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*History as politics*

In general I might agree with you:  
women should not contemplate  
war,  
should not weigh tactics  
impartially,  
or evade the word enemy, or view  
both sides and denounce  
nothing.

Margaret Atwood, “The Loneliness  
of the Military Historian” (1995: 49–50)

Women should march for peace,  
or hand out white feathers to  
inspire bravery. . .  
Instead of this, I tell  
what I hope will pass as truth.  
A blunt thing, not lovely.

A “blunt thing, not lovely” is an appropriate description for truth, or what passes for truth, in the social sciences. Stilted language and cumbersome methods contribute to its coarse features. More importantly, the homeliness of social scientific truth results from disinterestedly asking questions that lack clear answers. The beauty of science is its logic and parsimony. The beauty of literature is its expressiveness and involvement. Social science is generally messy and aloof. Yet it, and we its practitioners, continue to investigate issues about which people care deeply and act passionately.

One such set of issues is war and military service in democracies. Why do citizens sometimes enthusiastically give their behavioral consent to their governments and sometimes refuse it? Why at some times and in some places is there widespread protest or draft evasion and at other times and places considerable patriotism and volunteering? Why are some groups likely to support a particular war and others not? And how can a people consider a government democratic when it makes such harsh compulsory extractions of its citizens in money and life?

Military service is just one of many ways democratic governments demonstrate their immense power to tax. Democratic governments are able to elicit, legally and legitimately, both money and men from their

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populations. Certainly, there is tax evasion, draft evasion, and various other forms of disobedience and even outright resistance; yet it is remarkable the extent to which citizens acquiesce and even actively consent to the demands of governments, well beyond the point explicable by coercion. This is a puzzle for social scientists, particularly those who believe that individuals are self-interested, rational actors who calculate only the private, egoistic costs and benefits of possible choices. In this view the provision of collective goods would never justify a quasi-voluntary<sup>1</sup> tax payment; and the benefits of a war could not possibly exceed the cost of dying.

Such behavior may befuddle social scientists, but mobilizing support for their policies is a daily task for political actors. Few governments can survive without a high degree of quasi-voluntary compliance by their subjects and citizens. Sustenance of military, tax, and other political obligations depends on the willing compliance of large numbers of individuals who, albeit obligated to obey the laws and compelled to do so if necessary, comply because they choose to.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, both the political and economic costs of governance become too high. Whether, for democratic government to thrive, acquiescence and conformity must translate into active behavioral consent remains an important empirical question with significant normative implications.

This book has two principal explananda: the institutionalization of policy in response to anticipated and actual citizen behavior; and conditions under which citizens give, refuse, or withdraw their consent. The central claims flow from the argument that citizen consent is contingent upon the perceived fairness of both government and other citizens. Most citizens of democracies, most of the time, are more likely to give their consent if they believe that government actors and other citizens are behaving fairly toward them. Fairness is a critical element in effective and democratic governance. Yet the standards of fairness vary over time and place and among groups within the polity; so, too, do the democratic rules that will determine whose and which standards of fairness dominate. Consideration of how the standards of fairness emerge and change is an additional theme of the text.

Understanding the role of consent in governance advances democratic theory. Recognizing fairness as an important influence on behavior helps put to rest critiques of rational choice as a model that unrealistically

<sup>1</sup> It has become common practice for the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and its counterparts in other countries to emphasize the importance of voluntary compliance. However, such compliance, although willing, is also compelled by law: An individual who chooses not to comply will suffer sanctions if caught. Thus, I prefer the term quasi-voluntary compliance, developed in my *Of Rule and Revenue*.

<sup>2</sup> This was the argument of an earlier book, *Of Rule and Revenue* (1988), in which I explored the institutional choices of government actors.

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### *Why study the history of military service?*

assumes only narrowly self-interested actors. An equally important goal of the book, however, is the development of an empirical model that combines the microfoundations of methodological individualism with historically grounded case studies of macroevents. The result is a book that aims to transcend the usual boundaries between normative and empirical political theory, between ethics and rationality, between choice-theoretic models and more sociological or historical research.

#### WHY STUDY THE HISTORY OF MILITARY SERVICE?

History shapes agents and their ethics; it contributes to the definition of group membership, individual identities, and what constitutes fairness. Why some groups of people are more likely to comply with the laws than others rests on a dynamic analysis in which the past informs the present. Crucial to the investigation of consent are historical events that are the bases of expectations of what others will do and what the likely outcome will therefore be. The sources of present beliefs are past experiences and practices. Prior institutions, prior strategies, and prior actions delimit current options, and stories of yesteryears reveal what bargains have been broken and which kept. Although the past is not necessarily predictive of the future, it is a guide to the possible pitfalls that lie ahead. Consequently, political entrepreneurs and government actors struggle over the meaning of the past for the present.

History also shapes institutions and regimes, and history can reveal the underlying causes for institutional change or stability. Democracies, at least some democracies, survive significant strains. This book documents some of those strains, particularly ones caused by revolutions, civil wars, external wars big and small, and the domestic politics of conscription. For France, Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, such pressures led to the evolution rather than destruction of democratic institutions. Although the investigation of the history of military service can hardly offer a full empirical account of the causes or compass of democratic institutional endurance and transformation, it does suggest some reasons why democracies survive, on the one hand, and why they change, on the other.

Although governments often evoke political obligation as one basis for compliance, few issues permit observation of both the decisions that produce government policies and citizen choices in the face of government demands. Military service satisfies both criteria.<sup>3</sup> To join the army, to be a conscientious objector, to resist the draft are publicly recorded

<sup>3</sup> Thus, once again I find myself studying armed young men in uniforms. My dissertation and first book (1977) was on police unions. My husband notes that *Of Rule and Revenue* was a study of old men in uniform.

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behaviors. The data may be messy, but the data on who pays or evades taxes is even more difficult to obtain and often even more suspect. Moreover, military service is an important obligation of democratic citizenship, at least male citizenship. Noncompliance with this obligation has implications for the efficacy of government. Although each act of noncompliance may have a singular motivation, an ensemble can constitute a political statement and, on occasion, an actual rebellion.

There are further justifications for the investigation of military service. In recent years, scholars attempting to develop a more adequate theory of the state have given considerable attention to the relationship between states and citizens in regard to social welfare and taxation. Variations in the form of the military obligation and the institutions that enforce this obligation have received some descriptive but little or no theoretical attention. Yet military service is demonstrably as important an aspect of the state–citizen relationship as any that exists. There has not, of course, been total neglect. Several important historical and political sociologists have taken up the question to some extent but generally within the context of the role of the military in society (e.g. Janowitz 1980; Giddens 1985, esp. chs. 8 and 9; Mann 1986 *passim* and 1993 *passim*; Birnbaum 1988; Tilly 1990). There has been no systematic investigation of how governments induce citizens to accept military service nor explanatory theory of variation among states and citizens, even in important works like that of Huntington (1957) or Enloe (1980). International relations specialists and international political economists have certainly considered the importance of national defense and military power, but, with few exceptions (Thomson 1995), the state theorists among them have been more concerned with questions of hegemony, international cooperation, and trade than with why a state chooses the military format it does and what effects that has on citizen behavior. Thus, this study of military service further contributes to the construction of a more satisfactory theory of the state than is currently available.<sup>4</sup>

The history of military service constitutes an important subject for investigating not only state building (see, e.g., Gillis ed. 1989; Hooks and McLauclan 1992; van Holde 1993) but also what it means to be a

<sup>4</sup> Theorizing on the state has tended to be either extremely abstract, to concern itself with general issues of the state, such as its transformation over history, or to be inductively built from particular cases (for further discussion, see Levi 1988: 185–204). Some of this work begins the move toward an actual theory of the state that can specify why the state varies over time in the institutions that constitute it and what effect those institutions have on citizen behavior. However, there is still considerable ground to be covered in developing a satisfactory theory that links the actions of individuals to the structures and institutions in which they must act (Kiser and Hechter 1991). Nonetheless, these cases contribute to the literature that analyzes the microfoundations of state behavior.

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liberal and democratic state (see, e.g., Cohen 1985; Silver 1994). Debates over the introduction of obligatory military service in democracies rehearse themes of ennobling self-sacrifice, nationalism, and the superiority of the needs of the state to the rights of the individual, on the one hand, and of the nature of full citizenship, fears of standing armies, and the superiority of the rights of the individual to the needs of the state, on the other. Military service is one of the central dilemmas for the liberal social contract as initially formulated by Thomas Hobbes. It is to protect one's life that an individual agrees to submit to the regulations of states. Thus, the demand by government that a young man potentially give up his life for his country puts a tension at the heart of political life, a tension Hobbes recognizes but does not satisfactorily resolve.<sup>5</sup>

The issues of consent, fairness, and obligation are clearly and unquestionably present in the institutions of military service in liberal democracies. Conscription is possible only with some form of permission by the citizenry. At the least, conscription, like taxation, demands representation. To what extent democratic conscription actually rests on the more exacting standard of consent is one of the empirical – and theoretical – questions at the heart of this book.

The focus on military service means the study is limited by issues of gender and, to some extent, age. Those making decisions whether to volunteer for the army, evade the draft, submit to conscription, or conscientiously object are both young and male. Nonetheless, the arguments developed here appear to have relevance for a broader range of cases, reviewed in the last chapter. From the investigation of a set of extreme extractive obligations, it may be possible to generalize the explanation of behavioral consent in one sphere to others in liberal democratic societies.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The approach of this book to the important philosophical and practical questions embodied in the concept of consent is by means of concrete empirical investigations informed by formal theory, especially game the-

<sup>5</sup> Sara Monoson pointed this tension out to me. Cohen (1985, esp. ch. 6) also recognizes this issue. See Kateb's (1992) critique of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Rawls for their lapses on this point (184–7) and his critique of the reasoning behind the United States Supreme Court decisions that upheld conscription (187–9); and see Walzer (1970: 82–6) on the ways Hobbes (1985 [1651]) attempts to reconcile men taking a risk and even dying to “protect their protection” (Hobbes, pt. II, ch. 29) with the fact that they are giving up the self-protection guaranteed by the social contract. Walzer (1970, 1977), Singer (1974), Kateb (1992), and Klosko (1992) are among the contemporary political theorists who have wrestled with the problem of when, morally, there is an obligation to die for the state.

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ory. This description captures one of the meanings of “analytic narrative,”<sup>6</sup> the approach advocated here. Analytic narrative combines detailed research of specific cases with a more general model capable of producing hypotheses about a significant range of cases outside the sample of the particular project. Reliance on the techniques of analytic narrative encourages sensitivity to the complexities of the case while providing sufficient analytical rigor to support carefully reasoned explanations consistent with the evidence and superior to the alternatives.

The use of analytic narrative is not, of course, restricted to those combining game theory and history. Much of the research in economic history fits this description (e.g. McCloskey 1991) as does that of those comparativists concerned with combining detailed contemporary case studies with formal theory (e.g. Laitin 1992; Golden 1996). Moreover, the term has currency in sociology, among those who are mathematical (e.g. Abell 1987, 1993; Abbott 1990, 1993; Fararo 1993), those more concerned with ontology (e.g. Somers 1992, 1994; Aminzade 1993), and those who consider themselves rationalists (e.g. Goldthorpe 1996; Kiser 1996).

Despite the interest in what is now called analytic narrative, however, there are still relatively few attempts to use the tools of modern political economy to provide sustained analyses of comparative political behavior in actual concrete settings.<sup>7</sup> For both area studies specialists and historical macrosociologists, case studies have been the major form of research and communication. Although case study work may correct the lack of adequate detail common to broad comparisons, it usually fails to offer adequate causal mechanisms. This makes generalization problematic. Indeed, too many of the proponents of case studies tend to reject general theory and all that implies about testing propositions, generalization, and prediction (Kiser and Hechter 1991; Collier 1991). To use case studies theoretically requires retaining sensitivity to the particularities and richness of the stories while actually offering the microfoundations that permit illumination of general theory. It requires translating the insights of game theory, microeconomics, and the “new economic institutionalism” into hypotheses that can account for important political events and decisions.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Bates, Avner Greif, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, Barry Weingast, and I are currently completing a book that elaborates and develops this approach (in process).

<sup>7</sup> Among the exceptions not already mentioned are Bates (1991, 1997); Frieden (1991); Laitin (1992); Kiser (1994); Geddes (1994); Verdier (1994); and Kalyvas (1996). Although economic historians often claim to be political economists, there are still too few examples of sufficiently detailed cases in which politics and political institutions play an important role. Among the exceptions are Rosenthal (1992); Greif et al. (1994b); Milgrom et al. (1990); North and Weingast (1989).



### *Methodological approach*

In the analytic narrative used here, the tools of historical narrative combine with formal analytic theory to guide both the collection and assessment of information. The formal analytics require a deductive model in which rational actors strategically interact until they reach an equilibrium outcome from which no one has an incentive to deviate. This does not mean that all individuals are rational or strategic. Nor does it mean that there is a single equilibrium; it is more likely that there will be multiple equilibria. There are also instances where no equilibrium seems possible; cycles and chaos are more likely. Nonetheless, the presumption of equilibria permits the analyst to consider what would disrupt or inhibit a particular equilibrium.

Equilibrium analysis fosters the construction of comparative statics, which in turn produces a set of hypotheses concerning what exogenous shocks or alterations in the independent variables will have what effects on the actions of the individuals under study. For example, in *Of Rule and Revenue* (Levi 1988), a ruler, maximizing revenue to the state, must determine what kind of revenue production system to construct. Changes in the form of taxes and tax collection should, therefore, reflect changes in the transaction costs of collecting and enforcing certain kinds of taxes, the relative bargaining power of those likely to be taxed, and the expenditure requirements of the ruler. Moreover, particular outcomes should be predictable, that is, there will be no income tax until the costs of assessing and collecting income are sufficiently low to make it pay for the ruler.

The model indicates the links between independent and dependent variables and leads to an account of the mechanisms that are essential to a causal explanation. The logic of game theory is useful in simplifying the complexity of history, generating some testable, or at least observable, hypotheses, and providing grounds for generalization. A concern with the game logic builds both equilibrium analysis and institutions into the model. The new economic institutionalism clarifies what constrains or facilitates actions and what role information and beliefs play in affecting behavior (see, e.g., Tsebelis 1990; Ostrom 1990; Golden 1990; Bates and Krueger 1993; Firmin-Sellers 1996). The current infatuation among comparative political scientists, economists, and sociologists with institutions certainly gives institutions pride of place, but it is the fine grain of the links between institutions and behavior that rational choice scholars are attempting to model and that game theory helps to make plain.

An additional advantage of the game theoretic approach is that it permits specification of the counterfactual, the behavior that failed to occur because it is off the equilibrium path. In an important essay on "Objective Possibility and Adequate Causation in Historical Explana-

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tion,” Max Weber argued for the explicit and systematic use of counterfactuals as aspects of the empirical world that are contrary to fact but not to logical or “objective” possibility (1949 [1905]). Counterfactuals are indispensable in most comparative and historical work, since the number of possible causal factors are so numerous and interrelated and since the number of similar cases are seldom sufficient in number. However, Weber’s efforts to formulate some general principles for evaluating the plausibility of “objective possibility” lack adequate theoretical grounds for justifying and circumscribing his counterfactual assumptions (Elster 1978: 180).

Until recently (Tetlock and Belkin eds. 1996), there has been little effort to systematically evaluate the role counterfactuals do play and can play in social scientific analyses. Nor, until recently, has there been much success in giving counterfactual assumptions theoretical justification. However, game theory does provide a means to do just that. It outlines the range of sequential choices available to the actors. To understand why one of the paths becomes the equilibrium path, it is necessary to understand why the actors did not follow other possible paths.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the model generates testable hypotheses about: (1) what the beliefs of the actors had to be and what they could not have been; and (2) what the critical junctures were in the decision-making process.

Path dependence is the term social scientists currently use to capture how past actions constrain present choices. Developed to account for the persistence of suboptimal technologies (David 1985; Arthur 1989), its applications to social and political arrangements are generally less successful. Nonetheless, recognition of the persistence of suboptimal institutions (North 1981, 1990; Putnam 1993) has begun to produce models in which consideration of what is off the equilibrium path plays a critical role in explaining how current arrangements are the effect of past choices (Greif 1994a, b).

Of course, path dependence can have other sources as well. Game theory also illuminates these. For example, the notion of focal points (Schelling 1978) has proved essential for understanding coordination without direct communication. Institutional arrangements and past agreements often serve such coordinating functions and, moreover, make it difficult to coordinate around alternatives, especially when mass mobilization is involved (Hardin 1995; in press).

While it is certainly the case that good theory often elaborates contingencies or points on the path where a different action or event may have changed the outcome, it is also the case that theory should delimit the

<sup>8</sup> See, especially, the papers by Weingast (1996) and by de Mosqueta (1996). For a discussion of counterfactuals in historical analysis, particularly as applied to revolution, see Kiser and Levi (1996).



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possibilities. There is a tension in the work of most structuralists who, on the one hand, tend to make their theory extremely deterministic and, on the other hand, insist on conjunctural analysis that opens up too wide a range of possibilities. Here is where analytic narrative offers an important alternative approach. While it provides a causal model, it also illuminates the critical junctures or choice points. At its most successful, it can offer an account of why one path and not another is followed and then maintained.

The final problem that analytic narrative helps resolve is generalization and robustness. A wide range of cases in different places at different times provides a basis for presuming that the model is both general and robust, but more important is the derivation of explicit hypotheses from an explicit model. Such an enterprise permits the reader to reach her own conclusions about the persuasiveness of the evidence and to extend the model to other cases in other times and places. Particularities of cases may make generalizations across cases difficult, but theory helps sort the particular from the general. At this point in the development of analytic techniques, the complexity of the social world probably allows only “sometimes true theories” (Coleman 1964: 516–19; Scharpf 1990: 484). However, progress more often than not rests on the slow and incremental accumulation of knowledge.

### *The behavioral assumptions of an analytic narrative of citizen behavior*

In the analytic narrative of variations in citizen consent and government policy-making, individuals are the decision makers. They can be narrowly egoistic or ethical, but they are rational in that they act instrumentally and consistently within the limits of constraints to produce the most benefit at the least cost. The variation in choice reflects the variation in constraints, often in the form of resources or institutions that delimit or enable action, promote certain beliefs over others, and provide or hide information.

Model building begins by identifying the key actors, positing the ends they are maximizing or optimizing, and then explaining their behavior by reference to the constraints and strategic interactions that influence their choices. The analysis of variations in state revenue production policies across time and place (Levi 1988) relies on the assumption that rulers maximize revenue to the state subject to the constraints of their relative bargaining power, discount rates, and transaction costs. Revenue maximizing is an intermediate end, instrumental to the achievement of any number of further ends. A ruler’s ultimate goal could range from increasing personal wealth to enhancing power to promoting an ideolog-

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ical agenda. The goals vary among rulers as does the concrete amount of revenue it is feasible to collect.

Military service policies have a similar structure. The ultimate end is to win a war or provide adequate defense or, possibly, pay off cronies with military contracts or stage a coup and become emperor. Recruitment and payment of soldiers is the means to achieve those ends. Thus, most rulers most of the time wish to enlarge their armies subject to their constraints, and the most important constraint is often the probable consent – or at least compliance – of the governed.

Focusing on the citizen rather than the ruler requires somewhat different assumptions, however. For one thing, there is likely to be considerably more variation in the information and beliefs, as well as preferences of citizens than of rulers. Whatever rule or norm informs the choice to comply is often shared and constructed by a group of actors who possess a common identity. This may mean shared interests, but it as often means a shared culture – racial, religious, or ethnic based – that may cut across interests. How such a group is defined and what norms it uses as behavioral rules are critical to the decision about how to act.

Nor does citizen compliance lend itself easily to a single maximand. Not only are there multiple preferences within the universe of citizens, a single individual may hold several goals. As has been often demonstrated with voting and as has been more recently demonstrated for regulatory strategies and public opinion (Kiewiet and Kinder 1981; Kiewiet 1983; Ayres and Braithwaite 1992; Stoker 1992; Scholz 1994), there may be both an ethical and egoistic element in the decision to comply (or not) or volunteer (or not). Certainly there are segments of the citizenry who maximize on one dimension rather than optimize on several. A large proportion, however, appear to have dual utilities.<sup>9</sup> They wish to contribute to the social good, at least as long as they believe a social good is being produced, but they also want to ensure that their individualistic interests are being satisfied as far as possible. Moreover, these interests cannot be ordered in the way a ruler's can. Achievement of ethical goals may not ensure achievement of self-interest, and ethical concerns may conflict with or undermine more egoistic ends. Sometimes institutional arrangements can ensure that ethical and self-interested concerns reinforce each other. Sometimes they cannot.

### *From the individual to the aggregate*

Sufficient individual-level data to actually distinguish among causes of compliance are difficult (and usually impossible) to acquire. Even when

<sup>9</sup> Margolis (1990a, b) uses this term. Also see Margolis (1982).