Early draft: please do not circulate without permission.

The Epistemic and Metaphysical Roles of Voting: Addressing the Dual-Role Dilemma

Alex Guerrero
Rutgers University – alex.guerrero@rutgers.edu

Introduction

There are votes for people: votes cast to select a person or group of persons to serve as one's representative. And there are votes for policy: votes cast to select an option to be the governing policy or decision of some group or collective. These two kinds of votes are distinct in important ways, but they are alike in this regard: votes of both kinds can serve both an epistemic role and a metaphysical role.

The epistemic role claimed for voting is that a collective judgment that a particular person or policy is the best of several options under consideration, borne of a democratic aggregation of individual judgments, can sometimes be epistemically better than those individual judgments or even the judgments of a few relative experts. It is also sometimes expanded to include the expression or emanation of non-comparative judgments (of varying strengths) that a particular person or policy is a good, attractive, correct, or optimal option. Those observing elections also sometimes take elections to provide *evidence* that a candidate or policy is widely-supported, popular, generally endorsed, and so on—again, sometimes in a purely comparative sense, sometimes in a non-comparative way.

The metaphysical role, which we might also think of as a moral or normative role, is to alter various facts about what we might call the "normative landscape." The metaphysical role is to transfer a certain kind of *force* or *power* to a particular person or policy, to make it so that particular people have certain *powers* or *abilities*, to make it so that certain policies come to be given legal or other kinds of *force*, or to make it so that a group is *committed* to some decision or course of action. In many cases, this metaphysical role is also a moral role, since the new force, power, or commitment itself has a moral dimension: creating moral authority, legitimacy, obligations, and permissions that otherwise would not exist.

On some level, we are all aware that votes have these dual roles, and that—in the normal case—a single vote plays both of these roles simultaneously. Indeed, a natural story to tell about voting is that these roles are related: we accord to votes the metaphysical role *because* of our understanding that votes also involve the relevant epistemic dimension. In this way, votes are importantly different than lotteries. The former, but not the latter, are intimately bound up with selecting a person or policy on the basis of our judgment and reason.

That said, not enough attention has been paid to the way in which these two roles—the epistemic and the metaphysical—can come into conflict with each other. Specifically, these different roles can create dilemmas for would-be voters, at least under plurality voting systems in which a person can vote for only one candidate or policy, and in which they either vote wholly for that candidate or policy or not at all.

Differential responses to this dilemma on the part of voters raises problems for both the epistemic and metaphysical roles of voting. Because voters respond to this dilemma in different ways, that will have the effect of muddying both the epistemic and metaphysical waters.

In this paper, I will begin by saying more about these two different roles. In the second part of the paper, I will discuss how plurality voting systems generate dilemmas for would-be voters. In the third

part of the paper, I will consider alternative voting systems and procedures that might do better on this front. Additionally, I will argue that both social epistemologists and political philosophers should take a greater interest in the precise connections between the epistemic role of voting and the metaphysical role accorded to voting in particular voting systems.

I. The Metaphysical and Epistemic Roles of Voting

A few words about voting. In general, we vote either for people or policies, where policies can include *laws*, *decisions*, *courses of action*, and so on. Here is one way of describing what is going on when we vote:

> When we vote for people, we are voting to make a collective judgment about which person should occupy a particular role and authorizing that person to have that role.
>
> When we vote for policies, we are voting to make a collective judgment about what to do next, and to put that plan into action.

On this description of things, each vote consists of an individual judgment about *which person should occupy this role* or *what we should do next*, and these votes can be combined to constitute a collective judgment.

On this judgment model of voting, we could then ask questions about the *bases* of these individual judgments. Am I making this judgment about which person should occupy this role just based on my own self-interest? Or on what I take to be best for the group? Or on what I take to be required for the role? And so on. Moving away from the descriptive questions, we can ask about the *proper* bases on which to be making these judgments—the ethics of voting.

On a different way of thinking and talking about voting, voting is not about making or offering individual judgments about questions, but is instead expressing a preference for a particular option. On a certain view of what preferences are, this may be close to just expressing a desire that one has, where basic or fundamental desires are then close to rationally uncriticizable, except on the basis of things like coherence, internal consistency, and so on. I think that even if that is the story we want to tell about voting, we can still say many of the same things about the epistemic role of voting, we will just be using voting to provide information or evidence about what our collective preferences are, where that may exhaust what there is to say—there might not be further collective *judgments* about any part of the world.

But, even on a preference model of voting, we might also have a somewhat more robust conception of preferences, where preferences include or embody both desires and implicit or explicit judgments about the world. Or it may be that preferences with respect to *some* topics are more robust in this way.

I think that the thinnest conception of preference, where they are treated as tantamount to rationally unassailable desires, is implausible in many voting contexts, and particularly in the political context. Similarly, I find implausible those conceptions of voting that treat voting as a mere expression of emotion, without even a corresponding cognitive dimension that holds the emotional response appropriate because this is the better person or policy to be supporting. It is not clear that even those who sign on for an expressivist theory of voting go this far.[1]

[1] See, e.g., Geoffrey Brennan and Loren Lomasky, Democracy and Decision: The Pure Theory of Electoratal Preference (1993).

But I won't argue for that here. For the purposes of the paper, I will assume that a vote for a person or a policy does include, among other things, a judgment of some kind (although, of course, this judgment need not be altruistically focused or motivated; it might just be a judgment about what would be best for oneself). I think the basic story here can be recast focusing on preferences, even on a thin conception of preference, but I won't spell that out in this paper.

A. The Metaphysical Role

The metaphysical role of voting is, I think, the role that we typically think of when we think of the point of conducting votes (at least those that we understand to be "binding"). This role, which we might also think of as the moral or normative role of voting, consists in altering various facts about what is sometimes metaphorically called the "normative landscape." Through voting, we can alter what powers and obligations individuals have. The metaphysical role, generally speaking, is to transfer a certain kind of force or power to a particular person or policy. Different votes will do this in different ways, but here are some of the central metaphysical roles for votes:

- to cause people to have certain powers or abilities
- to cause people to have new responsibilities and duties
- to cause certain policies to have legal or other kinds of force behind them
- to cause a group to be committed to some decision or course of action

In many cases, this metaphysical role is also a moral role, since the new force, power, responsibility, or commitment itself has a moral dimension: creating moral authority, legitimacy, obligations, and permissions that otherwise would not exist.

Perhaps, for example, the people of Tennessee vote to elect Yolonda Smith to be one of their United States Senators. After that vote (and the official swearing in and other formalities), Smith will have various new powers, abilities, responsibilities, and duties. She can go places that she would have previously not been allowed to enter. She has new legal (and attendant moral) responsibilities: to attend various meetings, disclose various information about what she is doing, listen to people, make decisions about who will work on her staff, and so on. And she has new legal (and attendant moral) powers: to offer her views about what ought to be done in Senate meetings, to vote on legislation, to vote (or not) to confirm various executive appointments, and so on. And similar things happen when votes are conducted to elect judges, presidents, comptrollers, sheriffs, board members, department chairs, and so on, or to decide to whom various job offers should be made.

Just as people can come to have different powers, responsibilities, and so on, votes can also cause decisions and declarations and texts of various kinds to have a different set of properties, many of which are moral in nature. So, for example, prior to the vote ratifying a constitution, it is just a proposal, a bunch of words on some pages of paper. After the vote, it empowers some people to do things that they otherwise could not (levy taxes, pass legislation, go to war), if they are chosen in the ways specified by the constitution; it constrains what others can do; it tells people how long they can stay in various official roles; it gives some people various rights and might alter or limit others; and it may (depending on the details) come to have a kind of moral force beyond its legal standing, so that all members of the political community owe it a kind of respect, should abide by it, and more. Or consider the vote members of a jury take at the conclusion of a criminal trial. The result of this vote will cause a person to receive punishment or go free; if it is a vote to acquit, it will cause it to be impermissible to bring the same charges against this person (if in a jurisdiction that bars double jeopardy); and it may cause a person to be convicted of a felony, which, in the United States, will cause them to be ineligible for various kinds of government benefits and services. And similar things happen when multi-member panels of judges vote to support a

particular decision in a case, when legislation is passed, and when other kinds of groups vote to commit themselves to decisions of various kinds.

In all of these cases, the votes do not do all of the metaphysical work on their own; there are always broader structures in which the votes are taking place, pre-existing rules governing who is eligible to take a binding vote on this issue, along with (in some cases) the beliefs and attitudes of those involved in the vote and who will come to learn of the vote. Still, the metaphysical importance of voting is familiar and clear. Many votes have consequences: things happen because of them.

It is important to stress that in cases in which there is a binding and procedurally legitimate vote taken (legitimate according to the procedures of the institutions in question), votes play a metaphysical role in almost every case: they alter metaphysical facts concerning what is the law, what formal rules are, what legal and institutional powers individuals will have, and so on. This is so even if, in some of these cases, we might want to deny that a similar *moral* transformation has occurred. We might grant that someone is the *legal* winner of a vote, while also denying that the vote was *morally* transformative in authorizing that person to govern over us, for example. (We may want to deny this for reasons that I will go into later in discussing the dual-role dilemma.) Still, even in these cases (if there are any such cases), votes play a metaphysically significant role.

Of course, we all know this. That is why people work so hard to influence how a vote will go, why they fight and die for the right to vote on various issues, why who gets to vote is seen as morally significant (and for more than just symbolic reasons), and why we care about whether votes are fair or rigged. More could be said about the details of the metaphysical role of voting, but I take it the basic idea is familiar and uncontroversial.

B. The Epistemic Role

As noted above, we vote for people and for policies. In both cases, an individual vote can be seen as an expression or emanation of a judgment that a particular person or policy would be best, at least relative to the other options under consideration, or at least relative to the extant option set.

On this understanding of what a vote is, they can be seen as having a significant epistemic role. There are many different accounts of the epistemic usefulness and significance of voting, which I will consider in more detail shortly. On all of these epistemic democratic pictures, we begin with the premise that there are correct and incorrect or better and worse responses to political questions or collective decisionmaking situations more generally. (This is clearest if, as discussed above, we opt for the judgment-involving or rationalist or cognitivist conception of voting.) These are questions such that we can make a good decision or a bad decision. Our decisions to select policies or people can be better or worse, if not correct or incorrect—although there might be different accounts as to what makes them so, depending on our views about the nature of political questions.[2]

This is to basically sign on to what Joshua Cohen calls "an epistemic interpretation of voting" which, on his view:

[2] One view that denies this might deny that any of us are better or worse regarding making judgments about political questions, because political questions and political decisions are "funny" in a certain way—perhaps they are non-factual, or are best understood on a "constructivist" picture, so that the procedure of making the collective decision in fact *constructs* the good result. Certain readings of Rousseau on the general will lean in this direction, where a majority vote doesn't *track* what is in the general interest; instead, it simply *constructs* or *constitutes* what the general interest or general will *is*. I find these views mysterious and implausible and will leave them aside for the purposes of this paper. I also don't think this is Rousseau's view, but I will leave that interpretive question to others.

> "has three main elements: (1) an *independent standard* of correct decisions—that is, an account of justice or of the common good that is *independent* of current consensus and the outcome of votes; (2) a *cognitive* account of voting—that is, the view that voting expresses beliefs about what the correct policies are according to the independent standard, not personal preferences for policies; and (3) an account of *decision making* as a process of the adjustment of beliefs, adjustments that are undertaken in part in light of the evidence about the correct answer that is provided by the beliefs of others."[3]

Let me comment on two possible points of departure from this general statement (in both cases, it is not clear that this is to say anything in disagreement with Cohen). First, I don't want to foreclose the possibility that what makes for a correct decision in a particular case might be given by an independent standard, but something other than anything to do with justice or the common good. This will be most evident when we are considering the question of who should be chosen to occupy certain political offices. Second, I think that the key part of the cognitive account of voting is that voting is not *just* about *bare* preferences for policies; instead, voting always has a cognitive, belief-involving, judgment-making dimension.

Starting with this general epistemic interpretation of voting, arguments for the epistemic importance of voting and for democracy more generally can go in different directions. I will consider several of those options here.

1. Epistemic Role of Voting (1): Harnessing Widely Distributed Information or Expertise

One argument for using broadly inclusive votes to make political decisions, or at least to select the political representatives who will make those decisions, is that the epistemic contribution of the many will be better than what we would get just from having one or a few people make the decision. Here is one general form such an argument might take:

> (1) Political questions or collective decisionmaking problems have correct/incorrect or better/worse answers.
>
> (2) Information or expertise relevant to getting the correct or better answers is widely distributed across all or many members of the political community.
>
> (3) If information or expertise relevant to getting the correct or better answers is widely distributed in this way, then a necessary condition of making a correct or better decision is that there is an effective mechanism by which to bring that information or expertise to bear on the political or collective decision in a consistent and reliable fashion.
>
> (4) Giving all individuals in the political community a vote regarding the question or decision is an effective mechanism by which to bring that information and expertise to bear on the political question or collective decision.
>
> (5) Giving all individuals in the political community a vote is one way of satisfying a condition that is necessary to making correct/better political and collective decisions.

[3] Joshua Cohen, "An Epistemic Conception of Democracy," Ethics (1986): 26-38, p. 34.

This general argument captures several different epistemic arguments for inclusive electoral democracy, the differences turning on different views about why (1) is true and the corresponding reasons to believe that (2) is true. Let me consider four of these here.

a. Knowing our own interests

Perhaps the correctness conditions for political decisions are something broadly welfarist: that they better track what is in the interests of all, rather than just the interests of a few. The picture of interests could be fully utilitarian: a political choice of A over B is better or correct if and only if A will bring about more utility than B. If there are more than just two options, the correct political choice—whether of a representative or a policy—is the one that will bring about the most utility. But it could also be something other than utilitarian. There are at least two dimensions of modification that would generate different, but related views. One dimension of modification is to shift the focus from utility to some other welfarist value: a different conception of welfare, autonomy, education, wealth. The second dimension of modification is to offer an explicit delimitation on whose interests are relevant to the assessment, so that it is something short of all sentient creatures everywhere for all time. Maybe the only utility (or welfare) that matters to the correctness of political decisions is that of some circumscribed group: those who live in the political jurisdiction, those who are primarily affected by the political choice, those who will be represented by the person chosen, etc.

On this kind of view about correctness of political decisions, there might be reasons to think that (2) is true: that information relevant to getting the correct or better answers is widely distributed across all members of the community. This would be plausible if the bases of welfare were varied, complex, highly specific, and significantly idiosyncratic.

If this were so, then we might endorse (4): that voting is an effective mechanism for bringing this widely distributed information into the decisionmaking process. A simple reason is this: perhaps each of us has a better sense of what is in our interests (what will promote our own welfare, utility, autonomy, education, wealth) than other people—better than some central planner, autocrat, or technocrat. Better than someone who has never met us, never lived where we live, never believed what we believe, never cared about what we care about. We are not, of course, infallible about what is in our interests. And there are concerns about adaptive preferences, false consciousness, and the like. It is just a comparative claim: each of us has a better sense of what is in our interests than someone who is very far removed from us, or who doesn't know us at all. At least that is a kind of anti-paternalistic thought that has some plausibility and goes back to at least Mill.[4]

---

[4] At least the anti-paternalistic Mill of On Liberty, Chapter IV (1859). There, he writes:

> "But neither one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it. He is the person most interested in his own well-being: the interest which any other person, except in cases of strong personal attachment, can have in it, is trifling, compared with that which he himself has; the interest which society has in him individually (except as to his conduct to others) is fractional, and altogether indirect: while, with respect to his own feelings and circumstances, the most ordinary man or woman has means of knowledge immeasurably surpassing those that can be possessed by any one else."

This is somewhat harder to square with the plural voting Mill of Considerations on Representative Government (1861) and "Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform" (1859). Here is Mill in the latter piece:

> "The perfection, then, of an electoral system would be, that every person should have one vote, but that every well-educated person in the community should have more than one, on a scale corresponding as far as practicable to their amount of education."

On this picture, then, a reason to give each person a vote is to have each person register their view about what they take to be in their interests, or the kind of choice that they think would be in the general interest (but where we expect their view of that to be biased by their own situated perspective and their own sense of what would be in their interest more narrowly). By having each person vote in this way, and aggregating the results, we get a decent process by which to make a decision that will be in the interest of many people (even if not all), rather than just a few.

b. local, dispersed, micro-level information

Another kind of epistemic argument for democracy, and another way of making the case that votes are epistemically useful, focuses on the idea that even if correct political decisions are *mostly* about figuring out what is in all of our interests, and *especially* if they are not, there is a lot of other information about the world that is relevant to making correct political decisions, and this information is widely distributed across all or many members of the political community.

This kind of argument focuses less on the idea that we are each the best judges of what is best for us, and more on the suggestion that a massive amount of distributed information is relevant to making good political decisions—including facts about what people prefer and what they believe is in their interests, but by no means exhausted by this.

There are different ways of developing this suggestion, and they needn't compete with each other. The first is inspired by Hayek's theory regarding how dispersed, local knowledge of individuals is usefully aggregated through market mechanisms into prices that are much better and more accurate as valuations than anything that might be set by a central planner.[5] The thought here is that not only do we have information about what would be in our interests, we also have all kinds of other evidence and information that is relevant to political decisionmaking: evidence that comes from our experiences as workers, consumers, patients, employers, students, drivers, home-owners, renters, educators, parents, and so on. As Hayek puts it:

> "Today it is almost heresy to suggest that scientific knowledge is not the sum of all knowledge. But a little reflection will show that there is beyond question a body of very important but unorganized knowledge which cannot possibly be called scientific in the sense of knowledge of general rules: the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place. It is with respect to this that practically every individual has some advantage over all others because he possesses unique information of which beneficial use might be made, but of which use can be made only if the decisions depending on it are left to him or are made with his active cooperation. We need to remember only how much we have to learn in any occupation after we have completed our theoretical training, how big a part of our working life we spend learning particular jobs, and how

---

One way of reconciling these is to say that elected representatives should be constrained in what they do, and what kinds of laws they can pass, so that even though the election of them is epistocratic, they still cannot dictate what each person will be able to do. But this seems a bit implausible given the nature of law and what Mill himself says about lawmaking. Although a full discussion of the proper understanding of his "harm principle" would take us too far afield. Another way of reconciling these is by rejecting a view on which political decisionmaking is very closely tied to a welfarist account, so that formal education ends up being the most relevant thing for making good political decisions.

[5] See, e.g. Friedrich Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," American Economic Review 35 (1945), pp. 519-530; Law, Legislation, and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy (Routledge, 1982).

> valuable an asset in all walks of life is knowledge of people, of local conditions, and of special circumstances. To know of and put to use a machine not fully employed, or somebody's skill which could be better utilized, or to be aware of a surplus stock which can be drawn upon during an interruption of supplies, is socially quite as useful as the knowledge of better alternative techniques. And the shipper who earns his living from using otherwise empty or half-filled journeys of tramp-steamers, or the estate agent whose whole knowledge is almost exclusively one of temporary opportunities, or the arbitrageur who gains from local differences of commodity prices, are all performing eminently useful functions based on special knowledge of circumstances of the fleeting moment not known to others."[6]

All this micro-level knowledge informs our own views of what would make for good decisions, and (downstream of this, perhaps) who would make for good representatives. Prices tied to well-functioning markets are very effective at responding rapidly and spontaneously to shifts in what is happening locally. Votes are somewhat less good in this regard, as they happen less frequently, and attempt to incorporate much more information into a particular judgment about a policy or a person. But the underlying rationale we might offer is similar: allow all of these different on-the-ground local observers to register their input so as to improve the overall judgment as to what ought to be done (analogous to the 'judgment' of what the price ought to be).

c. distinctive contributions of expertise and intellectual skill

A related but different suggestion is that each of us has not only local, micro-level information but also something like differential expertise, skill, and virtue that is relevant to getting to correct political judgments. This suggestion is at least as old as Aristotle, at least on certain plausible interpretations of passages like the following:

> "The principle that the multitude ought to be supreme rather than the few best is one that is maintained, and, though not free from difficulty, yet seems to contain an element of truth. For the many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may very likely be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses; that is a figure of their mind and disposition. Hence the many are better judges than a single man of music and poetry; for some understand one part, and some another, and among them they understand the whole."[7]

There are many ways of interpreting this passage; Jeremy Waldron and Helene Landemore canvass several of them.[8] Let us consider the feast analogy.

On one interpretation, call this the *distinctive contribution* interpretation, we imagine that each of us have something different to bring to the table, perhaps because some of us are fishers, some of us grow oranges, some of us know where to find the best mushrooms, and so on. And a feast is better with all of these different contributions. Analogously, some of us might know a lot about medicine, others know

---

[6] Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society."
[7] Aristotle, Politics, Book 3, Chapter 11
[8] Jeremy Waldron, "The Wisdom of the Multitude: Some Reflections on Book 3, Chapter 11 of Aristotle's *Politics*," Political Theory 23 (1995), pp. 563-84. Helene Landemore, Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many (2013), pp. 59-64.

about raising children, others about environmental friendly transportation, others about living in poverty, others about chemistry, and so on.

A question emerges about whether voting is really similar to bringing food to the feast. One significant difference is that in the feast, we are all clearly enriched and benefitted by what others have brought, because (we are assuming) there is an opportunity for all to eat what has been brought. If we imagine circumstances in which we engage and talk with each other about what we know, we might imagine something similar in the political case. It is less clear that we get the same kinds of collective benefit from voting without "sharing" in this way, although a case can be made that our collective judgment is enriched in this way, because of the ways in which each of our distinctive contributions are encapsulated in our vote and the eventual aggregation of the votes.

On a second interpretation, what we might call the *resource* interpretation (an interpretation that focuses more on the "single purse" line), we imagine just that even the person with the most resources does not have as much as all of us combined. We can imagine a similar story with respect to epistemically relevant resources: information and intellectual skill or ability. You know about A and are good at investigating questions of type A. I know about B and am good at researching B kinds of issues. It may be that there is some person who is as good as we are with respect to *both* A and B questions. But it is implausible that this will be true if there are thousands of different relevant domains of knowledge; no one person or even small group of people will be in a good epistemic position with respect to all of them, certainly not when compared to those who specialize in those domains and the intellectual skills they require.

Both of these interpretations are compatible with the micro-level distributed local information story offered in a Hayekian spirit. They might even just be further elaborations or explanations of that story.

d. distinctive contributions due to social position

Another possible elaboration of why we should accept (2)—the idea that information or expertise relevant to getting the correct or better answers is widely distributed across all or many members of the political community—comes from the idea that each of us occupy distinct social positions, and that the evidence we are exposed to and our general understanding of the world is informed by that social location. Here I draw on the work of feminist standpoint theorists like Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Hill Collins, and others.

Hartsock makes a number of claims about the social situation of women, suggesting that "the position of women is structurally different from that of men" and that, as a result, "the lived realities of women's lives are profoundly different from those of men."[9] Hartsock suggests that this is explained in part by the "sexual division of labor" which means that "women's work in every society differs systematically from men's."[10] An epistemological consequence of this is that "women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy."[11] Standpoint theorists such as Hartsock argue that those who occupy non-dominant positions in society are better positioned, epistemically, to understand how mechanisms of oppression and control work, and to understand the nature of problems that are downstream of these mechanisms. Sandra Harding suggests that

---

[9] Hartsock, Money, sex, and power: toward a feminist historical materialism (1983), p. [xxx]. See also Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues (Sandra Harding, ed., Indiana University Press, 1987).
[10] Hartsock, p. 42.
[11] Hartsock, [xx]

investigations that begin with the thoughts and testimony of marginalized people "will generate illuminating critical questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group lives."[12] Patricia Hill Collins focuses less on individuals and more on groups who have "historically shared" experiences based on their common placement in hierarchical power relations.[13] This could include women, but it could also include others oppressed along lines of racial, ethnic, gender, or sexual identities, as well as intersectional identities within and across these groups.

The common idea for our purposes is that knowledge, information, and relevant expertise might be widely distributed across a political community, precisely because people in that community will occupy different social positions and thereby encounter different kinds of evidence, have different experiences that inform their judgments about proposed policies and candidates, and that we should be especially concerned to have input from those relatively disempowered and oppressed members of the political community. There is no suggestion that this input is unerring or infallible, nor that it is something that members of these groups possess essentially or intrinsically. The claims are considerably more contingent than that. Still, the suggestion is that there is a distinct epistemic contribution to be made here, and certain people who are considerably better placed to make it than others.

Again, as with the distinctive contribution interpretation of Aristotle's feast analogy, it is plausible that we would get more benefit here if we did not just give people the ability to register their judgments through voting, but also to engage with other members of the political community in advance of everyone voting. But voting is plausibly better than nothing in this regard, and it would certainly be better than having elite autocrats and technocrats make the political decisions—if the insights of standpoint theory are correct.

***

This section has suggested that making good political decisions may require gathering input from a wide variety of sources, because relevant information or expertise is or will often be widely distributed throughout the political community. This might be because we each know our own interests best, we each possess a host of relevant micro-level local information, we each have distinctive contributions to make to group decisions, we each have distinctive skills and expertise that are relevant to making political decisions, or many of us have distinctive evidence and experience and expertise because of our social position. As suggested above, it could be for all of these reasons. The further suggestion is that voting is a good or at least somewhat effective way of harnessing all of this dispersed information and skill in order to make good or correct political decisions.

There are certainly worries about how this might work in practice, particularly given the details of some of these accounts. For example, imagine that we are voting on which of 5 health care systems to put in place. And let's say that 30% of us have distinctive, relevant knowledge and experience that, if followed, would lead the group to the correct decision (assuming that there is one correct choice among the five options). But let's say that 70% of us do not have this distinctive, relevant knowledge and experience. How is it that the 30% will end up guiding us? If we could meet and hear from that 30%, leading the 70% to become better informed and modify their views, that might be one way. (This might work, but we might worry about whether the 70% will listen to the 30%.) But if we all just vote, there is at least a worry that if the 70% have fixated on the *same* wrong idea, their ignorance will carry the day. This is a concern if we just use voting, or if there are not opportunities for citizens to engage with each other in open and extended ways.

---

[12] Harding [xxx]

[13] Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment (1990), [xxx].

One response to this concern is to suggest (or hope) that, at least in many cases, those who are ignorant will be ignorant in a *variety* of ways, whereas those who know the correct answer will be aligned in the correct judgment. In this way, we might see "error-cancelling" effects so that the various errors of the 70% effectively cancel each other out, leading the united 30% to carry the day. As a simple example, imagine the five health plans are A, B, C, D, and E. E is the correct health plan, something of which the 30% are aware. The ignorant 70% have a range of views, with roughly 20% of each of them favoring each of A, B, C, D, and E. In that situation, given a simple plurality vote, E would win out.

Of course, for things to play out this way, the numbers must be favorable: the number of those who know the right answer has to be reasonably significant, the errors have to be distributed across a range of possibilities, rather than all clustered on the same mistake, and so on. There are reasons to think that things will not always play out this way. We might worry, in particular, about the possibility that powerful media institutions and various echo chambers will lead to concentrated and widely-shared errors. If the hoped-for error-cancelling effects happened rarely enough, we might start to question (4) entirely: doubting that giving all individuals in the political community a vote is an effective mechanism by which to bring that information and expertise to bear on the political question or collective decision. This worry is less pronounced if we think of political questions as having answers that are intimately tied to our own subjective viewpoints about what is in our interest, what we prefer, and so on.

2. Epistemic Role of Voting (2): Each of Us Is Pretty Good, Epistemically Speaking, but All of Us Together Are Even Better

There are a number of arguments that suggest an important epistemic role for voting, based not on the idea that relevant information and expertise is widely dispersed and voting can help us harness that, but instead on the idea that each of us is in a pretty good epistemic position, and that we are even better when we combine our efforts through majoritarian voting systems.

a. The Condorcet Jury Theorem

As noted above, the line of epistemic argument in the previous section begins with the premise that there are correct and incorrect or better and worse responses to political questions or collective decisionmaking situations more generally. It then maintains that information or expertise relevant to making a good political decision is widely distributed.

A different argument, starting with the same view about political questions, is that, for most political issues or questions, each of us is in a pretty good epistemic situation (perhaps for a variety of different reasons) so that we can expect that people will be better than chance at getting the right answer. On this picture, we imagine that all of us, or at least the median voter, will be better than random at answering binary political questions correctly. This argument then uses the Condorcet Jury Theorem to motivate having large-scale, inclusive elections and for having voting play a significant epistemic role.

The Condorcet Jury Theorem holds when voting contexts satisfy the following conditions:

(a) **binary choice**: the vote concerns a binary choice between A and B

(b) **correctness**: there is a correct answer, either A or B is the correct choice

(c) **competence**: each voter is better than random at choosing the correct answer

(d) **independence**: voters are independent of each other (strictly: the probability of one person being right on any binary question should be the same regardless of the probability of another person being right for that same question)

(e) **sincerity**: voters vote sincerely (representing their actual views) rather than strategically

Under these conditions, the Condorcet Jury Theorem demonstrates that as the number of voters increases, the probability of the majority vote being correct approaches one. Additionally, if the competence of individual members is increased (so that rather than being just .51 likely to get the right answer, they are, say, .6 or .7 likely to do so), the probability of rightness also increases even more quickly (so smaller numbers can suffice to approximate certainty of correctness). Similarly, under these conditions, the probability of correctness goes up even more quickly if a supermajority (something more like 60%) of the voters pick one option, rather than a bare majority. Thus, if these conditions are satisfied, there is a powerful epistemic case for inclusive, majoritarian voting, as well as for paying attention to vote margins.

Further work has expanded the application of this kind of argument, so that it can also apply to elections with three choices[14] and in circumstances in which not all voters are above the .5 competence threshold, but in which the median voter is.[15]

Questions can be raised about whether any actual elections satisfy any of the (a)-(e) conditions, let alone all of them. One worry is whether it makes sense to think of actual political choices as binary. Perhaps we can think of elections in two-party dominant systems as presenting a binary choice that can be correct or incorrect? Of course, we can always define "correct" so that it is relative to an option set, so perhaps there is some promise in that direction.

A perhaps more significant worry is whether the competence condition will usually or ever be satisfied in modern electoral contexts. This worry is heightened if we imagine that a large percentage of the electorate is getting their political information from only one or two sources, which might be providing information that leads voters to be worse than chance at getting the correct answer. The flipside of the Condorcet Jury Theorem is that, if voters are *worse* than chance at getting the correct answer, then the probability of getting the answer *incorrect* quickly approaches certainty as the size of the group increases.

A worry that I will discuss at considerably more length below is whether we should expect people to vote sincerely, rather than strategically, in contexts like those that most voters find themselves in.

Still, if we think that these conditions are satisfied, or might be, through institutional reform, this would provide us with a powerful epistemic reason to use inclusive, majoritarian voting systems. I might only be 60% likely to get the answer right, and you might only be 60% likely to get the answer right, and so on for a hundred or a thousand or a million more of us. But if our judgments are independent (in the relevant technical sense), and we take a vote, we can come to be extremely confident that the vote of the group is the correct judgment.

b. Wisdom of the Crowd through Each of Us Being Roughly Right

---

[14] Christian List and Robert E. Goodin, "Epistemic Democracy: Generalizing the Condorcet Jury Theorem," Journal of Political Philosophy (2001): 277-306. In the multiple option case, the competence condition is that for *k* options, individuals must be more than 1/*k* likely to pick the correct option.

[15] Citation

A similar kind of epistemic argument for voting suggests that, for some factual questions, everyone or almost everyone will have an opinion that is roughly, although not exactly, correct, and that when we take the average of our opinions (or go with what the median voter thinks), that answer will be very likely to be correct.

This is the kind of example used by James Surowiecki to illustrate the phenomenon of the "wisdom of crowds."[16] He relates the story of the statistician Francis Galton observing a competition to guess the weight of an ox at a county fair. Over eight hundred people entered. The average guess, according to Galton was 1197 pounds. The actual weight of the ox was 1198 pounds. This struck him as remarkable, and it might strike us the same way. The explanation offered is that people had views that were roughly correct, and that the distribution of errors around each rough judgment would cancel each other out when they were aggregated. So, some would guess 1000 pounds, others would guess 1400 pounds. Better guessers would go for 1150 pounds or 1250 pounds. But the distribution of these errors would be a mix of too high and too low in a way that would average to very close to the actual weight.

Now, it is somewhat hard to see how picking which of two people to select for a political representative might be closely analogous to guessing the correct weight of an ox. We might think this kind of story will more closely parallel other factual judgments that enter into overall political judgments about, say, health policy, or education, or taxation. Even there, we might worry, as with the conditions for the Condorcet Jury Theorem, that there are more systematic and troubling distortions introduced in the political context than in the weight-guessing competition context. If that is so, then this particular kind of epistemic role for voting may have only limited application.

3. Epistemic Role of Voting (3): Votes as Evidence of Support and Other Metaphysically Relevant Facts

Both of the two previous epistemic roles for voting began with the idea that there are political questions or decisions that admit of better or worse answers, that can be correct or incorrect, and that voting can be epistemically useful for arriving at the better answers and the correct answers. I will conclude this section by considering a different kind of epistemic role for voting; namely, the role that vote totals can play as *evidence* of what are plausibly morally relevant metaphysical facts.

In other work, I argued that votes and vote margins can be used as the best available evidence that we have of the level to which various candidates are supported.[17] I defined "support" as an attitude that an individual has or fails to have toward individuals who are seeking or holding elected office, where one supports a candidate if and only if one is content to authorize that person to govern. On this understanding of support, one might support more than one candidate in an election, or one might support none of the candidates. I argued that the normative mandate—the extent to which elected officials are supported by individuals living in their jurisdiction—affects how political representatives can permissibly behave when in office. In particular, I argued that representatives with a modest normative mandate must act more like delegates, than trustees. We encounter an epistemic difficulty, however: we can't easily know how much support any candidate has; we can't do the instantaneous brain-scanning that would allow access to those facts. So, we must employ some other method for investigating this question. A natural one: have people vote! I argued that the best evidence we have of a candidate or elected official's normative mandate is the extent to which adult citizens in their political jurisdiction voted for them.

---

[16] The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations (2004).

[17] Alexander A. Guerrero, "The Paradox of Voting and the Ethics of Political Representation," Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 38, pp. 272-306 (2010).

Consider two elections:	A	v.	B	C	v.	D
	70%		30%	51%		49%

In the first election, 70% of adults eligible to vote cast a vote for A, whereas 30% voted for B. (Assume that all eligible adults voted.) In the second election, 51% of adults eligible to vote voted for C, whereas 49% voted for D. Given these facts about *votes*, we might then want to say things like: (1) candidate A is more supported than candidate B, and (2) candidate A has more *support* in her jurisdiction than candidate C has in his jurisdiction. Our reason for thinking that these claims are true is the epistemic role that we are using votes to play. The claim is not that voting *constitutes* support (in the sense relevant here); it is that voting is *evidence of* support.

The problem is that, for many voting systems, these kinds of inferences are problematic. It might be that both C and D are supported by every person in the jurisdiction; it just turns out that C is even more supported by a few people. Just looking at percentage of votes received won't tell us this. And it might be that neither A nor B is at all supported—those voting for A over B are doing so for 'lesser of two evil' kinds of reasons. We can see that voting does not *constitute* support when we reflect on the fact that people might have reasons for voting for a candidate other than because they support the candidate (perhaps they want to elect the lesser of two evils), and they might have reasons to refrain from voting for a candidate other than because they do not support the candidate (perhaps they are only allowed to vote for one candidate, and they support several). In these cases, vote totals and vote margins will also be *misleading* as evidence, imperiling this way in which voting might be epistemically useful. What I will argue in Part Three of the paper is that some voting systems do better than others at enabling votes to serve this useful epistemic role: the role of providing *evidence* of important metaphysical facts concerning the existence and extent of authorization, normative endorsement, support, and other features of decisions that might be morally relevant. Before that, however, let me turn now to expand on the way in which the metaphysical and epistemic roles of voting come into tension with each other, causing a dilemma for would-be voters.

Part II: The Dual-Role Dilemma

Voting has significant metaphysical roles: it can alter the powers, abilities, responsibilities, and obligations of individuals, and the force and moral significance of decisions, documents, proposed laws, constitutions, and more. Voting also has significant epistemic roles: it can serve to harness widely dispersed information to help us make better collective decisions, to take advantage of the ways in which many of us together might come to be more accurate than any one of us, and to provide evidence of morally important facts about, for example, the extent to which some policy or person is supported or authorized.

In this part of the paper, I will draw attention to the way in which some voting systems, such as the plurality voting systems that are ubiquitous in the United States, generate dilemmas for would-be voters. I will argue that these individual-level dilemmas undermine the ability of voting to serve our collective decisionmaking aims, making it so that voting cannot fulfill either the metaphysical or epistemic role in the way that we might want it to.

All votes are conducted with certain options raised to prominence and salience, if not to the level of an exhaustive option set. Elections of political officials often have structured primary processes that lead to different candidates being the official candidates of the leading political parties, with those candidates then being the ones listed on the final ballot. Jurisdictions have precise rules governing what it takes for a candidate to appear on the final ballot. Even so, in many places, write-in ballots are accepted, so that, in principle, a person could vote for anyone. Still, it is natural to see the option set as being

relatively sharply constrained when one goes to vote. And similar things are true when it comes to committees making decisions about which candidate to hire or admit. There will almost always have been some process by which the group comes to a relatively short list of candidates. After that short list, there will typically then be a vote as to which of the people on the short list to select, or perhaps framed in terms of an up-or-down vote for particular candidates. This is true in even more dramatic fashion when it comes to legislative votes. In the typical case, a very specific piece of legislation comes to the floor for a vote, with the options being just "yes" or "no."

As a result, the most cautious thing we can say in some of these cases is about the collective judgment expressed through the vote, *relative* to the option set. They chose to elect A, rather than B or C. They voted in favor of the legislation, rather than against it. As discussed in the previous section, that will sometimes limit what we can infer about the attitudes of the members of the group toward the successful candidate, legislation, or decision. Still, it is sometimes tempting or even plausible to see voting as including the expression or emanation of non-comparative judgments (of varying strengths) that a particular person or policy or decision is a *good*, *attractive*, *correct*, or *optimal* option. This will particularly be true when the eventual voters have had a large role in shaping the salient option set, as in the case of hiring decisions or legislative votes.

Perhaps most importantly, it is plausible that the full metaphysical and epistemic roles of voting can only really be fulfilled by voting if the options are such that these kinds of non-comparative judgments are at least not far from people's actual attitudes about the options. If a group of people can only vote for one of three options, A, B, and C, which have been set for them by others, and all of which they dislike or disapprove of, then their vote cannot play a metaphysical or morally transformative role in terms of endorsement, authorization, or registering of support, even if it does play the metaphysical role of being legally efficacious. Nor will a majority vote for one of them do much to register anything very useful epistemically, at least nothing rising to the level of the judgment that the option with the most votes is a *good* option, or the *correct* decision—except insofar as those claims are relativized to the option set. So, arguably, we lose out on a lot of what we might want for voting in these circumstances.

In this paper, I won't focus on the metaphysical/moral problem of all-bad options, or of there being only one real option (as in all the totalitarian countries that nominally conduct elections). That problem will spell trouble for the moral dimension of the metaphysical role of voting in a relatively straightforward way, and the main solution to it is to improve the way in which the option set is constructed.

I am instead interested in a somewhat more complex problem, one that stems from what I will call the "dual-role" dilemma. This dilemma is one that confronts individual voters, but which results in an *epistemic* problem for all of us in interpreting what any particular vote tells us about (a) the new, post-vote metaphysical situation or (b) the epistemic usefulness of the vote totals.

The dilemma I am interested in confronts voters precisely because of the dual roles of voting, our awareness of those roles, and the fact that in many voting systems one is just allowed to cast a vote for one option. In many elections, then, one faces the following question: should I be a True Believer or an Instrumentalist?

I can be a True Believer, only voting for a candidate or policy if I think that candidate or policy is actually best, or actually good, or only if I actually want to give that candidate an affirmative mandate to govern me, or to transfer whatever moral power or authority might attach to this particular vote. Or I can be an Instrumentalist, voting for the candidate or policy that is the least bad, of what I believe to be the viable candidates or likely winners. True Believers will abstain from voting for lesser-of-two-evil candidates, because they are both, on her judgment, evil. Instrumentalists, on the other hand, might vote

for a policy or candidate while thinking that the policy or candidate is terrible, clearly misguided, and bad for them and for everyone.

This individual dilemma generates downstream problems for those who would rely on votes for serving either the metaphysical or epistemic roles.

If everyone acted as a True Believer, and was focused on the same political question (who should we elect? what policy should we implement?), we could infer from facts about final vote totals to facts about non-comparative judgments with respect to that question. If we go in for views on which voting is useful, epistemically, for getting the right answer because of facts about the wide distribution of relevant information, or because the group of us are more likely to make a correct judgment than a few of us, or for any of the reasons mentioned above, then we can feel correspondingly more confident about the judgment made.

Similarly, if everyone acted as a True Believer, and voted for a candidate or policy only if they actually wanted to authorize that person to govern or that policy to have a certain kind of authority and standing, then we would know how many people actually supported the candidate or policy in this morally serious way, and (if we think normative force comes upon certain thresholds of support being reached), normative force might actually be transferred through a vote.

But if we are Instrumentalists, or even if there are some significant number of Instrumentalists in the pool of voters, then things get murky. People might end up voting for candidates who they don't believe will do a good job, for policies that they think are deeply misguided, and for people and policies that they don't think should have any new normative powers or force—at least not in a non-comparative sense of "should."

So, why would a person not just vote as a True Believer? Well, quite obviously, it is because votes have not just an epistemic role—they also have a metaphysical one. And at least some of the metaphysical results—the legal or formal results—attend the conclusion of any binding vote, even if some of the other "moral magic" doesn't. That's why we feel the force of the dilemma: we can see the case for being True Believers (or some of us can, anyway). But we can also see the case for being Instrumentalists. Call this the "dual-role dilemma"

Let's look at some cases to get a sense of what we are up against. Just to have a background normative framework to work with, let me introduce three morally significant ideas relating to the election of political representatives: *support*, *individual authorization*, and *collective authorization*. (Analogous concepts could be defined for the case of voting for policies or decisions, rather than for people.)

Let us say that a person, X, *supports* a candidate, C, for an elected position just in case (a) X believes that C should have the powers that go along with that position and (b) X believes this because X believes that C would do a good job in that position and does so for non-comparative reasons. So, support is defined in terms of individual mental states, namely beliefs, that people might have about particular candidates.

Let us say that an individual, X, *authorizes* a candidate, C, to be in a position just in case (a) X supports C and (b) X expresses this support for C in the contextually appropriate way (say, by voting in an official election).

And let us say that a group *collectively authorizes* a candidate, C, to be in a position just in case a sufficient number of the members of the group authorize C to be in that position. (Let us leave aside for

now exactly how to define sufficiency; something that will depend on contextual factors relating to the nature of the position in question.)

Let us assume that support and authorization are of moral significance in at least this sense: certain powers should only be held by people in positions who are *collectively authorized* to be in those positions. There are many different stories that we might fill in here about why support and authorization are morally significant in these ways, stories focusing variously on individual autonomy, self-government, non-domination, and political equality. Basically, the reasons here will be similar to the reasons that many have thought electoral democratic systems of government do well from a perspective of political legitimacy. As we shall see, however, collective authorization in this sense requires more than just holding free, regular elections, and so that moral requirement here might be more demanding than the more minimal or thin accounts of democratic political legitimacy.

We might have that thought votes were epistemically useful for discerning support, and that voting itself would always or usually constitute an act of authorization. But, because of the dual-role dilemma, this is not true, at least not for many voting systems, including those most familiar to political contexts in the United States: plurality voting systems (in which a person gets only one vote, and the winner of the election gets elected on the basis of receiving more votes than any other candidates).

Consider some possible electoral situations. For all of these, assume that a person can only vote for one candidate, that almost everyone votes, and that plurality voting rules apply.

Election One (two candidates):	Betsy Bad:	70%
	Walter Worse:	30%

If all voters are True Believers, voting only for a candidate that they support (in the above sense), then we could say the following of Betsy Bad: that she is widely supported, that many people (holding various widely dispersed information, or from their various social positions) judge her to be good for the position, that she has much greater support than Walter Worse, that she is collectively authorized to be in the position, and so on.

But if some significant number of voters are Instrumentalists, or if we are unsure what percentage of voters are Instrumentalists, then we cannot be confident of any of those things. It might not be true that Betsy Bad is widely supported; indeed, it may be that literally no one supports her in the relevant sense. It might be that no one believes that she will be a good leader. She might not be authorized to be in the position by anyone. And she might therefore not be collectively authorized to be in the position. Of course, the names aside, it could also be that everyone supports both Bad and Worse, that everyone believes both of them would do a good job in the position, and so on. The problem is that the vote becomes useless for discerning these facts, if some people are behaving as Instrumentalists. Additionally, Instrumentalists will have instrumental reasons for obscuring their Instrumentalism, at least until after the election, as a way of trying to get more people to vote for the candidate who they think, for instrumental reasons, people should be voting for. And there may be no other good way of discerning actual levels of support other than elections—something I will come back to later.

Or consider the following electoral scenario (again, assuming that almost everyone votes; that the winner is the person with the most votes, even if it is not a majority; and that people can vote for at most one candidate):

Election Two (three candidates):	Boris Blah:	48%
	Brian Bad:	46%
	Grace Greatfringe:	6%

We could say many of the same things as in Election One, about having no real idea about who is supported or authorized, or who is judged to be good for the position. Additionally, it could also be that more people support Bad than Blah (the people who vote for Bad could support Bad, while few people who vote for Blah support Blah), and that, as a result, Bad is actually more collectively authorized to be in the position than Blah (since authorization occurs only when there are votes that are coupled with actual support). And it could be that many of the Blah voters actually support Greatfringe, but do not support Blah. Instrumentalists might well be in this position if they believe that Greatfringe will not be able to win, and they don't want to have the consequence of the election be a victory for Bad.

Finally, consider the following electoral scenario:

Election Three (two candidates):	Emma Excellent:	51%
	Greta Great:	49%

In this case, it might be that both Excellent and Great are very widely supported, maybe even supported by all voters, although that is not reflected in their vote totals. Here, the problem may be caused not by the dual-role dilemma and the choice of voters to be Instrumentalists or True Believers, but by the fact that the voting system doesn't allow voters to register their support for more than one person. This is yet another way in which plurality voting systems might undermine the epistemic and metaphysical usefulness of voting.

In both Election One and Election Two, we could imagine that all the voters were True Believers, and so the votes would be epistemically useful as a way of discerning support and beliefs about the quality of the candidates for the position. But we can also imagine that all the voters, or many of them, were Instrumentalists, in which case none of those inferences from the simple vote totals will be good ones. And—most likely—we will be in mixed populations of True Believers and Instrumentalists.

This is bad for the epistemic usefulness of votes, and for allowing votes to serve the metaphysical role we might want them to. We can't get pure judgments regarding support, and so can't get access to facts about collective authorization. And we have no idea whether those voting for a candidate or a policy actually think the candidate would be good in the position, and so we lose out on the way in which votes might have been epistemically useful. For this epistemic role, we need non-relativized, non-comparative judgments that might be expressed through votes. Think of judgments of quality or skill. In some cases, there will be skills that the candidates either do or do not possess. We want to make these judgments non-comparatively, even if we may end up having to settle for the best we can get.

And it is plausible that we should attach the morally significant metaphysical effects to these kinds of facts, not the relativized ones. Think of consent in other contexts. We want genuine consent, of a non-comparative variety. We don't just want consent relative to a set of options (at least not just any set of options). So, too, with respect to authorization. As I've defined it, it requires actual support. An Instrumentalist who votes for the better of two bad options doesn't actually support the person for whom they vote in the relevant sense. By voting for them, they may have done some thinner thing, such as conceding that they want this person to win this election, and, of these two options, to be the one to come to have the legal and formal powers. But this is not all that we might want, morally speaking, even if (on some accounts) it is sufficient for a kind of political legitimacy.

For both roles, we currently run into difficulties regarding cross-election comparisons, either comparing elections happening at the same time but in different places, or elections happening at different times. We may want to say things about how an election in 2012 compares with an election in 2016 in terms of facts about support, collective authorization, and judgements of candidate or policy quality. But

that won't be possible if the judgments made are limited to judgments relative to the particular option sets. We would, for example, mistakenly think that Betsy Bad was more supported and authorized than either Emma Excellent or Greta Great, when that is not the case.

So, under plurality voting regimes, we run into a number of problems that undermine the metaphysical and epistemic usefulness of voting. These problems make it so that electoral results are murky, incapable of providing us evidence of normative support or good epistemic judgment. We could say that this is because the electoral results are multiply ambiguous, consistent with many different interpretations.[18]

Additionally, I want to draw attention to a new idea about how votes could be morally significant, if we could overcome these problems. Here is the idea: the normative power or force that an individual or policy has should be tied to its level of support and/or authorization.[19] Call this the *power as a function of support* thesis. If we accepted this idea, we could tie the particular powers of people in official political and legal roles to the actual support and authorization that they have. If they have more support, they can do more—maybe they could raise taxes, or start wars, or depart from what their constituents currently think is best, or collectively overturn Supreme Court decisions, etc. If they don't have much support, then even if they win, then they cannot do these things, and might be relatively limited in what they have the power to do. Perhaps, in those cases, these decisions could only be made by some other body: a citizen's assembly made up of randomly-chosen citizens, or a direct referendum vote. Another possibility would be to require elected officials with only low levels of support to reach higher vote thresholds to do certain things, so that a low support legislature could only take actions X, Y, and Z if they get a supermajority vote in favor of doing those things.

Similarly, we could tie the support for a law or policy with how entrenched or protected that policy is. A law enacted by a very high proportion of a very highly supported legislature might not be able to be revisited or overturned by, say, a Supreme Court decision. Or there might be provisions in place so that a relatively weakly supported policy would automatically sunset in some relatively short period of time.

The normative case for power as a function of support has two parts. The first is metaphysical: support is connected to normative authorization which matters for the moral permissibility of engaging in political and legal decisionmaking—at least on familiar stories of democratic pedigree, concerned about

---

[18] This is an importantly different ambiguity than those which have troubled social choice theorists for more than 50 years since Kenneth Arrow's infamous "impossibility theorem." The central ambiguity concern arising from this work is that no aggregation mechanism can satisfy the demands of non-dictatorship (treating all participants equally), Pareto (procedures are responsive and unbiased with respect to feasible options), unrestricted domain (all views have equal access to the decision procedure), independence of irrelevant alternatives (individual choices not be subject to manipulation)—and still also result in social decisions that are consistent and stable. As a result, one can't go from a set of social judgments or preferences to a collective decision without worries about agenda manipulation and manipulation in the framing and presentation of alternatives. It can seem that what the 'collective will' is will be fundamentally ambiguous, incoherent, or unstable.

Another ambiguity enters in due to the availability of many aggregation mechanisms, which some see as roughly on a par, normatively speaking. As Jack Knight and James Johnson put it, "It starts from the recognition that assuming the same initial distribution of values and even assuming that voters vote sincerely, different vote-counting procedures, each with particular attractive normative features, can generate quite different collective decisions." The Priority of Democracy: Political Consequences of Pragmatism (Princeton U. Press, 2011), p. 111. I will have more to say about normative considerations that ought to enter into our selection of voting procedures in Part III of the paper.

[19] I discuss this idea in the context of political representatives and their ability to act as trustees, rather than delegates, in "The Paradox of Voting and the Ethics of Political Representation."

individual autonomy, non-domination, self-government, political equality, and so on. The second is epistemic: if we accept some of the epistemic arguments for democracy offered above, we should be more confident when a higher proportion of the people support the election of some individual or the enactment of some policy. Recall that the idea of support here itself has two parts, a moral/metaphysical one and an epistemic one: a person, X, *supports* a candidate, C, for an elected position just in case (a) X believes that C should have the powers that go along with that position and (b) X believes this because X believes that C would do a good job in that position and does so for non-comparative reasons.

The problems that we currently face, then, serve to undermine the epistemic and metaphysical usefulness of voting, and also to undercut our ability to track support and authorization in the way required to implement what I think is an attractive set of institutional design elements. Is there a way to respond to these problems? I think that there is, or at least that there are ways to improve things considerably. Let us turn to consider some institutional responses that might be made.

Part III: Responding to the Dual-Role Dilemma

There are many different voting procedures, and there are many different properties of voting procedures that we might find normatively attractive. In this Part of the paper, I want to discuss several of these procedures and to consider whether some of them might help us address the dual-role dilemma and the downstream problems it generates.

Let me begin by introducing a number of different voting systems that are taken to exhibit many of the desirable properties of voting procedures (or social choice procedures more generally).[20] It is easiest to discuss these with an example.

Imagine that all members of a political community have come to judgments about which of three candidates, Alvin, Bernardo, and Colleen, should be elected, and they have individual rankings of these candidates, so that we might form judgment lists (like the more commonly discussed preference lists) based on who they think would be best, second-best, and third-best for the job, of the three options.

[20] There are many different properties seen as normatively significant and, at least intuitively, desirable. These include the *always a winner* condition (every sequence of judgment/preference lists produces at least one winner), the *Condorcet winner* condition (if there is a Condorcet winner—an option X such that, for every other alternative option Y, one finds X occurring above Y on strictly more than half the lists—then the Condorcet winner will be selected), the *Pareto* condition (for every pair of options X and Y: if everyone prefers X to Y, then Y is not a social choice), *monotonicity* (for every option X: if X is the social choice or tied for being the social choice, and someone changes his or her preference list by moving X up one spot, then X should still be the social choice or still be tied), *independence of irrelevant alternatives* (for every pair of options X and Y: if the social choice set includes X but not Y, and one or more voters changes their preferences, but no one changes his/her mind about whether X is preferred to Y or Y to X, then the social choice set should not change so as to include Y); *anonymity* (the identities of the voters do not matter: if X and Y change votes, then the outcome of the election is unaffected); *neutrality* (the identities of the candidates/options do not matter: if two candidates are exchanged in every ranking, then the outcome of the election changes accordingly); *universal domain* (voters are free to have any opinion about the candidates; no ranking of the candidates can be ignored by a voting method). And there are many others. Unfortunately, there is no voting procedure that does well by all of the intuitively attractive properties for every case. The ones under consideration here all do reasonably well at satisfying many of these, but I will not go into further detail in that regard here. My hope is to introduce another kind of normative concern that should guide our thinking about which voting system to choose; not to offer a decisive all-things-considered view about which voting system is best.

Voter One	**Voter Two**	**Voter Three**	**Voter Four**	**Voter Five**
Bernardo	Alvin	Colleen	Bernardo	Alvin
Colleen	Bernardo	Bernardo	Alvin	Colleen
Alvin	Colleen	Alvin	Colleen	Bernardo

There are many different voting procedures that might be used to move from these judgment lists of the five voters to a selection of a winner (or winners).

On a *plurality voting* system, each voter has just one vote, and the winner is the person who receives the most votes. In this case, if they vote sincerely, rather than strategically, that would mean that they just vote for the person at the top of their list, and it would be a tie between Alvin and Bernardo. Perhaps, however, Voter Three realizes that Colleen has no chance. She might then vote for Bernardo, her second choice, which would make Bernardo the winner.

On a *Borda count* system, voters submit their ranked lists, and points are awarded in the following way: for n candidates, the person at the bottom of the list gets 0 points, the person above that on the list gets 1 point, and so on up to the top person on the list who gets $n - 1$ points. And then we just add the points, and the person with the most points wins. In this case, if people submit these lists (voting sincerely), then Alvin would receive 0 + 2 + 0 + 1 + 2 points, for a total of 5 points; Bernardo would receive 2 + 1 + 1 + 2 + 0 points, for a total of 6 points; and Colleen would receive 1 + 0 + 2 + 0 + 1 points, for a total of 4 points. So, Bernardo would be the winner.

On a *single-transferrable vote* system, voters submit their ranked lists. At that point, the person whose name appears at the top of the fewest lists is deleted. In this case, that would be Colleen. That would leave us with this:

Voter One	**Voter Two**	**Voter Three**	**Voter Four**	**Voter Five**
Bernardo	Alvin	Bernardo	Bernardo	Alvin
Alvin	Bernardo	Alvin	Alvin	Bernardo

We repeat that process until we are left with just one person. In this case, we would delete Alvin, leaving Bernardo as the winner.

On a *Condorcet method* system, voters submit their ranked lists. A comparison is then made between the individual rankings of each of the voters with respect to head-to-head competitions for each of the options. So, we would look to see how voters compared Alvin and Bernardo, Bernardo and Colleen, and Alvin and Colleen. A person X is a winner on this method if, for every other person Y, at least half the voters rank X over Y on their ballots.

Alvin v. Bernardo: Bernardo wins, 3-2
Bernardo v. Colleen: Bernardo wins, 3-2
Alvin v. Colleen: Alvin wins, 3-2

So, Bernardo would be the winner, as he wins head to head competitions with all of the other candidates.

On an *approval voting* system, voters can cast a vote for all of those candidates of whom they approve (we might try to define this idea of approval in more precise ways). The winner is the person who receives the most votes. In this case, we cannot read off of the judgment lists any results, because we do not have information about how their relative rankings correspond with judgments of approval.

On a *range voting* system, each voter submits a "ratings ballot" on which each voter rates each candidate with a number within a specified range, such as 0 to 9. In the traditional method, all candidates should be rated. There are then two ways of determining the winner. On the total score method, the scores for each candidate are summed, and the candidate with the highest sum is the winner. (If voters are allowed to abstain from rating certain candidates, as opposed to implicitly giving the lowest number of points to unrated candidates, then a candidate's score would be the average rating from voters who did rate this candidate.) On the median score method, one finds the median score of each candidate, and the candidate with the highest median score is the winner. Some have argued that this method reduces the incentive to exaggerate. Again, we don't know how that system would apply here.

There are other voting systems that we might be interested in, but this will suffice for present purposes. One thing to stress about all the systems other than plurality voting is that they provide an opportunity for voters to provide much more input into the system, allowing a much broader representation of their full judgment relating to the election. There are two significant complications here, however.

One is that we might worry whether people will really be well informed about all of the different options in the way necessary to make a useful contribution. If we worry, as some do, about voter ignorance and voter capacity, then asking for all of this additional information might not actually be a good thing. As they say in other contexts, garbage in, garbage out. We might think that this worry is less pronounced in certain kinds of high profile elections, where voters views about all of the salient candidates are about equally well-informed (so that it is at least no worse than with plurality voting).

A second worry is whether we would *really* be getting additional information by using these other systems, or whether we would just be encouraging people to behave in complex strategic ways to get their favored outcome. A familiar discussion in social choice theory and voting theory is the issue of whether a particular voting system encourages *sincere* voting, where sincere voting is voting according to a voter's actual views, rather than voting in a *strategic* way that requires misrepresenting a voter's preferences or judgments about the relevant options. This is obviously relevant to our concerns about the dual-role dilemma, as that dilemma is essentially whether to behave strategically or not.[21]

What would be nice is to at this point be able to introduce a voting system on which sincere voting is always the only rational option, and on which all of this potentially useful information was being provided. Unfortunately, that is not possible. There is no voting system for the selection of single winners amongst more than two options that can fully prevent strategic voting. This is a result, now known as the Gibbard–Satterthwaite theorem, which was published independently by Allan Gibbard in 1973 and Mark Satterthwaite in 1975.[22] There are some, however, in which strategic voting is lessened, which I will discuss below.

In what follows, I will introduce two different possible responses to the dual-role dilemma and the problems it generates. These can be grouped into "unified" and "bifurcated" responses. The unified

---

[21] For a short discussion raising the worry that strategic voting might undermine the epistemic usefulness of votes (although not put in exactly those terms), see Timothy Feddersen and Wolfgang Pesendorfer, "Elections, Information Aggregation, and Strategic Voting," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 96.19 (1999): 10572–10574.

[22] Allan Gibbard, "Manipulation of voting schemes: A general result," Econometrica, 41(4) (1973): 587–601; Mark Satterthwaite, "Strategy-proofness and Arrow's conditions: Existence and correspondence theorems for voting procedures and social welfare functions," Journal of Economic Theory, 10(2) (1975): 198–217. It is worth mentioning that there are systems of proportionate representation with multi-member districts, with more than one winner being chosen, on which insincere voting is almost never rational.

response attempts to keep the two roles—the metaphysical and the epistemic—together, but to offer possible improvements to the simple plurality voting system. The bifurcated response I offer considers the possibility of decoupling the metaphysical and epistemic roles through a variety of mechanisms.

In both cases, what I will do is introduce some alternative ideas and briefly discuss some of their advantages and disadvantages. Deciding what might be the best response, if any, is beyond my ambitions for this paper, although I do hope to have made a convincing case that there is a real dilemma and a real problem here, and that it is worth continuing the project of thinking through possible institutional responses to it.

1. Unified Response: Normative Approval Voting

Here is one possible voting system that might help with the dual-role dilemma: (1) an approval voting system; (2) with voters instructed to vote only for those candidates that they support (in the specific sense identified above); (3) along with the approval level of the eventual winning candidate tied to the moral and legal powers of that candidate; and (4) an election threshold, so that if no candidate gets a vote from more than 33% of the electorate,[23] then a new election with different candidates is held.

Approval voting is generally touted as one of the best and simplest voting methods, as it removes a number of dilemmas for voters (you can vote for both Boris Blah and Grace Greatfringe if you want to), it is simple, and it tends to lead to candidates who are relatively well-liked by a large percentage of the electorate. Steven Brams, one of the leading scholars working on these topics, has been advocating for approval voting for decades.[24] Brams and Fishburn have shown that, of all the voting systems that do not involve explicit rankings of candidates, approval voting is the best at discouraging insincere voting and is the most strategy-proof.[25]

This version of approval voting would introduce three new elements, elements (2), (3), and (4), that would connect approval voting to support, and support to power. Recall the definition of support offered above: a person, X, supports a candidate, C, for an elected position just in case (a) X believes that C should have the powers that go along with that position and (b) X believes this because X believes that C would do a good job in that position and does so for non-comparative reasons. If voters are encouraged to vote only for those candidates who they support, and if they do this, then vote totals will be connected to epistemically useful judgments about candidate quality. The elements (3) and (4) provide additional reasons for voters not to vote for candidates who they do not support, as doing so would enhance the power of those candidates, and would also make it more likely that they will cross the requisite threshold, rather than leading to a new election. The suggestion here is not that it would never be rational for a person to vote insincerely under this system; just that it will be much less likely to be rational than under a simple plurality vote system.

It is worth saying something about element (3), which would tie legal and moral powers to vote totals (through the connection between votes and support). As noted above, there are different ways this might be done. One option would to give individuals different powers, depending on their levels of support. These powers might include what domains they could legislate over, what kinds of actions one

[23] Obviously, this could be tied either to the total electorate (all eligible voters) or all actual voters. If we allow people to cast a null vote (voting, but for none of the candidates), as we should, then the difference here is just in what we will require people to do in order to register that they don't support any of the candidates. There are arguments on both sides here, but I will leave this issue to the side for the purposes of this paper.
[24] See Steven J. Brams, Mathematics and Democracy: Designing Better Voting and Fair-Division Procedures (Princeton U. Press, 2008); Steven J. Brams and Peter C. Fishburn, Approval Voting (Springer, 1983, 2007)
[25] Approval Voting, pp. 32-33.

could be involved in with respect to making law and policy, whether one could serve on various committees, and so on. One difficulty with this option is that it might effectively penalize those people in districts who elect someone with only a modest amount of support, since those officials will be relatively less powerful and less able to work on behalf of their constituents. Because of this, it might make more sense to instead limit these representatives by tying them relatively more to constituent views as made evident through official polling, or as arrived at through parallel Citizen's Assemblies made up of randomly chosen members of the political district. So, modestly supported elected officials would have to depart less from what their constituents want and to act instead more as mere delegates.

A second option would be to give each elected representative an approval score, tied to the percentage of eligible voters who cast a vote for them: Red (33%-40%), Orange (41%-50%), Yellow (51%-60), Green (61%-70%), and Purple (71% and above). Within the legislature, then, votes on some particularly significant issues (1) could be weighted by whether one is a Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, or Purple representative, with Red votes worth .6, Orange .7, Yellow .8, Green 1, and Purple 1.2; and (2) could require that some particular threshold be reached in the legislative body, so that, say, a legislative body with 100 members could only decide to go to war if there were 60 vote points worth of support for that idea. (This makes more normative sense if we are dealing with population proportionate districting, rather than something like the U.S. Senate.)

There are of course many other ways of tying support and power together; I offer these two just as suggestions of how this might be done. And, of course, the details would need to be modified in the case of voting for policies or decisions directly, rather than voting for political officials.

We can briefly revisit the three election scenarios from Part II of the paper to see what might happen with Normative Approval Voting. Consider Election One, with the two candidates, Betsy Bad (with 70% of the vote in the imagined example) and Walter Worse (30%). As their names suggest, these two are widely viewed as bad candidates, although we might imagine that there are different views as to which of the two is worst. With a Normative Approval Voting system, it would seem that very few people would vote for either Betsy Bad or Walter Worse, meaning that neither would cross the 33% electoral support threshold, and a new election would be held. This brings out that in this system, in some cases one should not vote for any candidate; in particular, if one does not support any of the candidates. And it also draws attention to the fact that, in some cases, it would be good if elections did not force us to elect any of the candidates if all of them are wanting.

Consider Election Two, with the three candidates, Boris Blah (48% in the imagine plurality vote election), Brian Bad (46%), and Grace Greatfringe (6%). Trying to stay with a scenario compatible with those plurality vote results, let us imagine that 54% of the electorate judges both Blah and Greatfringe to be much better than Bad. But let us also imagine that 50% of the electorate supports Greatfringe (in the technical sense of 'support'), whereas only 25% of the electorate supports Blah. But all of the 54% who dislike Bad believe that Blah has a much better chance of defeating Bad than Greatfringe does. Perhaps Blah is more of an establishment candidate, or has greater financial backing, or whatever (explaining why Greatfringe is perceived as 'fringe'). So, in a plurality vote system, they cast their votes for Blah. With Normative Approval Voting, those who support both Greatfringe and Blah can vote for both of them, eliminating the risk of casting a vote for Greatfringe. Even if we assume that all 46% of those people who voted for Bad support Bad, Greatfringe would still show up as the winner, with 50% of the electorate voting for her.

Consider Election Three, with the two candidates, Emma Excellent (who received 51% of the vote in the plurality voting system) and Greta Great (49%). As suggested earlier, both of these candidates are widely seen as wonderful, and are widely supported. With Normative Approval Voting, voters can

fully register this, as they can vote for both of them, making evident their true (and truly high) levels of support.

Although these are just three examples, I hope to have made it at least somewhat plausible that Normative Approval Voting would help reduce the instances of hard choices between being a True Believer and being an Instrumentalist, as well as making evident how a system could be used to track in some detail facts about support that are both epistemically and morally significant.

Given that approval voting is really just a version of range or rated voting, with the only scoring options being 1 and 0, we might also consider Normative Range Voting as an alternative. On this system, we could set a scale on which each candidate is rated from 0 to 10 in terms of one's judgment that the person would do an excellent job in the position, with 10 being "definitely yes" and 0 being "definitely no." We could instruct voters to only give scores of 7 or higher if they support the candidate, and we could say that giving a score of 7 or higher is a way of authorizing that candidate in the sense defined above. The candidate with the highest point total would be elected, and their support score would be defined by their total points divided by the total number of people in the electorate. And we could then tie support to power in some of the ways suggested above.

One advantage to range voting in general is that it allows for more fine-grained judgments about the candidates to be expressed. On the other hand, that requires individuals to have those fine-grained judgments, and (to be epistemically useful) to have those judgments be well-informed. Additionally, it introduces additional possibilities for strategic behavior, overstating one's views for candidates one judges positively and negatively. But it might be worth considering, in some contexts.

2. Bifurcated Response: Plurality Voting Plus

An alternative response to the dual-role dilemma would be to try to carve off or separate the two roles that voting might serve, having one action that constitutes the metaphysically relevant action, and one action that constitutes the epistemically relevant action. We might accomplish this by, for example, conducting plurality voting system votes as they have always been conducted, and then also doing comprehensive and sophisticated *polling* to try to get at the epistemically relevant judgments about candidate quality, which policy is actually a good idea (if voting on policies rather than people), whether candidates are supported (in the technical sense), and so on. If we wanted to, we could then tie the powers of those elected through the vote to the levels of support (in the technical sense) that they have as registered by the polling.

One worry about this is whether it would be possible to get sufficiently comprehensive and sincere responses to polling questions. Ordinarily, polls aim at just getting a representative sample of people surveyed. But that would arguably be insufficient, at least on some of the epistemic accounts of the usefulness of voting. One question would be the relevant dimension of "representativeness" if we think that knowledge and relevant information is widely dispersed, and along a number of different dimensions. Another issue would be whether people would really take the time to give accurate and sincere responses. Perhaps incentives could be provided so that they would. But there would be worries about strategic responses to the polling, particularly if it were conducted after the results of the election were known, but even if not.

A second, perhaps more significant worry about using polling is the way in which it could generate a substantial tension between the results of the vote and the levels of support as indicated by the polling. There would certainly be something odd and potentially unstable about electing a person and then immediately revealing that the person has no or very little support, that people judge that person to be unqualified for the position, and so on. It would be accurate, at least in some scenarios such as the

imagined Election One and Election Two, but it is unclear what would happen if this happened frequently enough. As noted earlier, we hold votes because we think there is some substantive input behind the voting decision: there are beliefs and values and preferences that lead us to vote as we do. This makes it different than mere random selection. We should want our voting system to help us pick the candidate who is actually the most supported, and to pick a candidate who is well supported. If the disconnect between votes and these other judgments is left unaddressed by the system and merely made apparent, there might be significant decreases in perceived legitimacy (as there arguably ought to be), perhaps making this an all-things-considered worse situation than the current situation (where the disconnect is often occluded or non-apparent), and certainly than the situation under Normative Approval Voting where the disconnect is substantially lessened.

Additionally, this response doesn't address the dilemma that voters face inclining them toward insincere, Instrumentalist voting. It will still make sense to vote for Blah over Greatfringe, for example, because it will still be better for Blah to be in office than Bad, even if both are somewhat reigned in by low support levels.

Another bifurcating alternative to plurality voting plus polling would be to have a plurality voting system where one casts a vote for a candidate while at the same time indicating one's level of support for that candidate, but in which that level of support doesn't affect the candidate's chances of being elected. Imagine that there are five different colors of ballot: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, and Purple, with those corresponding with something like No Support, Minimal Support, Modest Support, Strong Support, and Total Support. Voters would be asked to both pick a candidate, and to pick a color ballot with which to vote for the candidate. The winner would just be the person who received the most votes—of any color. But the colors received by the winning candidate would determine their support rating, which, in turn, could be connected to what powers they have, as discussed above.

This kind of system might help address some of the issues about scope and sincerity faced by polling, and it might even be better than what we have now, in that it would reduce the temptation to use vote totals as *evidence* of support. But it wouldn't substantially lessen the dilemma voters face between voting sincerely or not, and it would encounter many of the same issues as the polling system in terms of highlighting, but not addressing, the gap between who is elected and how much they are supported. Additionally, it inherits general problems of plurality voting in that levels of support can only be registered for one candidate. And there would be new strategic questions about not just which candidate to vote for, but which ballot to use.

Of course, there are just a few examples of systems that might be used, and bifurcated responses could be offered that used other voting procedures for the metaphysical role of voting. They have various strengths and weaknesses when compared with plurality voting, but I won't discuss those here.

Conclusion

I hope to have made clear that voting does, or at least might, serve two important and distinct kinds of roles: metaphysical, altering powers and responsibilities, and epistemic, bringing together disparate information and expertise, enabling collective decisions that are better than decisions made by just one or a few, and providing evidence of morally significant facts about support and authorization. I hope to have also made the case that under familiar plurality voting systems, individual voters face a dilemma stemming from these dual roles: should they be True Believers, voting sincerely for the candidate they most support, or should they be Instrumentalists, voting strategically if necessary. How individuals make these decisions will affect what votes can do for us, both metaphysically and epistemically. Additionally, I suggested that we should embrace the idea that power should be a function of support, and that, if we do so, it will be important to be able to track support and authorization as

accurately as possible. This is also imperiled by our current system of plurality voting, which leaves facts about support and authorization murky at best.

All hope is not lost, however. There are many systems, including Normative Approval Voting, which would seem to be much better than plurality voting systems at helping voting fulfill both the metaphysical and epistemic roles, as well as helping us track information about support and authorization.

I want to conclude by suggesting that *epistemic usefulness* and *metaphysical appropriateness* (including that candidates given power through voting are those who are widely supported) of voting systems should be treated as significant normative criteria that should be weighed when considering what voting system or social choice method is appropriate in a given context. Arguably, these should be considered as the fundamental values guiding our concerns about other criteria familiar from social choice theory: the always-a-winner, Condorcet winner, Pareto condition, monotonicity, neutrality, independence of irrelevant alternatives conditions, and so on. Social choice theoretic discussions of voting systems have been too divorced from normative political philosophy, and in particular from normative considerations like those relating to the epistemic and metaphysical roles of voting. And democratic theory discussions of voting have been too quick to translate vote totals into broader claims about support, authorization, and collective epistemic judgments.