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WHY EGALITARIAN DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE NEEDS EQUAL SUFFRAGE

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ABSTRACT

It is commonplace in contemporary political philosophy to argue that people's equal moral standing grounds their entitlements to equal citizenship. But many philosophers deny that equal moral standing has anything to do with our right to have equal suffrage. In this paper, I will defend the idea that equal moral standing provides moral grounds to equal suffrage, by refuting several representative challenges to it. By meeting Ronald Dworkin's and David Estlund's challenges, I argue that theories of egalitarian distributive justice cannot consistently endorse both equal vote and an ideal of moral equality that applies exclusively to distributive equality, but has nothing to do with equal vote. Thus, the positions taken on the issue of equal vote, I will show, indeed have important consequences for the structure of theories of egalitarian distributive justice. Then, by refuting Steven Wall's argument for a plural voting system, I will argue that the importance of people's interest in being equal authors of a polity is constitutive to our understanding of equal citizenship. I will argue that this shows the implausibility of any theory of egalitarian distributive justice that opts for a principled rejection of equal vote. I conclude that equal moral standing indeed provides an important moral ground for regulating the voting system. To the extent that a theory of egalitarian distributive justice has to be grounded on the idea of equal moral standing, which seems to be true for most such theories, it follows that, contrary to many theorists, justice indeed needs equal vote.

KEYWORDS

- Equal Vote
- Plural Voting
- Moral Equality
- Egalitarian Justice
- Democracy

1. Introduction

It is commonplace in contemporary political philosophy to argue that people's equal moral standing grounds their entitlements to equal citizenship^[1]. But the connection between equal moral standing and the justification of equal vote, i.e. one

¹ See, for example, similar assertions in Rawls's works (Rawls: 1996, pp. 3-7; Rawls: 1999, pp. 441-449) and Dworkin (2000, pp. 1-7); see also an influential political philosophy textbook (Kymlicka: 2002 pp. 3-5), for putting forth such a common ground as an organizing thread to explore different approaches of egalitarian distributive justice in contemporary political philosophy.

person one vote, has received much less attention in the literature^[2]. This article explores the possibility of such a justification by examining arguments from three leading political philosophers who *deny* that equal moral standing provides any justification to our right to have equal vote. Ronald Dworkin (2000) and David Estlund (2009) sought to justify equal vote on other grounds, while Steven Wall even goes so far as to propose a Millian plural voting scheme (Mill: 1998, pp. 326-345), and argue that it is consistent with people's equal moral standing. Both Dworkin and Wall are considered leading theorists of two important contemporary articulations of liberalism^[3], and Estlund is widely acclaimed as providing one of the most important recent defence of democratic institutions^[4]. It is notable that their position on the moral justification of equal vote has not yet been seriously challenged.

In this article, I defend the idea that equal moral standing provides moral grounds to equal vote, by refuting their representative challenges to it. By meeting Ronald Dworkin's and David Estlund's challenges, I argue that theories of egalitarian distributive justice cannot consistently endorse *both* equal vote *and* an ideal of moral equality that applies exclusively to distributive equality, but has nothing to do with equal vote. Thus, the positions taken on the issue of equal vote, I will show, indeed have important consequences for the structure of theories of egalitarian distributive justice. Then, by refuting Steven Wall's argument for a plural voting system, I argue that the importance of people's interest in being equal authors of a polity is constitutive to our understanding of equal citizenship. I argue that this shows the implausibility of any theory of egalitarian distributive justice that opts for a principled rejection of equal vote. I therefore conclude that equal moral standing provides an important moral ground for regulating the voting system. To the extent that a theory of egalitarian distributive justice has to be grounded on the idea of equal moral standing, which seems to be true for most such theories, it follows that, contrary to many theorists, egalitarian distributive justice indeed *needs* equal vote.

My strategy to proceed is the following. My positive points about the implication of the equal vote's position in the structure of theories of egalitarian distributive justice are developed via a critical analysis of Dworkin's arguments on the matter. In light of this analysis, I treat Estlund's arguments as suggesting a possible rebuttal to my criticisms of Dworkin's arguments; in other words, they may also suggest a challenge to the positive points I attempt to develop. I will argue, however, that Estlund's arguments fail. In what follows, I first expound Dworkin's arguments in section 2; section 3 is devoted to a critical analysis of them, and thus also to the development of my positive

2 The justification of equal vote is only briefly discussed in Rawls (1999, pp. 200-206), and Rawls's conclusion is at best agnostic: he actually argues that limitations to 'the precept of one person one vote' can be consistent with principles of justice. As far as I know, his agonistic conclusion has not been widely discussed. It is notable, given the influence of Rawls's work in political philosophy, and that nearly every page of his *A Theory of Justice* is thoroughly examined and criticized (See Rawls: 1999, pp. 204-205). For a similar opinion on Rawls, see Kolodny (2014, p. 196). Jeremy Waldron's and Thomas Christiano's works, which I shall discuss shortly, are two recent notable exception.

3 See Dworkin (2000) and Wall (1998). Also, see Quong (2011, pp. 21-22) on taking Dworkin as a representative theorist of comprehensive anti-perfectionist liberalist, and Wall as the leading voice of comprehensive perfectionist liberalism.

4 For an example of critical acclaim to this work, see Anderson's praise in her review (Anderson: 2008, pp. 129-130, 158).

points; section 4 deals with Estlund's arguments and completes the defence of those points. I then move on to argue against the suggestion that theories of egalitarian distributive justice should opt for a plural voting system, i.e. Wall's position. Thus, I offer my critical analysis of Wall's arguments in section 5. Since theories of egalitarian distributive justice cannot consistently endorse an ideal of moral equality that applies exclusively to distributive equality but has nothing to do with equal vote (sections 2-4), and it is implausible to opt for a plural voting system (section 5), it follows that theories of egalitarian distributive justice should endorse equal vote, and hence reconsider their understanding of moral equality as the basis of their theories. Section 6 offers a short conclusion.

2. Dworkin's Arguments for Equal Suffrage

In *Sovereign Virtue*, Dworkin argues that if a society satisfies the distribution of resources required by his theory of equality of resources, then there should not be any further claim for equality in political power or resources on the basis of equality (Dworkin: 2000, p.199). For Dworkin, giving equal respect to citizens' moral agency has already been achieved by a just distribution of resources (Dworkin: 2000, pp. 201-202). Since each citizen can justly lead their own life with their just share of resources, and their just share of resources is justified by a proper understanding of the ideal of equality, i.e., the "right conception of distributive equality", moral equality does not entail equality in political power, or what he called the 'detached conception of democracy' in any sense (Dworkin: 2000, p. 190).

Dworkin distinguishes two interpretations of equality of political power, namely equality of political impact and equality of political influence, and argues that both interpretations are problematic. For political impact, Dworkin refers to the impact of an individual on politics as defined by a given political institutional structure, while for political influence he refers to not just the impact on politics on one's own, but also include her possibility of leading others to choose or vote as she does (Dworkin: 2000, pp. 191-192). Equal vote is one requirement of what he calls horizontal equality of impact (Dworkin: 2000, p. 193). Dworkin argues that equality of impact fails to account for the injustice of inequality in extra-institutional political influence. For instance, it cannot account for the injustice of the rich enjoying more political influence than the poor because of their wealth (Dworkin: 2000, pp. 193-194). Yet equality of political influence as a political ideal is also problematic. For policies restricting some to use their just share of resources in politics, say, by limiting political campaign budgets, are also "*inegalitarian* because they would prevent some people from tailoring their resources to fit their lives they wanted though leaving others, who had less interest in politics, free to do so" (Dworkin: 2000, pp. 196-197, my emphasis). Hence, for Dworkin, to pursue equality of political resources, in the sense of equalizing people's political impact or influence, and thus altering the distribution of resources as required by justice or limiting citizens' use of their just share of resources, undermines citizens' moral equality⁵.

5 But note that if just distribution is not in place, Dworkin would recommend certain measures to guarantee for "some" leverage and influence to citizens in politics, so that their political agency can still be realized. Those measures

Given this understanding of the moral equality of citizens, Dworkin argues that equal vote cannot be grounded on people's moral equality. But he argues that equal vote can be justified by other reasons that are independent of equality of political power. As a historically contingent fact, it is widely perceived that equal vote carries the "symbolic declaration of equal standing of all" (Dworkin: 2000, p. 200). Since we perceive the value of equal vote in this way, Dworkin concedes that the idea of equal vote should not be denied in order to accommodate this deeply held symbolic belief. But imagine a society in which people do not perceive equal voting rights as bearing the symbolic meaning of equal moral standing. In such a society, Dworkin holds, equal vote would not be justified by its symbolic declaration of equal moral standing, or the value of equal moral standing as such (Dworkin: 2000, p. 201).

He further supports his argument by pointing out that we do not really consider equal vote to be closely connected to equal moral standing: we accept districted elections in general, but it is impractical for each district to have the exact same number of votes in order to equalize the value or impact of each vote. We do not see this as a violation of or a deviation from citizens' equal moral standing (Dworkin: 2000, p. 201). Dworkin argues that this further reveals a mere contingency of the significance of equal vote, and refutes its intrinsic relatedness to the ideal of moral equality. Indeed, Dworkin argues that once the symbolic value of equal vote is entertained, it is perfectly justified to make the weight of each vote unequal, by districting arrangement that provides more political impact to the people in the poorer district (Dworkin: 2000, p. 193).

Dworkin's considerations here seem to track common sense well, and are sensitive enough to the reality of existing political institutions in democracy. But in what follows, I will argue that his construal of the symbolic value of equal vote is problematic. I will show that a closer analysis of his symbolic value of equal vote, as well as his decoupling of equal vote from equal moral standing, reveals his position to be implausible.

3. From Symbol to Substance: A Critical Analysis of Dworkin's Arguments

Dworkin's construal of the symbolic value of equal vote is problematic because it is not clear whether he conceives of the symbolic value of equal vote as containing any moral force. Either the idea of symbolic value contains moral force or it does not. If it does not, then it is implausible. If it does, then Dworkin's entire conception of democracy, as well as his ideal of moral equality, has to be substantially revised.

If the symbolic value of equal vote does not contain moral force, then, for Dworkin, it is merely a practical parameter for the implementation of his ideal of distributive equality. Interpreted in this way, people's belief in equal vote's "symbolic declaration" of equal moral standing does not provide any moral reasons in our considerations for arranging our political system. Consequently, within Dworkin's theory, this belief does not contain any moral weight in itself. It implies that such symbolic value, by its character, is not substantially different to the sort of biases and

should approximate the effect of the distribution of political influence as if just distribution of resources is in place. See Dworkin (2000, p.203).

prejudices that we have yet to find measures for eliminating from our moral reasoning^[6].

But this interpretation of the symbolic value of equal vote is implausible, for it amounts to saying that social movements and revolutions in history that were fought for equal enfranchisement were not really backed by sound moral motivations, since the symbolic value of enfranchisement, under this interpretation of Dworkin's view, carries no moral force. It seems that the opposite is more plausible: these are powerful movements precisely because they articulate a morally sound case for equal enfranchisement, as they speak to people's deep convictions on the matter. Indeed, these movements, and their articulations on the moral value of equal enfranchisement, are precisely the intellectual resources that constitute our deep conviction of what is a just political arrangement^[7]. One can hardly think of examples of historically important democratic movements and revolutions that did not fight for equal enfranchisement. It is even less likely one can find a democratic activist or revolutionary saying that equal vote is simply a political demand grounded on its conventional symbolic value, devoid of further moral grounds. It thus seems absurd to regard these convictions as on a par to biases and prejudices that are unimportant to our moral understanding of modern democratic politics.

But if, alternatively, we interpret Dworkin as saying that our belief in the symbolic value of equal vote contains moral force, then we need a further explanation of this moral force. For it would be odd to say that to whatever we ascribe symbolic value would be in itself sufficient to comprise a moral reason in shaping a just political arrangement. A religious group may deeply believe that certain practices are constitutive to their collective identity, and consequently these practices would be of great symbolic value to them. But this is not sufficient in delivering a moral reason for accommodating these practices in a *just* political arrangement. If the symbolic value of a certain thing has moral force, it then presupposes that the belief that explains the symbolic value must also have morally justified claims on us. In other words, this belief must also be backed by morally sound reasons so that we, as citizens, will take it as a justified duty to sustain that belief through political institutions.

One may challenge my view that symbolic value, in order to make claims on

6 G. A. Cohen interpreted Rawls' Difference Principle as harnessing the self-interest of the talented by providing them with extra material incentives, for the sake of serving the least advantaged members of society. If Cohen was right, then this will be a fitting example to illustrate my point here. Self-interest is a morally unjustified but deeply rooted human attribute. Since we cannot eliminate it, the best we can hope to achieve is harness it for some better and more justified social goals (Cohen: 2008, pp.27-86; Cohen: 2009, pp. 53-79).

7 To see how the idea of equal enfranchisement are articulated in important political movements and revolutions, and thus precipitated as the foundation of modern political thought, here are two examples. The famous Rainsborough Putney speech of the Leveller movement during the English Civil War, in which it is claimed that 'the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he', and that constituencies should be 'more indifferently proportioned'. Many considered it to be an important articulation of the moral case for equal enfranchisement (For the Rainsborough quote, see Waldron: 1998, p. 315; Beitz: 1989, p.3). In the 18th century, the Chartist working class movement also placed equal vote (for male) as one of its core demands. Consider also the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizens in French Revolution, which is referred to more frequently as a milestone document of modern political thought. Article 6 of the Declaration reads: "The law is the expression of the general will. All the citizens have the right of contributing personally or through their representatives to its formation. It must be the same for all, either that it protects, or that it punishes. All the citizens, being equal in its eyes, are equally admissible to all public dignities, places, and employments, according to their capacity and without distinction other than that of their virtues and of their talents".

people's action, has to be backed by further substantive moral reason. Many conventions and rituals, for instance, may provide reasons for people to act in accordance with them, yet they are not considered to contain moral value in themselves. They ground claims against us because, so to speak, that is how other people behave in accordance with norms. For instance, we conventionally hold that wearing black rather than red (or any other bright colour) at a funeral is the appropriate way to show our respect symbolically. In other cultures, one can imagine, they may well choose the colour red instead of black. But as soon as it is conventional to take a particular colour as the expression of respect to the dead, people have to comply. One cannot wear a different colour and yet still claim that he is showing respect properly to the dead. So, the objection goes, this should also be the case for the symbolic value that supports equal vote. Dworkin can agree that the symbolic value contains moral force, and by virtue of this moral force equal vote is justified. But, according to this objection, this symbolic value needs not be further supported by a deeper, more substantive reason. Just as there is no deeper reason to recognize black clothes symbolize our respect to the dead. Equal vote carries the symbolic value of equal moral standing, but this symbolic value can well be carried by other things, just as respect to the dead can be carried by different colours, so the objector would argue.

But I think this objection is misguided. It is because there is an important difference in the case of a voting system. The very design and structure of the voting system, and thus the way people's votes are counted (or not counted), has a substantial effect on law and policy making, and these laws and policies are backed by the coercive force of the state. Thus, unlike the conventional dress code at a funeral, citizens' rights to an equal vote as the ultimate source of legitimacy or the final say on policy directives, as well as the policy consequences of all these, are *coercive*. If they were structured differently, say, by granting a subset of citizen with more votes, the policy outcomes would likely be different. It is, therefore, legitimate for citizens to ask for moral justification for the way the voting system is structured, and the answer to this request cannot simply be: "because people feel like it". Such an answer can only make sense if one really believes that there are good moral reasons to make voting as inconsequential in policy making. It does not seem to be a conception of democracy that will be accepted, with good conscience, by many citizens. Either way, in the real world, if this is actually the case, it is widely considered as a defect, not a virtue of a democracy^[8].

Therefore, if a certain arrangement of voting (say, equal vote) is said to be justified by symbolic value, and its decisions are supposed to be consequential, then it is perfectly legitimate for citizens to further ask why this symbolic value itself, with all its policy implications, is morally justified. That is, it is perfectly legitimate for citizens to ask whether the *substance* of the political arrangement that is to be represented by this particular *symbol*, i.e., *one vote for each citizen*, is morally justified at all. That is why I emphasize the roles of *political institutions* and the question of *justice* thus involved. Of course, it is true that the symbolic value of equal moral standing can be represented by some other inconsequential rituals, or even by the just egalitarian distribution itself.

8 See, for example, discussions from political scientists as in Krastev (Krastev: 2014, esp. pp. 9-15), and Mair (Mair: 2006).

It is not necessary to use equal vote to represent this symbolic value. But Dworkin himself suggests that this symbolic value is the main reason to justify equal vote. I am here just taking his words seriously, and point to those implications of his arguments that he must accept, if his own argument can be plausible at all. That is, if we follow through the logic of symbolic value, we can see precisely that symbolic value as such is *insufficient* to justify equal vote. Rather, I argued, since the voting system is supposed to be consequential, equal vote has to be grounded *directly* by the substantive value of that the symbolic value sought to represent.

Some may still argue that what I have argued here commits a fallacy of division: even though it is true that people consider it important for a democracy to grant equal vote to people, for the structure of a voting system will be significantly consequential to policy outcomes, it cannot be true that each citizen will consider their own single vote in this way. In a modern mass society, any single vote is very unlikely to be decisive in elections and referenda. Therefore, from the point of view of a single citizen, she cannot realistically consider her own vote as very important in policy making. She can only conceive of the value of that vote as no more than a conventional symbolic manifestation of her role as an equal citizen. Consequently, my opponents would claim that what I have argued in the previous paragraph is wrong. They would conclude that, to have voting rights equal to those of all other citizens is, from the point of view of any single citizen, hardly anything more than a ritual. What really matters to them, at the end of the day, is still the policy outcome of distributive equality, but not equal vote as such.

While this objection contains some truth, it cannot really go too far: to conclude from it that people will consider voting to be no more than a symbolic ritual, and thus that this is a correct normative conception of voting in democracy, is in a sense to commit the opposite fallacy, namely that of composition. Although it is true that a single vote of a single citizen is unlikely to have significant weight in a mass society, it does not follow that it is the only way a voter in a democracy can perceive herself. A voter can well consider herself a supporter or a member of a large political group, the purpose of which is to push forward a set of policies that its voters identify with. Together with other supporters, *as a bloc of voters*, their votes certainly matter. Indeed, this seems to be a more realistic picture of the public life of a citizen in a democracy, as compared to the perspective of an isolated voter⁹. To the extent that this is plausible,

9 My account here for people's motivation to vote is similar to the expressive voting accounts of electoral turnout. For major statements and arguments for this account, see Riker and Ordeshook (1968, esp. pp. 28, 34-35, 37-38), Brennan and Lomasky, (1985, esp. pp. 203-204), Brennan and Hamlin (1998, esp. pp. 155-160, 164-147) and Lomasky and Brennan (2000, esp. pp. 82-83). But there is one crucial difference. The expressive account of voting argues that people vote in order to express their endorsement to the political causes of the parties or the politicians, but that is nothing much different from acting like a cheering observer. For the premise of the expressive account is that for any individual the chance for her vote to be decisive is infinitesimal. My account is different because I think it needs not to be the case that people can only understand themselves as merely giving inconsequential cheers. People can also understand themselves as voting as a group or collective, and as a group or collectives their votes *really* matter. My reservation regarding the expressive account of voting, however, is out of the scope of this article. Another account of people's motivation to vote is what perhaps can be called the "pure-altruism" account, which argues that people vote because they see satisfaction of many other people's interest a part of their individual interest (See Jankowski: 2002, esp. pp. 63-65). I think it is also compatible with my account. Indeed, I think my account reinforce the pure-altruism account of voting, for it also suggests an explanation of why people can rationally believe themselves, as voters, can influence

people do have a reason to care whether they have a vote or not, and how many votes they have relative to others. For it is the political basis for them to join other voters into a bloc to push for a cause they identify with. To grant people a vote is thus an institutional arrangement to recognize and manifest such a political basis.

What, then, could explain the moral force of the symbolic value of equal vote, if it contains moral force at all? That is, what could plausibly be the moral ‘substance’ of the symbolic value that equal vote manifests? It seems that the idea that people have equal moral standing naturally suggests itself. If the moral force of symbolic value is explained by something other than equal moral standing, it then means that, for Dworkin, some values other than moral equality can meaningfully shape and regulate our considerations of a just political arrangement. This will be an ‘inegalitarian’ move, since in Dworkin’s theory, equal vote is a form of equal political impact, and equality of political impact is rejected by Dworkin as incompatible with distributive equality. This option would then weaken his theory’s commitment to moral equality, for it implies that moral equality could be limited by other values. To explain the symbolic value of equal vote by some interpretation of the idea of equal moral standing of citizens, then, seems to be a more promising way out for Dworkin’s theory, if it is to be consistent with its egalitarian commitment.

What will this explanation look like? Jeremy Waldron argues that the right to equal vote is grounded on respecting citizens as essentially “thinking agents”, all of them endowed with an “ability to deliberate morally, to see things from others’ point of view” (Waldron: 1998, pp. 330). Citizens of the political community that are disenfranchised or under-franchised rightly feel that others “ignore or slight” them as active thinking agents. They are thus entitled to and owed equal respect from others, as they are equal, in the sense that they are all in command of thinking and judgement-making capacities (Waldron: 1998, pp. 330-332). It is especially true that citizens normally have their own considered judgements on fundamental political questions such as rights and basic social justice. If people are not equally placed as decisive choice makers on these matters, we are then not taking their stakes in such issues seriously (Waldron: 1998, pp. 312, 332). In light of these considerations, it may well be the case that we take certain levels of thinking or judgemental capacities as a “range property”, i.e. when people’s level of those relevant capacities passes a certain threshold, the variation in degrees of capacity among people will not be relevant in determining how much of corresponding rights people enjoy; they will be granted equally the same set of those rights^[10]. I cannot go into further detail here, but this suffices for the discussion at hand, in order to show that equal vote can plausibly be grounded on citizens’ equal moral standing. More importantly, something like this *must* be in place to maintain the egalitarian appearance of Dworkin’s theory.

But if this is the case, it also weakens the case for Dworkin’s own proposal

the policies that would benefit many others.

10 See Ian Carter’s paper, for the discussion of the idea of “range property” (Carter: 2011, pp. 549-550). Carter’s paper is also an excellent discussion on the way this idea can be grounded on the consideration of people’s ‘opacity’. I think Carter’s argument is correct, and may well be the normative basis of equal moral (or, more appropriately, political, as he pointed out to me at a later occasion) standing and thus of equal vote as I consider it here. But due to limited space I cannot discuss his idea here.

of districting arrangement of giving more weight to the votes from poorer regions. For according to this understanding, equal moral standing matters because it treats people equally and seriously as agents that are capable of making moral judgements. It is on this ground that equal vote is justified. But deliberately assigning unequal weight to people's equal vote would likewise make them no longer equal agents in political judgements. I am, of course, sympathetic to the idea of giving the poor more political impact, for counter-balancing the rich's larger share of political influence. But Dworkin's proposal takes a wrong route for a noble goal. The right way to go is, on the contrary, to introduce policies that ensure everyone sufficient access to the means and arenas to influence voters. In addition, there should be limits on how much money the rich can spend on campaign finance, or that political parties should be public funded¹¹. (Beitz: 1989, pp. 202-203, 212-213).

Let me take stock of this long critical discussion on Dworkin's view. I argued that, for Dworkin, the symbolic value of equal vote has to be understood as a moral reason that needs to be taken into consideration in a just political arrangement. If the symbolic value of equal vote carries moral force, then it needs a morally founded explanation. To the supporters of these theories of egalitarian distributive justice, it seems that some interpretation of respecting the equal moral standing of citizens should be the most natural and appealing candidate. Dworkin otherwise risks weakening his general commitment to egalitarianism¹².

Note that none of the above arguments depend on Dworkin's substantive conception of a just distribution of resources. This suggests that my arguments have a more general implication: for any theory of justice claiming that respecting citizens' equal moral standing only entails a just distribution of social and economic resources, such a theory cannot consistently support equal vote *and* reject the idea that people's equal moral standing provides grounds for equal vote, provided it does not want to weaken its egalitarian commitment.

As I mentioned in the opening of this article, equal moral standing and equal citizenship are considered as the common ground for virtually all theories of egalitarian distributive justice in contemporary literature. This means that any theory of egalitarian distributive justice must either discard its support for equal vote, or reconsider the basis of its theory, i.e. the ideal of moral equality. Specifically, it must reject any ideal of moral equality that says people's equal moral standing entails exclusively a just distribution of social and economic resources. This is not an inconsequential move: as Dworkin's rejection of equality in impact and influence as *inegalitarian* hinted, a

11 Here it is important to note that the idea of equal moral standing, while implying equal vote, need not imply strict equality of political influence of citizens. Rather, it would serve as regulative constraint. It is because voting and other forms of political resources are separated by an important distinction. As Charles Beitz rightly puts it, while voting exercises direct causal influence on political decisions, other political resources exert their influences by influencing voters' beliefs attitudes.

12 Dworkin actually concedes that his is indeed a 'mixed' conception of democracy, i.e. not solely justified on the ground that it is consistent with distributive equality. He would even agree that citizens should be granted sufficient access to media, regardless of distributive equality being in place (Dworkin: 2000, pp. 200, 203). So, on a practical level, Dworkin may not need to disagree with what I have said. But what I claim here is stronger: as a matter of principle, Dworkin has no good reasons to reject the endorsement of equal moral standing as the moral reason for policies that regulate political influence.

principled support of equal vote could be in tension with a proper ideal of distributive equality that treats people's equal moral standing seriously. I shall have more to say on this in my discussion on Steven Wall's arguments. Before turning to Wall, however, I shall consider Estlund's arguments as a possible "rescue" strategy for Dworkin's position on equal vote.

4. Estlund's Rescue: Equal Vote only for its Epistemic Value

David Estlund's thesis on the epistemic value of democracy seems to suggest a possible way out of the conclusion I have drawn in the last section. He argues that we could justify equal vote on epistemic grounds, i.e. that universal enfranchisement could provide a certain guarantee for achieving "substantive justice of the decisions", without committing ourselves to the idea of equal moral standing, or "political egalitarianism", as he labels it (Estlund: 2000, pp. 127, 130-131). The problem with the latter, he argues, is that it leads us to some form of equality of political influence, which does not guarantee improvement in the epistemic value of decisions, i.e. the likelihood of getting the decisions right as required by substantive justice (Estlund: 2000, p. 128). To insist that citizens have equal influence (or equal availability of influence) in politics implies that we should prefer everyone having a lower political input of political participation, to having an unequal, yet higher level of input overall (Estlund: 2000, pp. 128-129, 134-136). But this reduces the likelihood of the political community to make right decisions, that is, the decisions that satisfy the substantive conception of justice.

Therefore, Estlund suggests that we should reject the idea of equal moral standing in politics. Rather, we should opt for a procedure that satisfies the "Epistemic Difference Principle": without disenfranchising anyone from voting, we should allow for inequality in political participation, as long as everyone's participation also increases (Estlund: 2000, p. 147). Estlund argues that universal enfranchisement contains higher epistemic value than dictatorship or oligarchy because it reduces the chance (i) to leave out important reasons and factors and (ii) to have sustained demographically influenced bias in the course of consideration and deliberation¹³. He adds that following such a principle increases everyone's participation, so no one could reasonably complain that they are disrespected (Estlund: 2000, p. 138). Equal vote and unequal political influence are then justified purely on the epistemic competence to reach right decisions as required by substantive justice, including a just distribution of resources. It is thus not inconsistent with the latter. It is certainly not inconsistent with Dworkin's thesis. Consider this passage from Dworkin: "the best form of democracy is whatever form is most likely to produce the substantive decisions and results that... [are] most likely to distribute material resources and other opportunities and values in an egalitarian way" (Dworkin: 2000, p. 186).

But one could wonder why, if epistemic competence is all that matters, Estlund's proposal recommends a system of equal vote with unequal political influence, but

13 Estlund's more detailed justification of universal voting rights can be found in his later book (Estlund: 2009, esp. pp. 169, 181, 215-216, 213-233). In addition, he argues that it is generally plausible to think that having many to cooperate with in deliberating for a correct answer is better than leaving the decision to just one person, just as a group of students will perform better in taking a biology test together than a student who takes the test on her own.

without endorsing a plural voting scheme that allows everyone to have at least one vote, while some to have more than one, subject to his Epistemic Difference Principle. Estlund's explanation is that such an arrangement would lead to "invidious comparisons" that could be reasonably rejected by "conscientious, cooperative, reasonable citizens" (Estlund: 2000, pp. 137, 159). But just like in the case of symbolic value, which I discussed in the previous section, invidiousness in itself does not constitute a sufficient moral reason to reject plural voting, no matter how strong it is. Further explanation is needed for its moral force. That is, what is the *substance* that makes us think such an arrangement will be invidious? What kind of substantial argument would ground good moral reasons that these 'conscientious, cooperative, reasonable citizens' could provide to reject plural voting from the aspect of "invidiousness"?

Estlund himself suggests a very plausible answer to this question: since there are no uncontroversial ways of judging someone to be more capable in whatever sense, in order to become entitled with more votes than others, any such arrangement will inevitably involve controversial comparisons between degrees of moral quality, and those comparisons are invidious (Estlund: 2000, p. 159). But to abandon comparisons and fall back to a "default" position of equality in order to avoid invidiousness assumes exactly that citizens' equal moral standing should be respected in the first place, as the *default* position. Therefore, in order to show that an arrangement will involve invidious comparisons of moral quality between citizens if equal vote is not granted to all, Estlund has to admit that the idea of equal moral standing indeed provides grounds for equal vote.

Indeed, even for Estlund, who places a strong emphasis on the role of epistemic value in the justification of democratic institutions, the idea of respecting people's equal moral standing still represents a weighty limitation to what sort of voting system can be justified. Equal vote, in virtue of being supported by the idea of respecting citizens' equal moral standing, indeed *trumps* epistemic considerations. For it provides Estlund with a strong reason to refrain from endorsing a plural voting system. It further shows that those who, like Dworkin and Estlund, consider that the moral justification of political processes and institutions should be (largely) dependent on how well it can bring about the right decisions and results required by distributive justice, but at the same time opt to sever equal vote from equal moral standing, have no good reasons to hold their view.

In other words, without rejecting Estlund's rather convincing epistemic arguments for equal vote, my conclusion still holds: an endorsement of equal vote should presuppose a commitment to the idea of equal moral standing. One cannot consistently hold that equal vote must be endorsed, but that such an endorsement is not grounded on a commitment to equal moral standing. It follows that one cannot consistently hold both that a commitment to citizens' equal moral standing includes distributive equality only, and that equal vote should nevertheless be endorsed.

5. Why not go for a Plural Voting System: Arguments against Wall

My arguments so far against Dworkin and Estlund concern their reasons for the endorsement of equal vote. These arguments are directed at their attempts to decouple

the justification of equal vote from the idea of equal moral standing, and from their theories of egalitarian distributive justice in general. My conclusion suggests that there are no good reasons for such decoupling. If one wants to support both equal vote and distributive equality, then both positions need to draw their support from the idea of equal moral standing. But what if one denies the endorsement of equal vote, by arguing that it is in principle inconsistent, or at least in tension, with our equal moral standing and equal citizenship? This is the line of argument taken by Steven Wall (2007), which I will challenge here.

Wall argues that giving citizens equal political status does not rule out possibilities that citizens are treated with unequal regard in collective decisions, and it is possible for decisions in a scheme of equal vote to undermine the moral worth of some citizens (Wall: 2007, pp. 428-433). According to Wall, one could imagine a situation in which, provided citizens have an equal say, they may ‘all agree’ upon a well-designed plural voting scheme that grants those who have properties relevant to good political judgements a weighted vote or more votes (Wall: 2007, p.428). Assuming a reliable procedure which would identify those with relevant properties, while setting egalitarian outcomes as the measuring standard for good judgement, it is sufficient, according to Wall, to treat citizens with equal regard (Wall: 2007, pp. 426, 428). Furthermore, not only is equal vote unnecessary in manifesting people’s equal moral status, but it may even be inconsistent with the latter. For if egalitarian outcomes are all that matters in treating people as equals, and a plural voting system that is designed in accordance with Wall’s suggestion is more likely to achieve such outcomes than a system of equal vote, then to insist on equal vote is inconsistent with the idea of equal moral standing, or there is at least a deep tension between these two notions.

The problem with this argument is that it assumes participation through voting is merely instrumental to citizens, which is an odd view of politics. In such a view, people only have an instrumental interest to participate as “decisive” actors in the design of political institutions. Thus, they only care if such institutions best advance certain goals, such as egalitarian distributive justice (Waldron: 1998, p. 312)^[14]. But people do have an interest to participate in democratic politics, in the sense that it is a kind of collective self-governance in a political community. To attain certain goals is not all that matters. They want to achieve these goals *themselves, as a collective*. It is true even in what Wall calls “judgement issues”, where the rightness or goodness of the issue does not rely on the citizen’s preference (Wall: 2007, pp. 427-428). This is because right outcomes are not all that matters, but that *we are included* in doing the right things. In Wall’s imagined scenario, this interest of the citizen is not accounted for, but it is implausible to believe that rational citizens would not care for it.

Wall actually anticipated this challenge. He admits that citizens do have an interest in participation, but it only entails that they are given some opportunity to participate in political life, not that citizens should be given equal opportunity or equal vote to participate in collective decision (Wall: 2007, p. 428)^[15]. But the idea of participation

14 See also the penultimate paragraph of this section for further elaboration and explanation of the notion of ‘decisive’.

15 Dworkin had similar arguments, appealing to ‘agency value’ in political participation (Dworkin: 2000, pp. 201–203. esp. p. 203)

is more closely tied to equality than in Wall's understanding. For the interest of participation in a political community is closely connected to the idea that we want our political community to be self-governed. If some citizens are institutionally recognized to have a say that is less weighty than that of others in the community's self-governance, then they are *alienated* from their community. For they are merely subordinates of those who have more weighty voices. The situation is similar to the following case: if your interest and voice are always taken to be less important among a group of friends when you are all making common decisions, you will cease to consider yourself a true member of the group. Instead, you will have weighty reasons to consider yourself a mere subordinate to others. If such a feeling of alienation occurs among a group of friends, and is sufficient to ground complaints for those who are alienated in such a way, why is this not also the case in a political community? Therefore, it follows that a self-governed political community requires some sort of egalitarian collective decision from its members.

It is certainly true that in large modern societies, it is impossible for every citizen to participate equally at every stage of decision making on every political issue. But a division of labour in the process of making decision, if structured properly, will be compatible with taking each voter as an equally decisive choice maker. This is true when voters are vested with the power to choose the *aims* of a democratic polity, via referenda and periodic elections of governments, whereas politicians, officials and interest groups are only agents who select the means of *implementing the aims* chosen by democratic equal votes. With such a division in place, citizens and voters would not find themselves to be subordinates to those actors that are more influential in policy making, since they are still 'in the driving seat' of democracy, so to speak; the more influential actors are only charged with the pursuit of aims chosen by equal voters (Christiano: 2010, pp. 199-200; See also Scheffler: 2015, p. 27).

Wall also admits this, and concedes that people may think a well-designed plural voting system is insulting to those who have fewer votes. But he argues that they are merely conditioned by historical and contingent facts to think in this way. Since the insulting message is better explained by this contingent "convention", rather than rational, "critical" reflections, it cannot be counted as a moral reason against the well-designed plural voting system (Wall: 2007, pp. 432-433). But the demand that a political community should be self-governed, and that citizens should thus have equal weight in participation, as I have argued in section 3, is constitutive to the self-understanding of modern democratic politics; we cannot make sense of the history of people's struggle for equal enfranchisement otherwise. It may be true that these social facts are historically contingent, but that does not imply that they have arisen uncritically, in the sense that people see equal vote as tied to equal citizenship merely by convention, because "people felt like it", as I have argued. Wall owes us stronger arguments that this conception of modern democratic politics, even though we may concede that it is contingent and conventional, is also *irrational*.

One might object that even if my arguments so far against Wall's attack of equal vote are sound, I still fail to refute his core argument for plural voting system, namely that the quality of the democratic outcome matters. The point of Wall's arguments, so the objection goes, is that because correct and just outcomes matter, we should give

those who can make better judgements in these issues more votes, or more weighty votes. Wall might well concede that plural voting system is indeed insulting, yet this wrong is outweighed by the good of correct decisions guaranteed by the plural voting system. It is especially true if we take into account how ignorant and irrational an average voter is. As Brennan vividly puts it in his recent work, empirical findings suggest that most citizens in the current democracies are either “hobbits”, who are apathetic and ignorant about politics, or “hooligans”, who have strong opinions and fixed worldviews but are deeply biased and partisan in making their judgment (Brennan: 2016, pp. 4-5, 23-53). So, the objection goes, it is questionable whether those voters are worthy of the “driving seat” at all. In other words, this objection argues that even if it is true that equal vote is grounded by respecting people’s equal moral standing, it can be overridden by a plural voting system, if such a system can be proved to be more likely to bring correct and just outcomes. Given how ignorant and irrational most voters are, this is very likely to be the case.

I think this objection to my arguments contains some truth, but it endorses a wrong solution to a legitimate concern. It is true that voters can be ignorant and irrational, and it is indeed the case most of the time. But this does not undermine the truth that collective self-governance serves an important human interest. If people self-govern poorly, they should be provided conditions and facilities that help them to govern better. For instance, people should be entitled to sufficient civic education, and the relevant data for policy-making should be made as accessible as possible and organized in a reader-friendly way. It also implies that citizens are entitled to a cultivated and vibrant civil society, where different intermediate institutions provide information *and* the incentive to acquire information to citizens. The mere fact that most people are ignorant and irrational in politics does not entail that they should be denied to vote or participate at all. Rather, given the fact that denying them equal political participation and self-government is insulting, it actually implies that people simply need more help to be qualified in the “driving seat” of democracy. It is true that one needs to be qualified as a driver in order to obtain a driving licence. But, so the analogy goes, everyone should also be entitled to accessible education and training for obtaining a driving license.

6. Conclusion

I believe the arguments invoked by Dworkin, Estlund and Wall represent the leading objections against grounding equal vote on people’s moral equality. I have shown that their arguments fail. Against Dworkin and Estlund, I have argued that theories of egalitarian distributive justice cannot consistently endorse both equal vote and an ideal of moral equality that only implies distributive equality, but not equal vote. My arguments against Wall further show that people have important interests in being equal authors of a democratic polity, which is constitutive to our understanding of modern democracy. Hence, equal vote indeed has a stronger normative bond with people’s equal moral standing and equal citizenship than some political philosophers suggest.

It follows that any plausible theory of egalitarian distributive justice should

support equal suffrage. Consequently, ideals of moral equality that assess what matters for treating people as equals in exclusively distributive terms are implausible. Such ideals of moral equality should not be considered as the core of a plausible theory of egalitarian distributive justice. Therefore, for any theory of egalitarian distributive justice based on an ideal of moral equality of individuals, only the ideals of moral equality that could accommodate equal vote are suitable. That is, a plausible theory of egalitarian distributive justice should have a structure such that the ideal of moral equality is the normative basis for both equal vote and distributive equality. To the extent that they have to share the same normative basis, justice *needs* equal vote.

The consideration of equal moral standing in designing the voting system, of course, might not trump other reasons. Dworkin plausibly shows that, in practice, people do not demand strictly equal weight for their votes; but at least it should have an important regulatory role in such design. It is true that, in practice, to ensure that every vote has *strictly* equal weight will incur a social cost that is too high to be accepted by citizens. For the sake of pursuing other valuable social goals, we may have good reasons to settle for an arrangement in which not every vote is, strictly, of equal weight in decisive choices. But it does not mean that the pursuit of providing equal weight to citizens' votes is not a normatively important goal. To achieve, at least *roughly*, an equally weighty vote for all should be considered an important social goal. Such a goal, as I have argued in this paper, is internal to the demand of the ideal of moral equality. The problem with Dworkin's, Estlund's and Wall's arguments is that no grounds can be found in their theories to account for the normative worth of this social goal, which is supported by the ideal of moral equality.

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