

INTRODUCTION

Voting as an Ethical Issue

WHY VOTING MATTERS

WHEN WE VOTE, we can make government better or worse. In turn, our votes can make people's lives better or worse.

If we make bad choices at the polls, we get racist, sexist, and homophobic laws. Economic opportunities vanish or fail to materialize. We fight unjust and unnecessary wars. We spend trillions on ill-conceived stimulus plans and entitlement programs that do little to stimulate economies or alleviate poverty. We fail to spend money on programs that would work better. We get overregulation in some places, underregulation in others, and lots of regulation whose sole effect is to secure unfair economic advantages for special interests. We inflict and perpetuate injustice. We leave the poor behind. We wage drug wars that ghettoize inner cities. We throw too many people in jail. We base our immigration and trade policies on xenophobia and defunct economic theories.

Voting is morally significant. Voting changes the quality, scope, and kind of government. The way we vote can help or harm people. Electoral outcomes can be harmful or beneficial, just or unjust. They can exploit the minority for the benefit of the majority. They can do widespread harm with little benefit for anyone. So, in this book, I argue that we have moral obligations concerning how we should vote. Not just any vote is morally acceptable.

This is a book on voting ethics. In particular, it concerns the ethics of voting in political contexts. (It is not about voting for MLB All-Stars or American Idol contestants.) The purpose of this book is to determine whether a citizen should vote at all and how she should vote if she chooses to do so. The field of voting ethics asks questions such as: Should citizens choose to vote or abstain? If a person is indifferent to the outcome of an election, should she abstain? When citizens do vote, how should they vote? May voters use their religious beliefs in deciding how to vote? Must voters vote sincerely, for the candidate or position they believe best? What counts as voting for the best candidate? In particular, should voters vote solely for their own interest, or should they vote for the common good, whatever that is? Is it ever acceptable to buy, sell, or trade votes?

There are related topics from the standpoint of political philosophy, such as: What should the government do about promoting participation? Which people should have the right to vote? How should elections be structured, and how often should they be held? Should the government attempt to educate voters, and if so, how? May governments compel citizens to vote? Should ballots be secret or public? These are worthy questions, but I am not concerned with them here. This book is about the obligations of citizens, not of governments. To determine what governments should do about voting would require another book's worth of work.

WHAT VOTING IS NOT

From a moral point of view, voting is not like ordering food off of a menu. When you order salad at a restaurant, you alone bear the consequences of your decision. No one else gets stuck with a salad. If you make a bad choice, at least you are hurting only yourself. For the most part, you internalize all of the costs and benefits of your decision.

Voting is not like that. If anything, when we vote, we are imposing one meal on everybody.¹ If you were appointed the Dinner Czar—who must decide what everyone will have for dinner each night—your decisions would be of obvious moral consequence. As Dinner Czar, you would externalize most of the costs and benefits of your decisions. It would be a big responsibility. You better not force diabetics to eat too much sugar, make vegans eat meat, or make Muslims eat pork. Or, if you did do these things, you better have good reasons.

Now, in voting, nobody chooses by herself. Each vote counts, but it does not count much. We decide electoral outcomes together. How *we* vote has consequences; how *you* vote does not. However, there are moral principles governing how people ought to behave when participating in collective activities. Even though individual votes almost never have a significant impact on election results in any large-scale election, I argue that this does not let individuals off the hook. Individual voters have moral obligations concerning how they vote.

Obviously, the good and bad that governments do are not entirely attributable to how we vote. Our voting behavior is just one of many factors affecting political outcomes. Despite steadfast and sure democratic oversight, a bad policy might be implemented out of bureaucratic caprice or a politician's corruption. For my purposes, what matters is that votes, on the whole, do make a difference. Political parties have policy bents—dispositions to implement certain kinds of policies rather than others. When voters vote for members of a party with a particular policy bent,

this greatly increases the probability that those kinds of policies will be implemented.²

Other factors besides voting also determine policy outcomes. This means that we cannot solve all political problems just by getting voters to vote better. That said, better voting would tend to lead to better government.

AGAINST THE COMMONSENSE VIEW

Voting is the principal way that citizens influence the quality of government. No activity is more emblematic of democracy. Some call voting a civic sacrament. Many people approach democracy, and voting especially, with a quasi-religious reverence.³

This means that people tend to have firm opinions about when and how people should vote. They tend to think the answers to the questions of voting ethics are obvious. They treat their views on voting as sacred doctrine. They dislike having their views challenged.

There is a widely held, commonsense view on the ethics of voting. Non-philosophers tend to subscribe to what I call the folk theory of voting ethics.

The Folk Theory of Voting Ethics:

1. Each citizen has a civic duty to vote. In extenuating circumstances, one can be excused from voting, but otherwise, one should vote.⁴
2. While it is true that there can be better or worse candidates, in general any good faith vote is morally acceptable. At the very least, it is better to vote than to abstain.
3. It is inherently wrong to buy or sell one's vote.

Of course, this so-called commonsense view is not common to everyone. People disagree. Still, the typical American endorses the folk theory.

Many people endorse the folk theory, but they do so for different reasons. For some people, points 1–3 express what they take to be close-to-fundamental moral principles. For others, they are all-things-considered conclusions, perhaps dependent on certain empirical considerations. For instance, some people endorse the first point because they think political participation is right in itself. Others think we should vote because individual votes make a big difference.

Many philosophers and political theorists endorse some version of the folk theory. Many do not.⁵ Some philosophers who reject the folk theory believe we have no duties whatsoever regarding voting. They think we

have no duty to vote, but if we do vote, we may vote however we please. Other philosophers believe that we have a duty not merely to vote but to vote well.⁶ The philosophers who endorse this second position debate what it means to vote well, but they tend to think it involves more than good faith. They tend to think citizens should keep an eye out for the public interest, should listen to and debate one another about what is best, and should vote on the basis of sound evidence.

In this book, I argue against the folk theory and also against these other popular philosophical positions. Instead, I argue for these claims:

1. Citizens typically have no duty to vote.⁷ However, if citizens do vote, they must vote well, on the basis of sound evidence for what is likely to promote the common good. They must make sure their reasons for voting as they do are morally and epistemically justified. In general, they must vote for the common good rather than for narrow self-interest. Citizens who lack the motive, knowledge, rationality, or ability to vote well should abstain from voting.

2. Vote buying, selling, and trading are morally permissible provided they do not violate the duties described in point 1. When vote buying, selling, and trading are wrong, what makes them wrong is that they lead to violations of the duties described in point 1. So long as these duties are not violated, vote buying, selling, and trading are not wrong.

On my view, citizens generally have no standing obligation to vote. They can abstain if they prefer. However, they do have strict duties regarding voting: they must vote well or must abstain. Voting well tends to be difficult, but discharging one's duties regarding voting is easy, because one may abstain instead.⁸

I am not arguing that voters should vote for whatever they *believe* promotes the common good. Instead, I am arguing that voters ought to vote for what they *justifiedly* believe promotes the common good. So, on my view, if a voter votes for some candidate whom she believes will promote the common good, but this voter lacks good grounds for her beliefs, then the voter has acted wrongly. She might have good intentions, but she has acted wrongly nonetheless. Consider, in parallel, a parent who feeds her child potassium cyanide because she believes it will cure the common cold, despite the overwhelming evidence that cyanide is poison. The parent has good intentions and believes herself to be promoting the child's interests. But she is not justified in this belief and does something wrong.

My position on voting ethics has counterintuitive implications. Some citizens cannot be bothered to vote. They would rather sit home and play video games. On my view, there is nothing morally wrong about abstaining for such frivolous reasons. (Whether this shows bad character is a more complicated issue.)

On the other hand, many politically active citizens—writers, activists, community organizers, pundits, celebrities, and the like—try to make the world better and vote with the best of intentions. They vote for what they believe will promote the common good. However, despite their best intentions, on my view, many of them are blameworthy for voting. Although they are politically engaged, they are nonetheless often ignorant of or misinformed about the relevant facts or, worse, are simply irrational. Though they intend to promote the common good, they all too often lack sufficient evidence to justify the policies they advocate. When they do vote, I argue, they *pollute* democracy with their votes and make it more likely that we will have to suffer from bad governance.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE VERSUS THE RIGHTNESS OF VOTING

These claims make some people furious. Partly, this is because many people are deeply irrational and emotionally invested in their political ideologies.⁹ Partly, it is because people make the same basic philosophical mistake. People tend to confuse two distinct issues:

- A. The right to vote
- B. The rightness of voting

I argue that some citizens should *not* vote. This does not imply that they should not *have the right* to vote. Claiming that you have a right to do something but should not do it is perfectly consistent. The right to vote and the rightness of voting are different things. I do not argue that we should disenfranchise anyone. Though I think many voters are wrong to vote, I will not argue that anyone should prevent them from voting.

People often assume that if it is morally wrong to do X, then it is morally permissible to stop people from doing X. Consider the following argument for disenfranchising bad voters:

1. It is wrong for people to vote when they are ignorant or irrational about politics.
2. If it is wrong for people to do X, then they ought to be prohibited, by law, from doing X.
3. Therefore, people who are ignorant and irrational about politics should be disenfranchised.

This argument fails because premise 2 is false. Sometimes it is wrong for you to do something, but the law and other people should allow you to do it. Sometimes it is within your rights to do something morally wrong.

In general, if you have the right to do something, this does not presuppose that it is morally right for you to do it.¹⁰ Rights are not about what

is morally permissible for the rights holder to do. Instead, they are more about what is morally permissible for other people to do to the rights holder.¹¹ If a citizen has a right to vote, this means at minimum that she ought to be permitted to vote—no one should stop her or deprive her of the vote—and that her vote must be counted. This does not say anything about whether her choice to vote was good or bad, praiseworthy or blameworthy.

Consider an analogy to the right of free speech. The right to free speech means, at the very least, that people should not be interfered with or punished for saying and writing certain things.¹² This does not mean that saying anything one likes is morally right. Neo-Nazi rocker Michael Regener has the right to write music spreading the hatred of Jews. It is perverse and unjust of Germany to imprison him for doing so, but it was also wrong for Regener to write those songs. I have the political right of free association to participate in neo-Nazi rallies. A society that prevented me from participating would be to that extent unjust. Still, my participating would be wrong, even though it is within my rights.

So, when I say that individuals sometimes have a duty to abstain from voting, I am not saying that they thereby lack the right to vote. If someone is going to vote wrongly, it does not automatically follow that she should be disenfranchised.

IN PRAISE OF EQUAL VOTING RIGHTS

Having the right to vote is important, even if it is not always important to exercise that right. It makes sense that people would fight for such a right.

Joel Feinberg writes that rights are a kind of moral furniture.¹³ They allow you to stand up and look others in the eyes as equals. To have rights is to have a kind of dignity. According to his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” this lack of dignity is what Martin Luther King finds most appalling. People such as King or Alice Paul worked to improve the material welfare and opportunities available for blacks and women, respectively. But they also wanted respect and public acknowledgment of their equal status. We have made significant moral progress since King’s time, even if there is plenty more work to be done. We could not have made this progress without protecting women’s and blacks’ right to vote.

Despite this, I do not regard it as self-evident that we have a natural right to political equality, nor do I hold that the symbolic value of equal voting rights is sufficient to justify them. Political equality has to be justified against inequality, and part of what justifies political equality is

how well it promotes the common good as compared to other kinds of arrangements.¹⁴

I do not want to overstate the value of the right to vote, either. If the rest of you voted to disenfranchise me, and only me, that would certainly send me a message. On the other hand, suppose I, and only I, had a choice between having the right to vote and having \$50,000. In this case, I would find it hard to choose the right to vote, and it is not because I am particularly materialistic. It is one thing to have a right denied to you or taken away. It is another to relinquish it voluntarily. Different rights have different value to different people. Because I write and philosophize for a living, the right to free speech probably means more to me than it means to the average businessman, who probably cares more about economic rights. A politically active citizen would care more about the right to vote than I do.

This book articulates standards of good voting. Many people violate these standards. If there are moral standards, should we not enforce them? If bad voting can be harmful, should we not stop it? Why not have a poll exam—a test of competence that determines whether a citizen may vote? Or why not give extra votes to educated people, as Britain did until 1949? In later chapters, I respond partly to these points. However, answering these questions goes largely beyond the scope of this book. I am concerned with how people ought to vote, not with what governments ought to do about voting.¹⁵

Some readers will view this book as an upper-middle class, Ivy League expression of disdain for the poor and uneducated. On the contrary, I hope readers recognize (especially in chapter 2) that this book presents an unusually egalitarian and populist conception of civic responsibility. Also, others will be tempted to read this book as a defense of technocracy—of creating powerful bureaucracies staffed by experts (such as the Federal Reserve) that lack voter oversight. Currently all major democracies are to some extent technocratic. Whether this is good or bad deserves study, but this book does not study that question and should not be interpreted as offering an answer.

HOORAY, DEMOCRACY

I support democracy. I am not antidemocratic. Some political theorists have more enthusiasm for democracy than I do and will thus regard me as antidemocratic. That is a mistake. I am a fan of democracy, if not its biggest fan.

I take a certain view of the value of institutions.¹⁶ On my view, political institutions are like hammers. We judge them in the first instance by how

functional they are, by how well they help us lead our lives together in peace and prosperity. Institutions are not, for the most part, like people—valuable as ends in themselves. Nor are they like paintings, to be judged on their beauty, by who made them, or what they symbolize. Institutions that hinder our ability to live well, regardless of what they symbolize or the good intentions of their creators, give us little reason to support them.¹⁷

At base, democracy is just a decision-making method.¹⁸ In politics, democracy is a method for deciding when and how to coerce people into doing things they do not wish to do. Political democracy is a method for deciding (directly or indirectly) when, how, and in what ways a government will threaten people with violence. The symbol of democracy is not just the ballot—it is the ballot connected to a gun.

Democracy is good because liberal, constitutional democratic governments perform well compared to the feasible alternatives. People living under liberal, constitutional democratic governments tend to have higher standards of living, greater educational levels, longer life expectancy, higher exposure and access to culture and diversity, greater reported happiness and life satisfaction, more freedom of all kinds, and more wealth than people living under alternative regimes. From a humanitarian point of view, liberal constitutional democracy is a clear winner, at least compared to the alternatives we have tried.

That said, we should avoid democratic fetishism. Some political theorists love democracy so much that they wish to see it pervade nearly every aspect of life. They advocate democracy as a way of living. They want democratic neighborhood associations with weekly meetings, democracy in the workplace, democracy on TV. They want political deliberation everywhere. They see all of this as a way of giving people more control over their lives and of making them freer.

Democracy could be a way of giving people control and making them freer, if only human beings were not the way they are. Actual human beings are wired not to seek truth and justice but to seek consensus. They are shackled by social pressure. They are overly deferential to authority. They cower before uniform opinion. They are swayed not so much by reason but by a desire to belong, by emotional appeal, and by sex appeal. We evolved as social primates who depended on tight in-group cooperative behavior. Unfortunately, this leaves us with a deep bent toward tribalism and conformity. Too much and too frequent democracy threatens to rob us of our autonomy.¹⁹

For some people, heavy political participation is necessary for them to lead what they consider a full life. For many others, active political participation would inhibit them from leading the kind of lives they want to lead. The first kind of person is not inherently more noble or sophisticated than the second.

Some people in the first camp will see this book as antidemocratic. Perhaps they are too democratic. Democracy is not a way of life, at least, not for all of us. Democracy is a method for selecting leaders and policies. Its point is to help us lead our lives, not to be our lives. Government should set the stage, not be the play.

HOW GOOD ARE REAL VOTERS?

My goal is to outline a theory of voting ethics. That is, I want to describe how voters should vote, if they should vote at all. This is a normative, philosophical question. There is a related descriptive, social-scientific question: how do voters behave? Combining the answers to these two questions would allow us to answer a third question: do voters behave well?

To assess actual voters, you need to combine a normative theory of how voters should behave with a descriptive theory of how they in fact behave. That is, you need both A and B to get C:

- A. *Normative Theory*: Voters ought to do X.
- B. *Empirical Account*: Voters in fact do Y.
- C. *Evaluation of Actual Voters*: Voters behave well/badly.

My main goal in this book is to provide A, a normative theory of how voters ought to behave. However, in chapter 7, I discuss B, social-scientific evidence describing how voters in fact behave. In light of this, I conclude C, that many voters in fact behave badly and that many nonvoters would behave badly were they to vote. Yet, if I am wrong in thinking voters often behave wrongly, it might not be because my normative standards (A) are wrong but because my empirical views (B) of how voters behave are wrong.

Not all voters are equal. They have equal voting power, but their contributions are not of equal quality. Some people tend to make government better; some tend to make it worse.

Some voters are well informed about what candidates are likely to do. They know what policies candidates endorse and whether the candidates are sincere. They know the track records and general trends of different political parties. Other voters are ignorant of such things. Others are misinformed rather than ignorant. So one way voters vary is in *knowledge*. Voters are on a continuum between extraordinarily well informed and completely ignorant, and on a continuum between well informed and misinformed.

Some voters form their policy preferences by studying social-scientific evidence—from economics, sociology, and history—about how institutions

and policies work. They are self-critical and use reliable methods of reasoning in forming their policy preferences. They actively engage contrary points of view and work hard to overcome their own biases. Other citizens form policy preferences on the basis of what they find emotionally appealing. They believe various economic or sociological theories (about how economies, governments, institutions, and the like function) because they find these theories comforting or flattering to their ideologies, not because the evidence supports those theories. They ignore and evade evidence, demonize the other side, and form their preferences through unreliable processes. They are unjustified in their beliefs. Their policy preferences reflect biases and nonrational or irrational bents. So another way voters vary is in their degree of *rationality*. Some voters are scrupulously rational, while others are irrational. Some have patently stupid beliefs. For instance, a 2009 poll of likely voters in New Jersey showed that 8 percent of them (including 5 percent of Democrats and 14 percent of Republicans) believe that Barack Obama is the anti-Christ, while 19 percent of them (including 40 percent of self-identified left-liberals) believe George W. Bush had knowledge of the 9/11 attacks before 9/11.²⁰

Some voters vote on the basis of sound moral values. They pursue ends that are worth pursuing, and which they know are worth pursuing. Others vote for morally despicable reasons. Consider, for example, that many voters in the 2008 U.S. presidential election rejected Obama on grounds that he is “a black Muslim terrorist-sympathizer.” These voters were not merely misinformed and irrational—they were bigots. So another way voters vary is in their moral attitudes.

One potential problem with campaigns to increase voter participation is that they might lower the average level of voter quality. Of course, in most cases, voting does not translate directly into a set of policies. During their campaigns, politicians promise to enact certain policies, but they rarely enact all of these policies. Still, our best available social-scientific research shows that politicians generally attempt to give people what they ask for.²¹ Increased political participation could mean that most voters start asking for foolish, ineffective, or immoral policies. It could mean that we are stuck with lower-quality governance than we otherwise would have. Having elections decided by irrational, stupid, immoral, or ignorant voters could mean that citizens have to live with racist and sexist laws, unnecessary wars, fewer and lower-quality opportunities, higher levels of crime and pollution, and lower levels of welfare.

Most activities—such as piloting aircraft, performing surgery, playing guitar, dancing, writing philosophy, nursing patients—require skill, training, and practice to do adequately. Some activities—such as being a professional physicist or athlete—require exceptional skill, such that most

people could not do them no matter how hard they tried. Others—such as being a truck driver—are within most people’s ability but still require training and expertise to do well. There is no obvious reason to think voting is an exception to these norms. It is easy to vote—just show up and check a few boxes—but it is not easy to vote *well*.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO BE INFORMED

There are different kinds of information needed to vote well. It is one thing to know which policies different politicians favor and are likely to promote. However, it is another matter to have the relevant social-scientific knowledge needed to evaluate these positions. The first kind of information is more easily acquired than the second.

To decide between two otherwise identical candidates, it is not enough to know that one favors free trade while the other favors protectionism. You would need to know the likely outcomes of such policies, for example, which policy package—free trade or protectionism—is more likely to promote well-being, prosperity, and other values.

Similarly, imagine you are choosing between two physicians who have proposed different treatments for your asthma. One physician wants to prescribe albuterol; the other, monoxidine. Knowing which medicine each favors does not give you enough information to decide between the physicians. You would need to know something about albuterol and monoxidine or to have some reliable way of checking the physicians’ credentials to determine which physician is more reliable. Otherwise, you are in no position to choose.

You are unlikely to encounter a physician who would prescribe monoxidine (a blood pressure medication) for asthma. Politicians, alas, are not consistently as good as medical doctors. They are far more likely to advocate bad or counterproductive policies. Even when they sincerely believe the policies they favor will deliver the promised results—and there is no doubt that they quite often are sincere—that does not mean that they are reliable or trustworthy. Politicians make mistakes and are frequently in the grip of false, long-refuted social-scientific theories.²² And checking their credentials is difficult.

EVERY VOTE COUNTS

In a well-functioning democracy, every vote counts. That is, every vote is counted and counted exactly once. That is not to say individual votes are important. They are not. Individual votes are of little instrumental value

in influencing electoral outcomes or the quality of government. In the next chapter, we look more closely at attempts to show otherwise. These attempts fail. Collectively, votes matter. Individually, they do not.

I am not going to argue that because your vote is insignificant, you should not vote. There are reasons to vote—and not to vote—even if individual votes do not matter much. Some economists (such as Mancur Olson) say it is irrational to vote. That is not my position.²³

Instead, I introduce this issue here for the purpose of explaining how it affects my argument. From my perspective, the insignificance of individual votes is neutral in how easy it makes it for me to argue in support of this book's conclusions. Because I want to argue citizens have no duty to vote, the insignificance of individual votes is, at first glance, helpful. Arguing that someone lacks a duty to perform an action is easier when the individual action does no significant good. On the other hand, because I argue that people sometimes have a duty to abstain, the insignificance of individual votes is a problem for me. Arguing that people should not vote badly is much harder when individual bad votes do no significant harm. If, contrary to fact, individual votes did make a big difference, it would become easier for me to argue that bad voters should abstain but harder to argue that knowledgeable citizens lack a duty to vote well.

JUSTICE AND THE COMMON GOOD

I argue that voters should vote for what they justifiedly believe to be in the common good. In a later chapter, I explain why voters should vote in a public-spirited way rather than for narrow self-interest. I also argue against skeptics who hold that we can make any sense of the notion of the common good.

That said, I am not planning to argue for a particular conception of the common good. The theory of voting ethics I give here is meant to be compatible with a wide variety of background theories of justice and of the common good. You can think of the term “the common good” as being a variable to be filled in by the correct political philosophy, whatever that is. Voters should justifiedly believe that they are voting for things that serve the common good, whatever that is. Their beliefs about what constitutes the common good must be justified as well.

Even if I do not take a stand on the common good, that does not make this book devoid of content. After all, I am going to argue for a number of controversial points, including:

1. Citizens have no civic or moral obligation to vote.
2. Citizens can pay their debts to society and exercise civic virtue without being involved in politics.

3. People who lack certain credentials (such as knowledge, rationality, and intellectual virtue) should abstain from voting.
4. Voters should not vote for narrow self-interest.
5. It can be permissible to buy and sell votes. It is not inherently wrong to do so.

Because this book is meant to present a theory of voting behavior that is neutral among different theories of the ends of government, for the most part I remain relatively neutral about what the common good is. I sometimes use examples of bad voting that rely on particular conceptions of the common good, but these are meant to be illustrations and should not be taken to be a definitive part of the theory presented here. For example, in the opening paragraphs I complained that bad voting could lead to homophobic laws. I happen to believe that homophobic laws, such as bans on same-sex marriage, are morally perverted and unjustifiable. I think defending this belief would be easy, though I do not defend it here. Still, it is not officially part of my theory of voting ethics. When I claim that voters should not vote for homophobic laws, this conclusion results from combining (A) my theory of voting ethics with (B) a theory of the common good and (C) a theory of moral epistemology (i.e., a theory of which moral attitudes can be justified). In this book, I am arguing for A, but not for B or C.

WHAT'S TO COME

In chapter 1, I examine whether we have a duty to vote. I show that most arguments for a duty to vote fail. However, I outline three arguments that seem more promising than the others. I take these to be the best arguments in favor of a duty to vote.

Still, in chapter 2, I explain why even these arguments fail. I do so by articulating a new theory of civic virtue and of paying debts to society. I show that citizens can exercise civic virtue and pay debts to society not only without voting but often without engaging in politics at all. So, by the end of chapter 2, I take it that I have established there is no duty to vote.

Chapters 3 through 5 concern how citizens ought to vote when they do vote. In chapter 3, I argue that citizens have to meet certain epistemic standards when they vote, or otherwise they ought to abstain. They must be epistemically justified in believing that the candidate or policy they support is likely to promote the common good, or otherwise they ought not vote at all. In chapter 4, I consider and rebut a variety of objections to this argument that hold that abstention involves a loss of autonomy for

the individual. I examine and respond to other worries about abstention. In chapter 5, I argue that citizens should vote in ways that promote the common good rather than in ways that promote their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

Chapter 6 investigates whether vote buying and selling are morally wrong. I argue that vote buying and selling are morally permissible provided that selling votes does not lead to violations of the duties I described in chapters 3 through 5. Vote buying and selling are not inherently wrong.

Finally, chapter 7 concludes by reviewing some relevant social-scientific literature that suggests that voters and citizens are often ignorant, irrational, and systematically in error in their political beliefs. If these findings are correct, this means that many voters violate the standards of rightful voting explained in chapters 3 through 5.