Deliberation, but Voting Too

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Introduction. The deliberative conception of democracy, by many accounts, arose in reaction to the aggregative conception of democracy. Two major and two minor tributaries joined to form the now mighty river of deliberationism, I suggest. The first, minor, current was the participatory ethos of the New Left. In the United States after World War II, the new science of politics described and prescribed an apathetic citizenry governed by the power equilibrium bargains of a plurality of self-seeking interest groups. The great civil rights movement, however, was neither apathetic, nor essentially self-seeking, nor in equilibrium. The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society (1962) found the American democracy to be apathetic and manipulated, and called for a participatory democracy in the political, economic, and social arenas. The statement reflected, rather than directed, the emergence of thousands of participatory experiments (for example, enabling legislation for the War on Poverty called for maximum feasible participation of the poor). The whole world seemed to change in 1968, with the movement against the Vietnam war, the Paris student revolt, the Prague Spring, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. This spirit manifested in political theory proper with Pateman’s Participation and Democratic Theory (1970). The personal was the political. From the civil rights to the antiwar to the feminist movement, in rebellion against the Old Right and the Old Left, the main political action was decentralized, face-to-face, and often organized by consensus rule. Although momentarily liberating, these many unitary democracies proved limited in scope and otherwise unsustainable, as hinted in Jane Mansbridge’s Beyond Adversary Democracy (1980). Whatever was the failing of liberal representative democracy, participation was a palliative, not a cure.

In political science, interest-group pluralism was overtaken, not by participation, but by the economic theory of democracy. The rational-choice school replaced the self-seeking group with the self-seeking individual of economics. Just as consumers purchase commodities in the market, so do citizens cast their vote in the democracy. Just as the
formal and numerical qualities of the price system opened academic careers to mathematical talent, so did the formal and numerical qualities of the voting system. William Riker (1982, 5), leader of the rational-choice school, declared that voting is the central act of democracy:

> All the elements of the democratic method are means to render voting practically effective and politically significant, and all the elements of the democratic ideal are moral extensions and elaborations of the features of the method that make voting work.

Although discussion has as much to do with democracy as voting, it is much harder to mathematize, and thus there were few career rewards in political science for theorizing discussion. The emigration of *homo economicus* to politics displaced several earlier ideals of democracy. If in the free market the many self-interests of individuals sum to a common good, and perhaps the same would be true of the democratic forum? Riker knocked out such frail hope with his *Liberalism against Populism* (1982): not only are voters self-interested, but voting is in principle arbitrary and meaningless, there is no common good. Voting was siphoned dry of normative content. Good is revealed only by free market exchange. Thus, according to mathematics, democracy should be minimized and the market maximized. The dead-ending of the aggregative conception of democracy was the first major current in the rise of deliberationism.

Meanwhile, amidst radical democratic ferment, the German social theorist Habermas fought for an escape from the pessimistic dead end of Frankfurt critical theory. His *Theory of Communicative Action* (in German, both volumes, 1981; in English, vol. 1, 1984, vol. 2, 1987) sought to restore emancipatory reason by theorization of communicative action, an indispensable supplement to the impoverished strategic account of action. Communicative action brings about an understanding, strategic action a response. Normative validity is redeemable in an ideal speech situation, where no one is excluded, anyone can introduce a question, and no one is prevented by internal or external coercion from exercising their rights. The force of the better argument would
lead to consensus in this hypothetical, frankly counterfactual, situation, and such consensus would define the true and the right. If the ideal situation would define *justice*, some approximation of the ideal situation in real political institutions would establish democratic *legitimacy*.

In the English-speaking world Rawls’s *Theory of Justice* (1971) restored the prestige of normative political theory, after fifty years of disdain and decay. Rawls admirably defended social liberalism, but democracy was secondary in his scheme. The Habermasian fountain revived arid American democratic theory, thanks to Benhabib, Bohman, Chambers, Dryzek, amongst other interlocutors. Europeans Manin and Elster added innovative responses to Habermas on democracy. Political philosophers in the orbit of Rawls (Cohen 2002, Gutmann and Thompson 1996, Freeman 2000), perhaps repelled by Riker (Cohen 1986) and attracted by Habermas (Cohen 1999), erected more direct justifications of democracy on Rawlsian and deliberative foundations. Rawls and Habermas went face to face intellectually in a 1995 issue of the *Journal of Philosophy*, and the circle seemed to be complete when Rawls declared himself a deliberative democrat (1999, 139). The Rawlsian contribution is the second minor current in the rise of deliberationism.

Voting and discussion are each essential to democracy. In the 1980s the aspiring democratic theorist encountered a theory of voting populated by self-interested citizens and an absence of the common good except in the case of unanimity, and a theory of discussion populated by impartial citizens and pursuit of a common good defined by rational consensus. Is it any wonder that there was a stampede away from voting and to discussion? Philosopher Freeman, in a “sympathetic comment” on deliberationism (2000, 416), observed that, “For many normative political theorists, the revival of interest in democratic deliberation can bring welcome relief from the seeming predominance of rational choice theory in normative discussions.”
In the remainder of the essay, I first relate my extensive practical experience with democratic discussion and voting, and how that led me to challenge pessimistic interpretations of democracy taught in graduate schools of political science. I compare the deliberative and aggregative conceptions of democracy, and conclude that the distinctive feature of deliberation is the giving of reasons, not its other hypothesized benefits. Then I contend that deliberative democrats uncritically accept the political science discipline’s cynical account of democratic voting. I argue that voting beneficially transforms citizen’s preferences from self-interested to public-interested, and recite the overwhelming evidence that voters are in fact public-spirited. I claim that the beneficially transformative effects of deliberation are due as much to voting as to discussion. I conclude with a call for more normative attention to democratic voting.

**A Personal Aside.** I have an offbeat history for an academic, and for that reason the editor asked me to tell some of that story as it relates to democratic theory. It is somewhat embarrassing to depart from the austere norms of academic writing, but here goes. I come from a quite modest background in Oregon, from among people who worked the woods and the sea. I could not afford to finish college, but by some fluke I was a keen autodidact. I came of age at the peak of participatory enthusiasms, and unthinkingly absorbed those values and put them into effect in my own life. I started to work in the woods, doing forestry, because the money for that was good back then. I helped organize a forestry workers’ cooperative that became large, held elected executive positions in that cooperative; helped organize a league of such cooperatives in the Northwest, and was its elected head; was a local, state, and federal lobbyist for forestry workers; worked in issue and candidate politics at the local and state levels, organized political campaigns and helped elect local officials, served as the policy aide to a county commissioner for three years; worked as a radio and weekly journalist covering the state legislature; among other political activities. Our large workers’ cooperative bridged to a great many other participatory activities, from neighborhood groups to gubernatorial
campaigns, and was a forum in which many people learned skills of democracy and leadership. At times, I attended a dozen meetings a week. It was our Athens (Mackie 1994).

I won’t pretend that our affairs were wholly idyllic. We experienced the hopes, the tragedies, the compromises, and the blunders common to all human pursuits. To deliberate in the democratic workplace was more satisfying than being bossed around by an arbitrary autocrat, and we had deliberation aplenty. It was our strength, although one of the first things we learned was to economize severely on deliberation. We were not a debating society but an economic enterprise on which people relied for their livelihood, and against the instincts of the times we quickly evolved from chaotic unstructured consensus to formal organization, specialized officers and committees, rules of order, majority rule voting, and increasingly disciplined limits on debate. I loved deliberation, but, I have to say, I came to love majority voting even more. Voting settles the issue and results in a binding obligation. The point of the process is to obtain a decision in order to get things done, things that urgently need to be done for the general benefit of all. No matter how clever or rhetorical are debaters, every voter, including those inevitably quiet or shy, has equal influence on the decision. As time passes, one can reflect on who was right and who was wrong in predicting the prudential and moral consequences of decisions. Beginning from a moralistic expectation that everyone should participate in all decisions, I slowly learned the liberal lesson that people have a plurality of aims in life: to raise their children, to build their homes, to follow their art, to enjoy spontaneity.

Thus, when I entered graduate study of political science in middle age I had far more experience and confidence than the typical student. If a swank formal model was contrary to my experience, I wasn’t afraid to reject it. Game theory provided many great insights into the puzzles of collective action I had encountered, and social choice theory many insights into the nature of various voting rules, but each was also empirically flawed. The rational choice literature rather credulously idealized the market, and its
most popular version in political science mockingly and even bitterly intoned against the value of democracy. Here are some examples. All political communication, including public deliberation, is nothing but cheap talk, not credible because not backed by incentives to be truthful. Or: look at any actual democratic arena: people debate, but nobody changes their minds, hence discussion is an irrational waste of effort. The logical vagaries of voting rules, including the famous paradox of voting, are such that democratic outcomes are inevitably arbitrary and meaningless. Hence democracy should be minimized and the market maximized. And it’s irrational to vote, we were told, and even more irrational to be knowledgeable about public issues. Although most citizens vote in the advanced democracies (the U.S. has unusually low turnout), the fact that they do was dubbed the paradox of nonvoting.

I too was tempted by these pessimistic results to turn to the study of democratic deliberation, and having had the good fortune to study with John Dryzek, Bernard Manin, and Jon Elster, each a pioneer of deliberative democracy, I planned a dissertation on the topic. Chapter two of the original outline was supposed to be a brief challenge to the mainstream view in political science that democratic voting is arbitrary and meaningless, but that chapter gradually expanded to 600 pages, and I renamed the project “A Preface to Deliberative Democracy.” A revision was published as *Democracy Defended* (2003). I argued that problems of cycling, agenda control, strategic voting and multidimensional manipulation are not sufficiently harmful, frequent, or irremediable to be of normative concern. I also examined every serious empirical illustration of cycling and instability, and found that almost every empirical claim was erroneous, and none is normatively troubling. In another essay (Mackie 1998) I argued against the influential idea that political communication is noncredible cheap talk. I said that speakers are constrained by recurrent interaction about knowable information among multiple senders and multiple receivers. I also examined the question of whether democratic deliberation changes minds (Mackie 2006). We witness much persuasion, but apparently little attitude change.
I suggest that attitude change is real, but hard to notice, because typically it is latent, indirect, delayed, and disguised. Recently I have challenged the idea that it is irrational to vote (2008b), and irrational to be knowledgeable about public affairs (2008a). I consider both voting and discussion to be essential features of democracy.

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**Aggregation versus Deliberation.** What is the distinction between aggregative and deliberative democracy? Is it that deliberation transforms preferences and aggregation does not? Is it that deliberation involves discussion (or no voting) and aggregation involves voting (or no discussion)? Is it that public deliberation allows the reciprocal exchange of reasons acceptable to all?

Sometimes the contrast between the two conceptions of democracy is said to be that deliberation transforms preferences, but that aggregation accepts them as fixed and unchanging: “Most proponents of deliberative democracy emphasize that this model conceptualizes the process of democratic discussion as not merely expressing and registering, but as transforming the preferences, interests, beliefs, and judgments of participants” (Young 2000, 26). The contrast is first developed in Elster (1986), who does not mistake it as essential. The social choice theory following from Arrow takes preferences as given and fixed, but only as a modeling convenience, not as a fundamental. One reason for this is that the question of preference formation and revision can be left to other disciplines. Another reason is that the standard choice model can’t deal with more than one changing parameter at a time. Change in a single belief is easily modeled. Suppose I have been led to believe that we should invade a country because it possesses nuclear weapons: \( \text{Invade}_{\text{Nuke}} > \text{Not Invade} \). Through public deliberation I am persuaded that the country has no nukes, and my preference is: \( \text{Not Invade} > \text{Invade}_{\text{NoNuke}} \). My overall preferences are consistent: \( \text{Invade}_{\text{Nuke}} > \text{Not Invade} > \text{Invade}_{\text{NoNuke}} \). Change in many individual desires and beliefs could be modeled these days with parallel-constraint-satisfaction networks of coherence, of which the standard model is, controversially, a special case ("preferences used in decision making are not
fixed, as assumed by classical theories of rational choice, but rather are reconstructed in
the course of decision making,” say Simon, Krawczyk, and Holyoak 2004, 335 about the
constraint-satisfaction model of choice; see also Thagard 2000).

Further, usually social choice results are true for any logically possible
arrangement of individual preferences. Thus, in the abstract, the pathologies of
democratic voting which Riker claims are shown by social choice theory would apply to
public-spirited preferences as well as to narrowly selfish preferences, to postdeliberative
preferences as well as to predeliberative preferences. There are no such pathologies
when the vote is unanimous, and ideal deliberation promises rationally agreed consensus
(and practical deliberation probably the reduction of disagreement). Deliberationists
have hoped that reduction of disagreement would ease the alleged pathologies of voting
(see Dryzek and List 2003 for a precise account of these possibilities, and Farrar et al.
forthcoming for empirical evidence of same). Some might bite if voters were only self-
interested, but, empirically, they are not; and I suggest that predeliberative preferences
are probably sufficiently public-spirited to avoid the pathologies. And the electoral
system of a polity can be designed to further discourage pursuit of partial interests over
the general interest, without reference to deliberation, as we shall see. Moreover, the
transformation of preferences is not essential to deliberation: suppose that the citizens
already have complete, transitive, well-informed preferences, oriented to the common
good, and backed by reasons acceptable to all. Adding public deliberation would
manifest those reasons, perhaps with process-benefits for the participants, but would not
change individual preferences or the social outcome. Finally, no one claims that
discussion necessarily reduces disagreement, only that it does so more often than not.

Discussion can make for fairer and better decisions. According to Mendelberg’s
literature review, “If it is appropriately empathetic, egalitarian, open-minded, and reason-
centered,” then,
Deliberation is expected to lead to empathy with the other and a broadened sense of people’s own interests through an egalitarian, open-minded and reciprocal process of argumentation. Following from this result are other benefits: citizens are more enlightened about their own and others’ needs and experiences, can better resolve deep conflict, are more engaged in politics, place their faith in the basic tenets of democracy, perceive their political system as legitimate, and lead a healthier civic life. (Mendelberg 2002, 154)

Or,

How does or might deliberation shape preferences, moderate self-interest, empower the marginalized, mediate difference, further integration and solidarity, enhance recognition, produce reasonable opinion and policy, and possibly lead to consensus? (Chambers 2003, 309).

The problem is that theorists of deliberative democracy tend to define deliberation in a question-begging manner: discussion which tends to make for fairer and better decisions is deliberation, and discussion which tends not to is not deliberation:

- deliberation is debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants. (Chambers 2003, 309)

My impression is that discussion often ameliorates problems between people, but that sometimes it make things worse. Even the exchange of reasons acceptable to all could be dispiriting. The false consensus effect describes a propensity to assume that others are like us in their beliefs and desires. Speaking from experience, suppose that deep discussion among putative allies in a political coalition shatters illusions of solidarity by disclosing that the factions have mutually detestable reasons for their unity on political action.

Which institutional arrangements promote good discussion, which discourage bad discussion, and how? Other than common sense (which I don’t dismiss), we can’t say. There are many studies, and a batch of review articles summarizing the empirical research on collective deliberation. Those review articles are themselves summarized by Thompson (2008), a leading theorist of deliberative democracy: “taken together the results are mixed or inconclusive.” It’s fair to say that there is a crisis of empirical

The beneficial transformation of preferences through public discussion is associated with, but is not identical to the central distinguishing feature of the deliberative conception: public discussion involving the reciprocal exchange of reasons that all can accept as democratic citizens (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, among others). This moral value is intrinsic to the deliberative process, and its value is independent from any change for the better or worse in the correctness of collective decisions. In the ideal marketplace the consumer is sovereign. So long as there is free exchange and no negative externalities, the consumer is free to choose without having to justify her choices to the polity, according to the liberal view. But in political choice the voter is asked to express preferences over states of affairs which differ in the way they affect other people, and it is here that the economic theory of democracy’s analogy of consumer to voter fundamentally fails (Elster 1986). We have a right to ask that such other-affecting preferences be justified. We should be given reasons for binding collective actions, and we should be able to offer reasons, and these reasons should be of the type acceptable to all.

For Freeman (2000, 337) the distinction between the deliberative and the aggregative conception is not that one involves voting and the other does not, nor is it that one involves discussion and the other does not:

the relevant distinction . . . concerns the object about which citizens deliberate and vote and the kinds of reasons that they take into account in coming to their collective decision. Whereas an aggregative view counsels voting one’s informed preferences regarding one’s own good or partial group interests . . . deliberative democracy counsels voting one’s deliberated judgments (or informed preferences) for the common good.

Freeman continues that such judgments are made for reasons that all can accept as democratic citizens, along the lines of Rawlsian public reason. Freeman, I believe, correctly recognizes the giving of reasons as distinctive of deliberation. Unlike a number
of deliberative theorists, he also properly mentions voting in all of his descriptions and prescriptions concerning democracy. In the next section I’ll argue that the object of voting is the common good. If so, that leaves the giving of reasons as the one distinctive feature of deliberation.

Discussion, when it tends to the good, is deliberation. Thus, deliberation tends to the good. Voting, in comparison, is usually bad, certainly sans deliberation. Or is it?

**Wrong Theory of Voting.** Voting has the same relationship to deliberation in much deliberationist theory as sex has to love in the Victorian marriage: it is necessary, frequent, of profound result, but is suspect and mentioned only in fleeting allusion.

Talk-centric democratic theory replaces voting-centric democratic theory. Voting-centric views see democracy as the arena in which fixed preferences and interests compete via fair mechanisms of aggregation. In contrast, deliberative democracy focuses on the communicative processes of opinion and will-formation that precede voting (Chambers 2003, 308).

“The essence of democracy itself is now widely taken to be deliberation, as opposed to voting, interest aggregation, constitutional rights, or even self-government” (Dryzek 2000, 1).

Deliberative theorists correctly reject the aggregative conception of democracy, but many mistakenly accept the aggregative conception of voting as merely the expression of untransformed self-interest. They rarely consider the possibility that voting, in its own right, could be morally noble and could tend to beneficial transformation of preferences.

What is the aggregative conception of democracy?

Voters pursue their individual interest by making demands on the political system….From the interchange between self-interested voters and self-interested brokers emerge decisions that come as close as possible to a balanced aggregation of individual interests. (Mansbridge, quoted in Young 2000, 19)

individuals vote their private preferences and group interests . . . in effect they act like economic agents removed to a different forum. What point could there be in
public discussion of their self-seeking and competing group purposes with others who have opposing interests? (Freeman 2000, 373)

Voting is sometimes omitted altogether from deliberative definitions of democracy:

Democracy, in my view, is best understood as a model for organizing the collective and public exercise of power in the major institutions of a society on the basis of the principle that decisions affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be viewed as the outcome of a procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals. Benhabib (1996, 68)

Deliberation oriented to the common good replaces voting oriented to one’s selfish interest, or, in more careful formulations such as Elster’s or Freeman’s, public deliberation remedies selfish voting.

Ideal voting, however, partakes of freedom, equality, and justice almost as much as does ideal discussion. In the ideal speech situation, no one is excluded, anyone can introduce a question, no one is prevented by internal or external coercion from exercising their rights, there is equal respect, and an orientation to impartiality (Chambers 1996, 238-239). The very same could be said about the ideal voting situation. Voting requires that all citizens should have the right to vote, and urges that all should vote. The agenda is open, any one citizen can introduce a question or stand for office. Citizens should enjoy all those basic rights necessary to their freedom and equality, not just political rights; these basic rights should be specially protected against majoritarian errors, and this minimizes deception and coercion of voters. Voting requires that each citizen should have equal influence, one vote, whatever are the inequalities in the economic, social, or argumentation arenas. In voting, each citizen should render her judgment on the common good; and those judgments should be aggregated by procedures which are both fair in preserving equal influence, and accurate in combining judgments. A voter should be adequately informed and should adequately consider reasons for and against an alternative. The Condorcet Jury Theorem suggests that if the judgments of voters are independent and are on average better than random, then the aggregation of such judgments rapidly approaches correctness as the number of voters increases. Ideal voting
perhaps falls short in obliging individual deliberation over alternatives but not public deliberation. But one could amend the account of ideal voting to oblige public deliberation for the sake of properly reasoned voting (deriving public deliberation from voting, rather than bringing in voting as an untheorized afterthought to nonexistent rational consensus).

Just as there is good discussion and bad discussion, so is there good voting and bad voting. Voting would be bad to the extent it did not conform to the ideal of voting. A voting rule could be fair but inaccurate, for example, add up equal votes (fair), but then do the opposite of what the majority wants (inaccurate). A voting rule could be more accurate, in that the social outcome is more responsive to the votes cast, but less fair, say, in allocating votes proportional to income. Voting would be bad if citizens vote their private interest rather than the public interest, or if citizens vote on the basis of negligently erroneous information, or if citizens are deceived or coerced. And when we praise voting we mean to praise voting in its ideal aspect, good voting, not bad voting.

The moral account of voting is nothing new. Something distantly resembling it can be found in Rousseau, who opposed public deliberation. Perhaps he intuited that voting itself has a transformative force: each citizen is to vote his opinion about the content of the general will, not his private will and his unfair advantage. Utilitarian, elitist, pluralist, and economic conceptions of democracy have submerged the moral account. The rational-choice model, in the hands of tough-minded men, finally drowned the moral illusion, or so it was believed. Whether or not desirable, the moral account was infeasible. The tough-minded view won by assumption, however, not by reason, not by evidence. There is a great deal of confusion about rational-choice theory, among both its proponents and opponents. In its general form, it assumes that humans are purposive, possessing consistent desires and beliefs, and is a hermeneutic method as much as an explanatory one. It is a method I find useful in understanding politics. A special form of rational-choice theory assumes additionally that humans are exclusively motivated by
material self-interest, and this form has explanatory (and, often, ideological) ambitions. In studying purely economic transactions, with no negative externalities, and no other-affecting preferences involved, it can be quite useful to assume that people want more rather than less money, although the assumption is not entirely accurate even in that realm. The material self-interest assumption fails in explanatory power the further we depart from the ideal market, however. Honor, for example, can’t be bought.

**Voting Morally Transforms Preferences.** It was a mistake for political scientists to concoct a market model of voting and democracy, assuming individuals exclusively motivated by material self-interest. The vessel soon struck two puzzling shoals, foundered, and will never be resuscitated. The first puzzle arises from Arrow’s Impossibility Theorem and associated social choice results. Those results predict that given a purely redistributive task, purely self-interested voters, and a pairwise voting rule, winning coalitions will never be larger than the barest majority, and will be hopelessly unstable as one after another coalition forms. Problem: in actual legislatures it is observed that redistributive tasks tend to be passed by universal and thereby stable coalitions. One way this could come about is if legislators, although primarily self-interested (rather, interested for their constituency), are secondarily interested directly in fairness (Mackie 2003, 99-108). The second puzzle is that rational and self-interested individuals would not bother to vote in mass elections, since the expected value of voting (the probability of being decisive times the benefit that would ensue) would never exceed the effort and opportunity costs of voting. Problem: in real democracies many people vote.

An economist would be “embarrassed to be seen at the voting booth” (Dubner and Levitt 2005). It’s extremely unlikely that any one vote would break a tie, and when a single vote does not break a tie it has nothing to do with the outcome. Since voting is costly, almost any single vote would be irrational. The paradox of nonvoting was first stated by Downs (1957, 244-246), and is often formulated as follows. $B$ is the
individual’s Benefit from a winning election outcome, $C$ is the Cost of the individual voting, and $p$ is the Probability that an individual’s vote is pivotal in causing the winning election outcome. An individual would vote then, when $pB - C > 0$. The probability of being pivotal, however, is minuscule, effectively zero; for any individual, the act of voting is all cost and almost no benefit, and hence no one should vote.

Elsewhere, I develop a contributory theory of voting (Mackie 2008b). Its argument can be summarized with a simple example. Suppose, reasonably, that one likes playing basketball for the sake of winning, winning by the largest margin, and losing by the smallest margin. The paradox, however, insists that only winning counts, and thus it would be irrational to play on the team if one expected to lose or if to win by more than one point. Past responses to the paradox say: Who cares about the score? It’s stupid to play, or one is paid to play, or it’s one’s duty to play. Or one expresses a desire for victory in play.

The paradox of nonvoting assumes that voters value only the winning of an election. Their utility function would look like the one in Figure 1.

– Figure 1 About Here –

From the diagram, it can be seen that unless one’s additional vote pivotally causes the outcome, it is of no marginal value. It would be futile or redundant. If 39 voters out of 100 vote for a cause, a 40th vote for the cause changes nothing. If 51 out of 100 vote for a cause, a 52nd vote for the cause changes nothing. The claim that voting is irrational often confounds two logically independent claims: redundancy and imperceptibility.

It’s likely that many voters value both winning, and how much their cause wins or loses by, the latter termed the mandate value of voting. Their utility functions would look like the one in Figure 2.

– Figure 2 About Here –

Each voter’s contribution is pivotal to the mandate value. None is futile or redundant. If 39 out of 100 votes for a cause, a 40th advances its mandate value. If 52 out of a 100 vote
for a cause, a 53rd advances the mandate value. In a mass democratic election between
two major parties, for example, a large mandate for the left party in the last election
would in the present term of office shift their governing policies left and assuming no
change among voters shift the policies of both parties left in the next election (Fowler
and Smirnov 2007).

Voters are mostly oriented to the public interest rather than to simple self-
interest. In older studies, aggregate data showed that voters turned against incumbents
when the economy was bad, apparently supporting the pocketbook model of voting.
Kinder and Kiewiet (1981) were able to look at individual rather than aggregate data.
Analysis of individual data showed little relationship between an individual’s personal
economic grievances, the pocketbook variable, and her assessment of the nation’s
economic health, the prosocial variable. Moreover, it showed that personal economic
grievances had little or nothing to do with preferences for congressional or presidential
candidates, but that assessment of national conditions is correlated with political
preferences. Sears and Funk (1990) carried out some of their own studies and
summarized the literature in an influential review. They say that in their work self-
interest variables account for on average four percent of variation in regressions, a minor
explanatory contribution. See Citrin and Green (1990), and Lewin (1991) for similar
summaries.

With respect to the prosocial voting identified by Kinder and Kiewiet, Funk and
Garcia-Monet (1997) investigated through analysis of the American National Election
Study the objection that self-interest could operate indirectly through perceptions of
national economic conditions to influence political preferences. They find quite a modest
contribution from an indirect effect, and that the total direct and indirect effect of self-
interest is low. In further work, Funk (2000) finds a dual influence of self-interest and
societal interest in public opinion. Chong, Citrin, and Conley (2001) find that prosocial
priming weakens but does not eliminate self-interest when personal stakes are clear, and
that people with low stakes in an issue respond strongly to prosocial priming. See also Brodsky and Thompson (1993) and Shabman and Stephenson (1994) for studies of one-issue local elections where it is shown that many citizens voted for a public good contrary to their objective material self-interest. From five observations about American voting behavior Jankowski (2002) infers that the best explanation is some altruism on the part of voters. In an analysis of the 1995 National Election Survey Pilot Study, Jankowski (2007) finds that agreement with a statement that these days people are not kind enough to others is significantly related to voter turnout. Fowler (2006) shows that people who care for others are more likely to vote. In addition, voters are most strongly motivated by duty and by desire to influence the social outcome (see Mackie 2008b and references therein).

The American Citizen Participation Study, for example, asked an instructive series of questions about citizens’ motivations to vote. Prosocial motivation dominates: half the respondents said at least one particular problem motivated them to vote, and for 9% of them myself, family, or others were affected by the problem, for 46% all the community was affected, and for 45% all the nation was affected. Most intend to influence the outcome: 97% say the chance to make the community or nation a better place to live is somewhat or very important, 91% say the chance to influence public policy is somewhat or very important, 65% say that furtherance of party goals is somewhat or very important, 22% say that getting help from an official on a family problem is somewhat or very important. Most are morally motivated to vote: 96% say that my duty as a citizen is somewhat or very important, 86% that to do my share is somewhat or very important. Given that so many voters name both influence and duty, someone who says that she has a duty to vote likely means that she has the consequentialist duty to advance the public good, that is, she is instrumentally motivated. Side payments for voting are not very important: 71% say so about obtaining recognition
from people I respect, 88% about not wanting to say no to someone who asked. Finally, few vote because they find it exciting to do so. See Table 1.

--- Table 1 About Here ---

These responses are consistent with the contributory theory. Label the number of citizens $N$, the number of voters for one of the causes $n$, a voters’ contribution to that cause roughly $1/n$, and her discounting of benefit to any other individual $\alpha$ ($0 < \alpha < 1$), and a citizen will vote when $1/n (B_{\text{self}} + \alpha NB_{\text{society}}) - C > 0$ (adapted from Edlin, Gelman, Kaplan 2007). The term for benefit to self, $B_{\text{self}}$, is small compared to the term for benefit to society, $B_{\text{society}}$, and, when each is multiplied by $1/n$ contribution, benefit to self usually goes to almost nothing, leaving benefit to society as the principal motivation for voting. If so, then, just as deliberation may operate as a filter to exclude unjustifiable preferences, voting may operate as a filter to exclude self interest and include public interest as input to collective decisions.

**Voting Structures Discussion.** Although it is possible to imagine talk without voting, the tendency of the deliberationists, and it is possible to imagine voting without talk, the tendency of the aggregationists, the two in combination are greater than the sum of the parts, and together are essential to democracy. Deliberative theory develops well the advantages of talk leading up to voting. Deliberation has the moral advantage of offering reasons for and against alternatives, reasons acceptable to all, and this is its greatest contribution. Maybe it also tends to orient preferences towards the common good, and to yield other good benefits. Might voting, though, improve deliberation? Most assuredly. That every citizen has the right to an equal vote means that generally arguments must appeal to all citizens, or to a majority of citizens on a specific issue. The act of voting tends to screen out private preferences and screen in public preferences. A common objection to deliberation in practice is that it would privilege those most skilled in argument, and those most skilled in argument could be rich, white, male and use their skill to defend unfair advantages. Whether advantaged or disadvantaged in this world,
many of us have experienced some bullying sophist, whose arguments we momentarily cannot answer, but whom we know nevertheless to be wrong. Voting levels the deliberative playing field. Not only must the deliberator address the whole audience, each individual voter reserves her own judgment, not alienating it to any expert. Ideally, the democratic association benefits from the information and argument of contesting experts but preserves its individual and collective judgments. Speakers do not each have the same weight in the judgments of the listeners, and this is as it should be. The individuals who would be bound by decision vote for the alternative each sees as supported by the best arguments, and each has an equal vote, and this is as it should be.

Thompson (2008) tells us that the defining elements of deliberation are a state of disagreement, a collective decision, and the legitimacy of the decision. Disagreement about what to do and the need for jointly binding decision on actions compose the circumstances of deliberative democracy, he says. I say, however, that deliberation is not a method of collective decision. Discussion, helpful or harmful, is often not even associated with decision. By prior convention, voting is the usual method of decision in a democracy. And voting is at least as important as discussion in bringing about the right process and outcome. In the most highly idealized deliberative process the decision is agreed to by all, and it is the unanimity voting rule, not discussion itself, that motivates each deliberator to address herself to the concerns of all. In the absence of the unanimity constraint, the deliberator would have little motivation to get beyond her own point of view. Ideal consensus is a situation of the highest abstraction where there is no social and political status quo. In any world like ours, with a status quo, majority rule is the best approximation of unanimity rule (Mackie forthcoming). Otherwise the consensus requirement would allow any one person to veto change from an unjustified status quo. In a world with a status quo, and ongoing majority rule over a series of provisional decisions, again it is the voting rule that properly motivates the deliberators.
The legitimacy of the decision, says Thompson, requires mutual justification, a process characterized by public-spiritedness, equal respect, accommodation, and equal participation (504). Again, I say that ideal voting is characterized by the same features. Voting is public-spirited, and the egoistic have no incentive to vote. It expresses equal respect in that all have the right to vote. It is accommodating in that the winner on one issue can be the loser on the next. It allows for equal participation: almost all are capable of casting a vote, but not many can offer explicit justifications. The point though is not to stage a contest between discussion and voting, but to stress the neglect in the literature of their essential connection.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a liberal democracy. Due to its geography it contains several thousand separate and competing clans, and is the most ethnically fragmented country on earth. Electoral violence is not rare, and communal violence is a problem. Deliberative democracy, as it stands today, would likely recommend to PNG involving more people in more public discussion about more public issues. If Reilly’s (2001) analysis is correct, a change in voting rule would probably reduce violence, and, I add, would beneficially restructure public discussion in PNG. PNG now uses plurality rule: voters cast one vote, and the candidate with the most votes win, even if he does not attain a majority. In the U.S. and the U.K. plurality rule induces a reduction in the number of candidates and parties because voters tend not to vote for their most-favored candidate but for one of the front-running candidates with a chance of winning. This is not observed in PNG, where voters cast a single vote for their own ethnic candidate. As a result, half the members of parliament are elected with less than 30% of the vote. By 1997, the average number of candidates per electorate was 22. One candidate won with as little as 6.3% of the vote. Such narrowly elected candidates respond to the demands of the narrow base that elects them, exacerbating electoral violence and communal violence.

Before independence, PNG used the alternative vote, the voting rule of its colonial power, Australia. Under the alternative vote, the voter rank-orders all the
candidates, or the first few anyway. In those circumstances voters would cast their first preference for their local coethnic, but the voting rule elicited cross-group candidates who solicited second and third preferences from voters in many groups. The way the alternative vote works, candidates with fewer first-preferences tend to be eliminated, and candidates winning more second and third preferences across several groups tend to be selected. The discourse of the cross-group candidates was more oriented to the general interest. And the discourse, and decisions, of a parliament of such officials is likely to differ systematically from the discourse and decisions of officials elected by plurality rule. Electoral and parliamentary discourse in turn influences the remainder of political discourse in the country (the horse-race nature of American election coverage has a lot to do with candidate incentives under the plurality rule: vote for me because I’m one of the front-runners). Changing the voting rule from plurality to the alternative vote would probably improve public deliberation in PNG more than would any directly deliberative remedy. Similarly, the media system in a country – its ownership structure, its regulatory constraints, its technology, its professional norms – probably have more to do with the quality of public deliberation than, say, experiments in municipal participation. In the United States, easing labor union organization, and thereby creating a countervailing power to business interests in the public sphere, could do more for deliberation and the justice of outcomes than would a large number of deliberative opinion polls.

Bächtiger et al. (2007) are among the few to study deliberation across different political institutions. They construct a discourse quality index (analogous to early comparative regime research which for simplicity relied on a procedural definition of democracy) with four elements: participation, justification, respect, and constructive politics. They found that discourse quality is higher in consensus systems than in competitive systems, in presidential competitive systems than in parliamentary competitive, in nonpublic meetings than in public meetings, and on topics of elite agreement rather than disagreement. Each of these institutions has its advantages and
disadvantages, aside from its effect on discourse quality. We would want to weigh all those considerations in choosing among institutions. It is worrisome that each of the discourse-improving institutions is also one that reduces accountability of representatives to the citizenry (it’s harder to know who to blame in a consensus coalition, in a presidential regime, and in a system of closed meetings, and the political elite can collude against the population). Bächtiger et al. (2007) also find no relationship between discourse quality and the justice of outcomes.

**Conclusion.** Dryzek (2007, 237) writes that, “Deliberative democracy now constitutes the most active area of political theory in its entirety (not just democratic theory).” The debut of a research community devoted to the empirical investigation of democratic discussion is welcome. It will be decades before discussion receives as much empirical attention as voting has in political science. Political science treatments of voting are often conceptually confused, and sometimes are ideologically hostile to democratic governance. Voting, oddly enough, is one of the least active areas in political theory, and I propose to remedy that neglect.
REFERENCES


Mackie, Gerry. 2008a. Rational Ignorance and Beyond.

Mackie, Gerry. 2008b. Why It’s Rational to Vote.


Figure 2
VOTING: VALUE WINNING & MANDATE

![Graph showing voting dynamics](image-url)

Value to Voter

Vote Share for Favored Candidate
### Table 1. Self-Reported Reasons to Vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons People Give Us for Voting</th>
<th>% Not Very Important</th>
<th>% Somewhat Important</th>
<th>% Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct Instrumental</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance to Make Community or Nation a Better Place to Live</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance to Influence Public Policy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Party Goals</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Help from Official on Family Problem</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moral</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Duty as a Citizen</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do My Share</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indirect Instrumental</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition from People I Respect</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t Want to Say No to Someone Who Asked</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrinsic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting to vote</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by author from American Citizen Participation Study (ICPSR Study No. 6635, 1990)

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