provide the means by which to plan and then enact such decisions. Consider again, the example of the old man and young woman. Although these two individuals may be able to relate to each other from an emotional level, if they do not possess the proper cognitive abilities, the emotional connection may prove unusable. That is to say, if there is insufficient use of rationality after an emotional connection is made, then the best possible choice (to whatever issue the two individuals want to address) may not be considered, chosen, planned correctly, or enacted correctly.

Third, political talk transforms reflection into action. Individuals have many thoughts. Of these thoughts, some will forever remain as thoughts, tucked away in the mind never to transcend the status of mere idea. Yet other thoughts transform into action, take on a life, and produce tangible effects within the world. It is the goal of strong democracy to have the latter of these two types of thought, namely thought that turns into action.

Consider the example of the old man and the young woman who are neighbors. Separately, each of these individuals may possess many thoughts about the community in which they live. However, if these thoughts are not expressed, they will forever remain as thoughts and therefore no action will come from them. But, when the neighbors speak with each other, as well as with others in the community, and share and financially support their ideas through the medium of political talk, action can then result.

In conclusion, the idea of political talk serves as the chief form of action within strong democracy. For talk to warrant the title of political talk, it must hold that listening is equally as important as speaking, it must use of affective as well as cognitive capabilities, and it must transform reflection into action.

### Part 3: Interview with Prominent Practitioners of Civic and Community Engagement

#### *Introduction*

Strong democracy is whetted to the idea of civic participation. Absent this civic participation occurring, however, it is merely an idea. It has no more power than any other idea that has not been enacted. The goal of strong democracy, then, is to link the idea of deliberative democracy (namely, the ideas that construct a democracy) to the process of participatory democracy (namely, the tangible participation within a democracy). While Barber creates this link in *Strong Democracy* through the use of theory (the idea of strong democracy, satisfying the necessary conditions for the possibility of politics) and then praxis (the participation within strong democracy, political talk translating into action), I have had, in my own life, the opportunity to deeper explore such a relationship.

In the Spring of 2010, I had the great fortune to participate in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Legislative Fellowship Program located in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The fellowship had me intern as a full-time staff member within a committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Each day, I worked in the Pennsylvania Capitol Building, the heart of political action within the state.

Before commencing the fellowship, I began seriously considering the field of study in which I wished to complete my Schreyer Honors College Thesis. Although I was pursuing a degree in philosophy, a field which interested me deeply, I had a penchant for the field of civic and community engagement. To resolve this conflict, I decided it would be in my best interest to complete my thesis in the field of civic and community engagement, as I thought such a field would allow me to connect the ideas of philosophy with the ideas of civic and community engagement.

I decided to use the fellowship as an opportunity to conduct research for my thesis; I wanted to know what others, individuals who have had experience in the political sphere, thought about civic and community engagement. Political thought and action were, after all, major components of their life. Accordingly, I decided, and then received permission, to interview some of these individuals during the fellowship.

I interviewed a wide array of individuals in the political sphere: some were Republican, some were Democrat; some were male, some were female; some had many years of experience, some had little experiences. All of these differences did not matter, however; for, all of these differences notwithstanding, the same thread ran throughout the interviews: namely, that civic and community engagement is an important concept and, that, in order to ensure the principles of a democracy, citizens have an obligation toward engagement.

For a number of reasons, I found the process of interviewing these individuals to be an enlightening experience: chiefly, I believe I gained a deeper understanding of why civic and community engagement is important—that is, why I should be involved—and the different routes through which engagement can occur—that is, areas within society that call for engagement.

I would now like to share these interviews so that you too may learn from them as I have. After each interview will be a short commentary about the interview, connecting the interview with the ideas of the first two parts of this thesis and as well as with the ideas of democratic philosophy as a whole.

I would like to thank all of those who participated in an interview for their kindness in the form of the time and the contribution they have made to this thesis.

**1. Could you please state your name and position?**

I am Marjorie Rendell and I am the Third Circuit Judge and also First Lady of Pennsylvania.

**2. Where geographically were you raised as a child and how have your childhood memories and experiences affected the person you are today?**

I was raised in Wilmington, Delaware, and I think the community spirit of Wilmington probably did affect me. People with whom I associated and with whom my parents associated were very politically active and astute. My parents were actually very active Republicans and their best friends were very active Democrats so there was very often discussion about issues, about policies, about politics, and about government. So I think my experiences growing up were very conducive to understanding civic engagement. I also went to a Catholic girls' school for 13 years and I think I was taught a lot about civics, about participation in government. That definitely impacted me.

**3. Where did you attend high school, college, graduate/law school?**

I attended Ursuline Academy in Wilmington, Delaware. I graduated the University of Pennsylvania with a Bachelor of Arts Degree, and I attended Georgetown Law School but graduated from Villanova Law School.

**4. Throughout your childhood and schooling, did any individual make a profound impact upon your life and thoughts? If so, who was this individual and how did he or she affect your life?**

I think my Mother, clearly, made an impact on me. She was very outspoken. She read the newspaper. She had opinions about things. She discussed them. We had a lot of conversations at our home about issues. I also think there was a nun who influenced me, who kind of believed in a world, global view of responsibility and I think she did impact me. But I would say it was mainly my parents.

**5. How did you enter the political/governmental sphere, that is, how has your life led you to the position which you currently hold? Was it always your goal to enter this field or did it occur more by happenstance?**

Well, I am a member of the judicial branch of government and I got here by practicing law and then being considered for a judgeship. It wasn't always my goal but after practicing law for a while I wanted to get into public service, and that did become a goal after a while. So, I guess it was a little bit of serendipity but also a goal of mine to become a judge.

**6. What would you consider are the key endeavors and responsibilities of your position? How do you feel this position reflects who you are as a person and that for which you stand?**

The key endeavors and responsibilities of the position are to decide cases based upon the law. And I think we in this country underestimate the importance of the rule of law, not just in court cases and disputes, but the rule of law and our respect for the orderly society—it really underpins everything that we do in this country.

I think the position reflects who I am because I think I am basically a fair person. I make judgments based upon the facts of the law. In my everyday life, I make judgments based upon having all the facts and

deciding what is the fair and appropriate thing to do. When people say, “Is a judge your job or is that who you are?” I really believe it is who I am as a person.

**7. What would you consider to be civic and community engagement?**

I think to be engaged you first have to understand underlying principles of our democracy and of our country. And I know a lot of people talk about engagement in terms of service and things of that nature, but I believe there is a more essential piece to it. And that is you really have to understand the way your community functions, the way your country functions. You have to understand your role in that community and then you have to think for yourself about what matters to your community, what is important. And I think only through the synthesis of your knowledge as well as your views as to what is important to you to become fully engaged. So I think engagement has many facets to it, but I think it starts with basic understanding and knowledge that leads to kind of the “buy in” that is necessary for engagement.

**8. Are there different degrees in which one could participate in civic and community engagement? For instance, is enlisting the military a greater form of civic and community engagement than enlisting in the Peace Corps or vice versa?**

I think it is a very individualized thing. I think for some people being in the military might not be engagement; it might be something that has to do with their desire to get more training in life. For someone else, being in the Peace Corps might be more of an engagement. I think there is a mental and an attitudinal aspect to it, that, it is going to be different for every person. I don’t think we can judge the level or degree of civic and community engagement just by the title or nature of the activities it involves. I think it is a very personal thing, which, I think it is important. I mean our democracy is made up of each of us, kind of one person at a time, and it is that individual freedom and liberty that is the hallmark of our country. So there might be gradations but I do think it is an individual thing.

**9. What are your views on American citizens and civic and community engagement? Do you believe enough Americans, particularly college age students, are politically active and participate in the democratic process that is this country?**

Unfortunately, no, I think we are getting away from making civic engagement part of who we are as individuals. I do not think it is stressed enough in our educational system and I think as a result we have a lot of people coming to adulthood who do not really appreciate what it means to be a citizen and therefore are not engaged. And they think that politics is what it is all about, but it really isn’t. Engagement leads to being politically active and politically astute but it is very different from “politics.” And I think a lot of young people turn off to the idea of civic engagement because they associate it with the idea of politics and they think that is not for them.

**10. What do you believe is most common characteristic, area, or trait of American government that American citizens misunderstand? Why do you believe this characteristic, area, or trait is so often misunderstood?**

I think it is the entire constitution and the way our form of government is established that enables us to have this amazing, orderly society and yet effectuate change where change needs to be effected through the courts and through legislation and through regulation. I mean when you step back and look at the branches of government and the way we have the judiciary as an overarching insurer, if you will, of consistency of laws and yet the ability to adjust to different societal circumstances, it is very unique. It is unique in terms of the independence of the judiciary, the fact that the judiciary can tell the President and

Congress what to do. And people just don't realize how unique and special it is—that is the trait, the special, unique aspect of government.

**11. What are the benefits of participating in civic and community engagement for an American citizen?**

Well obviously having a say in your government and having the ability to effect change. By doing—whether it is by voting, or by taking part in public service, or by just getting involved in things—you have that ability, even though you are one person, to effectuate change and to express your voice in a way that doesn't happen in other countries. And we do things one person at a time, but it all adds up. I think that is the democratic aspect of our government: the ability for each individual to play a role as a citizen. It is very special.

**12. What is an example in your life (besides your career) where you were engaged either civically or within the community? What did you learn or gain from such an experience?**

When my husband was Mayor of Philadelphia I started what is called Avenue of the Arts, Inc. It was a project to transform the southern tier of Broad Street basically into an arts and cultural district. I did it for many, many years (I just recently stepped down) but I think what I learned was that individuals, when they come together and have an idea, they are able, if it is a good idea (if they can get the support and move forward with the idea), to effect change and leave a legacy.

And I think that is what so rewarding to work in the public service and non-profit arena: You can actually effectuate change and do something that is bigger than you and to leave something to benefit people who come after you. And it's not all up to government to do these things; it's up to individuals to help effectuate change and to marshal the forces of government to support things that will sustain change.

**13. What is the pedagogical responsibility of a schooling system or university in transmitting the values of leadership, scholarship, and public service to its students? Is the responsibility of promoting these values in the hands of a schooling system/university or is it the responsibility of the students' parents? What role should each of these play in the development of an individual?**

I think it is a shared responsibility. I do think the schools have the primary role of educating in basic understanding of the way our government works. Such values of leadership, scholarship, and public service—I do think these are values that the school should teach. Parents should be there to support and further that education and to also model good leadership and public service for their children. I think children really follow examples and that is where parents can take the lead and show children how to engage and how to be public servants.

But I think it is a shared responsibility. I think the basic education in our form of government and how special it is really does fall to the schools. It is a shame with so many things being tested and civics and community engagement being pushed a little bit to the side, I am afraid we are not giving our children the education that is needed. So maybe it does fall to the parents. But I think that's tough, to have parents be responsible for something that is such a basic educational component.

**14. What are current social and political issues that could be solved/remediated with civic and community engagement?**

I think we see a lot of problems with individual responsibility these days in terms of people having guns, people using drugs, people engaging in bad behavior, criminal behavior. And I just think if we were teach our children from an early age that they have a role as a citizen, that they are important, and that they

have a responsibility to be part of their community and to engage—if we could instill the behaviors in them that would lead toward better behavior—I do think we could do more in terms of the crime rate and criminal behavior. I think all of what we do is a matter of education and modeling, and if we give them education and modeling in civic engagement, community engagement, I think we could improve a lot of the behaviors we now see in our communities.

**15. In what direction do you see the country moving and how does the voice of the American citizen help in the shaping such a direction?**

I fear that we are moving away from a thoughtful, contemplative society into a more self-absorbed, material culture. I see us dealing more with superficial concepts and a reality of things that do not encourage people to think, to analyze, and to take things into their own hands for good with projects that take time and effort and yet produce results. I just think we are becoming too superficial and self-absorbed. And I think it is regrettable.

We need to go back to basic teaching our children to be citizens in both school and at home, focusing them and not letting them drift into kind to the “television/computer” world in a way that reduces the time they spend on thoughtful, deliberative exercises and studies. We all have to take ownership of our citizenship and take ownership of the children and teach them there is a time for televisions and computers and yet there is a time for thinking and deliberation, and activities outside of their own individual sphere.

### Commentary

I found this interview to be quite insightful. Indeed, there are many views in this interview with which I agree. One of the views with which I agree, perhaps the most important view, and a view that is an analog to this thesis, namely the nexus between deliberative and participatory democracy, asserts that citizenship is an amalgam of understanding and action. As the Honorable Judge Marjorie Rendell states:

“I think to be engaged you first have to understand underlying principles of our democracy and of our country...you really have to understand the way your community functions, the way your country functions. You have to understand your role in that community and then you have to think for yourself about what matters to your community, what is important. And I think only through the synthesis of your knowledge as well as your views as to what is important to you to become fully engaged.”

Justice Stephen Breyer, also a member of the judiciary, similarly supports this view of understanding and action. This can be seen in his work *Active Liberty*. In this work, Breyer asserts that citizens in the United States, a liberal democracy, must understand the Constitution’s role to promote what he calls “active liberty.” As Breyer states: “[The Constitution] is built upon principles of liberty. That liberty not only means liberty from government coercion but also the freedom to participate in the government itself” (Breyer, 3). In other words, for Breyer citizens in the United States must first understand the Constitution in order to knowingly shape, through the liberty bestowed by such a document, the political foundation in which they live.

Extrapolating the precept from this view of citizens within the United States understanding the Constitution in order to knowingly shape the political foundation in which they live, citizens in a liberal democracy have a duty understand what, in fact, is a liberal democracy, specifically what this means in the purview of their respective political foundation. Moreover, once citizens understand what a liberal democracy is, they must then understand how each of them, as citizen, fits in such a framework. Grounded in a richer understanding of liberal democracy and their place in such a framework, citizens can then take action that is simply not “action for the sake of action,” that is, citizens can have meaningful participation.

*Interview with Pennsylvania State Senator John Pippy*

**1. Could you please state your name and position?**

I am John Pippy and I am a State Senator in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. My district is 37<sup>th</sup> which includes part of Allegheny and Washington County.

**2. Where geographically were you raised as a child and how have your childhood memories and experiences affected the person you are today?**

I've done a little traveling. I was born in Thailand on an Air Force base. My father was in the Air Force as an enlisted sergeant. I went back as a young child and grew up in his area which is Everett, Massachusetts, which is right outside of Boston. I started out in the projects in Everett and lived there until I was in elementary school. Then I moved to a home where my mother still lives which is an urban area. I went to public school up through junior high school, and then I went to a Catholic, all boys' high school. I played sports and got into the United States Military Academy at West Point when I was 17. So at 17 I moved to New York and spent four years at West Point as a cadet, and then I got married at the age of 21. I then went to Fort Hood, Texas and served in the Army in active duty all around the country. Then I left active duty and went to work for U.S. Steel in 1996 (I am an environmental engineer) as a quality control person and labor relations. Finally I moved to Moon Township because that is where my wife is from.

But I think it does impact the way I am. I think a person, how they view the world, has a lot to do with the way they were brought up, the environment they were brought up in, and the education—and not one area outweighs the other. Growing up in the projects, my Mother worked as an interpreter for refugees coming in exposed me to a lot of things, such as social services and more challenging parts families have to live with. Going to West Point really helped me shape how I approach issues such as project management, logistics, as well as the logical approach to problem solving. And being in politics after a while, I take from all those experiences and try to understand from each experience. I gain from each one and I also learn from the negatives. So I do think my experiences have made me the person I am today.

**3. Where did you attend high school, college, graduate/law school?**

Like I said, I attended West Point. I have also taken online courses in my Graduate Degree in Leadership and Business Ethics from Duquesne University and I actually just transferred to a Master's Degree in International Relations through the University of Ireland.

**4. Throughout your childhood and schooling, did any individual make a profound impact upon your life and thoughts? If so, who was this individual and how did he or she affect your life?**

I think my parents influenced me. My mother came over to America from Thailand, learned to speak English, and found a job as an interpreter for social services. So I saw the way she looked at things and that taught me a lot about cultural understanding. My father was an enlisted soldier and came back, started out as a technician, and then he went to community college and got a technical degree. Afterward he worked his way up to a successful person at a very large, international company. My parents never pushed me into any particular thing, but I saw how an individual's success or failure has a lot more to do with how they deal with things than what is presented to them.

**5. How did you enter the political/governmental sphere, that is, how has your life led you to the position which you currently hold? Was it always your goal to enter this field or did it occur more by happenstance?**

It was an interesting dynamic. While I was in Texas, my wife volunteered in different campaigns because she liked to get involved. And when we came back to Moon Township she joined the Republican Party and participated and become engaged in what they did. While this was going on, her and I would joke as to what I would do after my career with U.S. Steel. She always thought because some of my family was involved in politics that I might run for office, but it was never taken seriously. But I really believed when I got out of the military I wanted to do something more. One of the great things about the military—and one reason I am still in the guard (I have 18 years in now)—is the sense of brotherhood and comradery. There is a bigger purpose. So I kind of missed that and I joined the fire department and fought fires and met other individuals.

Every once in a while, though, I would talk to my wife and tell her I wanted to do something else. Well, she was at a Republican committee meeting and they stated they need a candidate to run for State Representative (which I thought was a part time job). So she mentioned my name and said I would be a great candidate. But they didn't tell my wife this district was 63% Democrat and 31% Republican and the reason there was no candidate is because no Republican had ever won it before.

So we started to go out and get petitions and I started to do research and learn more about the position. And then everyone told me I couldn't win, which upset me. But I think I was a benefactor of two things: (1) I am a hard worker and very focused and (2) because I was the only Republican, the Democrats ignored me completely during the primary. And then after the Democrat won the primary he completely ignored me until about October when they did a poll and found out I was close. But I ended up winning and had to retire from U.S. Steel and I have been doing it ever since.

**6. What would you consider are the key endeavors and responsibilities of your position? How do you feel this position reflects who you are as a person and that for which you stand?**

First and foremost our job is to pass a budget and oversee State Government through our committee process. But our fundamental job is to pass a budget and that is why it is very frustrating when you do not pass it on time because you are not doing your job. So that is the major responsibility.

But this is a Republic which means I was elected by 200,000 people to be their advocate in Harrisburg on a whole host of issues, whether it's fighting for money for the local district or fighting for laws and regulations that are consistent with which your constituency want. I really take strongly that belief that I need to be an advocate for them.

But because of my background I am more in tune to some of the social service needs than some of colleagues who did not have those experiences. Now even though I do not have a lot urban communities in my district, I think it is in the best interest of my district to be involved in urban issues because everything is interconnected. That is the key: You cannot just fight for one town or one district because if everyone did that we would be dysfunctional, which is, I would argue, in some ways what we are. So being an advocate for my constituencies is a big part of my responsibility but my job is to pass a budget and represent the issues my constituents care for.

**7. What would you consider to be civic and community engagement?**

I think it can be all things. Civic engagement, when I look at it from my background, I see it as those areas that deal with governmental policies, the local school district, local municipalities, and other areas because you are part of the structure of society as far as the operation of the government. It also can include many other things. As for the community side, I see all those non-governmental organizations, all those different associations that play a critical role, whether it is human services, athletics, politics, and

different organizations. But there is overlap between them. For instance, being a part of your zoning hearing commission of your local town to me is more civic than community but you're really helping your community. But I think anything that involves you and helping others or society is important.

**8. Are there different degrees in which one could participate in civic and community engagement? For instance, is enlisting the military a greater form of civic and community engagement than enlisting in the Peace Corps or vice versa?**

Now I am in the military so I think very highly of it, but I wouldn't put a scale or ranking from something like one to ten where one thing ranks better than another. I think it should be viewed in regards to your participation and your engagement in what you do. People who work in the local food pantry who dedicate their life, I would rank that higher than someone who barely participates in some other cause. It's so much more about the individual and their actions than the format for which you are serving.

**9. What are your views on American citizens and civic and community engagement? Do you believe enough Americans, particularly college age students, are politically active and participate in the democratic process that is this country?**

No, I just don't. I think more Americans are informed, although some time the information may be suspect. There is a lot of information out there. People are getting more information. But in the end I would wonder if you look at active participation and the voting process how much that has changed. I don't know. What I have seen is engagement when people believe they are directly impacted. For example, the highest turnout we ever had was when there was a tax issue on the ballot about adding a one percent sales tax.

I think there is more progress and universities are doing a better job, but I hope they show both sides and give students an opportunity to understand different issues. Most of the issues we deal with are not easy. To understand the positions takes a lot of time and you really have to appreciate where they are coming from, not what the issue is but where they are coming from. A lot of the debates and the biggest challenges we have are on when issues where there is opposition. A great example would be pro-life versus pro-choice. If you talk to the pro-life people they will tell you this issue is about the life of a baby. If you talk to the pro-choice they will say that it is about the human body and personal rights. So right there they are not talking about the same thing. So it is just really challenging.

**10. What do you believe is most common characteristic, area, or trait of American government that American citizens misunderstand? Why do you believe this characteristic, area, or trait is so often misunderstood?**

The issue that seems to be most prevalent right now is mistrust in the government. Many people think all politicians are corrupt and are looking for personal gains. Does that happen? Yes. Does that happen on a scale that is disproportionate to the general public? I don't know, but because it's in the public eye and because when it happens it involves public tax dollars, does it deserve more scrutiny? Yes. The problem is the brush that paints that person or group doesn't really apply to the majority of members. You know when people are passionate about people and when people have their own motives.

**11. What are the benefits of participating in civic and community engagement for an American citizen?**

I think first and foremost is that you have a government that is more reflective of society and hopefully in a better light. I think a lot of good people are focused on raising their families and their jobs and cannot engage because, to be frank, they have other things going on. And those are the kinds of people you want,

people who have had life experiences, wins and losses, and whose opinions aren't based solely on agendas. Everyone has goals and agendas, but if those experiences you are taking from are much more balanced, I think you can get more progress.

**12. What is an example in your life (besides your career) where you were engaged either civically or within the community? What did you learn or gain from such an experience?**

The most obvious example is my military background. I have served overseas. I have served in different areas such as Pakistan, India, Switzerland, England, Germany, Rwanda, Korea, and Thailand. Engaging with other societies and cultures has helped me look at issues from a broader perspective. Also it has allowed me the opportunity to add to the discussion, because we are a global world.

I think the military has exposed me to many different things. That has taught me to believe in what we are doing here is just as important, that there are children with autism, there are families in need. It has taught me that there are consequences for one's actions and if we don't get it right in this format then the only other option is to go to the military side, which isn't realistic in our country. Many of these countries, if they could get the government right, then they would not need the military.

I also have worked on boy scouts and growing up as a kid in youth groups, and I think that has engrained in me the service side. You have to do more than something than just a job. They talk about the spiritual, physical, and mental aspects of a full life and I think you need to tap into all of those if you want to be successful.

**13. What is the pedagogical responsibility of a schooling system or university in transmitting the values of leadership, scholarship, and public service to its students? Is the responsibility of promoting these values in the hands of a schooling system/university or is it the responsibility of the students' parents? What role should each of these play in the development of an individual?**

This is one I think has a lot of controversy. I think I said earlier, the universities are institutes of learning and you learn through a whole bunch of ways. My only hope is that when they do this learning that they expose the students to different perspectives. I think that is their role, to expose the students to as many perspectives as possible. Teachers will be biased, but I still think a biased teacher can do a good job.

The parent, their role, in many ways is guidance. I didn't see my parents play a major role in my college education, as much as being the sounding board for when I have questions or providing support. In many ways the parental role has got the student there and now it is the time for the student to be free and make mistakes and learn. At the secondary level, I think the parents' role diminishes.

**14. What are current social and political issues that could be solved/remediated with civic and community engagement?**

An issue I have been involved in the past is the failure of our urban areas. I think there are a lot of reasons for the failure of our urban areas. I do not want to limit it to just urban areas; I think it also occurs in our low-income rural areas. We need more civic and community involvement in these areas if we are to help them because there won't be any government program that is going to solve the tragedies of public housing in these areas or the fifty percent of Philadelphia students who drop out or don't go to class.

In many cases the Welfare system is involved, and I think that is the biggest black mark on our culture. I think that is a need too, the community needs to lift itself up. I have been in that type of community (it wasn't that bad in the projects, but it was a different environment back then), and I think that is where as a nation we can do a better job. We can provide the resources but it has to start at the home level. We have

to try to find ways to deal with this cycle. Many smart kids are not given the opportunity because of the environment they grow up in or lack of parental involvement. So that to me is one of the biggest issues we have to deal with.

**15. In what direction do you see the country moving and how does the voice of the American citizen help in the shaping such a direction?**

I think we are at a tipping point in our nation, and I don't think that in a negative way. I mean you look at the new millennium and everything that is supposed to go with it, the change and the way people look at the world. Isn't this supposed to be a more enlightening time? But I think if you study societies, we are at that point now. Everyone says this is a century for China. The question is, "What direction does our country go?" Do we continue this model of individual independence and opportunity or do we start to do that democracies have always done, such as promising more and hindering growth?

I am not saying this as a conservative, but instead as someone who has studied what has happened in other countries. The politicians have promised more and more (and taken more and more to fulfill those promises) and now you have countries that are weaker. So I think over the next two presidential elections, to be frank, will be about whether the government should be more engaged with more social programming and a higher tax burden, or do we want one that is disengaged, with less tax burden and, from my perspective, more opportunity. I am in the middle somewhere. I think we need fewer taxes but more social programming in certain regards. I think there has to be an incentive for people to try and find a way to succeed. This generation will decide where we want to go.

### Commentary

An idea that I found particularly interesting in this interview is the necessity for “hearing the other side” in a liberal democracy. This can specifically be seen in Barber when he emphasizes “political speech” with the use of both cognitive and affective abilities. Although in many liberal democracies issues may be difficult to solve, and, indeed, sides may be polarized, there must, for the liberal democracy to succeed, be a middle ground. As Senator Pippy states:

“Most of the issues we deal with are not easy. To understand the positions takes a lot of time and you really have to appreciate where they are coming from, not what the issue is but where they are coming from. A lot of the debates and the biggest challenges we have are on when issues where there is opposition.”

Ronald Dworkin in his *Is Democracy Possible Here?* furthers this view he asserts that “we [American citizens] are no longer partners in self-government; ours politics are rather a form of war” (Dworkin, 1) This “war” for Dworkin is divided into two camps, the Red and the Blue, respectively Republican and Democrat, and each camp, by virtue of their dispositions, “disagree, fiercely, about almost everything” (Dworkin, 1). To remediate this tension Dworkin suggests, much like Senator Pippy, that “we need to find ways not merely to struggle against one another about these issues, as if politics were contact sports, but to argue about them from deeper principles of personal and political morality that we can all respect” (Dworkin, Preface).

A keystone element of liberal democracy is the idea of differing views. For what else is a liberal democracy but a group of different individuals attempting to govern themselves? Of course, with different individuals come differing views. That said, absent the ability of these differing individuals able to express their unique views, even if controversial, a liberal democracy does function correctly.

*Interview with Pennsylvania State Senator Pat Vance*

**1. Could you please state your name and position?**

I am Pat Vance and the Senator of the 31<sup>st</sup> District.

**2. Where geographically were you raised as a child and how have your childhood memories and experiences affected the person you are today?**

I was actually born in Williamsport but reared in central Pennsylvania in Harrisburg. I think the work ethic was drummed into me very strongly and particularly my father was very, very active in the community and I was reared to believe that was my responsibility to give back as well.

**3. Where did you attend high school, college, graduate/law school?**

I attended what was called William Penn High School which is no longer in existence in Harrisburg. And I am a nurse by profession which is unusual because there are not any other nurses in the legislature.

**4. Throughout your childhood and schooling, did any individual make a profound impact upon your life and thoughts? If so, who was this individual and how did he or she affect your life?**

Probably when I was growing up it was my aunt. She was the oldest of five children (all boys) and she was not allowed to be educated. She had to make sure the boys got an education while she was probably the smartest of all of them, something that always bothered me. She was married to a minister and if I were to define the one person in my life who was a good person she was. I always wanted to emulate her morals and her values.

**5. How did you enter the political/governmental sphere, that is, how has your life led you to the position which you currently hold? Was it always your goal to enter this field or did it occur more by happenstance?**

Truthfully, it was an accident. I was a very active community volunteer and very, very active in a lot of different things. And we bought an old farm house and I spent a lot of time in the recorder of deeds office to find out how old my house was. At that time I was working as a nurse and it was always an argument in my family, "What you mean you have to work Christmas, Thanksgiving, the weekends?" And I found out, almost by chance, that the man who was the recorder wasn't going to run for reelection, and I thought this would be great—9-5 and no weekends! At the time (I know this sounds very strange at this point) they had never elected a woman in Cumberland County so I was a real oddity when I decided to run. But I won.

It was a very nice job: I liked it, I met a lot people, but it was repetitious. So when the man who was the House member at the time decided to run for the Senate, I decided to run for the House. It was the hardest election I have ever had. It was a very, very difficult four-way primary but I was fortunate enough to win. And when he retired from the Senate I ran for the Senate. But if you would have asked me growing up, no it was not something I even thought about.

**6. What would you consider are the key endeavors and responsibilities of your position? How do you feel this position reflects who you are as a person and that for which you stand?**

I think I have been very fortunate to represent the district that I do. First of all, because of its proximity to Harrisburg, they're very, very much aware what is going on. I always laugh, only half-kiddingly, and say I have all chiefs and no Indians; they all think they know how to do it better.

I think you have to know your community well to know how to represent it and I spend a lot of time out in the community. And being the person who introduces multiple legislations is not necessarily my prime objective; it is to serve the people who live in my district and in order to do that you have to know what is going on.

**7. What would you consider to be civic and community engagement?**

To me it means: "How can I make my community better through some type of volunteer organization?" For others, there are certainly enough organizations, particularly in this down economy, that need help. Some people even like to raise money (not many, but some people like to raise money for worthy charities), some people volunteer work. They are all very, very important things.

**8. Are there different degrees in which one could participate in civic and community engagement? For instance, is enlisting the military a greater form of civic and community engagement than enlisting in the Peace Corps or vice versa?**

I don't know if I would say the military or Peace Corps, that one is better than the other. I really would not. But a commitment to whatever, a project you find important in your life, is what matters.

**9. What are your views on American citizens and civic and community engagement? Do you believe enough Americans, particularly college age students, are politically active and participate in the democratic process that is this country?**

Certainly during the Obama campaign there was a very large amount of college kids involved. It remains to be seen if that will continue in the future. I think that every age has something to offer, so I would hope that all people would stay involved. Seniors tend to vote in huge numbers and if you look at some of the programs we offer state wide it is very reflective of their intense interest in politics and in voting.

**10. What do you believe is most common characteristic, area, or trait of American government that American citizens misunderstand? Why do you believe this characteristic, area, or trait is so often misunderstood?**

If you would have asked me this question five years ago, I probably would have given you a different answer than I would have given you today. The electorate is very, very jaded. I think in bad economic times if they lost their job, if their 401K has crashed, they wonder who they can blame. Well, they blame the government and in some cases perhaps rightly so. I have found that people do not differentiate between federal and state government. Now the biggest complaint we get in our office is about the health care program and it is not even ours. They are very upset with that.

And the media is certainly a way to sell papers or television. I do a lot of Eagle Scouts and I always tell the kids that they should be in the front page of the paper, not some teenager that is doing drugs. So the bottom line is good news doesn't make news. Are there some bad House members? Absolutely. But the majority of House members are good but you're not going to read about that.

**11. What are the benefits of participating in civic and community engagement for an American citizen?**

I think that every volunteer organization on which I have been involved, I have gotten more back than I have ever given. If nothing else, the feeling you get of self-worth is very good for your confidence and there is so many people who desperately need help if you are able to give that. My favorite saying is: “Fragrance lingers on the hand that gives the rose.” You gain far more benefits from volunteering than you give.

**12. What is an example in your life (besides your career) where you were engaged either civically or within the community? What did you learn or gain from such an experience?**

I have been involved in so many volunteer activities. There are always people who are far, far worse than you in life, their circumstances. And I think it certainly keeps you from feeling sorry for yourself and realize how blessed you are. So I have done lots of different areas of volunteer work either through my background as a nurse or just in the community.

**13. What is the pedagogical responsibility of a schooling system or university in transmitting the values of leadership, scholarship, and public service to its students? Is the responsibility of promoting these values in the hands of a schooling system/university or is it the responsibility of the students’ parents? What role should each of these play in the development of an individual?**

I think there should be a combination of all. One of the school districts in my district does community projects. It starts with kids around town, little kids, go plant flower gardens—I am talking elementary age students at nursing homes. They have a program where all the seniors have their sidewalks shoveled by school. They raise money for their charities. They foster this spirit of community from the time these kids are in kindergarten and they’re so enthusiastic about it. And that is the best example of civic involvement I have ever seen from a school district. We probably would get a pushback if we said you had to do that. But I think we should encourage it. The district I represent is just wonderful.

**14. What are current social and political issues that could be solved/remediated with civic and community engagement?**

Well, that is difficult. A lot of people in my area volunteer for Meals on Wheels and that is an area of civic involvement that really benefits seniors. We have, I am sure you know, the third highest percentage of elderly in the country. We just got older than other states, but it is a problem. It is a problem on a lot of things in our lives. You hear a lot of complaints about welfare, but 69% of our welfare costs are driven by seniors who have spent all their money or who are disabled and end up in a nursing home with no money, and that continues to increase.

We have not been as good as we should have in Pennsylvania in taking care of our seniors in the community. I think we are about 75% in nursing homes and 25% in the community and you look at a state like Oregon and it is flipped, 75% of the people live in the community and 25% percent in nursing facilities. We need to do more than that because first off it is going to break the budget, it really is. And if you talk to people they would obviously prefer the ability to stay in their own home, if it’s possible. The Builders Association finally has now a select group—they have to take a course—where they can go in and lower cabinets, change doorknobs, and really come in and revive the seniors’ homes so that they can stay in their homes.

**15. In what direction do you see the country moving and how does the voice of the American citizen help in the shaping such a direction?**

I don't like the way the direction of the country is moving first of all because I am very fiscally conservative and the fact that we just keep passing legislation federally to increase the debt limit is a terrible burden we are going to put on future generations. Rightly or wrongly, and I think rightly, in Pennsylvania we have to have a balanced budget. It's painful and may take longer but it is nevertheless balanced. I am concerned that the average citizen feels so disenfranchised from their government, and the negativity is just ramped.

Individual responsibility has also decreased and nobody is ever responsible for their own problems. So I think we need to reinstate some self-responsibility. Yes, circumstances happen to people they can't help, but nevertheless some of the problems we have really brought upon ourselves, even the legislators. For instance, the pay raises which have caused all this upsurge. They throw us all in the same bucket (I didn't vote for it and I didn't take it). We have to go a very long way to have the public trust us again and I am not sure, too, we are willing to make sacrifices to be good like we used to be. I'm not sure if we haven't lost the will to be great in this country and we are a debt ridden nation. We owe everybody—China, Japan—and that is not the route to greatness.

### Commentary

A noteworthy idea I found in this interview is the implementation of engagement within society. That is to say, Senator Vance, like Barber, asserts that engagement should be a fundamental part of the lives of individuals within a liberal democracy. One example from Senator Vance to which I am partial is the following:

“One of the school districts in my district does community projects. It starts with kids around town, little kids, go plant flower gardens—I am talking elementary age students at nursing homes. They have a program where all the seniors have their sidewalks shoveled by school. They raise money for their charities. They foster this spirit of community from the time these kids are in kindergarten and they’re so enthusiastic about it. And that is the best example of civic involvement I have ever seen from a school district. We probably would get a pushback if we said you had to do that. But I think we should encourage it.”

I chose the above quote from Senator Vance because I thought it was interesting that a school district could expose young children to the benefits of participation within a liberal democracy. While this exposure may be considered “coercion” by some individuals, I think such action is ultimately beneficial and necessary to the full education of a citizen within liberal democracy. Many times young children are never exposed to engagement and therefore cannot obtain an interest in it. Moreover, in recent years engagement that involves action participation, like in the above quote, has drastically decreased.

Theda Skocpol in her essay *Advocates without Members: The Recent Transformation of Civic Life* furthers this view of implementing active engagement. In her essay, Skocpol traces the history of civic participation in the United States over the last 50 years, having participation originally grounded in groups that required active participation (e.g., The American Legion, The Elks, and the PTA) fall by the wayside to a “dizzilyingly plethora of public affairs run by professionals” where individuals, instead of actively participating in an group, passively participate (e.g., simply sending checks to such organizations) (Skocpol, 461). Skocpol thereby suggests, like Barber and like Senator Vance, that in order to keep with the spirit of liberal democracy, citizens in America need to return to participation that actively involves them.

**1. Could you please state your name and position?**

I am Scott Boyd and I am the State Legislator for the 43<sup>rd</sup> District.

**2. Where geographically were you raised as a child and how have your childhood memories and experiences affected the person you are today?**

I was actually raised in Lancaster, in my legislative district. In fact I have only lived outside of my legislative district for four years when I first got married. Your childhood shapes just about everything that you do though: the values that you have, the kind of the mores, the system how you make decisions. I mean I graduated from the same high school that my children went to, the same school system.

I was raised middle class, suburban America. Neither parent went to college. Both worked themselves into white collar jobs from the farm and, honestly, lived the American dream. So does that shape who I am? Yes, because I believe everybody should and does have the opportunity to do that.

**3. Where did you attend high school, college, graduate/law school?**

High school was Lampeter-Strasburg High School. College was Millersville University. And that's it. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science.

**4. Throughout your childhood and schooling, did any individual make a profound impact upon your life and thoughts? If so, who was this individual and how did he or she affect your life?**

A couple people made an impact upon my life. Probably the primary person who made an impact was my Father. My Father and I actually started a business together so that relationship was probably the most impactful in my life. Second to my Father would be my Wife, who we have been married 31 years. She, like my Father, has shaped me into the person that I am.

**5. How did you enter the political/governmental sphere, that is, how has your life led you to the position which you currently hold? Was it always your goal to enter this field or did it occur more by happenstance?**

I graduated from high school in 1976, college in 1980. So I am a post 1960's kind of guy. I saw the political activism of the hippie movement and how it kind of fell apart. I lived through the Carter era of 18% interest rates and 18% unemployment. I got out of college and started my first job in the Regan era. At the same time I was active in our church and became a strong pro-life activist. So you combine the Regan era, 1980, along with being affiliated with organizations such as Rutherford Institute and some of the early socially conservative think tanks and that was just the formula for wanting to be involved.

And of course being a political science major I loved history and I loved our system of government. The best professor I ever had was a guy named Ivan Brichta who was from Czechoslovakia and who escaped Nazi occupation and was actually shot at by the Nazis—he had jumped out of a moving taxi, rolled down a hill being shot at, and jumped on a train to get out of Czechoslovakia. He taught, believe it or not, a Czechoslovakian guy taught, American political thought. His book was very small and he never used it. What he did was throw copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution on the table and that's what we would talk about. The guy would close his eyes when he would lecture and as he would talk about the American form of government tears would roll down his face. He was so enthralled with

the American form of government. So you put all those factors together, I couldn't help but wanting to get involved.

**6. What would you consider are the key endeavors and responsibilities of your position? How do you feel this position reflects who you are as a person and that for which you stand?**

Obviously first and foremost is being a law maker and trying to represent the values of the people of my district. Next, being a conduit for state government and for constituents. When you are a state legislator, you are really a small business person: You are an advocate for your constituents and their relationship to the executive branch of the government. So for any constituent our job is to make sure they get to the full extent of the law justice, equity, and fairness from the executive branch of the government.

**7. What would you consider to be civic and community engagement?**

For me, I am involved a multitude of civic and community endeavors. I sit on boards of finance committees for non-profits like the Water Street Rescue Mission. I cut my teeth as a planning commission member for the local municipal government. So people can be involved in local government, non-profits, charities, being involved with their school districts. There are a host of opportunities to be engaged civically.

**8. Are there different degrees in which one could participate in civic and community engagement? For instance, is enlisting the military a greater form of civic and community engagement than enlisting in the Peace Corps or vice versa?**

It's interesting. The answer to that question is I would say is no. I think people have different callings. I think that everybody should be required to perform some sort of civic service. I really like the nation of Israel's model where every young person serves in some capacity. In my opinion, I think it would have a tremendous benefit for our country if we would require high school students after they graduate high school to have a year or two of civic service before they enter higher education. Some 18 year olds are not ready to go off to college and this would give a little bit of delay. Plus, I think it would make our country stronger.

**9. What are your views on American citizens and civic and community engagement? Do you believe enough Americans, particularly college age students, are politically active and participate in the democratic process that is this country?**

Unfortunately, I think there is a great problem (it's actually a passage of scripture) and it says: "From those who are given much, much is expected." And our country is the most blessed nation of any of the world, probably in any time. I think it's a blessing and a curse. The curse is that we are spoiled. And that ties back into if people would be required to give back I think it would take a little bit of that spoiled edge off.

**10. What do you believe is most common characteristic, area, or trait of American government that American citizens misunderstand? Why do you believe this characteristic, area, or trait is so often misunderstood?**

People think governments have something, but they don't. All they have is what they have taken from someone. And when you begin to understand that you realize that every time we create a government program, we are taking from someone else to give to someone else. That is something people don't grasp at this point.

**11. What are the benefits of participating in civic and community engagement for an American citizen?**

The primary benefit is the personal satisfaction and the pride of giving back.

**12. What is an example in your life (besides your career) where you were engaged either civically or within the community? What did you learn or gain from such an experience?**

I served as a Republican committee person. I served on various charity boards. I went on mission trips. I served in local governments. And what did I learn? I learned how things work. I learned that there were a lot of people that were a lot worse off than I was. I learned not to complain as much. I learned to count my blessings daily. You can't fathom what you learn until you go and serve someplace.

**13. What is the pedagogical responsibility of a schooling system or university in transmitting the values of leadership, scholarship, and public service to its students? Is the responsibility of promoting these values in the hands of a schooling system/university or is it the responsibility of the students' parents? What role should each of these play in the development of an individual?**

I think the primary role of raising children resides with the parents or guardians. I think that is one of the failures of the system: We think the state can step in and do a better job. Does the school have the role to play in that? Yes. You ask any teacher what the single most important factor to a successful student, they say engaged parents. So, what we have to do is create an environment in the school system that engages parents. I think the system should be built to engage the family into education.

**14. What are current social and political issues that could be solved/remediated with civic and community engagement?**

You could just go on and on. I mean active community engagement could solve just about anything.

**15. In what direction do you see the country moving and how does the voice of the American citizen help in the shaping such a direction?**

Right now the direction of the country was, I think, summed up in the most recent election in Massachusetts with Senator Brown. And I think it was when the reporter mentioned to Senator Brown about "Senator Kennedy's seat" and he said "this isn't Senator Kennedy's seat; this is the peoples' seat." Right now I think there is a move nationally across the states for the government to belong to us, you work for us, and to get back to that core.

### *Commentary*

Of all the interviews I conducted, the interview I found most compelling was that of Representative Boyd. In this interview, as in Barber, Representative Boyd captures the uniqueness, the beauty, of liberal democracy, and the pride individuals should have living in such a form of government. In this endeavor, Representative Boyd tellingly shares the following story:

“The best professor I ever had was a guy named Ivan Brichta who was from Czechoslovakia and who escaped Nazi occupation and was actually shot at by the Nazis—he had jumped out of a moving taxi, rolled down a hill being shot at, and jumped on a train to get out of Czechoslovakia. He taught, believe it or not, a Czechoslovakian guy taught, American political thought. His book was very small and he never used it. What he did was throw copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution on the table and that’s what we would talk about. The guy would close his eyes when he would lecture and as he would talk about the American form of government tears would roll down his face. He was so enthralled with the American form of government.”

I found this story quite touching. It is ironic that a man born outside the United States would come to so passionately teach about the government of the United States, namely a liberal democracy. Yet, the story can serve as an example to all: citizens within liberal democracies need to appreciate the form of government in which they live, for many individuals in the world, who live in other forms government, do not have the luxuries of liberal democracy.

## Part 4: Personal Narrative

### *Introduction*

Hitherto this thesis has discussed the idea of democracy, both deliberative and participatory democracy. In this endeavor, deliberative democracy can be described as the ideas that construct a democracy, and participatory democracy can be described as the participation within a democracy. Deliberative democracy asserts the following: a democracy is a form of government by and from its citizens. By virtue of this arrangement as espoused by deliberative democracy, therefore, in order for a democracy to function correctly, citizens have a particular obligation toward engagement. When the engagement occurs it becomes an act of participatory democracy.

The goal of this thesis is to create a nexus between the ideas of deliberative democracy with the participation of participatory democracy, that is, to translate idea into praxis. The following narrative further elucidates this nexus between deliberative and participatory democracy; however, this narrative does not use traditional democratic theory but, alternatively, relies upon personal experiences from my own life. That is to say, in this narrative I trace the origins of my own interest in engagement. Although these origins are not grounded in traditional democratic theory, they are aimed at the same end, namely engagement.

The hope in the construction of this thesis is that others, when chronologically examining this thesis, namely the democratic theory that commences this thesis to the personal experiences that complete this thesis, will receive a deeper elucidation of engagement, both from traditional democratic thought and from my own personal experiences. Such a view, my hope is, will motivate these individuals toward engagement.

### *The Helping Philosophy*

Had someone informed me prior to entering college that I would select philosophy as my major concentration of studies, that I would develop an interest in the idea of democracy, and that I would attend law school upon graduation, I would have been in disbelief. Everyone in my family who has attended college has selected practical areas of study, areas like business and engineering. Indeed, nothing like philosophy. But this was everyone else in my family, not me.

Although I possessed an academic ability in high school, my work ethic left something to be desired. Classes did not matter me, and I was interested in other things—things like sports, girls, and cars, things typical of a male teenager. These interest outside of schooling thereby rendered my grades in high school as average and thus when I applied to Penn State (as an accounting major, mind you) I was not accepted to the University Park campus but instead to the Greater Allegheny campus in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I was somewhat upset at not receiving admission to the University Park campus. This is where my brother attended college for four years and where many of my friends were planning to attend college. I thought, at least at a level of intelligence, I was equal with these individuals. But, alas, due to my high school grades I was relegated to the second-tier (not-the-real-Penn State) branch campus. Here I would receive “watered-down” courses (not like the “real courses” at University Park) and would have to serve a two-year prison sentence before I could reach the promise land of Happy Valley.

I accepted my prison sentence with resignation; really, what else could I do? I presumed, however, that my time at Penn State Greater Allegheny would quickly pass and, soon enough, I would leave the campus and then happily enter University Park. In the meantime, however, before I could transfer to University Park, I had to complete my coursework at Penn State Greater Allegheny.

As an accounting major I was required to enroll in many general education courses. One of these general education courses in which I decided to enroll was an Ancient Greek philosophy course; it satisfied a humanities requirement. The course was scheduled to meet as a night course, once a week, every Wednesday. I was partial to this meeting schedule, as it provided more leisure time outside of class.

I entered the Ancient Greek philosophy course not expecting to gain much from the endeavor. Philosophy, I thought, was an area of study that focused on the abstract and the impractical. I mean, really, what could a course about thinkers from thousands of years ago teach me, a pretentious 18-year-old who thought he already knew things about life? I always thought if there was a flawless philosophy, a system of belief that answered all of life's questions, everyone would have already adopted such a disposition.

The first day of the philosophy course my professor walked in the door. She was a shorter woman, and I immediately noticed her bright red hair, which seemed to flow from the top of her head to her shoulders. Although the class was talking when she entered, it soon grew quiet. No one, including myself, knew what to expect. The professor slowly gazed around the classroom, and, after a moment, she spoke: "Hello," she said, "my name is Dr. Irene Wolf. Welcome to Ancient Greek philosophy."

I cannot remember many details from the rest of that first day of class. Much like any course, we most likely discussed the syllabus, reviewed the course material—nothing out of the ordinary. But, what I do remember is having a strange feeling. There seemed to be something different about this class. It was as if, deep inside, I knew something in me was going to change.

About this time in my life I started to experience the angst of many college freshmen—and for a few reasons: first, I had recently ended a long term relationship (or should I say "I was dumped on my ass"); second, I was away from my friends, many of whom were away at other colleges; and third, I missed the atmosphere of high school. Regardless, it is safe to say I was not in the best of states of mind. I thought I might need to take a semester off and regroup.

To deal with the problems I was encountering, I did much like anyone else I knew: I attended college parties. I thought, by virtue of what I had seen in the media, that staying out late and meeting new people might be the solution I sought. After all, this was college—a time for fun, even if I was at a branch campus. Toward this end, I attended several college parties; however, I soon grew disillusioned in this type of experience, that is, I began to notice that college parties were generally aimed at physical pleasure—whether that was through alcohol, meeting others of the opposite sex, so on and so forth—and did not help to address the problems I was encountering.

While physical pleasure might have proved beneficial for others my age, it did not for me; rather, physical pleasure seemed to suppress the problems I was encountering for a short period of time, leaving the problems to exist, just as they had, when the feeling fled. Therefore, because physical pleasure did not resolve the problems I was encountering, I decided to abstain from further attending college parties and to look elsewhere for the solution I sought. Since I had already participated in the social atmosphere of college, I thought I might look at the academic atmosphere of college. This is where Dr. Wolf and philosophy entered my life.

Dr. Wolf was a dynamic professor. You could tell her profession mattered to her; you could see it in her body language, you could feel it in her voice. She seemed a very happy person, unlike me during this period of time, a very unhappy person. Accordingly, as the semester progressed and I began to seek new outlets to solve the problems I was encountering, I decided to embrace what Dr. Wolf was teaching. After all, if what she taught made her happy, I thought, it might make me happy.

We read many different texts in the Ancient Greek philosophy course. There were many different “philosophies,” if you will. Yet while each of the texts espoused a different set of ideas, a general theme ran through all of them: the importance of critical thinking, of questioning the world in which you live. By way of example, an individual whom we studied in the course, consider Socrates, a man who gave his life for the field of philosophy. Socrates, the “social gadfly” (his Athenian moniker), continually questioned his fellow citizens within the Athenian polis. After such questioning, his interlocutors would realize, by virtue of their inability to provide answers to the questions he posed, that they did not know what they thought they originally knew. In other words, he made them aware of their ignorance.

Drawing from Socrates, I too began to realize that, in my own life, I did not know what I thought I knew—and not only in a philosophical sense. That is to say, what I thought I knew about life prior to entering college—namely who I was, that for which I stood, and that about which I cared—seemed to be falling apart. And I think these erroneous outlooks were causing my sadness: I had vested so much emotion into beliefs that were ultimately not well-grounded. Instead of clinging to these old beliefs, however, I decided to start from the ground up, to deconstruct everything I once thought about life and to start anew.

Starting from this new vantage point, I decided to embrace the teachings of philosophers which we studied in my philosophy course, as well as the personal opinions of Dr. Wolf. In this endeavor, one of the ideas that continually repeated among philosophers, as well as with Dr. Wolf, was that everyone in the world, like myself at this time, was suffering in some way (many times from ignorance about their ignorance) and, to find happiness in life, individuals should have compassion for, and therefore help, others who are suffering. For, according to this philosophy, when you help others you are helping yourself.

Always somewhat of a cynic, I viewed the notion of helping others to help yourself as “an after school special.” Really, would helping others help me? Ostensibly, it seemed that others would benefit from this, not me. Accordingly, I thought this might be some type of “trick.” Notwithstanding this cynicism I decided to endorse this “helping philosophy.” Although I was not sure the results this decision would yield, I was sure that the lifestyle I had lived hitherto had not provided happiness, so, I supposed, I had nothing to lose.

To embrace this helping philosophy I started out by doing small things for others: for example, I would hold the door for another individual when entering or exiting a building; I would say please and thank you; and I would compliment a person each day. Originally this was somewhat of an awkward disposition, not that I was an unkind individual, just, I had not consciously practiced helping others before this time. Yet insofar that I began helping others did I begin to feel a new sense of happiness. One significant example comes to mind: when I rendered aid to a man whose car had broken down.

A significant example of the effects of the helping philosophy upon my life begins one snowy day when I was driving in my car. In a hurry, I was driving to campus for a class, I noticed a man in the middle of the road whose car had broken down. Although previously in my life I had seen many cars broken down, I remember thinking, as I drove near this man, how I, myself, would not like to be in that type of situation and how the man must have felt at this time. Nevertheless, because I was on my way to a class and did not wish to be late, I drove past the man (much like everyone else who was driving), still contemplating his predicament.

As I continued to drive, a funny thing happened: I could not refrain from reflecting on the man and how he had to have felt, sitting in the cold, with a car that did not work. No one deserved that, and I could not simply drive by and do nothing. Therefore, I turned my car around and drove back to where the man had broken down. I then parked my car and proceeded to help the man physically push his car to the side of the road. I thought this is what the helping philosophy of Dr. Wolf might suggest.

Until my death, I will never forget the look on this man's face after I had helped him push his car to the side of the road. Tellingly, with large, open eyes and a humbled expression, he shook my hand and graciously thanked me many times. He appeared awestruck, for he could not believe that a stranger, someone whom he did not know, would have provided him help. As the tow truck arrived and I walked back to my car, I remember a deep feeling of warmth overcoming my body. Even I could not believe what had just transpired. But it was at this point I realized the true impacts of the helping philosophy espoused by Dr. Wolf. And for once, in the midst of many difficult problems, had I felt genuinely happy.

As the philosophy course came to end that semester, I knew I wanted to study philosophy at a deeper level. Although the field of accounting, my major concentration of studies at the time, would cultivate financial success, I thought philosophy, something that had already significantly changed my life, would cultivate a sense of happiness, which I believed was more important than financial gain. Accordingly, I decided to change my major concentration of studies to philosophy and to enroll in several more of Dr. Wolf's philosophy courses, as well as to heed any advice she might offer. One piece of advice Dr. Wolf offered at this time was to enroll in a civic and community engagement course. She said it would provide a deeper elucidation of her helping philosophy, specifically within the community. Curious, I then took the necessary steps to enroll in the civic and community engagement course.

The civic and community engagement course was taught by the Chancellor of Penn State Greater Allegheny, namely Dr. Curtiss Porter. He was a tall, black man who you could tell, by his posture and tone of voice, had in some way served in the military. Despite his initial seriousness in appearance, he had a jovial, playful side, many times joking with the class. Like Dr. Wolf, though, it was clear that the subject he was teaching mattered deeply to him. Engaging in the community was something in which he believed.

Per the requirements of the civic and community engagement course, I participated in activities that involved me in the local community. While these activities aided in my understanding of the helping philosophy of Dr. Wolf, they also exposed me to the benefits of community participation. One example that comes to mind was when I, and the others in the course, wrapped and distributed Christmas gifts for underprivileged children at a local church near the Penn State Greater Allegheny campus. I remember the students within the civic and community engagement course walking to the church located near the campus and, together, wrapping gifts that others had donated. The process took roughly an hour, and upon wrapping the gifts we placed the gifts on different tables within the recreation room of the church. Then we waited and watched as the children, with excitement in their eyes, flooded the room.

As the children approached the table at which I was stationed, I remember seeing one young girl come and take a present. She was missing both of her front teeth, and I could not help but smile, for I at a young age had also been missing my front teeth. My smile slowly closed, however, as I realized this girl was different from me: that is, while I at her age had the luxury of living in a warm home with new clothes and food consistently available, this girl did not: she was sickly thin, her hair was unkempt, and she wore an oversized, pink jacket with a large tear near left elbow. I could not help, just like when I had seen the man whose car had broken down, but feel terrible for this girl. Again, no one, especially a young child, deserved to be in these kinds of conditions. All of this notwithstanding, the young girl's face lit up, she happily took her present, giggled, and ran back to her parents, whom I could see were nearly as happy as she.

But there I was, an individual who earlier in the day, was complaining to his parents about how he could not receive all of the gifts he desired for Christmas. While I was afforded so many things in life, I continually wanted more because I thought it would provide happiness. This young girl, however, seemed to radiate the happiness I desired despite having so little. At this time I felt ashamed; I felt embarrassed; I felt as bad as I thought that young girl should have felt in her abject conditions. Because of this discomfort, I took a few moments to reevaluate my life and then I decided the following: henceforth,

I would consistently appreciate the blessings I had received and would take full advantage of the opportunities available to me.

In addition to the requirements of the civic and community engagement course, I read a variety of texts focusing on the idea of engagement within society. Recently inspired by this young girl to take full advantage of the opportunities available to me, as well as with an unyielding inquisitiveness from previous philosophy courses, I began questioning, much like Socrates to his interlocutors, Dr. Porter on why he was he doing what he was doing, that is, why he selected the specific course texts. I thought that, from what I learned in other philosophy courses, philosophy texts would better serve as an example as to why individuals should be engaged instead of the texts selected by Dr. Porter. After all, learning of my own ignorance and understanding the happiness that comes from helping others, I thought the helping philosophy espoused by Dr. Wolf could motivate individuals toward engagement.

Although Dr. Porter successfully defended his text selections for the course, I was nonetheless determined to try and capture the helping philosophy and its relation to engagement. Therefore, I decided to create my “own text” for the civic and community engagement course to ensure that future students could benefit, even if in some small way, from what Dr. Wolf had taught me.

Around this time, when I initially wished to create my own text for the civic and community engagement course, I established a bond with another professor, namely Dr. Clifford Manlove. I had previously enrolled in Introduction to College English with Dr. Manlove and was currently serving under his tutelage as Editor-In-Chief for the campus literary and art magazine *ABSENCE*. Accordingly, we had become familiar with each other in the regard of academic publishing. Thus, I informed Dr. Manlove of my desire to create a civic and community engagement text for future students to use and he agreed to support my proposal. We registered the project as an independent study.

I realized the amount of time allotted in a one semester independent study would not be sufficient in personally creating an entire text regarding the relationship between the helping philosophy espoused by Dr. Wolf and the idea of engagement. Indeed, by this time I was merely a year away from transferring to University Park, a transition to which, ironically, I was not looking forward. (I had grown close with many of my professors and Penn State Greater Allegheny had changed me as a person in so many beneficial ways; I did not want to leave.) Therefore, with time being a critical factor, I decided to ask faculty and staff if they would be interested in composing short, two to four page essays on the importance of civic and community engagement and its relation to their specific discipline or profession. Likewise, I decided to ask my fellow students for submissions; I believed that they, too, also possessed interesting anecdotes and personal experiences with civic and community engagement. The text would thus become a scholarly journal.

*Reflections on Civic and Community Engagement*, as the scholarly journal came to be known, became a great success thanks to the kindness of many professors, staff, and students in the form of their meaningful essays. I, myself, also had the opportunity to contribute: I wrote an essay regarding the relationship between happiness, helping others, and engagement. When the magazine was completed Penn State Greater Allegheny (specifically the Officer of Academic Affairs, Dr. Kurt Torell; I also wish to thank him personally for all that he has done for me; like Dr. Wolf, Dr. Manlove, and Dr. Porter, I consider him a mentor) was generous enough to professionally print several hundred copies of the scholarly journal for use throughout the campus, most notably in future civic and community engagement courses. My idea for this project, which at first blush seemed unreasonable (a college student creating his own text), had translated into a tangible creation from which others could benefit. I felt as if my dream had come true, and, in addition, that deep sense of happiness I sought in life. And all of this was thanks to philosophy inspiring engagement.

### *Closing Statements*

“This [thesis] will perhaps seem strange; it will seem too strict to be edifying, and too edifying to be strictly [scholarly]. As to this latter point I have no opinion. As to the first, however, this does not express my opinion of the matter; and if it were true that the form were too strict to be edifying, that, according to my conception, would be a fault. It is one question whether it cannot be edifying to everyone, seeing that not everyone possesses the capacity for following it; it is another question as to whether it possesses the specific character of edifying.”

—*Sickness Unto Death*, Søren Kierkegaard

Much of the first part of this thesis explores the relationship between deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, and the duty of citizens, namely engagement, in this purview. While this exploration has proved insightful—indeed it examines many important ideas within traditional democratic theory—I do hope my experiences in this personal narrative have enhanced this exploration such that individuals who read this thesis find some motivation toward engagement. Perhaps this motivation toward engagement is grounded in the first part of this thesis, a duty as a citizen within a democracy, or perhaps this motivation is grounded in the latter part of this thesis, a search for meaning and happiness in life—or, perhaps, it is grounded in both. Regardless, my hope is that others find importance in the idea of engagement.

It is implausible to expect every individual to devote the entirety of their lives toward engagement. Indeed, we cannot all be like such figures as Martin Luther King Jr. or Mother Teresa. Notwithstanding this limitation, if there is anything I have learned, and if there is anything I hope others learn, it is that each of us can perform small actions in our everyday lives that are considered engagement; and, together, the totality of these small actions can make large differences in our lives and in the lives of others.

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