

Is There a Duty to Vote?

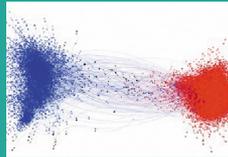
PPE 101

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Review: Epistemic Bubbles Echo Chambers

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Epistemic Bubbles & Echo Chambers



Four Hypotheses

- (A) The Miscalculation Theory
- (B) **The Ignorance Theory**
- (C) The Divergent-Values Theory
- (D) **The Irrationality Theory**



Epistemic Bubbles

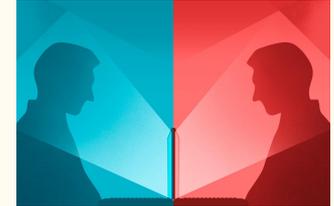


Epistemic Bubbles

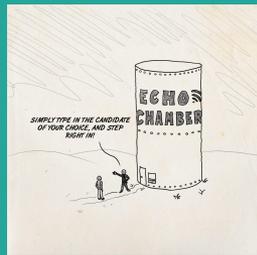
An **Epistemic Bubble** is an informational network from which relevant voices have been excluded by omission.

“Luckily, though, epistemic bubbles are easily shattered. We can pop an epistemic bubble simply by exposing its members to the information and arguments that they’ve missed.”

[The Ignorance Theory]



Echo Chambers



Echo Chambers

An **Echo Chamber** is a social structure from which other relevant voices have been actively discredited.

Epistemic bubbles omit contrary views.

Echo chambers actively make their members distrust outsiders.

People in **echo chambers** might have access to lots of information—they just don’t believe any of it unless it comes from insiders.



Does Social Media create Epistemic Bubbles or Echo Chambers? (Or neither?)



What Can Be Done?

What Can Be Done?

According to Huemer, ...

First: Understanding the nature of political irrationality is itself a big step towards combating it. Congrats!

Second: We should identify cases in which we are particularly likely to be biased, and in those cases hesitate to affirm the beliefs that we would be biased towards.

Third: We should take account of the irrationality of others, and adjust our confidence in reported information accordingly.

Fourth: Avoid insults, identify empirical questions, be fair-minded, and build trust.



What Can Be Done?

According to Nguyen, ...

What Won't Work:

- *Exposure to information:* the person may already have it; and they are primed not to believe it if it's coming from an outsider.

- *"Just use your own head":* We need to rely on experts; and, if you are in an echo chamber, using your own head will lead you to discredit lots of good arguments.

Consider the case of **Derek Black**.



What Can Be Done?



What Can Be Done?

What Can We Learn From Derek Black?

What made Derek change his mind and exit the white nationalist echo chamber?

- New community
- Friendly interactions with people he had been taught to mistrust

Result of leaving the chamber: **Trusting** new people.
He could then engage their arguments and ideas constructively.

But what if no one wants to invite me to dinner?



What Can Be Done?

According to Nguyen, ...

The social-epistemic reboot

“In order to undo the effects of an echo chamber, the member should temporarily **suspend all her beliefs**---in particular whom and what she trusts---**and start over again from scratch.**”

The Hope: This strategy busts you out of your echo chamber by making you rebuild your networks of trust from scratch.



What Do You Think?

Is There a Duty to Vote?

Do You Have a Moral Duty to Vote?



THE 100 MILLION PROJECT

Do You Have a Moral Duty to Vote?



POLITICS

Poll: Despite Record Turnout, 80 Million Americans Didn't Vote. Here's Why

December 15, 2020 · 5:00 AM ET
Heard on Morning Edition



Do You Have a Moral Duty to Vote?

IS THERE A DUTY TO VOTE?*

By LOREN E. LOMASKY AND GEOFFREY BRENNAN

I. INTRODUCTION

The genre of public service advertisements that appear with two- and four-year cyclical regularity is familiar. Cameras pan across scenes of marines hoisting the flag on Iwo Jima, a bald eagle soaring in splendid flight, rows of grave markers at Arlington. The somber-voiced announcer remonstrates: “*They* did their part; now *you* do yours.” Once again it is the season to fulfill one’s civic duty, to vote.



I WANT YOU TO SERVE
YOUR COUNTRY.



I WANT YOU TO VOTE.

Contents:

- Prudential Argument
- Utilitarian Argument
- Kantian Argument
- Expressive Argument

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Prudential Argument

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Prudential Argument

The argument goes something like this:

- P1** You have a moral duty to yourself to do what best serves your interests.
 - P2** Voting for your preferred candidate in the election best serves your interests.
-
- C** You have a moral duty to vote for your preferred candidate in the election.

Both premises are questionable, but let’s take a closer look at **P2** in particular.

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Prudential Argument

	Vote Doesn't Make a Difference		Vote Makes a Difference
<i>Vote for A</i>	A	B	A
<i>Stay home</i>	A	B	B

What has greater expected value for you: *Vote for A* or *Stay home*?

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Prudential Argument

	Vote Doesn't Make a Difference		Vote Makes a Difference
<i>Vote for A</i>	A	B	A
<i>Stay home</i>	A	B	B

Let p = probability that your vote makes a difference.

And let c = cost of voting in the election

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Prudential Argument

	Vote Doesn't Make a Difference		Vote Makes a Difference
<i>Vote for A</i>	$A-c$	$B-c$	$A-c$
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Prudential Argument

	Vote Doesn't Make a Difference		Vote Makes a Difference
<i>Vote for A</i>	$A-c$	$B-c$	$A-c$
<i>Stay home</i>	A	B	B

Let p = probability that your vote makes a difference.

Vote for A > *Stay home* just in case $(1-p)(0-c) + p(V(A)-V(B)-c) > 0$
 $p(V(A)-V(B)) - c > 0$

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Prudential Argument

	Vote Doesn't Make a Difference		Vote Makes a Difference
Vote for A	A-c	B-c	A-c
Stay home	A	B	B

Let p = probability that your vote makes a difference.

$$\text{Vote for A} > \text{Stay home} \quad \text{just in case} \quad (1-p)(0-c) + p(V(A)-V(B)-c) > 0$$

$$p(V(A)-V(B)) > c$$

Prudential Argument

$$p = ??$$

$$V(A) - V(B) = ??$$

$$c = ??$$

	Vote Doesn't Make a Difference		Vote Makes a Difference
Vote for A	A-c	B-c	A-c
Stay home	A	B	B

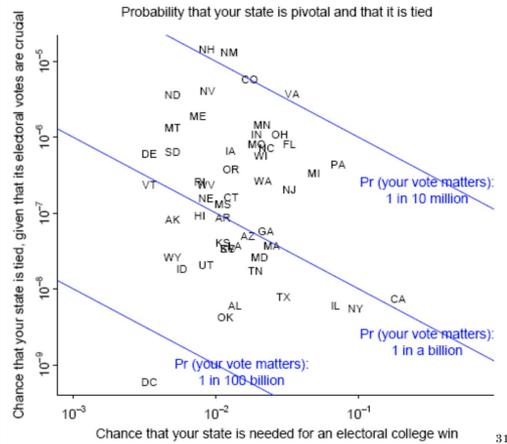
Let p = probability that your vote makes a difference.

$$\text{Vote for A} > \text{Stay home} \quad \text{just in case} \quad (1-p)(0-c) + p(V(A)-V(B)-c) > 0$$

$$p(V(A)-V(B)) > c$$

How likely is your vote to make a difference?

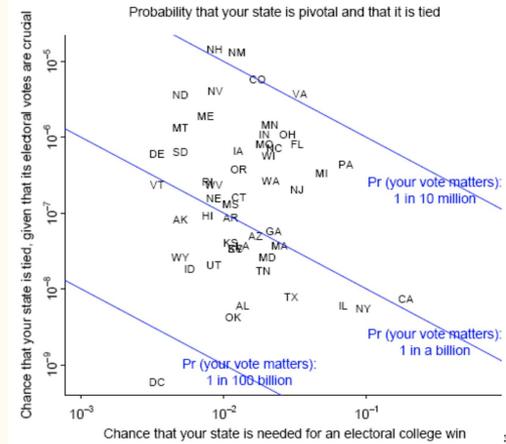
1 in 10 million
 $p = ??$
 1 in a billion



How likely is your vote to make a difference?

1 in 10 million
 $p = ??$
 1 in a billion

Is your candidate winning worth to you over *10 million times* the costs of voting?



Utilitarian Argument

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Utilitarian Argument

Because p is so small, the stakes have to be very large in order for *Vote for A* to be worth more than *Stay home*. But, if you're a Utilitarian, maybe they are!

P1 You have a moral duty to do whatever maximizes overall wellbeing.

P2 Voting for your preferred candidate in the election maximizes overall wellbeing.

C You have a moral duty to vote for your preferred candidate in the election.

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Utilitarian Argument

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$V(A) - V(B) =$ very large

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Utilitarian Argument

Because p is so small, the stakes have to be very large in order for *Vote for A* to be worth more than *Stay home*. But, if you're a Utilitarian, maybe they are!

“If an act-utilitarian really gives full weight to the consequences for everyone that he expects will be affected, this will normally provide an adequate reason for voting. **If I think that one party will increase the GNP by 1/4 percent over five years more than the other party, that for a utilitarian is a big aggregate difference.** Are there really so many more beneficial things one could do with fifteen minutes?”
[Brian Barry 1978]

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Utilitarian Argument

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C You have a moral duty to vote for your preferred candidate in the election.

$$V(A) - V(B) = \text{very large}$$

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Problem 1:
How Confident Should
You Be That You're
Right?

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Utilitarian Argument

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-

C You have a moral duty to vote for your preferred candidate in the election.

$$V(A) - V(B) = \text{very large}$$

How confident are you that $V(A) - V(B)$ is very large?

If you are **very** confident that A is *a lot* better than B, won't everyone else be too?

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Problem 2:
Duty to Vote? Or the
Duty to Vote
Correctly?

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Utilitarian Argument

Because p is so small, the stakes have to be very large in order for *Vote for A* to be worth more than *Stay home*. But, if you're a Utilitarian, maybe they are!

- P1** You have a moral duty to do whatever maximizes overall wellbeing.
 - P2** Voting for your preferred candidate in the election maximizes overall wellbeing.
-

C You have a moral duty to vote for your preferred candidate in the election.

In any case, this gets us the conclusion that you have a moral duty to *vote right*.

Vote for A > *Stay home* > *Vote for B*

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Kantian Argument

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Kantian Argument

“But what if everyone acted that way?!”

- P1** If no one voted, that would be bad.
 - P2** If it would be bad for *everyone* to do something, then you have a moral duty *not* to do it.
-

C You have a moral duty to vote.

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Kantian Argument

“But what if everyone acted that way?!”

- P1** If no one voted, that would be bad.
 - P2** If it would be bad for *everyone* to do something, then you have a moral duty *not* to do it.
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C You have a moral duty to vote.

Objection: It doesn't seem like **P2** is true.
Consider the farmer who wants to be a dentist instead.



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Kantian Argument

“But what if everyone acted that way?!”

P1 If no one voted, that would be bad.

P2 If it would be bad for *everyone* to do something, then you have a moral duty *not* to do it.

C You have a moral duty to vote.

Objection: It doesn't seem like **P2** is true.

Consider the farmer who wants to be a dentist instead.

If no one farmed, that would be bad. But so what?



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Kantian Argument

What's the difference between **the Farmer Example** and the **Lawn Example**?

Suggestion: *fairness*.

Does doing the act in question *unfairly* burden others?

(Quitting your job as a farmer actually makes the other farmers *better off!*)



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Kantian Argument

What's the difference between **the Farmer Example** and the **Lawn Example**?

Suggestion: *fairness*.

Does doing the act in question *unfairly* burden others?

(Quitting your job as a farmer actually makes the other farmers *better off!*)

Voting Example:

If you don't vote, you make other voters' votes more powerful.

So, *not voting* doesn't unfairly burden anyone.



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Expressive Argument

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Expressive Argument

- P1** You have a moral duty to evince a minimally decent level of regard for the political process.
- P2** Not voting in the election fails to evince a minimally decent level of regard for the political process.
- P3** Voting in the election *does* evince a minimally decent level of regard for the political process.

C You have a moral duty to vote.



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Expressive Argument

- P1** You have a moral duty to evince a minimally decent level of regard for the political process.
- P2** Not voting in the election fails to evince a minimally decent level of regard for the political process.
- P3** Voting in the election *does* evince a minimally decent level of regard for the political process.

C You have a moral duty to vote.

Think about sports fans **expressing** support for their team. Cheering doesn't make it more likely that your team will win. But true fans cheer anyway.



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Expressive Argument

Objections:

Is **P3** true? Does voting express a minimally decent level of regard for the political process?

“**The mere act of showing up at the polls** every several years and grabbing some levers **is palpably inadequate** to qualify as a significant act of political expression.”

Lomasky & Brennan

What do you think?

Are you a true fan if you only cheer for the team once every four years?

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Expressive Argument

Objections:

Is **P2** true? Is *not* voting *not* an expressive act?

“**[R]efraining from voting can be no less expressive than voting.** One may wish to record one's total contempt for all the candidates, or one's conscientious objection to some policy that is a feature of all the major candidates' platforms, or one's belief that the entire enterprise is a fraud and a delusion.”

Lomasky & Brennan

What do you think?

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Conclusion

There is no **moral duty** to **vote**.

Do you think that's right?



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Questions?

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