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Wasted Votes: A Moral Look At Voting For A Third Party Candidate In A First-Past-The-Post Electoral System

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INTRODUCTION

When the ancient Greeks invented democracy circa 2500 years ago they ushered in a new age of civic duty and participation. This new form of government took centralized power away from a religious appointee and transferred it to the masses-- at least to the Athenian-born male-- so that they might decide for themselves how their city would be best governed. They created a rich tradition of expected involvement, with many viewing it as the duty of the citizen to actively participate and to make his voice heard in the political arena.

Most often, this political self-expression came in the form of one of the most enduring civic duties that continues to play an integral part in the democracies of today, voting. To cast a ballot in favor of a candidate or policy position in an election where every vote has equal weight¹ is one of, if not the most, fundamental way to express oneself politically and bring about desired change.

Because the government touches almost all aspects of life, from the roads we drive on, to the food we eat, to the wars we fight, the act of voting can have profound impacts on the lives of not just the voter, but in the case of the United States of America, the more than 300 million people who call the country home. The wide ranging implications of how one votes lends credence to the idea that voting is a necessarily moral act that carries with it the weight of being able to influence a great number of peoples' lives, for better or worse. One would generally assume that when faced with two choices, one which will improve the lives of a great many people and another which will make the lives of that same group of people much harder, one

¹ In some countries, such as the USA, institutions such as the electoral college lead towards votes being weighted differently depending on a number of factors. Systems such as these have been accused of being roadblocks to a functioning democracy by some. See Levinson, Sanford 2007 "Our Undemocratic Constitution: Where the U.S. Constitution Goes Wrong (And How We the People Can Correct It)"

ought to pick the option which will have a net positive effect. Because of this idea, when casting their ballot, the voter must consider the effects that their vote will have on society as a whole.

When someone is voting, especially in elections for a position as powerful as President of the United States, they must choose between a number of candidates, one of whom they should believe will necessarily cause the best outcome for the greatest number of people. While it is impossible to know in advance who will be the better candidate of the people, it is the duty of voters to vote for the candidate who they believe is best positioned to bring that positive change.

In a country that has a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, such as the USA and Great Britain, the choice most voters face is between two candidates who are competing on behalf of two major parties. This follows concept in political science called Duverger's Law which holds that in FPTP systems third parties are swallowed up by larger, mass appealing parties, while also losing any practical possibility to win as voters flee to the major parties. This leaves those who would vote for a third party faced with the choice of either voting for a party they are less aligned with, or voting for a candidate that does not have a realistic chance of winning.

While this dilemma often ends with voters choosing to vote for a mainstream candidate, many question whether or not they have made the correct moral decision. This is compounded by the recent unpopularity of major party candidates in the most recent election in the US and elsewhere. One needs to only look at the historically high disapproval ratings for the candidates in the most recent presidential election for proof of this. Many felt as though neither Hillary Clinton nor President Donald Trump were the right person to take the country forward, yet they risked having the candidate they perceived as worse win if they chose not to just vote for the lesser of two evils.

This paper seeks to explore the question of whether or not it is *morally* acceptable for a person to vote for a third party candidate knowing that the candidate will not win and that by not voting for the major party candidate with whom they most agree, they are potentially enabling the victory of the candidate they think will do more harm to the country as a whole. In order to do this, I will first take a look at the electoral systems which enable this dilemma in the first place and look to historical examples of third party performance to gauge the efficacy of third party voting. I will then establish voting as an inherently moral act where the right decision can be informed by a normative ethical theory. It will finally turn towards two of these theories in an attempt to find which one offers the best explanation on how to vote.

The first of these will be a utilitarian theory of voting ethics which holds that one should vote in an effort to create the most utility for the largest number of people. This view will hold that one should not vote for a third party candidate since it ultimately makes it easier for the least desirable candidate to be elected. By voting for the major party candidate a person agrees with the most, they do their part to ensure that the citizens of the country will be given what the voter considers to be the best chance of an improved life.

The other normative theory of voting ethics will be a deontological argument that centers on the idea that by expressing oneself at the polls, regardless of electoral outcome, the voter is doing a service to democracy and the democratic process as a whole. This view holds that by lending their voice to the opinions that they truly believe in voters are affirming the legitimacy of the process as well as helping to legitimize the opinions that the third party espouses.

This paper will also address objections to these two viewpoints and do the best possible job to offer rebuttals to these objections on behalf of the normative theories. It will ultimately

come to the conclusion that a voter cannot be faulted by voting for a third party and that the long-term benefits to society from voting in this way will outweigh the short term benefits that the utilitarian viewpoint seeks.

FIRST-PAST-THE-POST AND THE INFLUENCE OF VOTING SYSTEMS

In 1951, Maurice Duverger made the prediction that in states with a plurality rule voting system two dominant parties will emerge, while in states using proportional representation, coalitions comprised of a number of different parties will rule the day. In the 66 years since then, electoral outcomes and the political landscape of states have backed these claims up as the intrinsic connection between voting system and voting outcome has been validated.

For Duverger, this rested on two concepts which, when combined, stack the deck against the chances of small parties surviving: elimination and fusion. To this end he predicted that as clearly dominant parties emerge, voters, realizing the futility of voting for a party who will not win, will abandon the smaller niche parties that they support in favor of a more powerful party who stand a chance of coming to power. He also believed that in search of the best possible chance of winning smaller parties will be pre-disposed to combine with other parties of similar political leanings. In this way, they are more able to deal with the larger and more accessible parties with whom they are competing for hard earned votes.

These predictions have been born out in elections around the world. In states where FPTP exists, such as the United States and United Kingdom, plurality rule has entrenched two party systems that have barely seen disturbances in the modern era. Using example from both of

these countries we now turn to some possible outcomes when a third party candidate has managed to capture the nation's attention.

In the late 19th century one of the first major progressive parties in America was coming to maturity in the form of the People's Party, a political movement largely comprised of farmers who felt that the classic Democrat/Republican split in America had left many underserved people by the wayside and sought widespread progressive changes.² What started as a grassroots movement spread throughout the country ended up as one of the strongest showing in America by a third party candidate in the election of 1892 with the People's Party candidate gaining just under 9% of the vote. Hoping to build upon their relative success, and realizing the ultimate futility of running against the Democrats, against whom they were largely competing for votes, the People's Party decided to cast their support behind the Democratic nominee, William Jennings Bryan in the next presidential election. This heralded the beginning of the end for the People's Party whose support would not be enough to get Bryan elected and would never again see the success that they had achieved in 1892. In a practical example of Duverger's Law, they would be swallowed up by the larger Democratic Party and found themselves "fused" out of existence.

However, their efforts were not for nothing. In the wake of their success and subsequent absorption by the Democrats, the People's Party was able to move the Democratic Party platform further to the left in ways that aligned with their goals.³ In this way, the people who made up the 9% of Americans who "wasted" their vote on a candidate who didn't have a snowballs chance in hell of being elected were able to vote for their preferred candidate while simultaneously

² Hild, Matthew 2007. "A Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South"

³ Hicks, John D. 1933. "The Third-party Tradition in American Politics"

affecting the policies of one of the major party candidates. Additionally in the 1892 election where they fielded their own candidate, People's Party voters were able to avoid the negative consequence of taking away votes from the preferred major party candidate when Grover Cleveland won his second term, in what could be considered a major success for third parties.

The general success of the People's Party stands in contrast to the second of the two examples that will be looked at in this section, the plight of the Liberal-Democrats in the wake of the 2010 UK election. In the time leading up to the election many pundits had the Conservative Party winning a plurality of the votes, but potentially missing out on being able to form a Government due to a potential coalition between the Lib-Dems and Labour.⁴ While the pundits were correct in calling the vote share, their prediction that it would be a red and yellow Parliament proved shortsighted. Instead, the Tories formed the first coalition government in almost 50 years with the Lib-Dems, a move which brought the newly empowered third party into the fold of the Government. Unfortunately for the Lib-Dems this victory came at the expense of the major party with which they lined up closest, Labour.

Many of the seats that the Lib-Dems had taken over came from their main competition for votes, and closest party to them ideologically, the Labour Party,⁵ and by taking their votes away they guaranteed a Conservative majority in Parliament. For the Lib-Dem voters, who now hoped to reconcile the fact that they needed to deal with a Government that was decidedly more conservative than them, the idea that they were now involved in that Government gave them confidence that they would be able to institute some of their own policies. This however proved more difficult than they would have hoped and they were unable to move on some of their key

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/apr/20/general-election-2010-poll-editorial>

⁵ [Blair wins historic third term – majority of 66](#)". BBC. 6 May 2005. Retrieved 21 March 2008.

policy issues, such as voting reform. During their time in Government, the Lib-Dems would see their popularity wane and with it, their vote share. In the following election of 2015 they would go on to lose 49 out of their 58 seats in Parliament.

If the performance of the People's Party was a resounding success where supporters of the party saw their preferred candidate, of the two major parties, elected as well as having positive policy change, the situation of the Liberal-Democrats over 100 years later was the exact opposite. They had their least preferred major party candidate win while being unable to fundamentally change the political conversation *and* having their voters flee back to Labour and the Tories.

These two examples serve to highlight the opposite sides of the spectrum of success when it comes to third parties, and more generally to showcase the difficulty that voters are faced with when deciding who they should vote for. Voters are faced with a decision that is undoubtedly important and as the next section of the paper will show, is an inherently moral one.

VOTING AS A MORAL ACT

As humans we live our lives in a perpetual state of decision making, from the shirt we choose to wear in the mornings to the kinds of chips we decide to pick up at the store, rational creatures are constantly weighing the pros and cons of various options as they make their way through life. While many of these choices negligibly affect us and the people with whom we interact with -- perhaps someone at the party does not like sour cream and onion chips and feels bad that they cannot have any -- a certain type of choice requires a higher order of decision making and carries with it a certain degree of importance not seen in more benign choices.

These choices, and the actions that represent the options between which we must choose, live in the realm of the moral which contains both moral dilemmas and moral and immoral actions. Acts of this nature often affect not just the person who performs the action, in contrast to things such as picking out ones shirt which is a purely personal choice⁶, as well as generally having consequences of a more serious nature than creating an unsatisfied party goer. It is from this class of actions that we see the kinds of dilemmas that have become mainstays of philosophy classrooms such as the trolley problem where one must decide whether it is right to let five people die or to cause one person to meet the same fate, or the parasitic violinist which attempts to show that abortion is not inherently immoral.

Much in the same way that choosing to pull the trolley lever or kill the parasitic violinist invite us to make a moral decision, the very act of voting entails similarly moral consequences. The way that one votes can have wide reaching repercussions that affects not just life of the voter, but can lead to consequences that touches people around the world. Say for example, a particular candidate is a known war hawk who has campaigned on a platform of United States imperial expansion by a force assembled via a draft. By voting for this candidate the voter is committing current members of the US Army and, whomever is drafted into the armed forces in the future, as well as the army and citizens of whichever territories deemed strategically important, to years of war and conflict that will likely result in mass casualties across the board (consider the over 1 million casualties in the War on Terror).⁷ While some might argue the relative merits of this kind of imperial expansion, the fact remains that to put so many people in harm's way is a moral decision of the highest order and must be considered as such.

⁶ This is not to say that personal choices do not have repercussions at all, someone who chooses to dress like a Nazi will undoubtedly affect some people negatively. Simply that, within the realm of reason, there are many choices that we make that ultimately do not profoundly affect other peoples' lives in a morally significant way.

⁷ See "Body Count: Casualty Figures After 10 Years of the War on Terror" March 2015

The moral weight of potential outcomes to voting does not just stop merely at the point where lives are on the line through armed conflict however, with morally repugnant outcomes occurring in even less dangerous situations. Imagine a candidate who despite being a self-avowed pacifist believes that free speech and free thought are blights upon society that will ultimately lead to the unraveling of the social order. Despite it being clear that this politician will not involve the country in any unnecessary foreign conflicts, they are nonetheless an incredibly dangerous person who would seek to undermine some of the basic freedoms that many agree are necessary for a society to function well.⁸ Similarly, a candidate might feel that all government spending is irrational and that the country should devolve into a loosely held together anarchic state.⁹ If implemented this policy would see thousands, if not millions, of people who rely on government assistance in their everyday lives thrust deep into poverty from which it would be difficult to recover¹⁰. Even if a voter agrees with the candidate principally, they must reconcile their principles with the moral implications of causing so many to be put into an objectively terrible situation.

These examples serve to create a portrait of voting that sees it as a necessarily moral issue, where by voting one way or another, the voter is ultimately making a choice that can be viewed as either moral or immoral. In this way, voting can be seen as an issue of applied ethics, a discreet moral problem where the voter can use a normative ethical theory in order to inform their decision making. While there is widespread disagreement on which normative theory one should use to determine how to vote, which this paper will discuss in due time, there is a central

⁸ Balkin, Jack 2016 "Cultural Democracy and The First Amendment"

⁹ See Huemer, Michael 2013 "The Problem of Political Authority" for example

¹⁰ The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) is a United States federal law considered to be a major welfare reform. ... President Bill Clinton signed PRWORA into law on August 22, 1996, fulfilling his 1992 campaign promise to "end welfare as we have come to know it".

tenet to voting that is accepted by this paper as the foundation for how one should approach the ballot box; the idea that one should vote in order to help the common good.

In his book “The Ethics of Voting” Jason Brennan defends the view that voters should seek to vote with a “public-spirited view” whereby they put the common good of society over mere personal gains. He is of the opinion that to vote self-interestedly at the expense of the common good is to vote in favor of the subjugation of others for personal gain, a morally dubious act. While some might argue that ultimately, the only duty of a person is to put their own success and happiness above all others, this is a dangerous precedent to set. Imagine the sadist, whose highest aspirations are to attain a life of torture and cruelty. No reasonable person would say that it is acceptable for the sadist to follow his dreams of violence to the detriment of society as a whole. In the same way, to vote for a candidate purely for personal gain with no regard for the consequences, such as in the case of the millionaire who wishes to pay no taxes and votes for a fascist to achieve that goal, is to shirk one's duty as a moral agent whose actions affect more than just themselves.

It is important to note here that this is not to say that a person is not permitted to vote for a candidate that they reasonably think will bring about *some* negative consequences. In other words, a voter justifiably believing that a candidate will do some amount of harm does not preclude the voter from supporting that candidate. The political arena is one built on compromise, and often voters will have to compromise some of their ideals in order to support others. When they step into the ballot box voters must do a form of utilitarian math where they weigh the potential benefits to society a candidate will bring against the potential harms, and when they cast their votes, it is the duty of voters to support the candidate that will be the most advantageous to the common good of society as a whole.

While it is well and good to suggest that voters should support the candidate that will enhance the good of society, it is slightly trickier to determine what the common good actually is. To this end we may turn back to Brennan who offers a two-fold explanation of what is included when we describe a common good society

The first of these is the idea of a “personal” good which focuses mainly on the wellbeing of the citizens. This form of the common good is exemplified in the preamble to the US Declaration of Independence where it states that all men are endowed with the rights to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” This tripartite goal set at the founding of the USA includes within it the right to a certain degree of health, the right to not be deprived of the liberties upon which we believe democratic societies are founded, and the right to not be unduly hindered on one’s quest for success, economic or otherwise.

In the modern context we can see these rights being embodied by a certain amount of healthcare provided by the government, a state where the governed has recourse against the government, and a government that supports the economic wellbeing of all its citizens equally. A candidate who outwardly seems to support the personal common good would be one who seeks to strengthen anti-discrimination laws, or who supports increased spending on social programs to attempt to level the economic playing field for the most underserved and impoverished in society.

On the other side of the coin, is the “institutional” conception of the common good. If personal common good can be thought of as things that are the responsibility of the government to provide for its people, institutional common good represents ways in which the citizens can support the state. By supporting the common good of the political institution, citizens vote in a

way that supports the state as a liberal democracy as well as strengthen the respect that citizens have for such political institutions. A candidate who advances the institutional common good could be one who is seen as more legitimate by the voters. For an American example, one might consider a candidate who does not use a Super-PAC to fund their campaign and relies on small donations from average citizens. Voters might feel that since the candidate is not as much in the pocket of corporations for their campaign funds, they are not as susceptible to corruptive influences. If this candidate were to win the election, the people of the country might be reassured that money is not the be all and end all of political races, which would positively affect their view of the democratic institutions that govern them. Ultimately, this would strengthen the institution's legitimacy and by extension, its ability to govern well.¹¹

By viewing the common good this way, we are given a framework by Brennan to assess the ways in which a candidate might positively affect society. What he fails to provide however, is a system for weighing the two aspects of the common good against each other. Imagine, for example, the friendly dictator who despite hating democracy and citizen involvement wants nothing more than to help the people of his country escape poverty. He will provide a wide swath of programs to get his citizens working as well as introduce a robust single payer healthcare system to ensure none are without necessary treatment again. At the same time, once elected he has vowed to abolish the parliament and establish himself as President for Life, entirely dismantling the democratic process and any form of government accountability. This potential dictator seems to meet all the requirements of supporting the personal common good while at the same time neglecting any form of institutional support. As voters, are we morally required to vote for this man rather than another candidate who will help less people yet will

¹¹ See Grimes & Esaisson 2014 "Government Responsiveness: A Democratic Value with Negative Externalities?"

preserve the democratic institutions upon which society is based? We tend to place a certain value on our ability to autonomously decide how to live our lives¹² and in lieu of anarchy; democracy seems to be the most efficient way of making our voices heard on the national scale. On the surface though, it seems a tough pill to swallow that we should push aside the needs of the many to preserve our moral obligation toward autonomy.

Third party political candidates exemplify this problem from the opposite side of the common good spectrum. As has been already discussed, third party candidates in a FPTP system have a next to nothing chance of actually being elected, despite the strength of their positions. What this means is that a vote for a third party candidate will never be a vote in favor of helping the personal common good, because the candidate will never have an opportunity to implement any of their policies.

However, the personal good is not the entire story and we must also consider how a vote for a third party candidate might affect the institutional good of the system in which the voting is taking place, a metric that it certainly does better in. Belief in the legitimacy of an electoral system is essential for that system to function in the way that best supports the electorate. It has been shown that voters are more likely to vote in states that are perceived to operate effectively and fairly.¹³ An engaged electorate is one of the essential aspects of a robust and functioning democracy. As stated above, we place a premium on the ability to be autonomous and a government based in democratic ideals is the best way for the average citizen to express that autonomy on a political scale. Whether direct or representative, democracy gives citizens the ability to make their voice heard in the form of votes and ultimately to influence the policy

¹² Wolff, Paul 1970 "In Defense Of Anarchism"

¹³ Miles, Matthew 2015 "Turnout as Consent: How Fair Governance Encourages Voter Participation"

positions that the state takes. In doing this, it legitimizes the role of the government as the holder of a monopoly on legitimate uses of force by asserting that the actions of the government are an extension of the will of the people who provided its mandate.

Common goods that are impersonal or institutional in nature help to serve this purpose of legitimizing the government. Given that there is a political value to autonomy, personal choice, and involvement in the political process, surely a democracy in which the greatest number of people are engaged and informed is similarly the most legitimate. By voting in a way that ensures democratic systems of government are protected and the citizens retain faith in their state, voters are securing their ability to meaningfully participate in the future.

Unfortunately, in countries such as the United States, where many voters feel forced to pick the lesser of two evils rather than a candidate they truly support, the lack of a representative candidate runs the risk of eroding the faith that people have in their electoral system. It was this lack of faith in the political establishment that led to the electing of Donald Trump, a person who has swapped parties a number of times and is a self-described outsider who seeks to “drain the swamp”¹⁴ of Washington D.C.. Many of the people that voted for him simply couldn’t stomach the thought of a career politician, who has “played the political game” for most of her life, becoming the president. Many Trump voters latched onto his promise to “drain the swamp” and, in effect, were looking to secure the future of US democratic institutions from the perceived corruption of Washington elites and the political class.

Though they might not describe their actions in this way, many Trump voters were in fact voting to support the institutional good by casting their ballots for a candidate who they believed

¹⁴ Trump, Donald J. "Five Point Plan For Ethics Reform." Colorado, Colorado Springs. Speech.

would restore a sense of fairness to the political system. The parallels between voting for Trump and a typical third party candidate do not stop there however. Consider the record disapproval rating at the time of the election as well as the significant number of people who voted for Trump despite exit polls indicating they found him unprepared and ill-equipped for the role he has been thrust into¹⁵. This seems to be a rejection of the personal good that many use as a metric for deciding who to vote for in that, while voters are conceding that Trump may not be the person best prepared to be president, he was needed for America democracy to be “made great again”¹⁶.

A NORMATIVE QUESTION

In a sense, the question faced by American voters in the 2016 election was the same that is faced by voters the world over in FPTP systems who support a third party and want to have their voices heard. It is also the same question of priorities raised by Brennan’s view that we must vote in favor of the common good, either personal or institutional; do we prioritize the good of the people or the good of the state’s ability to function well?

It is my view that this question is at its core one of normative ethics, where the philosophical perspective a person takes will ultimately inform how they feel about this issue. What is discussed in the sections that follow is an assessment of two broad normative ethical theories that would inform the decisions of their adherents in opposite ways. This assessment will look at both, the way these theories prioritize the two aspects of Brennan’s common good, as well as how successful they are at achieving the desired goals.

¹⁵ Pew Research Center 2016 “In Their Own Words: Why Voters Support – And Have Concerns- About Clinton and Trump

¹⁶ Huang et. Al 2016 “New York Times Election 2016: Exit Poll”

The first of these two theories will be a general form of act utilitarianism, which holds that one should act in the way that is able to provide the most amount of utility to the greatest number of people. This will not be a hedonistic perspective and will view utility as analogous to the general well-being of not just the person who is voting, but of society as whole. This view will ultimately take the stance that the personal good of the citizens take precedence over any institutional benefits that the country might see by some voters casting their vote for a third party and allowing the non-preferable candidate to win. In the mind of utilitarians, the tangible well-being of the citizens in the present is much more important than abstract, potential good that might happen at some point down the line if enough people vote for third parties.

On the flip side is a position that draws on a deontological perspective and looks at the duties citizens have to democratic institutions of which they are members. Within this position will be a discussion of the form of expressive voting espoused by Jerry Gaus who believed that voting is an expression of preference and voting for a candidate can serve to legitimize that preference in the national political arena. This view holds with it a firm belief that people are well within their rights, and may go so far to say that they are obliged, to vote for their conscience, even if that means “wasting” their vote by supporting a third party. It will feel that the service a vote of this nature does to democracy will outweigh the potential disservice done to the citizens of the state by electing a leader who is less than ideal. This prioritizes the process and the duty that voters have to building a fence around democracy to ensure that its citizens will continue to be engaged and create a legitimate government that can effectively govern at the present time

While both views will be scrutinized in due course, we will first turn to the utilitarian view and determine whether it accomplishes what it sets out to do and whether the well-being of the citizens of a nation should ultimately outweigh any harm to the institutions of that nation.

THE UTILITARIAN VOTER

For many people, the act of voting serves one purpose; to enhance the lives of the current citizens of a country through political action. Every time a person votes, they are tasked with determining which candidate will have the most immediate positive effects on the constituents of a nation and should vote accordingly. In this way, the voter is doing their best to maximize the utility gained from voting and help the greatest number of people be as well off as possible. In most FPTP systems this version of utilitarian arithmetic ends with the voter deciding to cast their ballot in favor of one of the two major parties that Duverger's Law claims will inevitably develop. Voting in this way invariably leaves third parties, who have no shot of winning in the face of the centrist powerhouses that are the major parties, by the wayside as anyone who would support them realizes the utilitarian futility of voting for such a candidate.

There are certainly good reasons that someone might choose to vote in this manner beyond a voter simply agreeing with the major party candidate on the most issues. For example, a utilitarian might believe that in fact the two party system is beneficial to democracy as a whole. While they might think a particular third party candidate would be the best choice for the country, they realize the value that exists in the compromise necessary to adequately govern in a two party system. When the two major parties move themselves towards the center in order to appeal to the largest number of voters, as seen in the political landscape of countries such as

Great Britain,¹⁷ they shield themselves from the extremism that is espoused by much of the fringe. While some of the voters who would prefer to see fringe candidates win lament this fact, by moving away from the extreme views at both ends of the political spectrum parties are able to create large coalitions that carry with them strong mandates and prevent legislative bodies from being “held hostage” by parties whose votes are necessary to create a majority coalition.¹⁸ While this may prevent a voter’s preferred candidate from winning, it also prevents the rise of extreme candidates from polluting the political process, a trade-off many would readily make.

In a sense, the utilitarian vote for a “second choice” candidate from one of the major parties instead of “first choice” candidate from a third party is as much a vote against the less desirable major party candidate winning as it is a vote in favor of the more desirable candidate. In effect, a person voting for a major party candidate on utilitarian grounds is saying that while they would prefer for a different candidate to win, they are willing to cut their losses to ensure the candidate they think will do the most harm to citizens does not. While this is not inherently an argument against a utilitarian principle of voting, it nevertheless strikes one as odd to think of voting as a negative act rather than a positive one.

In response to this, a supporter of utilitarian voting might say that in fact it does not really matter why a person votes for the person they vote for as long as that vote is used to create the best possible outcome. While it may be moderately unsavory to people to think that they are voting to keep someone out of office, a utilitarian might say that we must overcome those feelings in order to do our civic duty. While this argument seems plausible in the short term, it is

¹⁷ Current disagreements between the very liberal Jeremy Corbyn and the largely centrist MPs that make up Labour’s PLP aside

¹⁸ Israel is a notable example of this where Netanyahu’s conservative party is essentially held hostage by the ultra-orthodox for fear of losing power. See Fisher, Natanel 2016 “The Fundamentalist Dilemma: Lessons From the Israeli Haredi Case”

impossible not to think about the potentially long term implications that voting in this way might have on the way that people view the electoral process. A process where votes, instead of being for the candidate best suited to the job- go to the candidate who is least poorly suited, could threaten to undermine the legitimacy of the democracy. Those unpleasant feelings of choosing between candidates that are essentially the lesser of two evils could lead to voter apathy as the reality of not having an ideal candidate ever be elected begins to take hold

That said, a voter who elects to go with a major party candidate rather than a preferred third party candidate seems, on the surface at least, entirely justified in attempting to help the greatest number of people in the immediate future. It appears that it is a morally honorable undertaking to ensure that the common good of citizens is protected. Much like the debate about which common good should be prioritized, the question of which candidate will provide the most utility is a tricky one that seems to have no clear answer. Should we vote for the candidate who will ensure that our nation is defended from foreign invaders? What if that defense comes at the expense of economic stability? Voters each try and answer this question to the best of their ability and some candidates may make it easier than others; but as far as creating a robust theory of voting is concerned, it seems lacking.

While supporters of the theory might concede that yes, it is impossible to create an entirely objective assessment of candidates predicted utility, especially considering the fact that the rhetoric of many on the campaign trail does not link up with the actions that they end up taking while in office, they will point to the fact that such an assessment is almost impossible for any action. As rational creatures, they would argue, as Wolff does,¹⁹ that despite the fact that we may not always make exactly the right decision, our moral obligation towards autonomy means

¹⁹ Wolff, Paul 1970 "In Defense Of Anarchism"

that we must make the decision that we believe is best based on the evidence provided. To not make a choice is within itself a shirking of our duty to make the right one, a sentiment immortalized in the seminal progressive-rock band *Rush*'s ode to Ayn Rand, *Freewill*, where they say "if you choose not to decide/you still have made a choice." A utilitarian might agree with this sentiment and feel that incomplete information does not absolve us of our responsibility to do what we think is best.

While the utilitarian may have responses for the previous critiques, I think the most compelling argument against political utilitarianism is one raised by Ajume Wingo in his paper *Aesthetics and Freedom*, which acknowledges the similarities between the political arena and violent recourse.²⁰ He notes that on the utilitarian view, both tactics are a means to an end with neither providing any incentive for why it would be preferable. For a utilitarian, the only calculation that matters is the final utility of the act and there is no inherent value in how that utility is achieved.

To highlight the problem that this poses, consider a successful nation where the citizens all lead happy, wholesome, and fulfilling lives that are unconcerned with crime. Their state of perpetual bliss is possible because three times a year the society engages in a murderous festival where the laws are suspended and everyone is free to rape and pillage to their hearts content. This has the dual effect of satiating the criminal urges of all the would-be criminals while simultaneously trimming down the population to ensure that there is always more than enough food and jobs so that few people ever want for anything.

²⁰ Wingo, Ajume 2009 "Aesthetics and Freedom"

While the outcomes of this carnival of carnage create a society that borders on utopia, the savage means used to attain this bliss immediately strike a reasonable person as barbaric and ultimately unacceptable. Regardless of how wonderful of a world this creates, the human cost of using violent means to an end is an unsavory proposition no matter how one cuts it. This is, in part, because we place an inherent value on non-violent action and unfortunately, most theories of utilitarianism do not account for this inherent value.

Someone defending a political utilitarianism might say that the value of human life is so great that it would be impossible for the value gained from murder to make the endeavor a worthwhile one. This however begs the question of whether it would ever be acceptable to kill someone for the benefit of society, especially if that benefit prevented future killings. For a utilitarian, this raises some problems since it seems that they would be hard pressed to defend, for example, refusing to kill an adolescent Hitler who otherwise would go on to murder millions of people and thrust the Western world into chaos. While it must be conceded that our hypothetical purge causes more innocent people to be killed and most likely would save less than preventing a teenaged Hitler from maturing and attempting to take over the world, the question remains about where the line is drawn. Would it be acceptable to kill one innocent person in order to save ten thousand people? What about only one thousand? It seems as though for utilitarians there must be a point at which the number of people saved will outweigh the harms of murdering one, or more, innocent people. They appear to be wedded to the idea that violence may well be the right answer to attain a political goal if it would help enough people. To many, this seems like an unacceptable consequence as it could be used to justify a plethora of potentially violent strategies “for the good of the people.”

A final point one must consider when thinking about voting for a major party for utilitarian reasons is whether or not the vote actually achieves the goal that it sets out to, which is to help the greatest number of people in the immediate future. While at first glance it might seem that voting for a major party candidate will have the most immediate utilitarian benefit, it too must be considered compared to a vote for a third party candidate. To do this, consider two political candidates, one who occupies the space left of center on a political spectrum and the other a space slightly to the right of center. These two candidates agree on many issues, the benefits of free-market economics for example, and diverge only on select social issues. If either is elected, these candidates will be forced to work with a legislative body that is run by the opposition party who only disagrees with the executive's stance on certain social issues. This means that when push comes to shove, either candidate will be able to get the majority of their platform policies in order but will face gridlock when it comes to bringing about social change. Effectively, this creates an election where, for the utilitarian, neither candidate is preferable since both will bring about the same immediate consequences for the same number of people due to any change on the only significant policy difference between the candidates being hamstrung by the legislature.

At this point, a utilitarian seems to have two options: 1. They could accept that in this case there really is no preferable candidate, which seems odd considering a voter would inherently prefer one candidate's positions to the other, or 2. They might suggest that by voting for the candidate whose views line up with your own you are affirming that view to the rest of the country and working to legitimize it.

As stated earlier, the first option seems to be the most dubious since it suggests that voting for a candidate the voter agrees with isn't preferable to a vote for a candidate the voter

doesn't agree with. Despite the fact that the immediate outcomes are the same it seems highly likely that there is something inherently desirable about voting for a candidate that lines up more exactly with the preferences of the voter. To answer in this way creates a version of utilitarianism that does not account for this, a point that goes against it as a potential normative theory of how one should vote.

The second option gives a little more room to maneuver; however, it seems that it instructs the voter to move away from utilitarianism and toward the expressive voting that typifies the deontological approach to voting that will be discussed in the following section. In brief, it suggests that there is a value in voting to make your voice heard and to potentially legitimize a position for the future. While it is true that in this example this doesn't come at a utilitarian cost, it nevertheless opens the door for the value of non-utilitarian voting in the future. If there is a value that can be placed on legitimizing opinions, at what point does that value exceed the needs of people in the present? It appears as though this lays the foundation for a great potential future good to add more utilitarian good than a small amount of good in the present. At this point it would not be a great stretch to say then that a third-party candidate might provide more good in the future than a major party candidate can right now, a proposition that many utilitarian voters would scoff at immediately. This leaves the second option as one that is ultimately lacking the teeth necessary to fulfill the needs of someone hoping to convince us of the benefits of utilitarian voting.

Perhaps then, the outright refusal to accept the example might provide a defender of utilitarianism the necessary means to protect their voting theory. They might say that the contingency in the example is impossible since it is very unlikely that a nation would hold an election where it is known that the legislature and executive will be gridlocked, and moreover it

is a stretch to think that such an election could swing in favor of either candidate without the legislature being similarly swayed. On the matter of gridlock, one only needs to look to the state of the US Congress during Barack Obama's second term where there was so much disagreement and partisan bickering that the government was shut down in 2013, an event that would lead to the estimated loss of \$24 billion dollars from the US economy,²¹ and 4 times less legislation passed than in the Congress of the 1940s that was referred to as the "Do-Nothing Congress."²² This serves to highlight the depths that legislative bodies will go to in order to ensure that the executive is unable to implement their policy platforms, and there is no reason to think that in our fictional example the legislature would not do everything within its power to stop the executives preferred social changes from being enacted.

Regarding the second of the two objections to the example, that such a close election occurs where opposite parties win the executive and legislative branch, it turns out that in fact such elections are almost the norm. Since 1901 in the United States, 30 out of 61 elections have ended with different parties controlling the White House and either one or both houses of Congress. Surely then, it is not inconceivable to think that such a situation could happen in any election in the US or other modern democracy where people are able to freely vote for the candidate they choose. Ultimately, it seems as though the objections to the previous example on the grounds of it being unrealistic are themselves, unfounded.

For the reasons laid out in the previous section, I believe that I have shown that utilitarianism does not provide a robust enough theory for how one should vote. It carries with it repugnant consequences that could lead to the use of violence for political gains as well as being

²¹ Walshe, Shushannah 2013 "The Costs of the Government Shutdown"

²² Montanaro, Desjardins, Wellford, Pathe 2015 "It Wasn't The 'Do-Nothing Congress' After All"

shown to be impractical in certain electoral circumstances that require special consideration. In the section that follows, I will lay out and defend what this paper considers to be a superior theory of voting that is based on deontological principles and the idea that one should ultimately be voting expressively.

EXPRESSIVE VOTING AND MAKING ONES VOICE HEARD

If political utilitarianism offers a voting strategy which focuses largely on the short term benefactors from how one decides to vote, a voting theory centered around the duties of voters to democracy mostly considers the “grand scheme of things” and less tangible benefits to make its case. On this theory, there is a higher order of purpose that people must serve when they vote that goes far beyond simple utilitarian calculus based on the wellbeing of the citizens. It requires a consideration of the pillars that hold up the democratic institutions that govern our everyday lives. This is because by living in a democracy we enter into a covenant with the state as an entity. In exchange for being provided with the means to participate in government we have a certain obligation to follow the laws set forth by government and to do our best to ensure that it remains a robust and effective system capable of representing the will of the people.

This does not necessarily mean that every voting citizen of the country must run for public office, be engaged in all public meetings, or give their lives up to ensure the government runs as smoothly as possible. The proper functioning of a state is a complex puzzle that involves people from almost all walks of life. There must be farmers to feed the people, teachers to instruct the youth, and garbage collectors (amongst many others) to ensure that cities are sanitary, in addition to the statesmen who run the government. All these professionals cannot reasonably be expected to have the same dedication to governing that politicians do, and as such,

their moral obligations must be able to exist within the context of their work. It should not be all consuming work, but rather an addendum to the working world that people can do in their free time.

The question is what form this obligation takes for the common man. First and foremost, there seems to be an obligation to be informed. As Brennan argues, it is better for a person who is uninformed to not vote rather than to cast a vote that is based on misinformation and hunches.²³ He is of the opinion that people such as these corrupt the political system and that by being reckless with their votes, they are ultimately doing a disservice to the democratic processes that we would hope to be protecting. Some argue against this idea, suggesting that ultimately there are so many misinformed voters across the political spectrum that their votes essentially cancel each other out, leaving the informed and passionate voters as a sort of tiebreaker settling the conflict between large swaths of ignorant citizens.²⁴

While this seems to make sense on the surface, I think one would be hard pressed to argue that if only informed voters were to cast their ballots, the world would not be better off. Just because uninformed voters are spread across the political spectrum does not mean that those voters add value to the political process. If all the uninformed voters were to take the time and become informed about the issues at hand, surely we would have a more representative government that is better equipped to deliver the will of the people rather than having to assume what people want based on a mandate given by citizens who do not know what they are voting for. If we are to assume that a majority of voters do not know what they are voting for, then the politicians who are elected would not be able to assume that their mandate was for the policies

²³ Brennan, Jason 2011 "Ethics of Voting" p. 68

²⁴ Palfrey & Poole 1987 "The Relationship Between Information, Ideology, and Voting Behavior"

that they campaigned on behalf of and therefore would not know how to best act in the interest of their electorate. This cannot be good for democracy as a whole and would ultimately lead to voters not getting what they want out of their government.

One proposed solution to this problem might be a test on the policy specifics of candidates taken before a person enters the ballot box. The questions would be taken from the websites and handouts of the campaign to ensure that no candidate is favored and the voter would be allowed to take it as many times as is necessary until they “passed” and receive the right to vote. While some might view this as a barbaric continuation of the literacy tests used to disenfranchise black voters in the wake of the American Civil War,²⁵ there could be protections in place to ensure that this test would not be used to discriminate against any group. Translations into almost all languages spoken in America could help immigrants pass, and the option of an oral test could make sure that those who are illiterate have the ability to cast their vote correctly for the candidate that they support. Ultimately, this is a conversation worthy of its own article, but it serves to show that uninformed voting is a problem in the USA and abroad, and that there are steps that the government could take to mitigate it.

Since we have established that there is a duty on voters to become informed prior to voting, the next- and most salient- question becomes how they should use that information in order to cast their ballot. While it may seem that given an informed voter, one should just vote for the candidate that most aligns with their views; as we have seen with our exploration of a utilitarian theory of voting this may not be as simple as it appears. One must make considerations about whether their most preferable candidate is good for society as a whole, or

²⁵ Goldman, Daniel 2004 “The Modern Day Literacy Test?: Felon Disenfranchisement and Race Discrimination”

whether it is worth it to vote for a candidate who likely won't win without belonging to one of the major parties.

Regarding the first consideration, that a voter must consider whether a vote for their preferred candidate will be a benefit to the whole of society, we might turn toward a different Brennan and his co-author Loren Lomasky who address the question of whether a member of the Ku Klux Klan should vote for a person who is similarly a member of the Klan, or as they ingeniously refer to this hypothetical person, a "kandidate." They believe that no, one should not vote for this morally repugnant man who stands for morally repugnant things, even if there is absolutely no chance that they would end up winning an election. This is because by voting for someone like this a voter is identifying with in a morally significant way, which lends credence to their platform of hatred and racism.²⁶ This position, while chiding those who hold opinions and vote in ways that are immoral, points to the power of what is the central focus of this section of the paper, expressive voting.

Building off the work of Brennan and Lomasky, Jerry Gaus argues that a large number of voters cast their ballot not to instrumentally affect the outcome of the election, but rather to express themselves in a meaningful way, and that ultimately this decision is a rational one.²⁷ He suggests that while many view voting as simply the role that citizens have in the political process which see laws passed by legislative bodies (a job that speaks to the idea of the personal common good, whereby people vote to create the best outcome for the people in terms of laws passed), it in fact is an essential means that the people of a nation have for communicating their opinions on the political climate. For example, consider a single-issue candidate running for an

²⁶ Brennan & Lomasky 1993 "Democracy and Decision" p. 186

²⁷ Gaus, Gerry 2010 "The Place of Religious Belief In Public Reason Liberalism"

outsider party whose main stated goal is to dismantle the armed forces. While someone voting for this candidate knows that both 1) the candidate will not ever be elected and 2) the armed forces will likely always play a large role in the nation, should even 1% of the population vote for this candidate a message will surely be sent regarding the opinions of the electorate.

One needs only to look at the previous election in the UK where the pro-Brexit UKIP party received 10% of the vote despite not getting a single MP elected. Despite the clear message that having 10% of the population vote for a party that clearly stood little chance of winning, the country was shocked when its citizens voted to leave the EU.²⁸ Because so many people are aware that FPTP systems are a two party game, when a voter chooses to vote for a third party they are often consciously forgoing their ability to decide which of the two likely candidates they prefer and instead opting to exclusively express their opinion on any number of issues. This is not a decision that politicians should be making lightly, and as the United Kingdom example shows, to ignore these expressive choices is to ignore a clear message from the electorate.

While it is undeniable that voters cast their ballots for third party candidates for expressive reasons the salient question of this paper remains, whether or not this is the right thing for them to do. In his critique of this argument, Brennan differentiates between two categories of expressive voters, those who vote with the goal of achieving certain political outcomes (what he calls strategic voting and endorses), and those who vote expressively with no regard for the outcome of that expression²⁹. Those in the first category vote for a third party with the hopes of potentially legitimizing that party on the national stage or potentially bringing the issues that the

²⁸ Kellner, Peter 2015 "How Britain Really Voted" ; Financial Times 2016 "EU Referendum Poll of Polls-Brexit Poll Tracker"

²⁹ Brennan, Stephen 2011 "Ethics of Voting" p.88

party stands for to the forefront of the public debate. On the contrary, those in the second group vote only to express displeasure with certain aspects of the political establishment or unease at certain events with no discernable plan to effect the change they claim to seek. This seems to include the sorts of people who, in America, vote for a candidate such as Gary Johnson; these people vote this way because they are frustrated with the two party system, rather than because they have a deep love of libertarian economic values.

In contrast to the opinion of Brennan, I believe that voters from both categories are attempting to accomplish similar goals and because of that should not be differentiated from each other. If the expressive voting by one group is protected, then so too should expressive voting by the other group be protected. This is because the value that is gained by Brennan's strategic voting is not from the direct outcomes that voting of this nature brings about, but rather the message sent by the vote itself.

When a person votes with the hopes of legitimizing some position they are effectively saying that the current course of action is unacceptable. Whether it is a vote for a third party candidate with well thought out opinions on almost all aspects of policy or a single issue candidate standing on a soapbox, by voting for a candidate who is outside of the status quo you are offering an official rejection of that status quo. The voter has taken their opportunity to decide between two potential candidates and instead chosen to focus on the idea that they believe the system is flawed and not serving its purpose as well as it should. This is ultimately the same thing being said by the voter who votes for *any* third party candidate because they are unhappy with the way things are running. First and foremost they want a change in system; the change in policy is secondary.

It is because of the message sent regarding the structure of democracy that voting expressively is able to serve the common good of society. If voters feel as though they are able to vote expressively in a way that can bring about change at the institutional level to make a government more representative, they create a positive feedback loop in which government moves towards better representing the will of its people, and becomes more legitimate in the process; at the same time, they are empowering their citizens to feel as though their vote matters, regardless of who they are voting for. Even if our preferred candidate does not win, by voting expressively citizens are able to strengthen the pillars that hold society up, despite relinquishing their say in the specific policy issues of the day.

That said, what remains to be seen is whether the scales of moral obligation tip towards the institutional good of third party voting or the personal good of “sucking it up” and voting for one of the major two party candidates. In the end, this is a question of scope more than anything else. Immanuel Kant’s Categorical Imperative, one of the building blocks of deontological ethics, holds that we must act in such a way that we would will our actions to become the universal law³⁰ of the land. Additionally, he believes that in some instances, our moral obligation to this concept leads to negative consequences, such as lying to a murderer at your door, as was pointed out by Benjamin Constant in 1797.³¹

To that end, he also describes what he considers to be perfect and imperfect duties, where perfect duties (such as the one to tell the truth) should always be followed and imperfect duties have a specific time and place where they apply. I contend that the duty to create a government

³⁰ Kant, Immanuel 1785 “Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals”

³¹ Kant, Immanuel 1797 “On A Supposed Right To Tell Lies From Benevolent Motives”

that is responsive and represents the will of the people falls under Kant's conception of a perfect duty and as such, should always be followed.

Most people would agree that generally speaking, a government which is reflective of the will of the people and is as fair as possible is a good thing that states should strive to achieve. Government provides the framework by which we live our lives and should ultimately reflect the will of the people that it claims to speak on behalf of. By voting for third party candidates in an attempt to legitimize those candidates, or to express displeasure in a flawed system, citizens are using their power at the ballot box to push for a political system that they truly believe will better serve the people.

Opponents might make the argument that in fact voting in this way is not always required and instead should be viewed as an imperfect duty. They could defend this position by providing an example where the will of the people is deeply flawed and goes against many of the democratic features that we consider a good government to have. For example, they might say- the Nazi Party came to power as a result of the people of Germany voting for the party they felt would best help the German people. While it is true that the Nazis gripped Germany- and most of the rest of Europe, as a result of the will of the German people, you would be hard pressed to argue that a vote for them was a vote for self-determination. The Nazi platform saw the German state totally discount the rights of millions of their Jewish citizens and ultimately presided over the slaughter of them and others. This was no secret and a vote for the Nazi party was effectively a vote to restrict the ability of German citizens to self-govern and for this reason, immoral. The same logic would hold in most cases where the citizenship would elect a despot who would strip away their rights or otherwise disenfranchise potential voters. If everyone were to vote in a way that supports democratic institutions where all rational people are able to make

their voices heard and express their voting preferences, surely governments around the world would be more responsive to the wills of their people and work toward creating legal frameworks that work for all people rather than entrenched special interests.

Another objection that could be made against voting to support democratic institutions could derive from another of the principles of Kant's categorical imperative, that one must never use a person as a means rather than to be an end themselves. To highlight this, imagine a slave living on a plantation in the American South. Due to the plantation owner's assertion of the slave as property, he reduces the value of a slave to no more than a means to a large crop yield and ultimately financial gain, an act which places slavery clearly outside the scope of the categorical imperative. Challengers of my proposed system of voting ethics would say that suggesting voters should expressively vote to change the system, if they feel it is necessary, is to use those voters as a means to the end of good government rather than as the ends themselves. They would suggest that building a government which is representative and efficient on the backs of real people whose lives are negatively affected by a non-ideal candidate winning, is to use those people in a way that is inconsistent with Kant's vision.

However, this view misses the second half of Kant's view on the matter that says one may use people as a means to an end if they are also the end themselves. This applies to voting when one considers that yes, to build the foundations of the government some people might be made to deal with less than ideal conditions, but simultaneously a representative government is desired for the effect it will have on the people. So, while the citizens of a state are a means to an end, that end is to the benefit of all that state's citizens and therefore acceptable under Kant's categorical imperative.

Since we have seen that under Kant's conception of duty, voting expressively for the benefit of democracy can be considered a perfect duty, we might be able to convince the deontologist that it is the right course of action. In order to convince the utilitarian however we must return to the question of scope mentioned earlier.

Voters do not simply vote expressively for no discernible reason; instead they attempt to make their voice heard in a way that, ideally, will support positive and systemic change for the people of the state that the voting occurs in, and whether they outwardly express that idea or not is of no consequence. To that end, they believe that having as good of a political system as possible will ultimately benefit people from all areas of society, a sentiment that is shared by the very people who might oppose this position on utilitarian grounds. Both theories seek to provide the best possible world for their adherents despite reaching different conclusions about how that is best achieved.

While we have already looked at the problems with the utilitarian viewpoint, for many of its advocates, this involves doing whatever possible to maximize the wellbeing of those in the present. For the deontologist this involves fulfilling an obligation to help create a society where a government is fair and represents the will of the people accurately, something that will undoubtedly help a huge number of people via the ability of previously marginalized groups of people to make their voices heard in the political arena. When one considers the amount of people who might be helped by decades of political fairness and proper representation, it seems that voting for a third party not only makes sense from a duty-based point of view, but also a utilitarian one. If a large number of people are helped in the long run, surely a utilitarian would say that we ought to vote in the way that would help the greatest number of people, even if that

means that in the present some are worse off. This is essentially the philosophical equivalent of the old saying that “in order to make an omelet, you have to break a few eggs.”

This might not sit well with some utilitarians who would take umbrage with the idea that intangible potential benefits should be weighted the same as real, guaranteed benefits that will benefit people who are alive today. They would argue that it would take a number of elections for actual institutional change to take place and that in the process, many people would be harmed by politicians who were the worse candidate and who would not have been elected had voters chose the lesser of two evils instead of voting expressively. Continuing, they might go on to say that even if some benefit could be guaranteed, the lives of those effected could be so much worse that no amount of future prosperity could make up for.

The first of these points, that potential future benefits are not as valuable as tangible present ones, is the same argument that is made by those who oppose taking action to mitigate the effects of climate change. If we invest money to oppose climate change, they argue, all those in the fossil fuel industry will lose their jobs which will hurt our economy. Additionally, they would say, climate change might prove to not be real, in which case we have wasted our money. They are effectively suggesting that the long term potential benefits of preventing climate change (not living on a planet that is uninhabitable) is not worth the hardships that some will go through in the immediate future, an argument analogous to the one against expressive voting. With climate change, as with voting, people are blinded by the concept of “present bias,” a bias that has been widely studied and holds that people have trouble objectively deciding between future and present benefits. In both cases, the fears of a needless economic downturn or a bad president cause people to be unable to consider that the harms that would come about if action is not taken are worse than the drawbacks of taking those actions.

While the benefits are only potential, so too are the drawbacks. For example, while it is true that -- despite an overwhelming amount of evidence to the contrary -- man-made climate change may not be as serious as once thought, the economic downturn that some predict may also not be as serious as previously imagined. Similar to voting, while the potential benefits of having a more open and representative political system may not be as great as imagined here, the negatives of a non-ideal candidate may also be overstated. Additionally, who's to say that the "right" candidate may not be elected in spite of a large number of people voting for third parties? Both sides of the argument couch their opinions in hypotheticals, and it would be foolish of us to discount one side because their hypotheticals occur down the road rather than in the immediate future.

We now turn to the second utilitarian argument against expressive voting which says that it is possible for ills in the present to grossly outweigh any future benefits and we should avoid voting expressively because we would be condemning the citizens of a nation to a difficult life. However, this idea rests on the shaky premise that such a terrible politician could be elected in a modern democracy in the first place. Looking again to Wingo, who in his paper on leader-centrism discusses the idea that the fortunes of African nations are so largely tied up in the fortunes of their leader, we see his argument says that the reason for this is, in no small part, due to the fact that many of the political systems in which the leaders find their seat of power, are exceptionally weak.³² He makes the point that in more fleshed out and entrenched systems, such as the one in the USA, the odds that a single leader would have the ability to cause such rampant turmoil is much lower. Inherently, this makes sense; the 250 years of legal precedent and the US tripartite political structure provide protections from any one leader moving unilaterally in one

³² Wingo, Ajume. Under . "The Perils Of Leadercentrism in Africa"

direction or another. One needs only to look at the failed executive order from the current US president, banning immigrants from a number of primarily Muslim nations which was quickly shut down by the courts for its unconstitutionality, to see this in action. On the other hand, it is not hard to imagine that in a country with a despotic leader who came to power with military coup, it would not be so easy to hold the head of state accountable for their actions.

From this we can see how checks and balances in a country like the United States guards against a leader too powerful or too terrible from arising. No matter how intense the rhetoric of a supposed leader is, deeply entrenched political institutions such as the Constitution ensure that the rights of citizens are not infringed upon too seriously. Granted, this is not an absolute guarantee that no person could be elected in a well-established democracy who erodes rights or institutes a violent regime, rather having such a well-established democracy is one of the few real defenses we have against that happening. By voting expressively and helping to promote a robust and representative democracy, voters are helping to preemptively defend against a politician like the hypothetical one described above. It is true that this may lead to less than ideal candidates being elected; this is a case of losing a battle so that you may win the war.

It is for these reasons that I believe that expressive voting offers the best theory on how one should vote, and from that, when faced with a choice between “throwing ones vote away” voting for a third party and voting for the lesser of two evils in the form of voting for a major party candidate, the morally correct action is to vote for the third party. This is because of a duty we have to support our democratic institutions as well as the fact that voting for a third party will ultimately have better consequences for the greatest number of people, despite that these consequences are for a time predicted rather than guaranteed.

CONCLUSION

Voting is a complex issue that, despite an individual vote not counting for much, has immense consequences that can ripple through the fabric of society. Because of this, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is that we vote in ways according to our moral values. This paper has sought to explore the issue of how to vote morally by looking at two normative ethical theories that provide different answers to the question of whether or not it is acceptable to vote for a third party and effectively “waste” ones vote in a first-past-the-post electoral system.

On one hand, is the utilitarian argument that suggests that by voting for a third party we are opening the door for a less than ideal candidate to be elected. This in turn, leads to well-being not being maximized for the sake of a voter wanting to express their opinions. For a utilitarian this is an unacceptable consequence that precludes people from voting for third parties.

In contrast to this view is one of expressive voting that is based on our duty to democracy. This view holds that by supporting a third party candidate, a voter is helping to legitimize the democratic system that they are operating within. By voting expressively, they are lending credence to the idea that the government is responsive to the will of the people, which in turn helps support the governmental structures that rule our everyday lives. It is this view that I ultimately find most compelling.

This is in no way the end of the conversation when it comes to the ethics of voting. Whether it is centered around how to prioritize issues when selecting candidates or whether there should be some form of a test to ensure voters are informed, the questions surrounding voting abound and deserve answers of their own. Voting, and voting well, is one of our core civic

duties and the quest to discover what voting well looks like is one that should be taken seriously by all citizens, philosophers or otherwise.

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