

Chapter 3

DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The REDEM project aimed to foster research into the ethics of electoral participation, and notably into the ethical demands that may weigh on individual voters as they form their electoral decisions and/or perform electoral actions, such as voting or abstaining. The present document supports this aim by looking at how normative thinking on individual voting ethics is structured by broader philosophical views on democracy as an ideal. Specifically, this chapter aims to identify and synthetically present the conceptions of democracy that feature prominently in normative democratic theory; it further aims to survey and reconstruct the positions and arguments that are influential in existing scholarship on the ethics of electoral participation; and, finally, it aims to develop a preliminary analysis of how different conceptions of democracy shape electoral-ethical positions and arguments.

The chapter starts by outlining the overall approach taken to produce this synthesis. Section 3 then surveys contemporary democratic theory and synthetically describes four particularly prominent conceptions of democracy, namely the minimalist, the aggregative, the deliberative and the counter-majoritarian conceptions of democracy. Section 4 surveys the contemporary electoral-ethical literature, showing that it contains a range of positions which can roughly be divided into three categories: positions that regard the ethics of electoral actions; positions that regard the ends or goals that voters pursue; and positions that speak to the knowledge voters acquire prior to voting. Sections 5, 6, and 7 then go on to look more deeply into the arguments that the literature offers in support of the respective positions, each outlining the relevant arguments and conducting a preliminary analysis of how minimal, aggregative, deliberative, and counter-majoritarian democracy bear on those arguments, notably by making particular lines of argument conceptually unavailable. Section 5 specifically deals with arguments that relate to the ethics of electoral actions, section 6 looks at arguments on the ethics of voter ends, and section 7 focuses on arguments that speak to the ethics of voter knowledge. Section 8 concludes with some observations on what the present chapter entails for future electoral-ethical research.

2. APPROACH

To ensure a proper understanding of the chapter's character and scope, several clarifications are in order. The first concerns the idea of conceptions of democracy, which builds on the distinction drawn by Rawls (1999, 5) between 'concepts' and 'conceptions'. Concepts, according to this distinction, refer to the basic, essential features of a term, whereas conceptions are more particular, or thicker, interpretations of those features, and it is in this particular sense that the present document uses the idea of conceptions of democracy. That is to say, it considers that the general concept of democracy refers to a form of government in which the people rule (cf. Held 2009, 1), whereas different conceptions of democracy offer thicker and more particular interpretations of this idea.

Where do the conceptions of democracy come from? While conceptions of democracy in principle have diverse sources, this chapter exclusively looks to the conceptions that are most influential in contemporary, anglophone, normative democratic theory. As such, it leaves aside conceptions or views that serve to make democracy empirically measurable (e.g., Dahl's polyarchy conception). The chapter equally leaves aside views or models of democracy that serve to describe and/or explain how existing democratic societies function *de facto*, e.g., Lijphart's (2012) majoritarian and consensus models of democracy, or the pluralist democracy model of Dahl and Truman.¹ And the chapter does not cover either conceptions of democracy that have been historically influential, but receive relatively little support in the contemporary philosophical scholarship; in particular the chapter does not cover the direct conception of democracy, which interprets democracy as the continuous and unmediated participation of the people in public decision-making, and law-making in particular.²

The chapter also leaves aside views on why one or another conception democracy is (normatively) desirable or justified. Proponents of particular democracy conceptions of democracy usually offer particular lines of arguments in favour of their favourite conception of democracy. Przeworski, for instance, advances a minimalist conception of democracy and argues it is desirable specifically because it prevents the eruption of political violence (1999, 45, 49). Likewise, Waldron articulates an aggregative conception of democracy and defends it on the particular grounds that it affords equal respect to all citizens (1999, 109-14). But reasons that tell in favour of a particular interpretation of rule by the people and the interpretation itself are conceptually distinct, as may be seen from the fact that democratic theorists characteristically disagree on the reasons that underwrite particular conceptions of democracy, and often offer contrasting accounts of why one and the same conception is desirable. For example, in the case of minimalist democracy, some of its proponents take it to be desirable not so much for its ability to prevent political violence as for the reason that

¹ For a helpful outline and critical appraisal of pluralism see Held (2009, 158-84).

² For a prominent historical articulations and defences of direct democracy, see Rousseau (2002) as well as Held (2009, 119-32) on the Marxian, delegative interpretation of democracy. Notice further, that the bracketing of the direct democracy conception does not mean that the chapter leaves entirely to the side all forms of direct citizen participation in government, and popular referenda in particular. As will be noted below, several of the discussed conceptions are open to the use of referenda as tools of democratic rule. Simply, these conceptions do not, in contrast to the direct conception, treat continuous direct citizen involvement in policymaking as an *essential* feature of democracy.

minimalist democracy tends to prevent elite capture of the state and the implementation of policies that are grossly inimical to the ordinary citizenry (Riker 1982, 9, 10, 14, 245; Bagg 2018, 895, 901-2). Proponents of aggregative democracy similarly do not uniformly rally behind Waldron's respect defence, but instead propose a range of alternative justifications: Kolodny, for instance, has defended aggregative democracy on the grounds of social equality; Goodin and Spiekerman (2018) have proposed that aggregative democracy can be desirable because it is an epistemically advantageous way to make collective decisions. So, the conceptions of democracy are to be distinguished from the lines of arguments that tell in their favour, and this document does so by focusing exclusively on the former, leaving aside the underlying arguments and remaining agnostic on what arguments, if any at all, are persuasive.

A further point worth stressing is that the chapter specifically focuses on views and arguments that address the ethics of voting at the level of the individual citizen. That is to say, the focus is on views and arguments that answers questions such as: Is voting morally required for a citizen, or can they permissibly abstain? What ends should citizens, morally speaking, pursue in their capacity as voters? What, if anything, is a citizen supposed to know prior to voting? And so, this document leaves aside several bodies of literature that are cognate but distinct nonetheless. In particular, it brackets the literature on the ethics of electoral systems design (e.g. Guinier 1994; Christiano 1996, chap.6; Blau 2004; King 2005; 2015; Rehfeld 2005; McGann and van der Hout 2009; Wilson 2019, chap.8), the literature debating whether voting should be legally obligatory (e.g. Hughes, 1966; Brennan and Hill, 2014; Lever and Volacu, 2018; Umbers, 2020), and also the literature that discusses the virtues that citizens should exhibit generally or specifically when acting as deliberators (e.g. Kateb 1981; Waldron 1993; Habermas 2006; Beerbohm 2012, chap. 6 & 7).

Finally, it is to be noted that in its survey of the electoral ethical-literature, the chapter concentrates on views and arguments that set out a positive account of the ethical obligations and permissions that bear on citizens in the context of voting. This is important to stress because at present, the electoral-ethical literature is to a significant part constituted of arguments that aim not so much to articulate a positive ethics of voting as to critically examine and reject certain such views. In particular, there is an important body of analyses that critically engage the notions that a) citizens are ethically permitted to abstain (see Brennan and Lomasky 2002, 261-1; Maskivker 2016), that b) voters are ethically permitted to pursue their own, private interests (see Brennan 2011, 119-26; Roark 2016), and that c) voters are ethically required to only aim at realising the common good (see, Beerbohm 2012, 122; Lever 2016, Ottonelli 2018). Equally, there exists an important body of analyses that criticise arguments in favour of an ethical duty to vote that turn on notions of fairness (see Lomasky and Brennan 2000, 78; Brennan 2011, 53, 55; Beerbohm 57-8; Maring 2016), universalizability (Lomasky and Brennan 2000, 76; Maring 2016), and civic virtue (see Brennan 2011, 45-52). But for the sake of keeping the chapter reasonably focused, only those electoral-ethical arguments that sustain a positive account of the duties and permission that bear on voters will be outlined and discussed.

3. CONCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY: MINIMALIST, AGGREGATIVE, DELIBERATIVE AND COUNTER-MAJORITARIAN

In the contemporary philosophical scholarship on democracy there are four especially influential interpretations of what democracy, or rule by the people, means. These include a minimalist conception, an aggregative conception, a deliberative conception, and a counter-majoritarian conception of democracy. This section describes the respective conceptions in the stated order to lay the ground for the analysis to be developed in the subsequent sections.

The minimalist, the aggregative, the deliberative, and the counter-majoritarian conceptions of democracy all have in common that they are of a broadly liberal character: although it is not always made explicit, each presumes and supports the presence of familiar, liberal freedom rights such as freedom of speech and thought, freedom of association, freedom of the press, free movement, etc. The conceptions also have in common a commitment to political inclusion, at least in a thin sense. That is to say, on none of these conceptions, there can be citizen categories (e.g. women) that are permanently excluded from the political process and electoral participation in particular. In positive terms, each conception is at a minimum committed to universal enfranchisement such that adult citizens generally have robust, electoral participation rights. But within these basic, parameters, the four conceptions differ on how it is that ordinary citizens ought to participate in politics and the formation of public policy.

The ‘minimalist conception’ (Przeworski 1999, 23)³, for one, associates citizen participation specifically with the election of representatives. Minimalistic democrats such as Schumpeter (2010), Riker (1982), Przeworski (1999), and Bagg (2018) characteristically think that elections cannot reliably indicate what citizens collectively want to be done by way of public policy (Riker 1982, 233-41). Schumpeter also famously worries that citizens have too shallow an understanding of public matters to be entrusted with the making of substantial public decisions (Schumpeter 2010, 235) and so, minimalist democrats are characteristically sceptical of the idea that democracy might mean citizen participation in policy-making. As Riker stresses: properly interpreted, “popular participation is *not the act of making policy*” (Riker 1982, 245; emphasis added; cf. Schumpeter 2010, 262). Yet, as democrats, minimalists want to carve out some space for citizen participation in politics, and they do this at the level of leadership selection. Minimalists argue that the proper and distinctive “role of the people is to produce a government, or else an intermediate body which in turn will produce a national executive or government” (Schumpeter 2010, 241) and so, the minimalist conception of democracy suggest that democracy is a form of government in which “rulers are elected” by the citizenry, specifically through (inclusive) “competitive elections” and that that is “all there is to democracy” (1999, 23, 44; cf. Riker 1982, 242; Bagg 2018, 891).

³ Terminological note: What is here described as the minimalist conception of democracy is in the literature sometimes called by different names. Schumpeter refers to it simply as ‘another theory of voting’ (2010, 241); Riker calls it the ‘liberal theory of voting’ (1982, 9); and Held refers to the view as ‘leadership democracy’ and ‘competitive elitism’ (2009, 125-57) ‘Minimalism’ is the label preferred in this chapter, as it tellingly gestures to the restricted role that citizens are meant to play in this view of democracy, and also because it prevents a misunderstanding invited by Riker’s terminology – i.e. that this conception this would be more committed to liberal rights than are others.

Compared to the minimalist conception, the 'aggregative' view of democracy (Gutman and Thompson 2004, 13) is more amenable to citizen participation in policy making.⁴ In fact, democracy on this view is not so much a scheme for the popular election of political personnel as it is a scheme for policy-making *by ordinary citizens*. Specifically, the thought here is, as Freeman aptly describes, that democracy is a "procedure for making laws within which individuals who are counted equally register their preferences for competing alternatives, and outcomes are decided according to ... majority rule" (2000, 372), or according to some other rule, perhaps, that treats equally the individuals' declared preferences. After all, the point of import, is not the use of majority-rule decision-making *per se*. Rather, what proponents of the aggregative conception of democracy care about is that public policy decisions issue from a process that accords equal weight to every citizen's expressed judgement or preference. Waldron expresses this idea particularly clearly as he associates the idea of 'democracy' with the normative ideas that every citizen's voice "count in public decision-making" and that "each individual ... [have] the right to play his part, *along with the equal part played by all other individuals*, in the government of the society" (1999, 262-3; original emphasis). And this also what is endorsed by Kolodny who characterizes democracy as a form of public policy-making that "gives everyone subject to it ... equal and positive, ... formal and informal opportunity for informed influence either over it or over decisions that delegate the making of it" (2014, 289)

How the aggregative conception of democracy as equal citizens' influence in public policy-making is to be implemented, proponents of the view tend to leave relatively open. For instance, Waldron underlines that his democracy conception is compatible with, and may be institutionalized through, familiar forms of political representation (1999, 109). But Waldron also cites "majority-decision in a *direct* democracy" (1999, 109; emphasis added) as an exemplar form of democracy, thus indicating that popular referenda elections can play a role as well in the institutionalization of democracy as he conceives it. Likewise, Kolodny allows that democracy as he conceives it may be realized through diverse intuitional arrangements (2014, 326), including representative institutions (cf. 2014, 318-19). But although the aggregative conception of democracy may take the form of public decision-making by elected representatives, it still contrasts with the minimalist view of democracy as it pictures representatives as agents who stand in for, and are accountable to, ordinary citizens (cf. Waldron 1999, 109; Kolodny 2014, 318-19). Representatives are not, as in the minimalist view, an institutional cesura that starkly separates ordinary citizens from the process of policy formation. Rather, elected representatives are conduits that connect ordinary citizens with public policy decisions so as to bring about - however imperfectly - the aggregative view of democracy as form of government in which all citizens' judgements or preferences weigh equally in the determination of public policy.

The deliberative conception of democracy, for its part, is different again, notably because of its emphasis on "informed debate, the public use of reason, and the impartial pursuit of truth." (Held 2009, 232). More specifically, the deliberative conception holds that a democratic form of government is one in which decisions are to a significant measure arrived at through

⁴ Another note on terminology: What is here referred to as the aggregative conception of democracy is sometimes in the literature called the liberal conception; see notably Miller (1992) and Habermas (2002, 113). The reason this document favours the adjective 'aggregative' over 'liberal' is very same it prefers the adjective 'minimalist'.

a discussion in between citizens that at a minimum bears the following characteristics: The discussion “takes place in public” (Gutman and Thompson 2004, 4); it is open to participation by all who are affected by the policy-making (Gutman and Thompson 2004, 9) and the terms of participation are the same for all participants (Cohen 1989, 23; Mansbridge et al 2010, 65); in the discussion, the participants defend and criticize the policies at issue on the basis of principled grounds - “deliberation is reasoned in that the parties are required to state ... reasons for advancing a proposal” (Cohen 1989, 22; cf. Gutman and Thompson 2004, 4, 7; Mansbridge et al 2010, 65) - and the discussion participants are finally amenable to revise their respective views in light of the arguments that get articulated. As Gutman and Thompson write with respect to the last point, the idea with public deliberation is that “participants ... learn from each other, ... recognize their ... misapprehensions, and develop new views ... that can more successfully withstand critical scrutiny.” (2004, 12; cf. Cohen 1989, 25-6).⁵

Within this general (or minimal) characterization, many more determined positions are possible, and so there are several important disagreements among the proponents of deliberative democracy. Notably, views divide on the kind of arguments that citizens may permissibly leverage during deliberation. Some deliberative democrats think that in deliberation, citizens must defend their favored positions specifically with arguments or reasons that are acceptable to free and equal citizens seeking fair terms of cooperation (cf. Cohen 1989, 22, 23; 1997, 413-14; Gutman and Thompson 2004, 3, 7). Less restrictively, others think that deliberators may deploy any argument they like provide that it is understandable to others, though not necessarily acceptable (cf. Bellamy 2007, 179, 191, 192-3); and yet others, e.g. Habermas (2006, 8-10) and Lafont (2019, 207-9), take views that are different again. Deliberative democrats also take diverse views on how deliberation is to be institutionalized, and how it is to work together with aggregative processes of decision-making, voting in particular. For instance, some propose to make deliberation happen in particular fora such as mini-publics, or at particular events such as deliberation days (e.g. Ackerman and Fishkin 2004; see section 7 below); Gutman and Thompson, on the other hand, picture the deliberative process as a practice that ought to be pervasive and layer on top of conventional practices of electoral representation, referenda-elections, and policy making. In their words, ‘all institutions of government have a responsibility for deliberation ... all the makers of public policy - legislators as well as judges - should give reasons’, and this, they add, applies to citizens, too: the ‘deliberative labor should not be divided so that representatives give reasons while citizens merely receive them’ (1996, 358). Differently again, Habermas has proposed a two-track model of deliberation in which the general public is responsible for keeping alive a relatively undisciplined and morally unregulated public discussion, while institutions of government function as the locus of a more disciplined form of deliberation that draws on discourses in the wild public sphere, but is subject to more stringent moral requirements, especially with regard to the reasons that the deliberators may invoke (2002, 122-23). And yet others (notably Bellamy 2007, chap. 6) associate deliberation with the processes of program and compromise formation that occur within and between political parties. So, proponents of deliberative democracy really occupy a wide range of positions (cf. Held 2009, 232), leading some commentators to describe the deliberative

⁵ For further (congruent) characterisations of the conversation that deliberative democrats call for, see Christiano (2008, 192, 198), Beerbohm (2012, 107-9) and more generally Held (2009, 231-258)

democracy view as a 'family of views' (Bohman 1998, 401). But for the present purpose, it is arguably possible to abstract from these particularities and sufficient to characterize the deliberative conception of democracy quite generally as a view that conceives of democracy as a form government in which decisions are arrived at in part through aggregative electoral processes such as representative and referenda elections, but also to significant degree by a process of public, inclusive, and reflective reason-giving between citizens.

This finally brings us to the counter-majoritarian conception of democracy, which, similarly to the deliberative conception, is a general view that underwrites (or assembles) a number of more particular positions, notably the 'constitutional conception of democracy'⁶, Pettit's 'republican theory of democracy', and also the minority representation views defended by, e.g., Williams (1998) and Phillips (1998). These three views or positions are importantly distinct. The constitutional conception, as defended by, e.g. Dworkin (1996), Christiano (2008), and Lovett (2010, 217-20),⁷ provides that in its ideal form, democracy signifies that the people rule, but that they do so within limits of constitutionally entrenched civic and political rights and the review of legislation by an independent, constitutional court. Pettit's republican theory of democracy resembles this view in that it, too, describes democracy as a form of government in which the people rule - notably through the institution of a legislative assembly elected in fair elections (Pettit 2012, 195-7; 210) - within the limits of constitutional rights and judicial review (Pettit 2012, 216-17). But on this interpretation of democracy is more far reaching still, for on Pettit's view, democracy ideally also implicates a 'mixed constitution' providing for a separation of state powers (Pettit, 2012, 221-23); it involves the existence of contestatory fora such as court systems, or ombudsmen that enable citizens to legally challenge policy-makers and public policy (Pettit, 2012, 216-17); and it involves a vigilant citizenry that continually oversees government activity, for example by the means specialized, non-governmental watch-dog bodies (Pettit 2012, 226-7). And differently again, the view of Phillips and Williams is that whatever else it means, democracy involves the existence of institutional mechanisms that target groups liable to form persistent political minorities (e.g. ethnic or racial minorities, women) and help them be represented within public decision-making institutions, such as the legislature - for example through group-conscious districting (Phillips 1998, 105, 111-12), the use of multi-member legislative constituencies (Williams 1998, 348), and/or the deployment of legislative gender quotas (Phillips 1998, 80-1). But despite these significant institutional differences, these views all testify to a general understanding that in a democracy, political majorities should be able to rule only within limits that are substantive, procedural, or both. Hence, these particular views arguably exemplify, or express, one common conception of democracy that associates it with the presence of counter-majoritarian devices and pictures democracy as form of government in which the people rule in some form, where that government also features a more or less

⁶ The apt label of constitutional conception is Waldron's (1999, 282), but notice that he is, ultimately, a critic of that conception.

⁷ Constitutional entrenchment of rights and judicial review has recently been defended as well by Christina Lafont (2019, 229-33; 236-39), for the distinctive reason that constitutional review can help to foster deliberation of a certain kind. This suggests that, to a degree, the deliberative and the counter-majoritarian conceptions of democracy bleed into each other and that they are not separated by a bright, conceptual line.

complex web of devices designed to limit substantively and/or procedurally the exercise of public power by political majorities.

4. INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL VOTING ETHICS: POSITIONS IN THE LITERATURE

Shifting the focus now from the description of particular conceptions of democracy to the existing literature on the ethics of voting, three conceptually distinct themes, or questions, stand out as being particularly prominent within this literature. The first question enquires about the normative, or ethical, status of particular electoral actions, such as voting or abstention. The second question asks about the goals or ends it is proper for citizens to pursue qua voters. For example, must a voter aim to advance the common good through their voting, or may they have other objectives too, for instance the advancement of their own personal interest? The third question, for its part, looks to the knowledge that voters acquire prior to voting and to the ways voters acquire it. And on each of these three questions, electoral-ethical theorists take a range of particular positions.

The precise content of the said positions is related below. But it is worth stressing first, that the positions to be related are not all mutually exclusive: this is only so where the positions pertain to one and the same question. Positions on distinct themes or questions – e.g. positions that pertain, on the one hand, to the ethical status of particular electoral actions and positions that pertain to voters' required knowledge, on the other hand – are generally logically compatible with each other.

With respect to the status of electoral actions, then, there is notably the position (I) that citizens in a democracy should generally participate in elections, irrespective of the contextual features of their situation. In particular, this is the view of Lomasky and Brennan (2002), Goldman (2002) and Maskivker (2016, 2018). Additionally, there is the position (II) that citizens are maybe not ethically required to participate generally, but that they ought to do so when particular contextual conditions obtain. This type of position is occupied by Maring (2016), who argues that citizens ought to vote when voting is practically easy and the voters are not already tied up by other morally important duties. It is also the sort of position espoused by Beerbohm (2012), who argues that there is an ethical injunction for citizen to vote when their state perpetrates injustices. And a third position on the status of electoral actions is that (III) citizens sometimes have an ethical duty, not to vote, but to abstain. In particular, this is the notorious position of Brennan (2011), who argues that citizens ought to abstain if they otherwise would cast their vote for an unjust or harmful option, or if they otherwise would vote without having epistemically good reasons for thinking that their preferred party or candidate is a good one.

With respect to the ethics of voter ends, the spectrum of positions is somewhat less diverse, there being only two positive proposals. One is that (IV), as voters, citizens shall look to promote the common good only, as it is affirmed by Brennan (2011) and J.S. Mill ([1861] 2008). And the other positive position is the one of Oxley (2016), who affirms that (V) the voters' concern should be specifically with promoting substantial gender justice.⁸

⁸ For important critiques of the view that when citizens act as voters, they must only look to further the common good, see Beerbohm (2012, 122), Lever (2016) and Ottonelli (2018). These critiques, however,

And in relation to the final question of voter knowledge, there is again a wider spectrum of positions. Brennan (2011) affirms that (VI) insofar as citizens want to vote they should have or acquire knowledge of such a kind that they have an epistemically sound basis for judging the extent to which candidates service the common good. Another position, taken by Flanders (2016), Maskivker (2016, 2018), and Brennan and Lomasky (2000), is that (VII) voters need to be merely reasonably, or roughly, knowledgeable about the issues and debates that crystallise around an election. Goldman, for his part, argues that (VIII) voters in an election ought to be knowledgeable about things that allow them to judge whether parties or candidates are reliable and competent to realise the voter's preferred outcomes, whereas Baurmann and Brennan (2009) take the view that (IX) voters need to be knowledgeable about how candidates reason and arrive at decisions.

And lastly, there is the qualitatively different position of Ackerman and Fishkin (2004) that irrespective of what voters know substantially, they should (X) let their knowledge be influenced by participation in a properly deliberative procedure.

How do the positions I to X relate to the different conceptions of democracy described in section 3? It is in principle possible that particular conceptions of democracy have direct, conceptual ramifications for the positions I-X in and of themselves. For instance, it is conceivable that the deliberative conception of democracy, due to its specific characterisation of the democratic decision-making process, conceptually rules out particular positions from the set I-X, permits others, and possibly even mandates some particular positions. Indeed, position X comes to mind as natural candidate for the latter. But in the existing electoral-ethical scholarship and democratic theory more broadly, those connections are not systematically explored. An analysis of these possible connections or ramifications also far outstrips the scope of the chapter, and so it does not propound any particular view on what is implied by minimalist, aggregative, deliberative and counter-majoritarian democracy for the positions I-X in and of themselves.

To say that one does not take a view on what particular conceptions of democracy imply for particular electoral-ethical positions is not to say, though, that one takes no view at all on how particular ways of conceiving of democracy relate to the ethics of voting. This is so because particular conceptions of democracy can not only carry ramifications for the *positions* that feature in the electoral-ethics literature, but also for the *arguments* that underwrite those position. Consider as an example position I, which holds that citizens of a democracy generally ought to vote. Lomasky and Brennan, Goldman, and Maskivker espouse this position each for their own reason. And these reasons are also liable to conceptual

have not spawned any positive or constructive views about the goals that it is morally obligatory or at least permissible for voters to pursue. Notice also, that there is a relatively rich literature criticising the notion that voters can permissibly vote with an eye to *only* further their own private interests (cf. Brennan 2011, 119-26; Beerbohm 2012, 94; Roark 2016) However, it is not clear that any theorist of voting ethics purposely defends this position. Theorists who favour legally compulsory voting on the grounds that it may raise the electoral participation of socio-economically disadvantaged citizens and thus help to render redistribution policies more egalitarian (Lijphart 1997; Hill 2006; 2010) implicitly commit to the view that self-interested voting is ethically permissible, at least for citizens who are at disadvantage (Lever and Volacu 2018, 245-46). However, those egalitarian advocates of compulsory voting do not explicitly defend this substantive take on the ethics of voting, and a purposive defence the view that self-interested voting is ethically permissible does not appear to exist elsewhere in the literature either.

interference from the minimalist, the aggregative, the deliberative, and the counter-majoritarian conception of democracy: a particular conception of democracy may, for example, conceptually contradict and so make unavailable particular arguments for I, or else it may be consistent with a particular argument, thus implying that it is arguably a permissible approach to voting within that conception of democracy.

The tentative contention of this chapter is, in fact, that just such relations exist. Based on a preliminary analysis, it proposes that the four conceptions of democracy described earlier have some notable ramifications for the various arguments that sustain the positions I to X. The following three sections elaborate this suggestion, each by first reconstructing the arguments that sustain the various positions on the ethics of voter actions, voter ends, and voter knowledge, and by then proposing a preliminary analysis of how those arguments relate to minimalist, aggregative, deliberative and counter-majoritarian democracy.

5. ELECTORAL ACTIONS

5.1 Arguments for Positions I – III

With respect to ethical voting position I, then, three arguments are offered in the literature as to why citizens generally ought to vote. The first of these is developed by Goldman, in the form of a ‘causal responsibility’ argument (Goldman 2002, 267). This argument starts with an assumption that people should generally aim to be morally praiseworthy, and that they therefore should try to play a role in bringing about appropriate outcomes. In Goldman’s way of thinking, an individual should be concerned to attract ‘moral credit’ (2002, 269), and, as this happens through the production of good outcomes, every individual should strive to “help produce a good outcome or ... avoid a bad one” (2002, 269). Participation in elections, in turn, is instrumental in this regard. Elections, Goldman argues, form ‘vectorial causal systems’ in which each vote represents a contributory cause to the final electoral result, much in the way that participants to a tug-of-war all contributorily cause the rope to move in one direction or the other (Goldman 2002, 275). The activity of voting is, accordingly, causally laden; through it voters effect particular results, even if their vote is not decisive. Since each vote is vectorially causative, the voter “can make a partial causal contribution toward the election of a given candidate even if he is not a swing voter” (269) and electoral participation thus represents an instrument by which voters can further good outcomes and prevent bad ones. As Goldman puts it, the voter “can earn ... moral credit by voting for the good candidate’, and so Goldman infers that ‘people *should* vote” (2002, 281). This last inference in Goldman’s argument is logically unwarranted, of course. If people should look to accumulate moral credit by promoting good outcomes, and voting is a way to do the latter, then it does not follow that people ought to vote *simpliciter*. Rather, the implication is, if anything, that voters ought to vote specifically for those parties or candidates that are good or best, whatever that may specifically mean. But Goldman seems not to appreciate this limitation, presenting his argument not as defense of good voting specifically, but as an account that explicates the ‘moral (or quasi-moral) reasons citizens have for *voting*’ (Goldman 2002, 267).

The second argument in favour of the general ethical expectation that citizens take part in elections is the ‘expressivist’ argument theorised by Lomasky and Brennan (2002). People, so these theorists argue, should generally take a stand on the important issues of their time

and society, simply as a matter of expressivist ethics. “[E]xpressive activity”, Brennan and Lomasky argue, “matters in its own right, ... irrespective of its causal product” and hence, “individuals ought to take a principled stand on issues of great moment” (Brennan and Lomasky 2002, 263). Elections and referenda, for their part, are junctures in which “principles of undeniable salience are at stake” (Brennan and Lomasky 2002, 261). Elections decide what is done by way of public policy, and how burdens and benefits come to be assigned within the political community. Accordingly, electoral participation is an important instrument for citizen expression. It is a tool that allows citizens to discharge their expressivist duty and so, on Brennan and Lomasky’s view, it follows that citizens ought to vote or at least that the expressivist principle furnishes a ‘cogent’ “contender ... account of why citizens ought to vote” (2002, 262).

And, finally, the third argument for the general ethical duty to vote is the one developed recently by Julia Maskivker. This starts with a distinctively epistemic view of elections. Maskivker argues that because of processes known as the Condorcet Jury Theorem, the Miracle of Aggregation, and the Diversity Trumps Ability Theorem, large-scale elections tend to have epistemic virtues, especially when the elections are well attended and voters participate in large numbers. “The aggregation of judgments through elections”, Maskivker writes, “results in epistemic advantages” (2016, 18), and this, she claims, tends in turn “to move democracy towards better results” (2016, 18). The operation of elections’ epistemic qualities helps society to get rid of “unaccountable, corrupt and indifferent leaders” and is the mechanism thanks to which “elections can help societies select good governments” (2018, 412). The ‘epistemic properties’ of elections thus “tend to lead to more just and responsive institutions and social arrangements” (2016, 17) and electoral participation by citizens accordingly represents a contribution to the production of justice and the aversion of the outright harm that follows from bad governance. Citizens who do not vote “contribute”, in Maskivker’s view, “to denying democracy the epistemic properties that come with the aggregation of ... votes”, which in turn “contributes to making society unjust by putting in place or keeping officials and policies ... [that are not] consistent with the public interest” (2016, 2; cf. 2018, 413). Voting citizens, by contrast, contribute to bolster the election’s epistemic qualities, and thus aid with the “instalment of acceptably just governments” (2018, 410) In short, Maskivker’s thought is that “voting prevents the quality of governance from declining” (2016, 17) and that, positively, “[e]lections offer ... a way improve society” (2018, 417). Is it ethical necessary though, that citizens aid to improve society? Maskivker thinks it is, at least within limits. In her way of thinking, individuals have a ‘natural’ (2016, 2) or ‘Samaritan’ (2018, 411) duty to avert harm and injustice and to further just arrangements, at least so long as this is not excessively costly for the individual: “we are all bound by duties of aid when our intervention would be relatively easy” (2018, 411). Participation in episodic elections, for its part, is rather easy and associated with few costs (cf. 2018, 413), and so Maskivker contends that “citizens are bound by a moral duty of Samaritan justice to aid society via the ballot” (2018, 410; cf. 2016, 2).

The arguments presented so far have been in favour of the position that voters generally ought to vote. But as indicated, this view is not the only game in town. In particular, some theorists agree in principle that citizens ought to participate in elections, but regard this (II) as a conditional ‘ought’ that depends on the presence of certain background conditions.

Notably, this is the position of Maring and Beerbohm, though they specify differently the relevant background conditions.

Maring argues that for people to excel at the roles they inhabit, they need to play or execute these roles in a substantially good manner or, simply, with skill. But this is not all. Excellence in a role is, according to Maring, ‘two-fold’ (Maring 2016, 253) and requires, in addition to skilful execution, that the role player respects the practice in which they are implicated. In Maring’s words, “S is an excellent participant in practice P” only insofar as “S is skilled (according to P’s standards) and S avoids disrespecting P”. (2016, 253) Applied to the citizens of a democracy, this formula means that in order to be excellent, they need to execute their civic role with skill - they “need to skilfully play the ‘game’ or politics” (2016, 252) - and that they simultaneously need to “avoid disrespecting democracy” (2016, 253). How do citizens respect (or avoid disrespecting) democracy? Maring’s answer is that it involves voting, provided that it is easy to do. Maring reasons that democracy has popular self-rule as a foundational ideal, and that therefore, a democracy-respecting citizen will have to respect and treat popular self-rule as an important ideal in their practical deliberations. “To respect popular rule”, in turn, “a citizen has to stay moderately informed *and cast a ballot*” (2016, 254; emphasis added). At least, this is true as long as voting is no obstacle to the fulfilment of other moral duties (e.g., duties of care) and voting is not made practically difficult (2016, 255). Excellence on the part of democratic citizens will thus involve electoral participation - not always, but in a range of cases nevertheless. Do citizens need to aspire to excellent citizenship, though? With a qualification, Maring believes they do. In his way of thinking, citizens of a “healthy democracy have a pro tanto moral duty to fill their role excellently” (Maring 2016, 247), and so Maring concludes that “citizens in healthy democracy have a pro tanto moral duty to vote” (2016, 247) - in particular when voting is practically easy and the voter is not tied up by other morally weighty obligations.

Beerbohm, for his part, takes a conditional view of citizens’ voting duties, too. But the relevant condition here is that the citizen’s state is implicated in injustice such that citizens’ moral reason to vote gains in strength as “political institutions become more unjust” (Beerbohm 2012, 76). Why is this? Beerbohm’s answer is that people should generally avoid being complicit in injustice, but that when states perpetrate injustices, they characteristically recruit their citizens into complicity. Through their law-abidingness, their fiscal contributions, and their general non-resistance citizens typically “find ... [themselves] contributing to ... [the state’s] ability to coerce others” and to treat others unjustly (Beerbohm 2012, 73). Citizens are thus liable to become complicit in state-perpetrated injustices, even if they are not directly implicated in the creation and administration of the unjust actions or policies. In particular, they are liable to become complicit in an accessory sense, as when one does not actively participate in, or profit from, a burglary, but knowingly provides the burglar with information that enables them to commit the burglary (cf. Beerbohm 2012, 63-4). However, being accessory complicit to injustice is undesirable. People should generally “avoid [being liable to] the charge of democratic accessory” (Beerbohm 2012, 74) and so, when a state perpetrates injustice, citizens should take steps to put moral distance between themselves and the state’s unjust actions. In Beerbohm’s words, citizens should try and fulfil the “exculpating conditions of complicity” that “break the liability relation” between themselves and their state (Beerbohm 2012, 73). Beerbohm further thinks that electoral participation is a way to satisfy such exculpating conditions, and thus he concludes that for

citizens there is a ‘complicity-based reason’, and more particularly an ‘accessorial argument’, to participate electorally and to “attempt to join with their fellow citizens to alter the course of an unjust state” (Beerbohm 2012, 74).

The literature on the ethics of voting offers a number of arguments then, as to why voters ought to take part in elections, either generally or conditionally. But as seen, there is no consensual view – some theorists, indeed, take the contrasting view that citizens are sometimes ethically required to abstain from voting (III). This is notably the view of Brennan, who has argued that citizens ought to abstain if they otherwise would engage in ‘harmful voting’, that is to say, if they would cast a vote for “harmful or unjust policies or for candidates likely to enact harmful or unjust policies” (Brennan 2011, 69). Brennan argues that people have “an obligation to not engage in harmful activities”, at least not when the costs for doing so are insignificant (Brennan 2011, 71, 73). Harmful voting, however, is a type of harmful activity. A single vote cast for a harmful or unjust option does not do any damage in and of itself, but combined with other votes for the same option, it does. Harmful voting is thus “collectively, not individually, harmful” and a citizen who votes harmfully thus engages in a collectively harmful activity. As Brennan puts the point, “to cast an ... harmful vote is to engage in a collectively harmful activity” (2011, 71) and so, if it does not entail any significant costs, citizens should avoid taking part in this activity. Brennan further argues that the latter rider condition is normally satisfied: “refraining from harmful voting has little personal cost” (2011, 73) and thus Brennan infers that voters have a moral “duty to refrain from harmful voting” (2011, 71) and that when voters plan on voting harmfully, they “should abstain” (2011, 68).

However, Brennan does not only argue that abstention is ethically called for when the alternative is harmful voting. Citizens should abstain as well if they are prone to ‘fortuitous voting’, that is to say voting despite a lack of “sufficient justification to believe that ... [one’s favoured] policies or candidates are good” (Brennan 2011, 68, 79). This is so, Brennan argues because “fortuitous voting imposes unacceptable risk” (2011, 80). To vote on the basis of candidates’ emotional appeal, for example, or on the basis of group identification rather than on the basis of considerations that form epistemically sound reasons for thinking that one is picking a good option, is to make decisions on the basis of “a highly unreliable decision method” (2011, 80). Furthermore, these individual decisions can combine with the electoral decision of others to generate perfectly tangible results. Thus, fortuitous voting is a form of collective, undue risk-taking, both for oneself and for others. It is a way, Brennan says, to “expose those governed to undue risk” (2011, 80). However, this is morally impermissible. According to Brennan, “individuals should not participate in activities that impose undue risk provided that refraining from such behaviour imposes little personal cost” (2011, 80) and since the abstention alternative is virtually costless, it follows in Brennan’s way of thinking that people “have an obligation to abstain from voting rather than to vote fortuitously” (2011, 79).

The arguments outlined above are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary: Positions and Arguments on the Ethics of Electoral Actions

I: Duty-to-Vote Position
Responsibility Defence
Expressivist Defence
Samaritan Defence
II: Conditional-Duty-to-Vote Position
Excellence Defence
Accessory Complicity Defence
III: Duty-to-Abstain View
Harm Defence
Risk Defence

5.2 Preliminary Analysis: The Implications of Particular Conceptions of Democracy

Focusing now on the conceptual connections that might exist between, on the one hand, the minimalist, the aggregative, the deliberative, and the counter-majoritarian conceptions of democracy and, on the other hand, the particular arguments just outlined, a preliminary analysis⁹ suggests 8 particularly noteworthy points that are elaborated below and illustratively summarised in Table 2 at the section's end:

1. The aggregative conception is ostensibly compatible with all the arguments outlined under 5.1. The arguments that sustain positions I-III respectively invoke a range of premises - notably (but not only) normative premises about the ethical responsibilities of individual citizens - that are external to the aggregative conception of democracy. As an example, consider Beerbohm's premise that citizen should generally avoid being (accessory) complicit in state injustice. This proposition is not in any way implied by the aggregative conception, nor is it otherwise derivable from that conception. At the same time, though, there is no logical inconsistency between the two: there is no contradiction in affirming, on the one hand, that individuals should generally avoid complicity with state injustice and, on the other, that the democratic ideal is that all citizen's declared preferences weigh equally in the making of public decisions. The same goes for all other premises that feature in the various arguments in favour of I to III and, thus, the aggregative conception *permits* all these arguments to be made, though it does not positively call for any one of them.
2. The minimalist view of democracy probably cannot accept Goldman's responsibility argument. Underlying Goldman's responsibility argument is an idea that elections are causal in bringing about policy outcomes, and that voting is a way citizens may help to steer public policy into one or another direction. However, this is a way to interpret elections that the minimalist conception of democracy cannot readily accept. As seen, this conception envisions elections thinly as the mechanism by which ordinary citizens

⁹ Being preliminary, this analysis does not aim at exhaustiveness and does emphatically not aim to work out what each conception of democracy entails for every single argument in favour of I, II, and III. Rather, it picks out and develops potential connections that stand out as salient at first glance.

appoint political officials, and it is, indeed, emphatic that the crafting of public policy is reserved to those elected. Expressing this idea particularly starkly, Schumpeter writes: "The voters outside of parliament must respect the division of labour between themselves and the politicians they elect. They ... must understand that, once they have elected an individual, political action is his business and not theirs" (2010, 262). So, the minimalist conception of democracy ostensibly conflicts with the analysis of elections that informs the responsibility argument, and so this conception appears to imply a rejection of that particular argument: from the point of view of the minimalist conception, the responsibility argument is not available to be made.

3. The minimalist view seems inhospitable as well to the expressivist case. As seen, this case says that citizens ought to vote because to vote is to position oneself and to take stance on the important issue of one's time. However, for this interpretation of voting to make sense, there has got to be a background assumption that a vote in one direction or another carries a substantial meaning and indicates a view on, e.g., the death penalty, the state of the economy, climate policy, or whatever. However, from a minimalist point of view, this assumption is probably not warranted. In this way of thinking elections serve to elect political personnel, not to steer public policy. The latter is, again, the domain of those elected and so, from the viewpoint of minimalist democracy there exists only a tenuous connection, if one at all, between a voter's substantial views and how s/he votes. A vote for one or another candidate is a vote for them to occupy a particular function, not really a declaration on the part of the voter of any substantial commitment. So, while the minimalist conception does not, on the face of it, contradict directly the expressivist argument for position I, it probably cannot, due how it conceives of elections and the role of voters, support the particular interpretation of voting that informs the expressivist argument. And if so, this rules out of court the expressivist argument.
4. Beerbohm's argument related to accessory complicity fares badly, too, if seen from the point of minimalist democracy. This is so because that argument, too, posits a connection between elections and substantial public policy. As seen, the argument turns on the thought that if the state is implicated in injustice, then citizens can meet a morally exculpating condition by taking part in elections. But in order to think that electoral participation constitutes a way for citizen be exculpated from their state's injustice, one probably has to think that elections and public policy are connected in a fairly robust fashion. The exculpation view of electoral participation make sense only on the assumption that elections are in principle a genuine way citizens can to try to "to alter the course of an unjust state" (Beerbohm 2012, 74). But again, this is largely denied by the minimalist conception of democracy, which treats the popular election of political personnel and the crafting of public policy as largely separate processes. As such, this view of democracy does not permit the formulation, as it were, of a key premise in the accessory complicity argument, the result being that this argument is rejected.
5. The minimalist conception of democracy is ostensibly closed as well to Brennan's two arguments in favor of the electoral-ethical position III. This so because both the harm argument and the undue-risk argument hang on a notion that elections and the shape of public policy are causally connected in a relatively tight fashion. Only when one thinks that election results have relatively immediate causal ramifications for public policy is it plausible to picture 'harmful voting' as a collectively harmful action comparable to

pollution and 'fortuitous voting' as a form of risk taking. Let the causal connection weaken, or be confounded by intermediary factors, and those interpretations of 'harmful' and fortuitous voting become tenuous. The minimalist conception, however, denies the existence of a causally tight connection between elections and policy formation. As such, this conception precludes some of the critical background assumptions that inform Brennan's arguments, and its implication for the arguments is hence a rejection.

6. Both the deliberative and the counter-majoritarian conceptions of democracy seem unable to countenance Maring's excellence argument for a conditional moral duty to vote. A critical premise of this line of argument is that in a range of cases electoral participation is necessary to respect democracy and, thus, to excel at citizenship. But, from the point of deliberative democracy, it is not clear that voting is truly necessary for civic excellence, for in this interpretation of the democratic ideal, public policy making should be fed both by electoral processes and a process of public, inclusive and reflective reason-giving in between citizens. The democratic policy-making process is pictured as double-tracked, and consequently it is not obvious, in this way of thinking, that electoral participation is necessary for civic excellence: participation in the deliberative process - be it through active production of reasons (e.g., in op-eds) or through the passive reception of reasons - might be excellence-conferring as well. Roughly the same applies to the counter-majoritarian conception of democracy. If democracy in its ideal form is characterized by the presence of counter-majoritarian devices, and especially devices such as Pettit's contestation channels and civil-society watch-dog organizations, it is not particular clear the electoral participation stands out as a necessity for civic excellence: appealing to a local planning decision or giving to Amnesty International might be ways to excel civically, too. Of course, Maring may reply to these observations with an elaboration of the argument showing that electoral participation is connected *especially closely* with civic excellence such that, even in the context of deliberative and counter-majoritarian democracy, voting is necessary for citizens to excel in their roles. But absent such elaboration, the deliberative and the counter-majoritarian conceptions of democracy appear to foreclose the proposition that civic excellence hangs on electoral participation, thereby ruling out this particular line of argument.
7. The deliberative and counter-majoritarian characterization of democratic policy-making as a multi-faceted process that offers citizens a range of entry points over and beyond the electoral process has ramifications, as well, for Beerbohm's accessory complicity argument. It implies that if citizens are to successfully put some normative distance between themselves and their unjust state, they need (at minimum) to vote. But if policy-making is a multifaceted process, there is ostensibly no reason to think that voting is the one way to go. Exculpation might, again, be obtained by various other means as, for example, participating in marches, writing to one's MPs, or being a regular buyer of an oppositional newspaper. And so, the deliberative and the counter-majoritarian conceptions of democracy seem to foreclose this complicity argument too - at least in the absence of a further elaboration explicating why electoral participation is particularly salient for meeting moral conditions of exculpation.

Table 2: Summary: Implications of Conceptions of Democracy for the Ethics of Electoral Actions (Preliminary Analysis)

Voting-Ethical Positions & Supporting Arguments	Conceptions of Democracy			
	Minimalist	Aggregative	Deliberative	Counter-Majoritarian
I: Duty-to-Vote Position				
Responsibility Defence	Rejection	Permission		
Expressivist Defence	Rejection	Permission		
Samaritan Defence		Permission		
II: Conditional-Duty-to-Vote Position				
Excellence Defence		Permission	Rejection	Rejection
Complicity Defence	Rejection	Permission	Rejection	Rejection
III: Duty-to-Abstain View				
Harm Defence	Rejection	Permission	Rejection	Rejection
Risk Defence	Rejection	Permission	Rejection	Rejection

8. Brennan’s harm and undue risks argument are ostensibly inadmissible, too, from the point of view of deliberative and counter-majoritarian democracy. As noted under 5 above, the harm argument and the undue-risk argument both turn on the idea that elections and the shape of public policy are connected in a causally tight fashion. But if democratic public policy-making is multifaceted as the deliberative and the counter-majoritarian conceptions suggest, then it is not clear that the connection between elections and policy is particularly tight. Citizens’ electoral participation rather appears as one input that gets “mediated by a [whole] social system and a variety of other agents and is limited by the extra-electoral mechanisms of liberal democratic politics and constitutional structure” (Taylor Smith 2016, 231). Citizens’ votes stand at a causal remove from public policy outputs, and thus it is conceptually difficult to characterize ‘harmful’ and fortuitous votes as positively harmful or risky. Such a characterizing, though, is crucial for the harm argument and the undue-risks argument respectively, and so the deliberative and the counter-majoritarian stance seem to preclude both these arguments along with the arguments on excellence and complicity.

6. VOTER ENDS

6.1 Arguments for Positions IV - V

Turning now to the domain of the goals that are proper for citizens to pursue when acting as voters, recall that the literature features two positive positions: one (IV) is that voters shall look only to promote the common good; the other one (V) is that voters ought to be concerned with realising substantial gender justice.

IV is the position explicitly taken by J.S. Mill, who argues that the vote “is not a thing in which he [the voter] has an option. It has no more to do with his personal wishes than the verdict of a jurymen. It is strictly a matter of duty; he is bound to give it according to his best and

most conscientious opinion of the public good” ([1861] 2008, 193). IV is also endorsed by Brennan, who thinks that “voters ... generally should vote for policies that promote the common good” (2011, 113), and both these theorists hold the view on the basis of the same argument. This says that to be a voter is to occupy a public office and to wield public power. When exercising the franchise, “you take on the *office* of voter” (Brennan 2011, 128, emphasis added); you “exercise ... [a] political function” (Mill [1861] 2008, 193) and with that comes a role-specific moral duty. As Brennan puts it, “anyone wielding political power ought to use that power in ways that she believes ... maximally promote the common good” (2011, 129; cf. Mill [1861] (2008), 195) and thus it follows, according to Brennan and Mill, that citizens acting as “voters are obligated to choose the policy or candidate which, given the evidence, they ... believe will best serve the common good” (Brennan 2011, 128; cf. Mill [1861] (2008), 195).

As for the rival position V, the argument for it ostensibly turns on the thought that gender justice (interpreted as the goal of eliminating gender inequality across social, political and economic domains (Oxley 2016, 157)) is an important, but undersupplied social ideal. Oxley reasons that “individuals should care about gender justice as a primary concern ... and should vote with that in mind” (2016, 172) apparently *because* “gender justice is a critically important social goal” (2016, 173), but is not yet sufficiently implemented: “Gender justice”, Oxley writes, should be for voters a “top priority”, “*given* the slow progression of equal rights for women” (2016, 173, emphasis added). This, of course, is no valid line of reasoning. The fact that some ideal is important but undersupplied in practice does not in and of itself entail that it should be an end specifically for *voters*. But Oxley’s observations can yield the desired conclusion if paired with a further normative proposition that voters have an ethical responsibility to try and promote through their voting those ideals that are important but not yet properly implemented. And so, Oxley’s argument is best (and most charitably) interpreted as saying that voters should aim to promote gender justice through their voting because they generally owe it to promote unrealised but important ideals and because gender justice fits that description.

6.2 Preliminary Analysis: Implications of Particular Conceptions of Democracy

As for the relations between the Brennan-Mill argument and Oxley’s argument and the four conceptions of democracy presently under investigation, a preliminary analysis again suggests several important points, as elaborated below and summarised in Table 3:

1. The aggregative conception seems to implicitly permit both the Brennan-Mill argument and Oxley’s. The aggregative conception of democracy does not, on the face of it, entail positively any of the premises composing the two lines of argument. But it does not seem to prohibit them either. Hence, this conception seemingly permits both ways of thinking.
2. As seen from the point of view of minimalist democracy, deliberative democracy and counter-majoritarian democracy, the Brennan-Mill argument is afflicted by a fatal difficulty. The Brennan-Mill argument rests on a premise that public officials generally have a moral duty to look out for the common good. At first sight, this seems perhaps an innocuous proposition. But from the minimalist, deliberative, and counter-majoritarian viewpoints, it is not the only possibility. This is so because all three conceptions characterise democratic public policy making as fundamentally articulated. In the minimalist conception, public policy comes about through as a process of delegation: citizens elect representatives who then craft policies according to their own judgement.

The deliberative conception takes public policy to issue from the combination of electoral practices, on the one hand, and a process of public deliberation on the other. And in the counter-majoritarian view, policy is taken to issue from the interplay between political majorities and a more or less elaborate set of counter-majoritarian agents and constraints. So, in each conception, policy formation, and political life more generally, are viewed as articulated - as comprising several agents and processes - and this in turn opens the perspective that public officials might not all be subject to a uniform moral duty to service the common good. Given the articulated nature of politics, different agents may well have different moral duties depending on their particular place within the overall system or process. For instance, it might be thought that there are differentiated moral duties for those who occupy the office of member of government and, on the other hand, for those who occupy the office of voter (cf. Lever 2007); or else one might think that citizens' moral duties change depending on whether they act as voters or deliberators. At least, this a possibility within the minimalist, the deliberative, and the counter-majoritarian ways of thinking democracy and so, the Brennan-Mill argument would need to purposely explain why it is that the moral duty to promote the common good weighs uniformly on all public officials. But no such explanation is offered. As presently stated, the argument merely posits this general duty for public officials, and thus it probably is not acceptable from the point of view of minimalist, deliberative, counter-majoritarian democracy. As seen from any of these three perspectives, the Brennan-Mill argument unacceptably stipulates a potentially controversial proposition, and so it is ostensibly an argument to be rejected - at least so long as no explanation of the required kind is offered.

3. Oxley's argument is affected by a structurally similar difficulty as the Brennan-Mill line. (On a charitable interpretation) Oxley's argument presupposes that voters have a moral duty to promote important ideals, especially when they are insufficiently implemented. However, if democratic policy-making is viewed as fundamentally articulated, it is not obvious that such a moral duty should weigh on voters. Rather, one might think that the promotion of the important ideals is a duty that falls on citizens *qua* deliberators, or that it is mainly the moral business of government to see to the implementation of important objectives such as gender justice. So, here again, a substantial argument is owed to the proponents of minimalist, deliberative, and counter-majoritarian democracy as to why there is a moral duty specifically on voters to promote under-realised ideals. But no such argument is furnished, and thus the Oxley line of argument appears to be as well unacceptable from the point of view of a minimalist deliberative, or counter-majoritarian conception of democracy: As the Brennan-Mill argument, it ostensibly stipulates a proposition that from the points of view of minimalist, deliberative, and counter-majoritarian democracy is potentially controversial and requires substantiation.

Table 3: Summary: Implications of Conceptions of Democracy for the Ethics of Electoral Ends (Preliminary Analysis)

Voting-Ethical Positions & Supporting Arguments	Conceptions of Democracy			
	Minimalist	Aggregative	Deliberative	Counter-Majoritarian
IV: Common-Good Position				
Brennan-Mill Defence	Rejection	Permission	Rejection	Rejection
V: Gender-Justice Position				
Oxley Defence	Rejection	Permission	Rejection	Rejection

7. VOTER KNOWLEDGE

7.1 Arguments for Positions VI – X

If a citizen aims to vote and has some goals to guide their decision-making, what knowledge do they, ethically speaking, need to acquire? Do they need to acquire or consolidate that knowledge through particular processes? As seen already, these questions form the third centre of gravity within the ethics-of-voting literature and once again, the positions and arguments are varied.

One notable position (VI) is that voters are ethically required to acquire knowledge of such a kind that they have an epistemically sound basis for judging the extent to which candidates service the common good. This is the position of Brennan in particular, who defends the position with an argument similar to the one he deploys to vindicate the duty to abstain over fortuitous voting. To vote without having an epistemically sound basis for judgment is, in Brennan’s way of thinking, to engage in a collective activity that imposes undue risks on others. When voters make their decisions on the basis of ‘bad reasons’ such as the candidates’ emotional appeal, on the basis of group identification, or generally loose and uninformed opinion, “they impose undue risk on their fellow citizens” (2011, 80). However, this is a moral wrong, as already seen, and citizens planning on voting must thus see to it that they have an epistemically sound basis for judgment formation. Exactly what that entails Brennan leaves open to be determined by a theory of epistemology, but Brennan’s rough idea is that “if they do vote, ... [people] owe it to others and themselves to be adequately rational, unbiased, just, and informed about their political beliefs” (2011, 69).

Another position on the ethics of voter knowledge – one that contrasts with Brennan’s potentially very demanding position (cf. Flanders 2016, 136) – is that (VII) voters are morally required to be just reasonably, or roughly, knowledgeable about the issues and debates that crystallise around an election. This position is endorsed, on the basis of different arguments, by Flanders, Maskivker, and Lomasky and Brennan.

Flanders’s argument for the rough-knowledge view is based on the value of respect. Citizens of a democracy, he thinks, owe each other a certain degree of mutual respect. However, respect is not compatible with utter ignorance on the part of voting citizens. As Flanders contends: “if you close yourself off to the facts ... , [and] you endorse policy Y anyway, even though you don’t know the facts and have gone out of your way to not learn the facts ... [then]

it is hard not to see this as a matter of disrespect to your fellow citizens” (2016, 135). So, for there to be respect between (voting) citizens, there needs to be some knowledge. It simply is a necessary component of respectful civic relations - or so argues Flanders. In particular, Flanders argues that “if citizens make a good faith effort to keep themselves informed and abreast of the factual issues at the heart of many debates” then that “is enough for them to show respect to their fellow citizens” (2016, 138). And since such respect is morally called for, the conclusion is that voting citizens need to be reasonably informed about the issue surrounding an election. In Flanders’s own words, “citizens have a duty to be reasonably informed about the issues ... they vote on” (Flanders 2016, 135).

Maskivker, for her part, develops an argument for the rough-knowledge view that relates to the epistemic qualities of elections. As already mentioned, Maskivker thinks that people have a natural or Samaritan duty to promote and sustain just political and social arrangements, and that citizens for this reason should take part in elections, the thinking being that electoral participation is low-cost for the individual while it helps to bolster elections’ epistemic qualities, thereby helping to move public policy in the direction of better and more just results. Elections, however, do not have epistemic value unconditionally. For such value to obtain, it is necessary that the participants are at least somewhat competent judges of the matter at hand. As Maskivker notes, the “epistemic properties ... are unlikely to come about if individual voters fail to attain a certain threshold of competence, which we can label ‘better than random’” (2016, 4). So, if citizens are to discharge their Samaritan or natural duty through electoral participation, they not only have got to take part, but also to make sure they are so well informed that their judgment is better than a coin-toss. Maskivker thinks this is possible and not excessively costly to the individual. As she stresses, “the level of competence in voters must *only* be better than random ... if the epistemic virtues of ... [elections] are to emerge”. Voters need not be “expert in economics, public affairs or foreign policy”; they merely have to “put some thought into the [voting] decision and take the necessary steps to acquire pertinent information” (2016, 7-8) such that they know “what is at stake in the election” (2018, 411). What is more, voters only need to acquire such information at episodic intervals (2018, 413). As such, it is “not unreasonably burdensome” for citizens to acquire the relevant competence, and so Maskivker argues that on the grounds of their Samaritan or natural duty to sustain justice, citizens have a moral obligation not only to vote, but also to “acquire enough information so as to make a voting choice that is better than random” (2018, 409; cf. 2016, 1-2).

And then there is the third the argument for the rough-information position developed by Lomasky and Brennan. They argue, as seen, that citizens ought to vote in fulfilment of their expressivist, moral duty to take a stand on the important issues of their time and society. However, for a vote to reflect a stance and express something, it is necessary that the vote issues from an informed mind. “One who votes in ... [a] desultory and absent-minded fashion is not”, accordingly to Lomasky and Brennan “to be credited with taking a stand on anything” (2002, 263), and hence they conclude, that citizens’ general expressivist duty does not merely call the citizens to the ballot box but requires of them as well that they be reasonably informed about the issues of the election. The proposition, they argue, “that individuals ought to take a principled stand on issues of great moment includes the notion that they ought to do so intelligently”. More to the point, the citizen “who votes should know the issues,

scrutinize the candidates' statements, and make up their mind after weighing all the facts: this is how the voter's duty is ... expressed" (2002, 263).

The reasonable or rough-knowledge view receives support from various quarters, then. Nonetheless, it remains one among several other competitor views. Brennan's position (VI) is one, and another competitor view is the position (VII) that voters may not necessarily have to know the broad issues that are stake in the election, but ought to acquire a more focused type of knowledge that enables them to judge the extent to which parties or candidates are reliable and competent to realise the outcomes that the voter prefers. This is a position developed and defended by Goldman in particular. As related by Baurmann and Brennan, Goldman argues that it is normatively desirable in a democracy that elected officials realise the outcome preferences of ordinary citizens (Baurmann and Brennan 2009, 160-1), and in his view, this is most likely to occur insofar as citizens vote into public office persons who are reliable and competent executors of their respective preferences. As Baurmann and Brennan summarise, "the successful functioning of representative democracy depends on having representatives that are trustworthy", specifically in the sense that they "are motivated to pursue citizens' goals/ends; have the ability to discern what these goals are; and the capacity to achieve those goals/ends on the citizens behalf" (2009, 164). However, there is no automatism such that elections *simpliciter* will systematically return officials who are reliable and competent relative to citizens' objectives. Rather, this will tend to occur to the extent that citizens are able to judge the candidates' reliability and competence, which in turn presupposes the presence of the relevant information. As Goldman points out, "the functioning of democracy ... depends on the acquisition of certain types of knowledge by particular actors or role-players and what is of particular import is that voters have information such that they can judge which 'candidates ... would ... produce a better outcome ... from ... [their own] point of view'" (Goldman cited in Baurmann and Brennan 2009, 159-60; 161). More concisely, the thought is that citizens having knowledge of reliability and competence-indicating information is an enabling condition for the realisation of citizens' outcome preferences, and, based on this thought, Goldman's conclusion is that the prospective voter ought to acquire knowledge that enables her to "form a considered judgements about the reliability and qualifications of a politician" (Baurmann and Bennis 2009, 166). And as Baurman and Brennan (2009, 166) elaborate, this might practically include knowledge about the candidates' competence and political skill, knowledge about the candidates' likely position in parliament, government and their party, and/or knowledge about the general conditions in which the elected candidates will operate.

A further competitor view on ethics of voter knowledge is a view that interestingly contrasts with that espoused by Goldman. It (IX) is that voters ought to acquire knowledge of information that speaks not so much to candidate's reliability and competence, as to their personal characteristics and mode of thinking and decision-making. As Baurmann and Brennan put it, voters should not, *pace* Goldman, focus on "the ability of a politician to produce a certain and specified outcome set"; rather, voters should be "interested in the characteristics of their empowered agents in their political roles" and acquire information about "the personal characteristics and intrinsic motivations of candidates" (2009, 169, 170). The argument for this view is developed by Baurman and Brennan, who agree with Goldman that it is desirable that voter preferences for outcomes be realised by elected officials (2009, 167). In their analysis, however, that objective is not enabled by the election of reliable and

competent representatives. A voter cannot, in their view, “foresee how things will work out or what policies are required to best promote his or her interest” (2009, 168) or political preferences more broadly. A voter may, of course, have relatively determinate preferences at any given moment, and they may as well be able to identify the party or candidate that is reliable and competent relative to these preferences. But as time passes and conditions change, the elector’s preferences are likely to alter in ways not readily foreseeable. As such, a voter “cannot specify in advance the concrete outcome set that will at the end of the term satisfy her” (Baurmann and Brennan 2009, 168) and the election of representatives that are reliable and competent relative to voters’ *election-day* preferences is no guarantee, then, that voter preferences will be realised over the long haul. Rather, what secures the implementation of voter preferences, in an enduring fashion, is the election of representatives who through their particular ways of thinking and of arriving at decisions are likely to track, over time, voters’ fluid preferences. How candidates think and decide – what ‘decision calculus’ they employ (2009, 170) – is in turn revealed not so much by party programmes and election commitments as it is by the candidates’ personal characteristics and their publicly stated *reasons* for favouring particular policies (Baurmann and Brennan 2009, 170). And so, it is Baurmann and Brennan’s contention that based on the idea that representatives ought to realise voter preferences, voters should be primarily “interested in the characteristics of their empowered agents” (2009, 169).

This finally brings us to a fifth and qualitatively different view on the ethics of voter knowledge. In contrast to the positions VI to IX, this does not stipulate that prospective voters ought to acquire knowledge of one or another specific kind. Rather, the suggestion is (X) that voters’ knowledge should be shaped through participation in a properly deliberative procedure. In particular, this is a position occupied by Ackerman and Fishkin. They propose that prior to major elections there ought to be a ‘deliberation day’ during which ordinary citizens attend a deliberative event together with their fellow citizens¹⁰ and so they commit rather clearly to the position that it is desirable for ordinary prospective voters to let their beliefs and knowledge be shaped by participation in public deliberation. They offer two specific arguments for this view. The first is roughly that deliberation helps citizens to cast an authentic ballot. Participation in deliberation, Ackerman and Fishkin argue, helps voters to assess and classify the many empirical propositions that feature in political argument. The deliberation day “will be useful in allowing the participants to distinguish between relatively uncontroversial facts and a range of more controversial claims about the world” and thus it will generally “enrich the factual basis of ... [citizens’] understanding” (2004, 180; 182) That improved empirical understanding is significant in turn because it, in Ackerman and Fishkin’s view, will aid people to “get a sense of the way their basic values actually apply to the great national issue before them” (2004, 182), thereby enabling people to vote authentically, in ways that genuinely reflect their political values and judgments rather than their empirical mis-information.

The other argument that Ackerman and Fishkin offer in favour of the view that citizens ought to deliberate prior to voting is that doing so enables voters to participate electorally in a normatively appropriate way. According to Ackerman and Fishkin, citizens are morally required to vote in a way that is reflective of their considered judgements. A responsible

¹⁰ For the precise structure of the event, see Ackermann and Fishkin (2004, 17-47)

citizen does not vote on the basis of whatever crude and passing thought they happen to have at the polling station. Rather, “the responsible citizen thinks before he acts” - he “takes the time and trouble to think seriously about the public good” (2004, 180; 183). Ackerman and Fishkin further argue that deliberative participation a is good way to discharge this expectation. Deliberation, they explain, helps citizens to develop a “critical perspective on the relative merits of competing candidates” (2004, 176). It “enables ... voters to cast their ballots ... thoughtfully” (2004, 184) and so, the view of Ackerman and Fishkin is that citizens should take part in deliberation not only so that they may cast an authentic ballot, but also so that they may vote in the considered fashion they are ethically expected to.

Table 4 below summarises illustratively the arguments outlined above.

Table 4: Summary: Positions and Arguments on the Ethics of Voter Knowledge

VI: Epistemic-Adequacy Position
Undue-Risk Defence
VII: Reasonable-Knowledge Position
Respect Defence
Samaritan Defence
Expressivist Defence
VIII: Reliability & Competence View
Citizen-Ends Defence
IX: Candidate-Characteristics View
Citizen-Ends Defence
X: Deliberation View
Authentic-Choice Defence
Considered-Judgments Defence

7.2 Preliminary Analysis: Implications of Particular Conceptions of Democracy

Turning now from the description of the different arguments bearing on the ethics of voter knowledge to a preliminary analysis of the arguments’ relation to the conceptions of democracy under investigation, several points again stand out as particularly salient. As before, the points are elaborated below and graphically summarised the sections’ end in Table 5:

1. The undue-risks argument offered by Brennan in support of the voting-ethical position VI is ostensibly not sustainable from the perspective of minimalist, deliberative, and counter-majoritarian democracy. The reasons for this broadly speaking rehearses the discussion from 5.2, point 5. The undue-risk argument proposes that for voters to participate electorally without engaging in a form of unacceptable risk-taking, they must acquire information that is of an epistemically relatively high quality. This does not make much sense under the assumption that elections and policy outcomes are connected only in a causally loose fashion, or in ways that are heavily mediated. In order to view voting without the epistemically relevant standards as a straightforward form of risk-taking, one needs to assume a relatively tight causal connection between elections and policy outcomes. But as discussed previously, this tight connection between elections

and policy outcomes is denied, in different ways, by minimalist democracy as well as deliberative and counter-majoritarian democracy. These conceptions all view the process of policy generation as fundamentally articulated, and as such they preclude a critical background assumption to Brennan's undue-risk argument, thus making the argument conceptually unavailable.

2. The minimalist conception of democracy also implicitly rejects the expressivist case for the reasonable-knowledge position (VII). This is for familiar reasons again. The expressivist argument interprets voting as expressive act through which voters commits to particular substantial views. But as seen under 5.2 (point 3) the minimalist conception cannot accept this interpretation, given how starkly it aims to keep apart the citizen-driven election of political personnel and the elite-driven formulation of public policy. And so, the minimalist conception presumably rejects the expressivist case for position VII just as much as it rejects the expressivist case for position I.
3. Minimalist democracy's strong conceptual separation between the election of political personnel, on the one hand, and policy making, on the other, further means that this conception of democracy cannot accept Goldman's and Baurmann and Lomasky's citizen-ends arguments in favor of the positions VIII and IX respectively. Both these arguments fundamentally rest on a thought that public policy should track the objectives of citizens. But as seen, this is anathema to the minimalist conception, which specifically limits the role of citizen to being mere electors of policy makers.
4. The citizen-ends arguments advanced by Goldman and Baurmann and Brennan are problematic from the point of view of deliberative democracy and counter-majoritarian democracy, too. Both versions of the argument rest on a view that public policy should reflect citizen goals and representatives ought to realize, to the extent it is possible, the political ends of citizens. The counter-majoritarian conception of democracy is beholden to a view of democracy as a system of government in which political majorities' power is tempered by counter-majoritarian devices such as constitutional rights entrenchment, judicial review, guaranteed minority representation in decision-making bodies, a contestatory civil society, and so on. So, if this conception accepts any idea to the effect that citizen ends ought to guide, and be reflected in, public policy, it will be in form a strongly qualified claim. Certainly, the counter-majoritarian conception of democracy does not accept that public policy to track the citizens goals *simpliciter*, as is suggested by the arguments offered by Goldman as well as Baurmann and Brennan. Deliberative democracy cannot endorse either the idea that citizen ends ought to generally fashion public policy. The idea with deliberative democracy is, on the contrary, that citizens ought to reason with each other, and that in large part public policy should be informed by the goals that citizens form through the process of reasoning with fellow citizens. In a nutshell, deliberative democracy affirms that public policy should be informed by, and track, citizens' considered views and judgments, not their ends *simpliciter*. So, both deliberative democracy and counter-majoritarian democracy contradict a key normative premise in the arguments advanced by Goldman, Baurmann and Brennan, thus making these lines of reasons conceptually unavailable.
5. Deliberative democracy has a relationship with the deliberation view (X) and, in particular, with the considered-judgements argument that is difficult to pin down. As

noted under point 4 above, deliberative democracy is committed to the view that public policy-making ought to be informed by citizens' considered judgments, and, as such, the conception seems to align well with the considered-judgements argument. In particular, the conception seems to positively affirm the argument's key premise that voters ought to vote on the basis of their considered judgments rather than their first best opinion. On the other hand, deliberative democracy is committed to a view of policy-making as an articulated process that combines electoral processes and a deliberative process of reasoning between citizen. This opens up the possibility that the moral duties of actors within the process differ depending on the place they occupy or the function they discharge, as discussed under 5.2, point 2. And so, it is not altogether clear that deliberative democracy in fact accepts the view that when acting specifically as voters, citizen ought to vote on the basis of their considered judgements. If elsewhere in the system there are mechanisms to identify and feed the considered judgements of citizens into public-policy making, it is conceivable that from a deliberative point of view citizens have no particular responsibility to express their considered judgments *as voters*. Indeed, it might be thought that if citizens have assurance that subsequent to the election there will extensive public reasoning about policy in the legislature, in the public sphere more broadly, or, say, in dedicated mini-publics, then they can ethically vote on the basis of their more spontaneous and intuitive thoughts. So, in a preliminary analysis, there are reasons to suggest both that deliberative democracy is and that it is not compatible with a key premise in the considered-judgements argument, and as such, the relation between these two remains unclear, pending further examination.

6. Still, on the considered-judgments argument, this argument appears to be precluded by the aggregative conception of democracy, which otherwise seems to be compatible with most of the arguments discussed thus far. Specifically, a problem here arises because the considered-judgments argument holds that it is desirable for citizens to vote on the basis of careful reflection. This seems a problematic desideratum from the point of aggregative democracy, for the aggregative conception of democracy does not mark the distinctions between citizens' considered and non-considered judgments. Rather this view of democracy proposes more simply that citizens' political preferences should weigh equally in the determination of public policy, *regardless of whether they are considered preferences or not*. And so, the aggregative conception seems incapable of condoning a central premise in the considered-judgement argument.
7. Finally, although the aggregative conception resists the considered-judgements argument, it might be compatible with and permit the authentic-choice argument that tells in favour of the deliberation position (X) as well. The authentic-choice argument rests in part on the empirical claim that by participating in deliberation, citizens can improve their empirical understanding and work out what their own political views actually are. Aggregative democracy does not, on the face of it, contradict this. In addition to its empirical claim, the authentic-choice argument also ventures the normative proposition that it is desirable for voters to cast ballots that genuinely reflect their views. It is not clear that aggregative democracy denies this claim. Indeed, it is arguable that proponents of aggregative democracy wish precisely that public policy is arrived at through a process of preference amalgamation that treats equally the views that citizens *genuinely* hold, as opposed, for example, to ones that rest on an empirical misunderstanding. In any event, the main point is that aggregative democracy seemingly

does not rule out any of the premises in the authentic-choice picture of ethical voting, and it therefore seems a permissible perspective on the aggregative conception of conception of democracy.

Table 5: Conceptions of Democracy and Individual-Level Voting Ethic

Voting-Ethical Positions & Supporting Arguments	Conceptions of Democracy			
	Minimalist	Aggregative	Deliberative	Counter-Majoritarian
VI: Epistemic- Adequacy Position				
Undue-Risk Defence	Rejection		Rejection	Rejection
VII: Reasonable Knowledge Position				
Respect Defence				
Samaritan Defence				
Expressivist Defence	Rejection			
VIII: Reliability & Competence View				
Citizen-Ends Defence	Rejection		Rejection	Rejection
IX: Candidate-Characteristics View				
Citizen-Ends Defence	Rejection		Rejection	Rejection
X: Deliberation View				
Authentic-Choice Defence		Permission		
Considered-Judgements		Rejection	Unclear	

8. CONCLUSION

In addition to synthesising influential philosophical conceptions of democracy and to clarifying the structure of the electoral ethical literature this chapter has aimed to throw light on several points that are potentially important for future research on ethical dimensions of voting. Subject to the caveat that its analysis is provisional, the chapter suggests that salient connections exist between how democracy is generally conceived and the ethics of individual electoral participation. While it remains unclear whether particular conceptions of democracy directly entail any specific electoral-ethical positions, the chapter offers preliminary grounds to think that one’s interpretation of the ideal of democracy affects and potentially restricts the argumentative moves one can deploy in argument about the ethics of voting. The chapter further suggests that minimalist, deliberative and counter-majoritarian democracy conceptions implicitly rule out rather many of the arguments that feature in the electoral-ethical literature. This might be taken to indicate that these conceptions of democracy are somehow inhospitable to the formulation of an ethics of electoral participation, but an arguably more plausible interpretation is that this reflects a research lacuna and that in the field of voting ethics insufficient attention has been paid so

far to the development of a voting ethics that can be reconciled with minimalist, deliberative, and counter-majoritarian democracy. A final implication of the chapter is that insofar as one strives to develop an electoral-ethical account compatible with minimalist, deliberative, or counter-majoritarian democracy, a particular challenge will lie in negotiating these conceptions' view of policy-making as articulated. This is because of these conceptions' view of politics as a multi-stranded process which preclude a number of the existing electoral-ethical arguments. Thus, a voting ethics compatible with these conceptions will need to treat voters as a distinctive element within an overall political structure and tailor any ethical prescriptions and permissions in a way that fits the voter's distinct role and place in democracy.

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