

**Learning to Check Yourself: Improving Civic Engagement Through Duties, Better Voting  
Practices, and Combatting Group Loyalty**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Learning to Check Yourself: Improving Civic Engagement Through Duties, Better Voting Practices, and Combatting Group Loyalty**

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This project examines civic engagement. It is divided into three chapters: apathy, voting, and group loyalties. I derive two duties, a duty to care and a duty to reason well, that serve as a framework for community engagement aimed at facilitating moral progress. In the second section the main topic is voting. I argue for strategies to vote well. The third section of this project then focuses on group loyalties. This project uses two duties to frame how to engage with others, proposes a better way to participate civically, and ways to avoid pitfalls associated with group membership.

Signature Page for Leadership Studies Honors Thesis

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Thesis presented

by

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by *Katherine Brumund* has been approved by her committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis requirement to earn honors in leadership studies.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Deliberate actions are a better way to achieve good consequences than non-deliberate ones in most circumstances. The abolitionist movement illustrates this point. Look at the life of Sojourner Truth, a famous abolitionist and women's rights advocate. She fought through deliberate action the systems that she knew were wrong and was successful. Truth was the first black woman to take a white man to court and gain a ruling in her favor. When she discovered that her son had been illegally sold to the south, she prosecuted the man responsible for the sale and won.<sup>1</sup> She knew that by taking deliberate steps to challenge the oppressive systems surrounding her, she could change people's minds toward change and moral progress. Truth devoted her life to touring around the country delivering speeches aimed at showing the humanity of those that were still enslaved. She used her rise to prominence to shed light on issues of human rights and to show people the fault in their ways.<sup>2</sup> Her deliberate actions brought about more progress more rapidly than had been possible if she and other abolitionists had done nothing. It is necessary to push people toward deliberate steps toward bettering their society because waiting for them to do it on their own may never result in anything.

The abolitionist movement shows the huge importance of deliberate action to reach good consequences to improve the lives of significant parts of the population, but what about the case where good consequences just happen on a small scale in our everyday lives? Think about getting on to a crowded subway. You are waiting on the platform with only one other person as your train arrives. The other person is an older woman who has some trouble standing for long periods of time, you can tell because she leans heavily on the cane that she carries with her.

<sup>1</sup> Biography.com Editors, "Sojourner Truth Biography," Biography.com, (January 10, 2020), <https://www.biography.com/activist/sojourner-truth>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

When the train arrives, there is one open seat that one of you can take for the ride and whomever gets on first is able to sit down. In the first scenario, you are reading a social media app on your phone which causes your reaction to the arriving train to be delayed. By not paying attention to when the doors on the subway car, you give the old lady enough time to get settled in the remaining seat while you stand and hold the upper bar for the ride. In the second scenario, you choose to allow the woman to go in front of you deliberately to get seated before the train starts moving again.

In both of these scenarios it was your waiting longer on the platform that allowed the elderly woman to get settled in the train first which was a good consequence because she cannot stand for long periods of time and there was only one empty chair in the subway car that pulled in front of you. The difference between the two scenarios is that you made a deliberate choice to wait and allow the older woman to have the extra time to sit down. In the first, your delay was due to a distraction on your phone, so you were not making a deliberate choice to allow her more time. Now, you are still responsible for allowing the woman to have the seat since there were no other people on the platform waiting for the train with you two. The difference is that if you were to claim this responsibility for this, you would feel better claiming responsibility in the second scenario than you would in the first. In the second scenario you feel better about your action and responsibility for the outcome because you made the conscious choice to help.

The life of Sojourner Truth demonstrates that deliberate action aimed at moral progress can have huge impacts on the quality of life for millions of people and that we should not wait to strive toward these good consequences. We are responsible for ensuring that we help this type of moral progress along. Everyday scenarios like the platform example indicate that deliberate action is better than non-deliberate action that leads to good outcomes because claiming

responsibility for something feels better when you meant to do it in the first place. In both examples I noted, deliberate action aimed at moral progress has better outcomes and carries less moral risk than failing to take action at all. With that underlying assumption, I started thinking about ways that I could integrate this into more aspects of everyday life. Thinking about a way to live that is more likely to result in good consequences on a larger scale with as little work or changes in everyday life as possible to make it more accessible was the beginning of this project. I wanted to think about what could help guide actions toward good consequences to improve the lives of others.

This project, then, is meant to encourage life changes that people can take to be more deliberative in facilitating moral progress. Moral progress is intrinsically good, and we should want to do things that are intrinsically good. If moral progress is intrinsically good then we should want to create a pathway toward more of it, and if that is the case then we will feel much more satisfied creating it through deliberate action. The intuition about deliberate action and moral progress is what guided the methodology of this work. I opted to take a pluralistic approach by appealing to intuitions and judgements that we have to certain scenarios and situations we encounter and build up from there. There are several reasons for choosing to conduct my project this way. Most importantly, moral theories can produce paradoxical results that can seem to lead to the wrong answer, which we know is the wrong answer because of our judgements about the scenario.<sup>3</sup> If our judgements are what inform our decision about moral theory, then judgements about a scenario are more reliable for determining what to do in the specific case than a more abstract theory. Additionally, it seems that judgements in this way are easier to justify than appeal to a moral theory.<sup>4</sup> Meaning that using intuitions or judgements that

<sup>3</sup> Michael Huemer, "Ethical Institutionalism," *Arguments for Liberty*, 263-264.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 263.

we have about the scenarios I will discuss is likely going to help my reader accept more of my argument if they share the same judgements.

What is a deliberative action or set of actions that we can do that are likely to result in moral progress on a large scale? Civic engagement. Civic engagement, such as voting, is the biggest way that the average citizen is able to tell their government what their expectations are for treatment of others. It is a type of dialogue, and through voting and other means of engagement people can demand a certain level of moral progress if done properly. In keeping with the idea that I wanted to find a way that allowed people to help facilitate moral progress in a way that did not cause people who are already generally good to alter their lives significantly. Moral progress is a burden, but I do not believe it should be one that is overwhelming. Therefore, civic engagement seemed to be the best place to start looking for ways to help facilitate moral progress as long as people are making deliberate choices toward a good outcome. Thus, this project is mainly a work on bettering how we engage civically.

To approach this, I began my project by looking at the general principles that would orient people toward making good deliberate choices. In my first chapter on apathy, I derive two duties: a duty to care and a duty to reason well. These are the two duties that we ought to fulfil in order to interact and engage with others. In my apathy chapter, I began with the assumption that past moral progress has helped us achieve the point in time and morality that we currently find. Since we enjoy the benefits of living out the work that has been done to achieve this progress, we ought to work to continue it. Failure to recognize this is apathy, and apathy is morally blameworthy because it causes us to neglect our duties to others. My argument is that we have a duty to care about the lives of others in a way that motivates us to want to help them be able to solve some of their problems. Caring about others is the first step in being willing to see the

areas of their lives that might be suffering from a hindrance in moral progress. There may be some area or obstacle that is preventing them from being on the same level as others, and we ought to care enough about others to want to find those and help them overcome it. From there, we then have a duty to reason well about how best to help others. It is important that in choosing to do something, we do it well so that we do not waste resources.

The second chapter of my project focuses on the biggest way that we can all be civically engaged. After developing principles about a duty to care and a duty to reason well, it is important to put them to good use. Voting is one of the easiest and most impactful ways that we can be a part of making large decisions that affect the entire country. In my voting chapter, I work through all of the problems with voting. Voting is usually done badly because voters are both irrational and incompetent when it comes to reasoning through the complex issues that are on the ballot. Instead of using this as a reason to not vote, I argue that this is a failure of a duty to reason well about the lives of others. We still ought to vote, but we ought to vote well. Voting well requires us to be able to reason through all of these issues at hand to make a choice that is going to be the best overall, for everyone. To do this, I advocate that voters turn to the advice of experts to understand the problems at hand and their potential solutions. From there, voters would be better equipped to vote well. I focus on voting well because voting is an aspect of our society that elects the people that are responsible for framing how we live out our daily lives, and because voting is not going to go away.

The main problem that can lead voters astray when making rational decisions about policy issues is their group loyalty. This is the topic of the last chapter in my project. Group loyalties impair our ability to reason well because they cause motivated cognition, which in turn makes it difficult to assess and vote well. In this chapter I focus on two group loyalties in



particular that I think most people encounter every election: partisanship and patriotism.

Partisanship influences how likely we are to hear the other side of the issue and form a well-rounded opinion. Instead we are inclined to dismiss someone who does not share our party affiliation as already wrong before even hearing what they have to say. Patriotism is in the same vein because patriotism causes people to think only in terms of their nation instead of looking at the collective. Each of these results in voters choosing suboptimal solutions and suboptimal results. Group loyalties are a result of our social identity, or the identity that we derive from our membership in different groups, which make them incredibly difficult to overcome when reasoning. This is the main reason that they are such an obstacle to voting because in order to vote better, voters need to be more rational about their choices.

Now, to summarize how these three parts all fit together. I begin my project by discussing general principles of morality and what we should be striving toward. Moral progress is at the center of this investigation, and I argue that if we do not work to continue moral progress, we are doing something morally blameworthy and ought to avoid it. This results in two duties that underlie how we should interact with one another in our communities: a duty to care and a duty to reason well. These two duties help us to be deliberate in our actions toward moral progress. Then I turn to look at an activity that the community does as a whole on a systematic basis. We all vote to make decisions about the trajectory of our communities and country at large. We need to use these duties as a framework for how we should be approaching our voting decisions and vote accordingly. Group loyalties fit into this picture because it is something that gets in the way of applying these duties to reasoning well because it is ingrained in our nature and our subconscious. Learning practical ways to make progress in combating all of these issues to conform as best we can to living in accordance with a duty to care and a duty to reason well is

the ultimate aim of this thesis. Finally, I will conclude this project with a discussion with suggestions for where research can continue on and where there are areas for other developments or improvements on my arguments.

# **APATHY**

## **Introduction**

There is a myriad of social problems that are affecting groups of people all over the world. I mean, turn on the news and you'll likely be met with images of tragedy from across the globe, with some positive stories sprinkled in between the hardships. They are everywhere. Social injustices or problems are persistent challenges that can damage a specific group, breed conflict between groups, or in some way create unjust obstacles for a certain population. Examples of social injustices are human rights violations, discrimination, or immigration restrictions. Social injustices such as violations of human rights create unjust obstacles through preventing access to human liberties and standards of life such as those laid out in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights that all countries sign and agree to enforce.<sup>5</sup> Failure to enforce human rights denies people the basic rights they should be guaranteed, which creates an unjust obstacle to living a free life. Discrimination causes unjust obstacles for people through the systematic disadvantages it creates within a state. By definition, discrimination is the unjust mistreatment of a specific group on the basis of some aspect of their identity.<sup>6</sup> Immigrants, like with discrimination, face several systematic disadvantages but also face violations of human rights. In other words, immigration restrictions and discrimination cause unjust obstacles and removal of access to basic liberties that should be protected human rights.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> (Accessed: 11/17/2019).

<sup>6</sup> American Psychological Association, "Discrimination: What it is and How to Cope," <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/discrimination> (Accessed: 11/17/2019).

<sup>7</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, "Human Rights and Immigration," <https://www.aclu.org/issues/human-rights/human-rights-and-immigration> (Accessed: 11/17/2019).

There are a host of other social problems that could be mentioned here, but the main criteria of social problems is the impact they have on the targeted groups. These are problems of a large caliber that have serious consequences for vulnerable populations if they continue to persist. When thinking about, responding to, and engaging with these social problems, my biggest worry is that people simply do not care enough about the big problems of today, and if they do care, they tend to fall short when it comes to engaging with them. How are we going to work to solve these problems if we do not even know where to start in the first place?

Take my friend Butz for example. Butz is genuinely a nice guy, he will always be there when one of his friends needs support, and he tries his best to be what he considers a good person. At first glance, Butz is a good person, doing his best to live his life according to some set of values, but when we dig a little deeper, it is obvious that Butz is lacking in an important way. See, Butz thinks deliberating on social injustices is not worth his time. In his mind, he already knows how to be a good person, already knows that there are massive problems out in the world, and already knows that he is only one person who likely cannot make much of a difference on his own. He also is well aware that the world is incredibly complex and figuring out how to solve some of these large social injustices plaguing society nowadays will be nearly, if not completely, impossible. Butz argues that he does not know all of the information, nor does he care enough about the wide varieties of problems to drum up a desire to educate himself on them. He questions why should *he* care about ethics and societal problems when he can continue with his daily life unaffected otherwise?

I am sure that Butz is not the only person who thinks this way, in fact, I am fairly certain that there are many people who are led to the same conclusions that he has drawn. People like Butz are what I consider the apathetic person. Apathy, taken generally, is those who adopt a

“don't know, don't care” type of attitude toward these larger social problems. The apathetic person goes about her day by performing the tasks required of her. She is a decent employee, occasionally donates excess income to charity, and even makes sure to call her parents every once in a while, but she never concerns herself with the bigger problems at large because they seemingly do not affect her life. My main concerns are the repercussions of such an attitude. I will argue that the apathetic person is wrong, or morally blameworthy. The goal of this chapter is to establish a duty to care and a duty to reason well about social injustices because we fail to fulfil our moral obligations otherwise, take unacceptable moral risks, and are generally ineffective in moral progress. To accomplish this goal, I will systematically work through each of the premises in my argument that I believe leads us to a duty to care and a duty to reason well about social injustices. I will then consider objections to my claims and complete this chapter with the practical applications of my arguments.

Here is a brief summary of my argument:

1. Past moral progress has done work to achieve p
2. By taking advantage of or claiming the benefits of p, one actively benefits from past efforts to achieve p
3. Once we claim p, we are then active and willing beneficiaries
4. If someone actively benefits from past moral progress, then they incur an obligation to continue moral progress
5. It is morally risky and ineffective to not be aware of our obligations
6. It is morally blameworthy to not continue moral progress of which you have been a past beneficiary

7. It is morally blameworthy to not recognize moral risks and ineffectiveness that arises from an unawareness of obligations
8. Apathy is a failure to do/acknowledge 4&5
9. Apathy is morally blameworthy
10. We must have a duty to care and a duty to reason well to avoid the moral risks and harms associated with apathy.

### **Past Moral Progress**

I will start this section with a definition of moral progress. Moral progress, I take it, is intelligent activism that has been done to achieve the current status of the society in which we presently reside. Intelligent activism is the past series of actions that have used critical thinking skills to advance the rights and protections of liberties of others. It is not simply activism that has led to some good outcome, but the process behind activism that hedges bets toward a good outcome. Intelligent activism is a methodology of assessing situational climates, using resources effectively toward progress, and making precise steps toward a predetermined end goal. It must have a component of strategy involved in how the advancement of rights and protections of liberties was achieved. Intelligent activism is presumably good since it secures the expansion of rights for more and more groups of people. To put it another way, sometime in the past, someone else used intelligent activism to effectively and strategically convince others of a need for change that resulted in our present society that is better than before in some targeted way. We are free of feudal serfdom, slavery was abolished, and women and minorities have the right to not face discrimination in the workplace for example. These acts of intelligent activism have created the society that we live in and reap the benefits of whether we are aware of them or not. Most

importantly, without the work of intelligent activists we would not see the kind of progress that we see today. For the remainder of this paper, I use intelligent activism to mean the above.

The intrinsic value of intelligent activism is the deliberate nature of it. It is the deliberate use of critical thinking and logical reasoning skills to achieve some better end. Using intelligent activism to make decisions is valuable because it forces us to make decisions in a more well thought out way. Being more deliberate and more thoughtful of the types of decisions that we are making and the ends that we are working to achieve is good of how it makes us evaluate the trajectory that we are pursuing. Intelligent activism does not allow us to wait for good things to happen by accident. Instead, it forces us to take control to steer toward better in a structured way. It is better to pursue good things on purpose because it leads to better than accidental good outcomes.

Here my guiding assumption is that rational thought, not necessarily strict intelligence, applied to social injustices is only good. There are several cases where rational thought has successfully led to more benefits and protections for people with limited change to their daily lives. One example of this is organ donation registrations. Many countries in the European Union, such as France and Sweden, have “presumed consent” when it comes to whether or not someone is to be an organ donor, meaning that citizens must opt out of being a donor instead of opting in.<sup>8</sup> What is surprising about this case is that the percentage of organ donors in countries with the opt out policy actually have organ donor rates that are highly similar to the actual rate of people who respond to surveys that they believe in organ donation than those countries who have an opt out policy. Conversely, whereas countries with an opt out policy are close to the actual rate of people who say that they would be donors, countries such as the United States who have

<sup>8</sup> Kieth Stanovich “The Social Benefits of Increasing Human Rationality- and Meliorating Irrationality,” in *What Intelligence Tests Miss*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)

opt in policies are seeing thousands of people die each year while waiting for an organ, even though there are likely thousands of people who would agree to be donors but are not.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly enough, these two types of policies do not see a significant difference in overall willingness to donate an organ, so it must be the type of policy that makes the difference.

This is an example where rational thought can be applied to large social problems, namely the lack of organs available for donation, in a way that facilitates a better outcome. It makes more logical sense to have a presumed consent policy when polls have shown overwhelming acceptance for a phenomenon because it removes a barrier of entry.<sup>10</sup> It is easier for people to participate in certain programs that they likely will already want to participate in when they are automatically enrolled. Here, thinking rationally did not take any more intelligence than normal, rather it required someone to use critical thinking to find a way to overcome obstacles that were causing the problem.

Furthermore, those who feel strongly about what happens to their organs after their death will be more likely to search out and utilize the opt out option of an opt in system.<sup>11</sup> Again, the use of critical thinking led to this solution to the organ availability problem. Statistically, it is common to find that those who feel strongly about something will self select to either be a part of the project or will go out of their way to opt out. It is why we are aware of self selection bias. Therefore, it is likely that those who feel strongly about not allowing their organs to be donated after their death will find and use the opt out function. This slight change in protocol was able to save thousands of lives, not by implementing a wildly new system or through a revolutionary scientific breakthrough, but because of rational thought applied to an issue.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid



The intelligent activism for opt-out policies is understood through focusing on how we frame organ donation. Studies have shown that changing the presentation of organ donation as an opt in policy, which makes donation seem supererogatory, to an opt out policy, which makes donation appear more standard, encourages more people to donate their organs as their perspective on organ donation is shifted.<sup>12</sup> So, if opt out policies were to spread to the United States, framing organ donation as an action that is normal rather than heroic, would cause more people to likely be more willing to donate their organs, and then the United States can begin to see the same benefits as other opt out countries. The researchers from the study mentioned above are advocating for this shift of language as a mechanism for solving the problem of organ donation as it has worked in other places. This example illustrates how the intelligent activism used by leaders to better the lives of others under their leadership. Intelligent activism becomes increasingly important as leaders gain more and more influence over their followers' lives.

So far, rational thinking seems to result in a better outcome if we anticipate the ways that the populace will fall short and build in ways to prevent their downfall into society, but can this same type of reasoning be said of other social injustices? To answer this question, I will apply these concepts to the cases of civil rights and women's suffrage. If I am successful in showing how applying critical thinking and intelligent activism is what led to the outcomes of these movements, and that these movements had beneficial results, then my argument that past moral progress has led us to this point in time in our society is successful.

The American Civil Rights movement in the middle part of the twentieth century was a fight to get equal rights for everyone in the United States under the law. Intelligent activism initiated by leaders of the Civil Rights movement played a major role in eventually changing the

<sup>12</sup> Shai Davidai, Thomas Gilovich, and Lee D. Ross, "The meaning of default options for potential organ donors," in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 109, no. 38 (2012), 15201.

minds of the nation. Specifically, the use of nonviolence to illustrate the violence that was the major undertone of many of the segregation laws forced white people to come to the conclusion that their old ways of life were wrong. When minority groups use nonviolence, they force the opposing side to either continue their violence against unarmed and nonthreatening people, or to reconsider their actions to better conform to the concepts of “fair play” in engagement.<sup>13</sup> It asks how the oppressor can continue to be violent against people who have done nothing to provoke the violence, which in turn causes bystanders and onlookers to rethink their support of the oppressing side. The use of nonviolence is a form of intelligent activism because it has a way of forcing oppressors to reevaluate their viewpoints when faced with the scenario in which the side they favor is using violence against one unthreatening group.

Furthermore, there were other, lesser known, leaders who were working to sway the top-most level of America, the president. One of these lesser known heroes of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States is Whitney Young Jr. Outside of his impressive track record in social work and community outreach, he was also credited as being the man “who helped bridge the gap between white political and business leaders and poor blacks and militants,” in strategic ways.<sup>14</sup> Young was also an advisor to two U.S. presidents, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson, on the issues surrounding racial problems and civil rights. His work with these two presidents is credited with making significant headway into gaining civil rights for minorities.<sup>15</sup> He employed necessary tactics to appeal to groups on either side of racial issues to help them reach a common solution. Young is an example of an individual activist that used intelligent

<sup>13</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, “Nonviolence in Ethnopolitics: Strategies for the Attainment of Group Rights and Autonomy,” (American Political Science Association, 2000), 158.

<sup>14</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Whitney M. Young, Jr.: American Civil Rights Activist,” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Whitney-M-Young-Jr>, (Accessed: 11/17/2019)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

activism because of his strategic moves toward civil rights and ability to persuade the appropriate parties of his cause.

Women's suffrage is similar to the arguments presented by the American Civil Rights movement. When women were fighting for their right to be considered equal under the law, they used critical thinking to most effectively convince the public of their position. This is why women's suffrage coincides with prohibition. It was not a mistake that at the same time the United States was concerned over the dangers of drinking, and what alcohol was doing to American families, that women also started to advocate harder for their right to vote. Conventional arguments prior to this stated that women simply did not need the right to vote because they were too "emotional" to handle the right to vote,<sup>16</sup> and because they would vote along the same lines as their husbands. Then, when a fear of alcohol and its repercussions began to concern the greater population, the argument that women needed the right to vote to protect themselves from their husbands that were spending their time drinking did not seem entirely implausible anymore.<sup>17</sup> The growing concern over the effects of alcohol gave the suffrage movement the momentum that it needed to project women's rights into the sphere of national concern. Suffragists used intelligent activism to seize the timing of the prohibition movement to accomplish their own agenda. People were already concerned about one issue; intelligent activism suggests that the solution be something that solves two problems at once.

The women that led the women's suffrage movement acted at a critical time in history, a moment when they knew that their situation would look the most sympathetic, and they acted. It takes a high level of critical thinking to understand the political climate of any established nation,

<sup>16</sup> L. Ames Brown, "Suffrage and Prohibition" in *The North American Review* (University of Northern Iowa, 1916), 94.

<sup>17</sup> Olivia B. Waxman, "The Surprisingly Complex Link Between Prohibition and Women's Rights," (*Times*, 2019), <https://time.com/5501680/prohibition-history-feminism-suffrage-metoo/>, (Accessed 11/17/19).

and then to further understand the potential ways that other issues might interact within it is an even larger exercise in logic. The ability to understand how several issues corresponded and to know how to get the correct voices on your side is incredibly well thought out, and resulted eventually in the passing of legislation, the nineteenth amendment in 1920, granting women the right to vote. Arguably, the right to vote expanded the rights of a select group of people, namely women, which has the potential to elevate their current situation. They were then able to begin to participate in the system that had been oppressing them for so long. This in turn led many more women to begin to participate in politics and begin to systematically attack and overturn sexist laws and precedents.

Now, in both of these cases it appears that the rights of both groups fighting against the status quo expanded, and for the eventual betterment of those groups. This in my view was moral progress since these were calculated moves toward a common end that promoted expansion of rights. The granting of further rights enabled these groups to begin to form a better society, it opened a path for them to fight directly against oppressive systems to begin the long journey toward justice. There is also a question of who the intelligent activist is. Leaders, because of their influence and power, have more of a burden and ability to contribute to moral progress. Normal people who are not in leadership positions are able to be intelligent activists in smaller ways that still move toward moral progress. Therefore, moral progress through intelligent activism and utilization of critical thinking has brought us to this point in society.

### **Obligation to Continue Moral Progress**

Now that we have established that intelligent activism that contributed to moral progress is what got us here today, we now must investigate how these past actions impact us. In this

section I will argue that because we benefit from past intelligent activism, we ought to work to continue this moral progress through continued intelligent activism. To do this, I will argue that we have an obligation to continue moral progress out of respect for past intelligent activists, and we also have this obligation out of avoidance of free riding.

The reason that I argue that actions aimed at moral progress are the best way to achieve it is because of the ability to claim deliberate action. Something that motivated this thesis was the idea that deliberate action that leads to good outcomes are much better than those that do not when we must claim responsibility. Deliberate actions that are aimed toward moral progress are better than those that are not because we cannot claim that we wanted to accomplish those ends. In that sense, it is impossible to actually work toward any good end if we are not being deliberate about it. Further, we are already intervening in the lives of others in what we allow the state to do, and moral progress, as I discussed above, is intertwined with what we allow the state to do. Therefore, since we already intervene in these areas of peoples' lives, we should do it in a way that is deliberately trying to make it better. We can do this through intelligent activism.

Another intuition that motivates this section is that someone benefiting from some past action, should then also contribute to moral progress. This thought initially struck me when reading about people who have experienced some form of good and then devoted a significant portion of their lives to helping others in some, sometimes unrelated, way. For example, Chen Si, a man who has spent every weekend for over a decade patrolling the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge for potential suicide attempts and coaxes them back over the railing to him. From the time that he started his volunteering he has been able to save over 321 lives and has begun working with local psychology students from surrounding universities to offer even more aid.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Tracy You, "Man Meet the man who dedicates his life to preventing suicides in China's most notorious jumping spot - and he has saved 321 people in 13 years," Daily Mail, (November 25, 2016),

In an interview Chen says that he devotes such a huge part of his life to saving others because when he was struggling to make a life for himself after leaving his village he was helped by a stranger to get on his feet. Now, he feels that he should pay the favor forward and work to save other people who are feeling like there is nowhere else to turn.<sup>19</sup> Chen acknowledges that he was helped by someone who did not owe him anything, and now feels that he should do the same now that he is in a position to do so.

It is the idea that we have benefitted from something in the past that was not owed to us, then we ought to do something else to continue the good deed forward. Chen's experience is not unique. There are dozens of other news stories of people that are doing similar work or other "pay it forward movements" that entire communities participate in to help others when they experience random kindness. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a huge emergence of these types of movements in small communities looking to support one another.<sup>20</sup> There is some intuition that tells us that when we have received some undeserved help or kindness, that we ought to continue it on. Intelligent activism should function in the same way because it is a way that we have achieved the rights that we have today that were previously thought to be undeserved. Women did not have the right to vote before the suffragette movement because it was thought that women did not need or deserve the right to vote. The thought was that women would vote the same way that their husbands would vote or that they could not understand politics. Now, we understand that these were deserved, just like in the other examples people deserve as much kindness as we can give them. If we have these inclinations about small acts,

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3968696/Meet-man-dedicating-life-preventing-suicides-China-s-notorious-jumping-spot-saved-321-people-13-years.html>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Corey Murray, "Many Join the Pay-it-Forward Movement," Hillsdale Daily News, (April 18, 2020), <https://www.hillsdale.net/news/20200418/many-join-pay-it-forward-movement>

then we should have the same reaction toward moral progress generally once we recognize that we have benefitted from something in the past that we cannot repay.

Intelligent activism essentially framed the way that society is today. We live in a society where there are protections for our rights and mechanisms for their enforcement. For example, returning to my friend Butz, if he is experiencing discrimination at work, he has the right to go to a Human Resources department and file a formal complaint that will likely be addressed (assuming that he works for a company that generally adheres to the laws that a country has in place). This shows two aspects about the effects of intelligent activism. The first is acknowledging that certain actions or mindsets that previously were tolerated in the past are no longer acceptable. It demonstrates the wrongs that intelligent activism worked to mediate were wrongs that people continue to think are wrong. The second aspect of the effects of intelligent activism and the rights that it brought is a claim to benefits. Through the exercise of these rights gained from intelligent activism, one is actively claiming its benefits. In short, there is an acknowledgement that the benefits from intelligent activism are deserved and must be granted. Further, through the ability to exercise or use the benefits that led us to this moment, we also become active participants in the field of moral progress.

Since we are all beneficiaries of some part of moral progress that intelligent activists created for us, we should work to further this progress out of respect for the work that they did for our betterment. We have an obligation to “return benefits to those who have benefitted us.”<sup>21</sup> This obligation derives from a duty to love others and to put their well-being above our own. It is necessary to return benefits so that we do not foster negative emotions that could accompany an unequal division of benefits between people.<sup>22</sup> In addition to returning benefits, we also have an

<sup>21</sup> Allen W. Wood, “Duties” in *Kantian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 176

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

obligation to “cultivate feelings of sympathy” that will allow us to better understand the plight of others.<sup>23</sup> It is not enough to simply be grateful for what past progress has given us, we should work to continue the same mission of progress so that their efforts and sacrifices do not go to waste, and we should strive to recognize where others may not be benefiting as much as we are and work to help them. If we stop striving for moral progress, then we will have shortchanged both ourselves and past intelligent activists. Respecting intelligent activism means that we must continue their missions of moral progress since we cannot directly return the benefit to them. Instead we should honor their work by continuing it to honor our obligations of returning the benefit and of cultivating sympathy.

Further, we ought to continue the work of past intelligent activists because most intelligent activism work is never completed. It takes enormous amounts of time and effort to see a shift in a society where people are willing to change or abandon their deeply held beliefs. In other words, we will likely always be able to find some way to honor the efforts of past activists through continuing some part of their initial mission. For example, Title VII and Title IX are both pieces of legislation that are products of intelligent activism that aimed at gaining rights for oppressed and underrepresented people. These pieces of legislation are not only for those that they directly benefit, but it is also helpful for the broader community. When people gain more rights and access to freedoms, they are more able to contribute to their communities and also advance moral progress to benefit others. The former prevents employment discrimination<sup>24</sup> and the latter prevents discrimination for admittance to educational institutions.<sup>25</sup> These two pieces also developed from further activism following women’s and civil rights movements. They show

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm>

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, “Title IX”, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix#Introduction>



how even though social progress attained these rights in theory, there is still so much work to be done before these rights will actually be realized.

Title VII has been amended to better cover rights against employment discrimination more than thirty years after the initial legislation went into effect.<sup>26</sup> Title IX has also seen several other supplemental documents added to further support the goals of the original legislation added as recently as the early 2000's.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the rights granted in the two original pieces of legislation needed further explanation through either amendments or supplemental documents means, in my opinion, that even though there are mechanisms in place that are supposed to guarantee rights, there is still work to be done to ensure that particular groups are actually receiving the treatment and rights to which they are entitled. Therefore, we should work to continue this progress so that we are not stopping with a half-solved problem that intelligent activists spent their lives fighting toward.

Now, I do not mean to argue here that the intelligent activism that arose from these advances in Title IX and Title VII were just activism that led to good outcomes. As I explained before, intelligent activism is procedural, it is a process of careful rational reflection and critical thinking that in turn leads to positive outcomes. The aspect of these two pieces of legislation, their amendments, and supplemental documents is the process itself. My argument is that these continued efforts toward the original goal of expanding rights for women, for example, shows the employment of careful reflection and critical thinking. This process is, in my view, a demonstration of further activism that is reflecting and finding gaps to fill in that past progress missed, and critically thinking of new ways to fill them through legislation or other mechanisms, to further secure these expanded rights. It is continuing the process of past intelligent activists.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964"

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, "Title IX"

I argue that we cannot stop once we reach a half-solution to social problems. If we are willing to stop at half-rights for targeted groups, then the goals of the initial intelligent activists have failed because they set out to secure full rights for them. This is not to say that steps toward solving a problem are not successes in themselves, but rather that partial solutions to problems are not full solutions. It is not enough to argue that some rights are better than no rights because we should still be working toward the realization of full rights or solutions. To put this another way, we cannot say that a slight improvement in social injustices means that we should stop trying to solve them. It would be disrespectful to both intelligent activists and the victims of social problems to argue that since there have been some advances, that we do not need to concern ourselves with moral progress.

To clarify, I argue that we have obligations to contribute to moral progress generally and not simply the ones from which we specifically have benefited because of how interwoven different areas of moral progress are with others. Past moral progress has led us to where we are today, and there are a ton of interconnected ways that one action of past moral progress has influenced another form of moral progress that has led us to this point. We should be helping continue all moral progress. In other words, I believe that the different moral progresses that have led us to where we are now are all so interwoven, it would be incredibly difficult to determine specifically which kind of moral progress benefitted us the most. We will likely know that some have helped us along more than others, but there are likely going to be other instances of moral progress that we could miss, and therefore leave out if we were only committed to helping moral progress from which we benefitted. Further, as I argued earlier, it would be disrespectful to past intelligent activists to not continue their goals toward moral progress, and

accidentally leaving one form of moral progress out in this way would be disrespecting their past efforts, which we should avoid.

Our duties to others depend on being oriented to their needs and to give them the respect that they deserve as human beings, and to give this respect we must “value others as end-setters”.<sup>28</sup> The value another person has as an end-setter means that we acknowledge their ability to have authority over their own reasoning ability, and we should afford them this authority over their own lives. This authority can also be considered a claim to something, and we have a duty out of respect for the person to respond to their claims.<sup>29</sup> We are beneficiaries of past moral progress and are in a position that can be oriented toward helping others achieve the same ends. It would be incredibly privileged to think that since we arbitrarily were included in the beneficiary group and not someone else, that we are not obligated to help them. It could just as easily have been us that was left disadvantaged instead.

The second reason that I believe we have an obligation to help advance moral progress is so that we avoid free riding on other efforts of intelligent activism. Intelligent activism is the application of critical thinking and logic to social problems. It is a way of addressing these issues in a strategic way that is the most likely to result in success. This is why I argued above that intelligent activism is the framework of our society, because most of the successful activism has used logic and critical thinking to assess, strategize, and execute successful movements.

Intelligent activism is a public good because it is nonexcludable and because it is beneficial to everyone who is able to use it, but when there is a public good there is also the problem of free riders. So, as the amount of intelligent activism increases, the more moral progress we will be able to achieve for society. This was the case in the past, which caused moral

<sup>28</sup> Brooks Brown, “The Case for Reading the News”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

progress that then led to more recognition and additional human rights, and this creates a cycle of moral progress. Everyone benefits from the addition of more human rights that improves their quality of life and access to mechanisms to enforcement. Free riders of intelligent activism are the people that take advantage of this moral progress, those who are active and willing beneficiaries, without also contributing to moral progress themselves. They are the ones who enjoy the benefits that others have provided.<sup>30</sup> Free riding also unfairly places the burden to provide a good on the others in the group. This unfair burden will cause two harms, firstly the agents that are contributing to moral progress will experience an undue burden and burnout, and secondly due to this burnout there will be less moral progress since there will be less people willing to contribute to a cause that has free riders.

The first problem of free riders is that they push those that are using these important critical thinking skills required by intelligent activism to push themselves to overcompensate. Overcompensating in any scenario to account for free riders will lead to burn out, but I argue that this is particularly the case when it comes to facilitating moral progress. The mental strength and discipline that having good morals generally takes is taxing on the average person. It is why there is an entire branch of philosophy concerned with determining what our moral requirements are despite this potential for burnout and discontent. Susan Wolf in her piece on “Moral Saints” argues that trying to devote our lives to a moral ideal will result ultimately in a denial of life’s other joys.<sup>31</sup> In the case of the free riding problem, if others recognize their duty to help facilitate moral progress, and the free rider, recognizing their benefits, fails to do their fair share of intelligent activism or critical thinking, then they are placing this incredibly arduous burden on others. This additional burden will cause others to deny themselves other joys in life, which leads

<sup>30</sup> Lloyd Cohen, “Holdouts and Free Riders,” *The Journal of Legal Studies* 20, no. 2 (1991), 362.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints,” *Journal of Philosophy*, (1982), 424

to a greater increase in their unhappiness. One could argue, then, that by free riding and placing undue burdens on others, a free rider is the cause of the discontent of others and the failure to encourage moral progress.

The second problem with free riders is that they will eventually cause so much burnout in agents acting in the interest of moral progress that they will stop fighting for moral progress. It is incredibly difficult to keep expending significant energy to provide a public good such as intelligent activism when others are also not reciprocating and contributing. This will disincentive people from encouraging moral progress. It is irrational to continue to provide a good that will not be reciprocated and that has such a high cost to an individual after an extended period of time. Once there is no incentive to work toward moral progress, it will harm the entire system of intelligent activism because there will be less people working for solutions to social problems. It will fail to respect the efforts from the past as I mentioned earlier, and it will fail to expand to encompass those left out of past progress. Additionally, if there is no incentive to contribute to moral progress, what is the incentive to maintain it?

In order to avoid these harms, the free rider should then be obligated to contribute to moral progress. Contributing to moral progress through intelligent means, by using critical thinking and logic, will avoid disrespecting the past efforts of activists that achieved the current state that we are privileged to live in presently and those who do not enjoy the same benefits that active beneficiaries enjoy, and it will avoid the problem of free riding that will cause harm to those that are working toward moral progress by placing an undue burden on them and causing their burnout. We have an obligation to prevent harm that we cause to others because it does not make sense to rely on a system that benefits you without contributing to it.

## Moral Risk

Obligations are accompanied by a moral risk for failure to comply with them. It is morally risky to fail to fulfil our obligations because the “mere risk of making a deep moral mistake rules out certain acts,” or behaviors.<sup>32</sup> To illustrate the relationship between moral risk and obligation, I will return to my friend Butz. Imagine now that Butz, after hearing my previous arguments, is now concerned about his obligations to moral progress. He has weighed all of the arguments that he has heard so far and has defeated all of them with logic or counter examples. Overall, it appears that he has done all of the mental work that should allow him to feel relatively confident about his conclusion that he does not have an obligation to encourage moral progress. Moral risk asks whether or not Butz should be confident in his conclusions given how harmful failing to advance moral progress can be for everyone. Say, for example, that Butz in his deliberation had to employ some fairly nuanced philosophical arguments to defeat earlier arguments about moral progress.<sup>33</sup> There is likely a chance of mistake in his deliberation. If Butz did make a mistake in his deliberation, then he would be wrong about not having an obligation to advance moral progress and would fail to fulfil his duties as such. Is that a risk that Butz should be willing to take?

Answering this question is contingent upon how Butz sees how change happens and whether he thinks that there are also risks of engaging in intelligent activism. However, we should assume in this scenario that moral progress can only result in benefits. If people were acting in a way that intervened in the lives of others without contemplation of the outcomes, they could cause more harm than good. They could be manipulating others for their own ends without

<sup>32</sup> D. Moller, “Abortion and Moral Risk” in *Cambridge Journals*, (Royal Institute of Philosophy: 2011), 425

<sup>33</sup> Ibid 426

treating others as their own end setters.<sup>34</sup> The aim at moral progress necessarily means that there is a benefit to be had because moral progress provides more rights and liberties to everyone, especially those that were lacking it in the first place. More access to rights is intrinsically good because it allows people to better function as end setters in their own right. So, striving toward moral progress means striving toward a benefit and we ought to keep striving toward more good than risk allowing bad to continue. We owe it to ourselves and others to want to make progress in making society better and allowing more people to be granted the same freedoms that we enjoy so that we treat them as end setters and rational beings worthy of such respect.

There are two ways of assessing this question. The first is that we should refrain from doing anything. The idea is that if we don't know then we should not act because we could accidentally cause more harm than our intended good.<sup>35</sup> Though I fail to see how this is different from the free rider case. If we continue to do nothing, then we are essentially allowing the harms that I discussed in the section above. By refraining from doing anything we allow others to do all of the work for us and we do not contribute at all. In fact, by doing nothing we run the risk of things getting worse and worse instead of better. Doing nothing causes whatever harms that are currently happening to keep happening. Intelligent activism hinges on assessing the situation before acting, and if we are intelligent activists then it does more harm to do nothing than to act in a way that deliberately moves toward what we see as moral progress through logical reasoning and critical thinking.

My answer to whether or not Butz should be willing to take such a risk is that he should not. Butz should not be willing to risk being wrong about his obligation and make things worse

<sup>34</sup> Marcia Baron "Manipulativeness," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 77, No. 2 (Nov., 2003), 50.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Guerrero, "Don't Know, Don't Kill: Moral Ignorance, Culpability, and Caution," *Philosophical Studies* 136, (2007).

instead of working to continue moral progress since it would be detrimental to others. It appears to me that since making arguments in moral philosophy leaves room for error no matter how solid the argument due to the nature of moral arguments themselves. There is debate on essentially every topic under the sun, and even if philosophers agree that something is wrong, they likely disagree as to why. This illustrates that the likelihood that a philosophical argument is correct, and that the moral risk involved with that assessment is going to be worthwhile, is presumably going to fail. So, if there is a strong likelihood that we could be wrong about what our obligations are for moral progress, it is likely better to err on the side of providing more benefits to others than to do nothing at all and risk harming them. This is because deliberate actions aimed toward intelligent progress can only yield benefits.

Another component of moral risk is ineffectiveness. If we are obligated to help moral progress, then we should do so through intelligent means. Intelligent activism is how we have seen moral progress in the past as I have argued previously, and intelligent activism is likely the means through which we will continue to foster moral progress. So, we must use critical thinking and logic to assess the social problems around us, and then determine what the best course of action will be to ameliorate these problems. This same line of argument is used to praise effective altruism. It is good to maximize the level of good that we can do in the world, and using effective measures are built into the exercise of intelligent activism.<sup>36</sup> It is not enough to do something to try to solve problems, but we should be solving problems in effective ways. The reason that I argue effectiveness in solving moral problems is critical when considering moral risk is that ineffectiveness is a waste. We want to ensure that we are doing the most with the limited resources that are available to us, and we want to see our efforts pay off or there will be

<sup>36</sup> Angela M. Eikenberry and Roseanne Marie Mirabella, "Extreme Philanthropy: Philanthrocapitalism, Effective Altruism, and the Discourse of Neoliberalism," *American Political Science Association* (2017), 44



less of an incentive to help moral progress. After all, the payoff for moving forward moral progress is likely worth a risk if it means allowing others the freedom to live out their lives with the respect and dignity that they are due.

When people attempt to facilitate moral progress by trying to fix problems through unintelligent means, such as being uninformed or misinformed for example, likely they likely will not bring about effective solutions to social problems. They will not have the tools necessary to fully grapple with the wide array of facets of these issues and will likely find ineffective solutions. Even if, through unintelligent means, the result is a reliable and effective means toward unintelligent means may occasionally move us closer to solutions and moral progress, but they are likely the result of a happy accident or chance. Effective activism, on the other hand, is usually accompanied by some metric of evaluation that will accurately evaluate and reflect the success of efforts.<sup>37</sup> So, the more reliable means to consistently making moral progress is through the use of intelligent activism. Although, it is important to note here that intelligent activists will be aware that there may be risks that are too great. So, while it is better to err on the side of contributing to moral progress, there could be a direct risk to harming others through one's actions that would require the intelligent activist to refrain. However, it is important to note that the risk that would outweigh working toward moral progress would have to outweigh the benefit that someone would gain from access to more freedoms and rights.

Further, when we are working toward a project, we want to make sure that our limited resources are actually making progress toward our end goal. If our resources are not working toward our end goal and we are never seeing any type of progress on our projects, then the endeavor will feel futile. We should therefore choose projects of moral progress that are closest

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 44.

to us and will work on issues that are most salient to our daily lives. This is likely where we can do the most good. There is a normative importance of the projects and issues that are closest to us and warrant our immediate attention due to their proximity and their relationship to us individually.<sup>38</sup> We must take care of the issues closest to us in an effective manner before we will have the capacity to tackle those further away.

The proximity of issues to handle first is important for two reasons, first it allows us in a country where a significant amount of moral progress has already been made, to keep practicing on the same projects that have already begun, and secondly it will allow us to bring more people under the umbrella of beneficiaries of past moral progress much easier. The practice is important when it comes to working toward moral progress because it will allow people to hone their critical thinking and logic skills to work toward being better intelligent activists, so that when intelligent activism becomes more difficult as we expand beyond our own communities and countries, we are better equipped to grapple with those new challenges. Also, when bringing more people into the realm of being a beneficiary of past moral progress, then they too will incur an obligation to continue this same moral progress, and there will then be more and more people working for moral progress. The more people that are striving for moral progress through intelligent means, the more progress we can make overall. In theory this would keep making the cycle of moral progress move faster and faster.

To summarize, it is morally risky to fail to meet an obligation to continue moral progress because of the potential harm it could cause to others, and it is ineffective to not fulfil these obligations through intelligent means. This is to say that as long as the risk of helping moral progress is not outweighed by the benefit of allowing someone to reach their full potential for an

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Buss, "Needs (Some Else's), Projects (My Own), and Reasons," *The Journal of Philosophy* 102, no. 8 (2006) 380-381

autonomous being. Ineffectiveness is morally risky because it would slow moral progress and then would keep more and more people suffering from social problems for longer periods of time. Overall, we should attempt to honor our obligations to moral progress to hedge our bets so that we are not contributing to the harm of others.

### **Moral Blameworthiness & Apathy**

I have established above that there are several ways that failing to help continue moral progress causes potential harm to others, and that it fails to respect the efforts of those intelligent activists that worked to accomplish the moral progress that beneficiaries enjoy. My argument up until this point has been two-fold, one about the harms that could be caused and the other about the respect that we owe to others. In this section I will argue that it is morally blameworthy to both fail to contribute to moral progress and honor those obligations we incur in virtue of being said beneficiary, and to not recognize the moral risks associated with ineffectiveness to fulfil and unawareness of our obligations. I will conclude this section by arguing that the person that fails in these ways is apathetic, and therefore the apathetic person is morally blameworthy.

It is morally blameworthy to be the cause of other's harm. The harms that I have demonstrated above that arise from free riding, a failure to respect other's past actions, and a failure to account for moral risks either through neglecting the potential for great harm, or for inadequate work toward moral progress, are best summarized in the context of a type of arrogance. Arrogance is characterized by "an unwillingness to grant others the space or consideration she demands to oneself."<sup>39</sup> This means that the arrogant person is not willing or simply does not think to allocate the same level of respect to others that they expect for

<sup>39</sup> Brooks Brown, "The Case for Reading the News"

themselves. Further, arrogance is necessarily an “interpersonal matter,”<sup>40</sup> rather than just based on the internal musings of an individual. Here, I do not mean to indicate the traditional character flaw of arrogance that we teach young children to stay away from, I mean an attitude that is focused primarily on the needs of the self in comparison to the needs of others. Arrogance, then, is a reflection of how someone sees themselves relative to others in a way that does not acknowledge the full dignity and respect of the person. The arrogant attitude can be applied to all three of the areas that I demonstrated harms to others.

Free riding as I discussed above is the refusal or failure to contribute to a public good, such as intelligent activism. Free riding is problematic because it places an undue burden on others to provide the public good, which, as I argued, can cause harm to others by causing burnout and a disincentive to provide moral progress. So, this would cause harm to both benefactors and beneficiaries of moral progress and make the entire thing worse off. The free rider sees the moral progress that others are working toward, and decides that while they are benefitting from it, they do not need to contribute to moral progress themselves. The free riding attitude is wrong because it appears as though it does not allocate the appropriate amount of respect to people that they deserve just by virtue of their being a human being.<sup>41</sup> Respecting another person is to respect their efforts and to not cause them additional harm. The arrogant person does not respect the value of others when they fail to minimize the harm that others experience through not contributing to continued moral progress. Essentially the free rider is arrogant because they believe that they are relieved of a duty to contribute since they are

<sup>40</sup> Valerie Tiberius and John D. Walker, “Arrogance,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35, no.4 (1998), 381

<sup>41</sup> Oliver Sensen, “Dignity and the Formula of Humanity” in *Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide*, ed. Jens Timmermann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 102.

benefitting without having to participate. The free rider is primarily concerned with the benefits afforded to themselves, and not concerned with the needs of others, which is arrogant.

Similarly, when one fails to recognize the efforts of others from the past that have resulted in moral progress through intelligent activism, they are failing to respect their past work. Someone else's projects are an inherent part of who they are,<sup>42</sup> and if we are the beneficiaries of this progress, then we should contribute to the continued efforts toward making progress in that field out of respect. As I discussed above, our duties to others requires that we respect them in a way that honors their projects because their projects are an important part of their personhood. Therefore, to respect intelligent activists of the past, we ought to respect their projects and contribute to them to fulfil our duties to others. Intelligent activists sacrificed their time and energy in order to make gains in moral progress. We must respect people due to their inner worth, or human dignity, and to allow someone else's sacrifices of which we are active beneficiaries, is disrespectful of their efforts. All of this is not to say that we ought to devote our entire lives to contributing to moral progress, but that we ought to devote some of our time to it. We can still have our own projects and commitments. We must find a balance between the sacrifices that we ought to make to contribute to moral progress and contributing to our own projects.

Thirdly, ineffectiveness can also be viewed as not caring enough about a problem to find a solution "the right way," and instead trying to cut corners or refuse to do the appropriate legwork to be appropriately informed to find an adequate solution for social problems. I argue that this too is an exercise of arrogance. Arrogance is interpersonal and a refusal to allocate the respect that one thinks is due to oneself, to others. Here I am assuming that most people, if their

<sup>42</sup> Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, 1992), 83-84

rights were violated, would object to the treatment. In other words, they would push back against that treatment and demand that others recognize their right, or at the very least be angry about how others were treating them. They would recognize that the treatment they were receiving was wrongful because it does not honor their rights allocated to people universally. When one works in an ineffective manner, they are essentially committed to the idea that the moral progress they are supposedly working toward can afford to wait, since ineffective solutions inevitably will prolong the amount of time before a real solution is reached. In other words, by allowing ourselves to be ineffective we are not only disrespecting ourselves by wasting our limited resources on projects that will not work, but also diminishing the importance of the social problems we are trying to ameliorate by accepting the prolonged timeline.

Now that I have established that these three harms can be roughly attributed to something along the lines of arrogance, or a lack of respect for others, I must now establish why that attitude is wrong. Arrogance is a vice because it fails to give proper respect to others, but there are more reasons that arrogance is problematic. Arrogance leads one to mistreat others since one does not recognize another's human value in themselves.<sup>43</sup> Inherent in this idea is the privileging of oneself over others and taking one's needs to be first in every scenario. This is also evidenced by the comparative aspect of arrogance, if the arrogant person is primarily concerned with the needs of themselves,<sup>44</sup> then they will likely not engage with the needs of others unless it has some benefit to themselves. Arrogance is focused on the individual and does not look outward to see where there may be room for improvement. We must give others their "turn" to have their needs take priority, and we should work to genuinely give them the attention and effort that they

<sup>43</sup> Brown, "The Case for Reading the News"

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

deserve.<sup>45</sup> If we fail to do this, then we are treating others arrogantly, and that is morally blameworthy. We will not be solving problems or respecting each other if we are arrogant.

Further, the worse things are, the more important it is for people to not be arrogant. The question when confronting arrogant attitudes is this: why should you benefit so much? The answer is that likely you should not, but you can work to make the benefit gap smaller to better justify the difference. The worse things are, the more morally risky it is to not want to close this gap because it could leave people behind in more terrible conditions. Arrogant people have an obligation to change their attitude to see others as connected to themselves and recognizing the human value in others is the only way to make their lives more justifiable and to move toward moral progress.

The apathetic person is one who lives in a society where they are privileged enough to have the ability to be arrogant. Apathy adopts an attitude of not caring about the needs of others and not being informed enough to know the details of large social problems. In short, the apathetic person does not have enough of a sense of caring about the plight of others that they are not face to face with every day to want to help. Apathy appears to be a case of a low level of arrogance, not an attitude of malintent but an attitude of not applying the same considerations of the self to others. Further, apathy is contagious. Studies have found that when an individual is placed with a control group with the instructions to demonstrate an unwillingness to be concerned about the needs of others, the test individual will exhibit the same responses.<sup>46</sup> So, when one is not motivated to care about social problems, they will also not be motivated to be an effective solution to the problem, and they will likely cause others to follow suit. This can exacerbate the problem of apathy and solving social problems. How can anyone intelligently

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Bibb Lanté and John Darley, "Bystander Apathy," *American Scientist* 57, no. 2 (1969), 252

work toward a solution to social problems without first caring about what is happening in the first place, especially when they are motivated to do the opposite through outside factors? They cannot. If the apathetic person, due to their apathy, cannot engage with others in this way then they are morally blameworthy. They fail to respect others and their needs and therefore cause harm.

### **Duty to Care & Duty to Reason Well**

In order to avoid the harms that I have discussed above and to avoid moral blameworthiness for our actions, we must avoid apathy. To avoid apathy, we must fulfil a duty to care and a duty to reason well. The goal of this section is to argue that satisfying these duties will allow us to avoid being apathetic and therefore escape moral blame for the harms discussed above. To do this, I will first explain what these two duties entail in more detail, then I will explain how fulfilling these duties avoids harm. From there I will then explain why a duty to care and a duty to reason well are the two duties that we ought to fulfil to avoid apathy.

The duty to care creates the motivation to be aware of social problems and to be prompted to action. It rests on the assumption that there is injustice in the world and that we should do something about it. The assumption that we should intervene to reduce the amount of injustice in the world is because we ought to care about the lives of others to the point that they are able to access their individual freedoms. A duty to care about social problems relates to the types of problems that cause unjustified restrictions on someone else, and that the person experiencing these problems could have been us if events had played out differently.

The two components, awareness and motivation to action, are crucial to avoiding treating people not as ends in themselves, but as something to gain from or to treat them as less than we



treat others. In Kantian ethics, our duties to others include a duty of love and a duty of respect. These duties, I argue, are encapsulated in a duty to care because a duty to care means looking for problems where others are not adequately being loved and respected. If we ought to love and respect people, when we discover that others are not, we should not want to just sit aside and do nothing. You cannot love and respect others if you tolerate the mistreatment of them. A duty to care aims to establish the conduct for treatment of others that will help us to treat them as people should be treated regardless of their stance in society, and it will help us to avoid falling into the attitudes that will likely result in causing harm.

For Kant, our two duties for how we are to treat others are composed of a duty that is more rigid and a duty that is more open. Our duty to respect others is more rigid, which means it contains more of the types of actions that we cannot do to others, such as arrogance. In other words, “respecting others requires us to moderate our own self-esteem to allow for proper recognition of the dignity of others.”<sup>47</sup> Proper recognition of the dignity of others, I argue, requires us to be aware of the types of situations that may be causing them harm in some way. The absolute minimum that this duty allows is that we at least acknowledge their struggles because sometimes a simple acknowledgement of other’s plight is the only way to actually give them any respect.<sup>48</sup> When these problems that others are facing are incredibly difficult and we are not in a position to help them, becoming aware of their problem is the first step in fulfilling a duty to care because we begin to show others the respect that they deserve.

The second component of Kant’s duties to others is to love others. This second component is where we are called to action on the behalf of others. A duty to love can be broken

<sup>47</sup> Wood, “Duties,” 178.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, “The Case for Reading the News”

down into three parts, a duty of “beneficence, gratitude, and sympathetic participation.”<sup>49</sup> These three components essentially sum to our duty to help the plight of others because we should want to honor past efforts that helped us, want to put the happiness of others above our own, and to want to participate in the projects of others. Working together, these three require us to be aware of what is happening to those around us.<sup>50</sup> We ought to care that there are people suffering from harm and we should respect them enough to want to do something about it.

Therefore, a duty to care entails us being sympathetic to the needs of others. In order to do this, we have to have an awareness of what is happening in the world to even begin to be sympathetic. Then, from there, we can slowly begin to develop a motivation to action. It all begins with learning to care about others in ways that are outside of our everyday lives. A duty to care requires a certain type of reflection that will help to point us to the areas that we are potentially missing information on what could be happening to others, and then find that we care enough to find out more. It is a duty to respect others and to show them that they are entitled to the same rights, privileges, and benefits. Respecting others requires that we care about their lives and what is happening to them. Caring in this way is a form of recognition which is the very minimal way of respecting the lives of others.

A duty to reason well is a duty to think about, reason through, and apply critical thinking skills to the social problems we discover through fulfilling our duty to care. Reasoning well means that the method through which people come to conclusions about social injustices that they discover are sound and valid. There is wide disagreement about the causes of social injustices, and it is hard to understand them when there are so many differing opinions. A duty to reason well puts the burden on the agent to find the objective facts of the problem, understand

<sup>49</sup> Wood, “Duties,” 176.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 176.

where the roots might lie, and research the mechanisms proposed to solve it. Reasoning takes critical thinking skills to assess evidence, process arguments, and evaluate the claims of others. A duty to reason well means that it is our responsibility to make sure that we are making well informed choices about how to think about social problems and then how we react to them.

Fulfilling our duty to care and our duty to reason well avoids harms because we are first and foremost respecting others, both past and present. Respecting others is covered in a duty to care, and it avoids the harms I discussed above of disrespecting the past progress that other intelligent activists have contributed for our benefit. Further, respecting others would at least acknowledge that we see the harms that are happening to others that way they do not go completely unnoticed. This helps us to avoid failing to treat others as ends in themselves because we acknowledge their human dignity is being violated and that what is happening to them is wrong.

### **Objections**

I will now consider several objections to the arguments that I have made above. The objections that I will consider are on the following topics: effective altruism, individual motivation for morality and the origin of individual obligations, and the capacity and burdens to fulfil these obligations of moral progress. My goal in this section is to respond to potential concerns of my arguments and put them to rest.

Effective altruism argues for the most effective use of the resources available to us, to “make the world as good as it can be.”<sup>51</sup> The aims of effective altruism are similar to the ones that I have outlined for working toward moral progress. Effective altruism wants to accomplish

<sup>51</sup> Jakub Synowiec, “Ethics for everyday heroes – from Utilitarianism to Effective Altruism,” *Ethics & Bioethics*, (2016), 147.

goals such as “eradicating extreme poverty (which is also the UN millennium development goal), reducing suffering of animals and preventing extinction of life on Earth,” and to do this, effective altruists strive to maximize the effects of their contributions to these ends.<sup>52</sup> The principle of maximization has its roots in utilitarianism, and it seems obvious that the aim to reduce suffering will be the flip side of the utilitarian ideal of maximizing happiness. Therefore, effective altruism is an exercise in applying utilitarianism. Further, the reduction of poverty should be focused on the most poor in the world, not the relative poor of our communities.<sup>53</sup> In short, if we are to do the most good that benefits more people the most, then we should be targeting our efforts toward the worst off in the world because they have the most potential for benefit.

Effective altruists would object to my argument by saying that targeting our communities first we are not actually maximizing the good that we are doing in the world. The objection would correctly point out that intelligent activists could likely do better if they directed their efforts toward the worst off, and likely they would be in a better position to see more results from their efforts. Intelligent activism pointed at the worst cases of social problems, making any progress, would be a huge success at advancing moral progress generally. Effective altruists would argue that my argument is privileged to remain focused on local communities because it ignores the extreme suffering of others around the world. Additionally, effective altruism does not require the same level of capacity or skill as my argument for intelligent activism requires, effective altruism requires that people have a basic awareness of how to pick the most effective causes to direct their efforts toward. In short, effective altruism appears more accessible than intelligent activism.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 148.

Before responding to these claims I want to distinguish my view from that of the effective altruists because there are several points that we agree upon that it can at first glance be misleading. Effective altruists are inherently consequentialists and they argue for a maximization of the good. They are concerned primarily with getting the best outcomes from altruism as possible. Conversely, I see a different set of obligations, those to our society. In my opinion, we should strive to be effective as possible but in a way that is doing things the *right way*. I am focused on the procedure with the goal of bettering outcomes. I argue that we should be honing our skills to be effective procedurally and then from there we will be able to produce better and better results. I want there to be an investment in the journey, in the legwork, that it takes to contribute to moral progress. I do not want there to be an unthinking or low level of engagement in the amount of good that we are doing. I want people to know why they are working toward moral progress, and to be engaged in thinking critically about how they are going to accomplish their goal. My theory is not a maximizing one because I do not think that people can be as effective in their own lives if they are striving toward some maximization. I am arguing for an imperfect duty to contribute to moral progress. This, I believe, leaves more room for pursuing our own projects that allows us to take full advantage of moral progress.

Further, I am advocating for a systematic framework to follow the will hopefully result in better outcomes for moral progress. I already noted above that I want people to do things for the right reasons and be oriented to the right goals. It is about doing better during the process to better the outcome, rather than solely focusing on the outcome of our actions. My duties, then, are more of a systematic framework for engaging with others and how we make decisions about what we ought to choose for ourselves and society. This systematic framework focuses on the people whose lives we can directly touch through the decisions that we make. Eventually, I hope

that fulfilling these duties becomes a habitual action that we all take by training ourselves to be predisposed to caring about the lives of others and reasoning well about the best way that we can help them. In a way the duty to care and a duty to reason well are imperfect duties that we should strive to follow, but they do not force moral perfection. Instead, they are something that we ought to do in the background, they are a small sacrifice that we ought to make, and they are not heroic or extremely burdensome for most.

My response to this objection has two parts, the first, is a response to the failure of maximization, and the second is a response to the accessibility problem. So, while I am willing to concede that maximizing the good that we are doing is important in trying to facilitate moral progress, I am not willing to argue that the strict maximization of a good is what is the most important. Part of the argument for intelligent activism is to continue the work that others have already begun of which we are active beneficiaries. This boils down to a duty to respect others and their projects that are inherent to their personhood. We need to reciprocate the duties that someone sets forth for us to cultivate a better society altogether. We have duties to others that require our engagement with their projects.<sup>54</sup> It is this need for the respect and engagement from others that we are moved to action, therefore we are restricted through our relationships with others and our own projects for how we begin to solve social problems.

The extent to which these projects are fulfilled is going to be contingent upon the capacities of the intelligent activists themselves. It is the process of intelligent activism that I am concerned with, so the extent to which projects can be maximized is dependent upon the activist themselves during their own process, not generally. There must be room for learning and growth to exercise the necessary skills of intelligent activism so that we are able to create strong moral

<sup>54</sup> Wood, "Duties" in *Kantian Ethics*, 177

progress that will be long lasting. Intelligent activism sees the ways that we are already intervening in peoples' lives and works to better that intervention by aiming it toward moral progress. We cannot change the fact that in some capacity there must be intervention in our lives, but we can change how well we do the intervention.

Additionally, in response to the maximization problem and the accessibility problem, I argue that the community focus can be the beginning of intelligent activism. People will likely not start out as brilliant critical thinkers or logicians. These are skills that must be learned before we can expect anyone to be adept at using them. Intelligent activism can become more accessible once there is an established framework in which people can learn it. It is much easier to teach critical thinking skills in a framework that already has some success because it provides a model for how to use these skills that are more accessible to those trying to learn them. This is because of the nature of learning critical thinking itself, it requires repetition, it is laborious, and there needs to be quick feedback.<sup>55</sup> So, by using frameworks that are already established to teach critical thinking, those learning will be able to follow a model to repeat, will have a jumping off point for their work, and will be able to predict feedback from past actions that are similar to their own. It is not a classroom setting, but I think working within a system where critical thinking has flourished before to foster moral progress is likely the best place to start to attain some of the necessary conditions of learning critical thinking.

Therefore, the accessibility problem can be ameliorated as more and more people are able to learn critical thinking skills and use intelligent activism. They can do this through continued practice and commitment to learning this new skill and receiving feedback by engaging with past issues and with one another. This atmosphere can then foster stronger critical thinkers that are

<sup>55</sup> Javier Hidalgo, "Reflections on Teaching Critical Thinking," 12.

then able to tackle more difficult problems and work to solve them. Then, once people have learned how to be intelligent activists, they can then begin to expand their scope toward the worst off in the world as effective agents for change. The reason that I do not argue for compulsory education or engagement is because I think it would be too much at once for the public. People learn and process things at different rates, so asking them to be involved with every decision would likely cause more harm than good. Further, the enforceability of making people do the work to become intelligent activists is low. Ideally, people ought to want to become intelligent activists because of all of the harms they could avoid being a part in causing and they could contribute more deliberately to bettering other peoples' lives.

A second objection to my arguments above is that the requirements I have set forth to avoid apathy are incredibly difficult and are heavily burdensome to actually accomplish. A duty to reason well and to care are heavy duties because they require a wide range of skills and precautions that are both intellectually taxing and resource draining. Additionally, some people may simply not have the capacity to fulfil these duties due to a lack of intelligence, development, or other obstacle. My response to this focuses on three main points: deferring to experts and goal setting, practice, and looking long term.

Deferring allows room for some shortcuts that can solve the capacity and burden concern. Realistically, there is not enough room in our lives for us to become experts on every important topic that pertains to social injustices and greater policy. These duties embody a goal that we should be striving toward in the different facets of our lives. There are going to be certain areas that we are capable of completely fulfilling these two duties, and there will be others where we need assistance. Where we need assistance is when we can look to others who do have the information, resources, and capacity to understand the issues that we do not. There are some that



devote their entire lives to becoming experts on some of the policy areas that affect social problems. So, instead of attempting to form expert level opinions on every area that could impact social injustices, it is acceptable to defer to others who have more information or a better understanding of the situation. It is better to defer than to make a poor choice. We can defer to the experts to inform us on what the best procedure is moving forward to give us instructions on how to understand these issues, and to explain to us how their area of expertise fits into and impacts the greater scheme. A duty to care requires that we care sufficiently enough about social injustices that we are motivated enough to do our part to work toward fixing them.

Therefore, we can still satisfy this duty by caring enough to do the legwork to find an authoritative expert to defer to on matters that we do not have the capacity to tackle ourselves. In this way, there is still room for us to have other projects in our lives and those with limited capacity to use reasoning skills to find someone else to inform their decisions. This makes a duty to care and a duty to reason well much more accessible because one only needs to do so much as to find an authoritative source of information to make informed decisions. Our duties are satisfied since we were motivated enough to make ourselves aware that we did not have the capacity to make good decisions on whatever the topic may be, and that we reasoned well about the various sources of information that we were able to defer to one that was able to reason well about the issue itself to be an authoritative source of information for us. The point is to at the very least, be aware of our own shortcomings and work to mediate those while continuing to contribute to moral progress.

My second point in responding to this objection is on practice. Practicing critical thinking and logical skills that lead us to reason well and learning how to make ourselves more sympathetic and aware of the social problems will become easier as we do it over time, and we

will gradually become better at them. There is evidence that practicing tasks routinely has a positive impact on performance over time.<sup>56</sup> So, practicing reasoning will result in a better ability to reason well in the future. This is especially true for learning and honing critical thinking skills. Repetition is one of the key components of learning how to be a better critical thinker, and then become better at reasoning.<sup>57</sup> Further, some will need to learn how to reason well and use critical thinking in the first place. This is where my first point about deferring to experts and goal setting becomes important. Those who are still learning to employ these skills that allow them to reason well will be able to begin to fulfil their duties by their motivation to care, and ability to defer to experts so that they are not expected to know everything.

Additionally, practice does not only affect our performance when it comes to fulfilling our duty to reason well, it also helps us to be better at fulfilling our duty to care. A duty to care is the motivation to be predisposed to the plights of others. It is a requirement to be aware of social injustices, where the individual fits into that larger picture, and to have the desire to do their part to help ameliorate the problem. This skill requires us to be in touch with both ourselves and others, to be present and to not get bogged down in the craziness of our own lives so much that we forget about others and greater society. A way that this can be accomplished is through practicing a type of mindful awareness of others. There is evidence suggesting that those who practice mindful meditation are able to train their brains to be more aware of their surroundings.<sup>58</sup> If there is such strong evidence that we are able to change our brain chemistry at

<sup>56</sup> James E. Driskell, Carolyn Copper, and Aidan Moran, "Does Mental Practice Enhance Performance?" in *Journal of Applied Psychology* 79, No. 4, (1994), 488

<sup>57</sup> Hidalgo, "Reflections on Teaching Critical Thinking," 12.

<sup>58</sup> Juliane Eberth and Peter Sedlmeier, "The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation: A Meta-Analysis" in *Mindfulness* 3, issue 3, (2012), 174.

will, then I would argue that there is a likelihood that we can do the same in regard to bringing awareness to the needs of others.

The third part of my response to this objection is to look long term. This third component, combined with the other two parts of my response, can provide a fuller picture of a duty to care and a duty to reason well. In looking long term, if we cultivate these two duties and make them part of the mainstream process of thinking about social injustices then we will be better about solving them. So, while the initial implementation of a duty to care and a duty to reason well will be difficult and requires serious effort, it is likely going to get easier as time goes on. As people learn how to better fulfil these duties they will not need to expend so much energy on them and the benefits then compound upon themselves.

One more point on the accessibility objection is the distribution of burdens. I do not argue that there should be more of a burden on those who are better positioned to help, though it might turn out that way. Instead, I argue that everyone should generally want to contribute to moral progress through intelligent activism. It is not about singling out direct beneficiaries or those with the most to gain, it is about working to make everyone better off because we all benefit from that regardless. Everyone, then, has some burden to contribute to moral progress and strive to be an intelligent activist. Conversely, those that are more apt to do this might find that they feel a greater weight to help moral progress as they are the ones that are more aware of the problems that need their help. This would mean that as more and more people continue to become better and better intelligent activists, the heavier their burden toward moral progress will become. Therefore, those that are better intelligent activists will have a heavier burden that will be lessened as more and more people join them.

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have been concerned about being a good citizen by adhering to two duties. If we satisfy these duties then we are both working on being a better person by improving on how we view ourselves in relation to others, and by learning about how we can change our attitude to help others once we acknowledge them. A duty to care and a duty to reason well are necessary duties we must fulfil to avoid apathy and engage well with others. An attitude of apathy leads to harm because we fail to respect others from the past, cause undue burdens to others, and because we take too much of a moral risk when we fail to help moral progress. We owe others the respect of acknowledging both their past efforts and current struggles, and to do that we need to first be motivated to care about the lives of others before we can be moved to action. Once we are motivated enough to care, we can then begin to find effective solutions to problems by reasoning well through intelligent activism.

Intelligent activism is non-instrumentally valuable. Within intelligent activism there are two components that make it especially valuable, that even without helping to improve the lives of others, it would still be worth our while to be intelligently active. The most valuable aspect of intelligent activism is the focus on critical thinking. Critical thinking is good in itself because it makes us better people. We are better off when we are able to have a firm grasp on the use of logic to understand the world around us. Intelligent activism is therefore valuable because it forces us to hone our critical thinking skills which in turn makes us better participants in the world around us.

To bring this down to a more practical level, there are four changes that I think people can make in their everyday lives to get closer to fulfilling their duty to care and duty to reason well. Once people are aware that we ought to be fulfilling these duties, it becomes easier to look

for ways to address them and be aware of our potential shortcomings. Our two duties hinge on our being exposed to a sufficient amount of differing perspectives that we gain an insight into how others are living their lives. Thus, the first change that we can make is to seek out a more diverse group of people. It is important to not be sucking into an echo chamber of sameness because then we will only be exposed to the same problems and the same way of life that we likely have. This could mean incorporating one new activity into your week, such as volunteering in a new area and field to gain exposure to both a new problem and the people that are facing it. The most important part of this is to expose ourselves to more diversity and get out of our comfort zones of who we normally associate with. Further, we can engage in more diverse discussions with those that we do interact with regularly that are like us. Having more difficult conversations and talking about them openly can help to increase awareness of where you might disagree with those closest to you and understand their lives a little better.

The second change that we can make in our lives is to be a better consumer of information. If we are already making ourselves branch out and find more diverse people to engage with, then we ought to be also finding ways that we can actually use that information in a productive way. There is no reason to gather “data” if we cannot eventually put it to good use. Reasoning well requires that we know where to start. This means that we need to be learning how to evaluate sources of information. There are several ways to do this. First is that we should all be aware of what makes a study reputable: a large sample size, replicability, etc. That way we can understand how much we should be swayed by results in a scholarly article. Second, we should understand which sources are known fact check themselves or are peer reviewed. By focusing on sources that can back up the information that they are releasing, we will begin to have a better handle on which sources have a reputation for being trustworthy and which are not.

Thirdly, we need to make sure that we are searching out both sides of debates. It is impossible to reason well about an issue if we only have one side of the story, namely only our own. We need to strive to be smarter consumers of information.

The third change goes hand in hand with the one above, we need to practice critical thinking skills. In this chapter I discuss intelligent activism as having strength in a critical thinking ability, so we should be practicing it. Critical thinking is hard to do well without deliberate practice. In order to deliberately work on critical thinking, we ought to go back to the basics. When we are reading articles and consuming information, we should be stopping to think what each piece of the argument is. What are the claims? What sorts of assumptions does the author make? How do all of these elements fit together? Asking ourselves these types of questions will help us to be more deliberate about our critical thinking. Further, in critical thinking the evaluation of arguments is crucial. To work on this, people could practice questions from the LSAT, or other tests geared toward critical thinking. I am not arguing that this is supposed to be a fun process, but that it ought to be one that can help us hone our skills. So, taking time to do twenty-five LSAT logical reasoning questions is a quick way to gain exposure to this.

Fourthly, we need to set smart goals for ourselves in doing all of the three things above. The goal should be specific enough that it has direction. It should be manageable, meaning that it is not too big nor too easy. Goals should still require discipline and sacrifice before completion, that is the entire point. Goals should also have a realistic timeline and way to hold ourselves accountable. So, when we are working toward fulfilling a duty to care and a duty to reason well, we ought to challenge ourselves to set small benchmark goals toward them. This could mean setting a goal to volunteer in a new place and do a set of critical thinking practice once a week

for six weeks. Then increasing those actions in frequency as it becomes easier and easier for us to do. Fulfilling our duties to others is not meant to be an overnight change, but one that we work toward consistently.

## **VOTING**

### **Introduction**

Now that we have looked at apathy and the two duties, we are required to fill to avoid apathy, let us now look more closely at another practical application of these principles. The question that I want to address now is: should you vote given that most people will be apathetic? In this chapter I will argue from many of the same points that Jason Brennan and Chris Freiman regarding the realities of voting.

Primarily, voters overwhelmingly tend to vote poorly. Both Brennan and Freiman argue that since the average voter is bad at voting, there is reason to believe that instead *we do not have a duty to vote at all*. In this chapter, I will explain how people find themselves voting badly, the difficulties that voting itself presents, what the consequences and moral implications of these bad votes are, and then I will argue that the duty to care and duty to reason well show that we have a duty to vote. I will argue that our duty to vote requires us to vote well, and before concluding this chapter I will explain how almost everyone can become competent voters.

### **Voting Badly**

Voters tend to vote badly two ways: irrationally, and incompetently. Voting is essentially the expression of a set of political beliefs, so by casting a vote an actor is submitting their

opinion for count in one direction or another. Here is the problem with political beliefs as put by Michael Huemer: they are widespread, strong, and persistent.<sup>59</sup> This means that there are wide varieties of beliefs that people hold, that when confronted with disagreement people are confident that their belief is the correct one, and that they are unlikely to be convinced otherwise. The nature of political beliefs tends to make actors make poor decisions when discussing issues because they tend to block themselves off from hearing arguments from the side that does not agree with them.<sup>60</sup> Further, people will be unwilling to consider changing their beliefs even when they are presented with reliable evidence that their belief is wrong. This unwillingness and tendency to shut down during conversations perpetuates an attitude of irrationality and creates more polarization as people stick to their guns even when presented with evidence that their beliefs may be wrong or flawed.

Consider a different scenario, the same voter is trying to navigate their way to a new store that just opened in town. They think that in order to get there from their house, they must take a route that requires two lefts and a right before arriving at their destination, but their housemate, having already been to the new store, tells them that instead it is actually three lefts instead of two and no right turns. Any rational person would adjust and correct their belief about how to get to the new store instead of refusing to believe their housemate. It would be irrational for the agent to disregard the new information offered by their housemate. This scenario is common enough, we have all found ourselves to be mistaken about some matter of fact and changed our belief when presented with reliable evidence. What is different about politics, according to Huemer is that voters will not change their belief when presented with evidence otherwise,

<sup>59</sup> Michael Huemer, "Why People are Irrational about Politics," in *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics: An Anthology*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 2015), 456.

<sup>60</sup> Jan-Willem van Prooijen and André P. M. Krouwel, "Psychological Features of Extreme Political Ideologies," in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 28, No. 2, (January 29, 2019), 162.



instead they become even more adamant that their view is the correct one.<sup>61</sup> The store scenario is a matter of day to day life that people do not have as strong convictions about, whereas voting is closer to home and there is much more emotional weight put into those choices. Therefore the former has less of an emotional cost than the latter, making it much easier for people to change. When it comes to voting, people tend to be more focused on the content of their belief rather than the method through which they conceived of the belief in the first place.

Even more problematic than a refusal to alter or change a belief is that a voter could hold beliefs that derive from justifications that are contradictory to another belief justification they also hold, which is, speaking logically, invalid.<sup>62</sup> Voters do not usually pull their political beliefs out of thin air, there is some form of a justification process that happens to form their political beliefs. I assume here that when voters are forming beliefs about social or economic issues, they begin with some type of underlying principle or principles that guide their choices. Therefore, having contradictory justifications in reasoning seems to me to indicate that voters must not be applying the same beginning principles to their beliefs or applying them inconsistently. There must be something awry in the logical application of principles that lead to the good if we are finding seemingly contradictory justifications and conclusions.

Further, voters are also irrational in how they form their justifications more generally. Most voters use bad arguments to justify their political beliefs by attempting to take shortcuts. They take shortcuts in various ways that often result in a suboptimal choice through heuristic voting. There are several types of heuristics which range from affect, single factor, ideology, and

<sup>61</sup> Huemer, "Why People are Irrational about Politics," 457.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 458.

likeness heuristics.<sup>63</sup> In all of these cases the voter is using one small aspect of a campaign or candidate platform to make a sweeping generalization about the rest of their views and how they will perform as an elected official. These short cuts make the voting decision easier, but they inevitably result in a suboptimal choice.<sup>64</sup> More problematic though than just taking one aspect of a campaign to make a decision, many voters rely on personal attributes of candidates to make their decision. These attributes have nothing to do with a candidate's ability to perform their job.<sup>65</sup> Voters, then, are not even concerned with the relevant issues in making their decisions and justifications for who they are voting for, instead they are focused on other outside factors.

The second way that voters vote badly is due to their incompetence. Voters are ignorant about the issues on the ballot, or they may simply not have the capacity to understand the complex issues at hand. This is called the ignorance problem.<sup>66</sup> The ignorance problem is one of the best documented phenomena in recent political science.<sup>67</sup> The basic idea is that it is easier for the individual agent to remain ignorant about issues that they are voting on, than to spend enormous amounts of time, effort, and resources gathering the appropriate information and educating oneself on it when an individual vote is likely to be "inconsequential."<sup>68</sup> In other words, it is more beneficial to remain ignorant and enjoy the positivity that our society associates with civil participation, than to incur the high cost of being competently informed. So, while political beliefs may be irrational in how they are developed and engaged in discussion, the

63 Bryon Allen and Chris Wilson, "Heuristics: Shortcuts Voters Use to Decide Between Candidates," *Campaigns and Elections*, <https://www.campaignsandelections.com/campaign-insider/heuristics-shortcuts-voters-use-to-decide-between-candidates>

64 Ibid.

65 Monika L. McDermott, "Candidate Occupations and Voter Information Shortcuts," in *The Journal of Politics* 67, No. 1 (February, 2005), 201.

66 Jason Brennan, "Polluting the Polls: When Citizens Should Not Vote," in *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 87, No. 4, (August 11, 2009), 538.

67 Chris Freiman, "In Pursuit of Political Wisdom," 3.

68 Jason Brennan, "The Right to a Competent Electorate," in *The Philosophy Quarterly* 61, No. 245, (October 2011) 710.

ignorance problem is an area where the voter is being rational. It is rational for the voter to not want to expend the time and effort to learn everything that is necessary to understand complex political issues when the payoff is likely to be essentially negligible.

Additionally, a country like the United States has a population of over 330 million people which means that many of the policies and changes to the governmental system are incredibly complex. This complexity means that many voters are not competent enough to gather the necessary information and analyze it in a way that would allow them to reasonably come to a solution about the vote to cast that will result in the correct policy choice.<sup>69</sup> In short, the average voter is not going to be able to adequately understand the issues well enough to vote well on them. Even the top experts on some of these issues are not reliably accurate when predicting correct policy choices.<sup>70</sup> This, to me, indicates that the lay person, a non-expert, should not be attempting to make decisions with little to no understanding of the issue as a whole when it is likely that they will fail to make an informed choice and vote well.

Another component of the ignorance problem is that in addition to being unequipped to fully understand the complexities of policy, the average voter may just not have the resources to access the necessary information regarding policy issues in the first place, or they may not have the resources to access the education to begin to learn how to approach policy issues. If a voter does not have the ability to even gain access to the necessary information to vote well, then they will continue to vote poorly through no fault of their own. This adds another layer to voting well that must be addressed. Inability due to restricted access to information and resources should not be a justifiable reason that people are voting badly.

<sup>69</sup> Freiman, "In Pursuit of Political Wisdom," 8.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 9.

Lastly, when voters cast their votes, they are expressing their distinctive perspectives and way that they view social issues. This means that voting is also a reflection of how they view the world which can inform some aspects of how political institutions function. This information is important because it reveals how the individual is thinking about societal issues to an extent. The problem that presents itself when people are voting without reflection of what their vote really means. There is a tendency to vote along party lines because voters think that one party follows their thinking on one issue,<sup>71</sup> which then results in them choosing to vote in a certain way on other things based on one issue. Which, in my opinion, is not the right way to be making decisions because it removes the opportunity to make decisions on every issue.

My question now is this: in a country as large as the United States with so many layers of complexity to policy that impact the lives of hundreds of millions of people, should voters be voting on issues that they realistically have no reliable knowledge about, and what should they do about it?

### **Difficulties of Voting**

To answer my question above, we first need to look at the difficulties of voting to understand where these voters may be justifying their reasons for voting badly. Many of the difficulties of voting arise from the nature of voting itself. Voting's main difficulty is the disconnect of individual action versus the collective change that action is likely to bring about. The three areas where voting is difficult that I want to address in this section are the difficulty of one vote making a tangible difference, the difficulty of convincing people to do their homework

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 11.

before voting, and the difficulty that there are much more effective means of facilitating change outside of voting.

If I am a well-meaning voter that is seeking to create a change in my community or country at large, the likelihood that my single vote will make a significant difference is incredibly slim at best. Firstly, this is because most elections or referendums are won by a margin wider than one vote. So, adding my one additional vote to either side is not going to make too much of a difference. In fact, there is evidence that the likelihood of a single vote making or breaking an election is as low as “one in a billion.”<sup>72</sup> This is because for a single vote to make a difference in an election two conditions must be satisfied. The first is that the number of electoral college votes has to be “necessary for the candidate to win the electoral college,” and once that condition is satisfied, a single vote would have to break a tie in that state to sway the electoral college vote distribution.<sup>73</sup> Even if those two conditions were satisfied to make that tangible difference to sway an election, there is also a strong likelihood that a national election that is going to be determined by a tiny margin will be taken out of the hands of the voters. For example, during the Bush election in 2000, the votes were so close that it ultimately was decided by the Supreme Court who would be president.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it seems difficult to argue that a single vote is going to affect any tangible difference in the outcome of a large election.

Secondly, even if every single voter was able to surpass the problems of incompetency and irrationality discussed in the previous section, it is still difficult to incentivize voters to do their homework to be effective and good voters. In fact, there is little incentive to do any part of voting well. I have already discussed the weighted costs and benefits of being a good voter and

<sup>72</sup> Chris Freiman, “Why Your Political Participation Won’t Do Any Good,” 1.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 2.

why people tend to not vote well, but there are other reasons for the incentive to do their homework when it comes to voting badly. Right now, in the American political climate, the public act of going to the polls and voting is more rewarded than anything about the goodness of the decision of the vote itself. It is easier to reap the benefits of a public praise of being out and voting than it is to stay in and do the work required to make a reasonably informed choice.<sup>75</sup> After all, why do we give out “I voted” stickers on election days? And why do absentee voters complain that they do not get them?

Researching and doing the mental work to understand complex police issues is also more costly than choosing a button that may sound nice in the voting booth. There are a ton of costs involved in a voter learning to vote well. There is essentially no incentive to reason well about politics because it is not something that our current political climate values. Additionally, it is mentally exhausting to constantly evaluate and reevaluate political beliefs through fact checking them and listening to opposing arguments.<sup>76</sup> This further incentivizes people to not be good voters because there appears to be no outward reward.

The last difficulty of voting is consequentialism. Consequentialism is the idea that we should be choosing our actions based on maximizing the good that we can do in the world, whatever leads to the most good consequences is the choice we should pick. The difficulty that arises from consequentialism is that there are much better and more effective things that we could be spending our time on than voting or preparing to vote. Instead of going to the polls I could volunteer for an effective charity, or even donate the amount of money that I save by staying at work instead of voting to charity.<sup>77</sup> Some argue, however, that if the expected utility is

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

<sup>76</sup> Brennan, “Polluting the Polls,” 543.

<sup>77</sup> Freiman, “Why Your Political Participation Won’t Do Any Good,” 9.

high for voting, then it may be worthwhile to spend time voting. The argument is that if I were to cast the single vote that changed the direction of an election, then my one vote could determine the trajectory of an entire nation for that election cycle.<sup>78</sup> While this is a claim that demonstrates some of the potential benefits for voting, I think that the chances of this happening are astronomically slim, and if it did happen, then it would be taken out of voters hands and decided by a judicial body.<sup>79</sup>

Therefore, consequentialism poses a difficulty to voting because there are consistent and guaranteed results from using my hour of voting to do other activities. I can directly positively impact my community or the world every time I devote an hour's worth of work to a cause, but I cannot determine a guaranteed result from the marginal at best chance that I will make an astronomical difference in a close election. It seems better to focus on being consistently effective. If I did that, there are more tangible effects of my action that I will have more control over than I do when I vote. It seems that if I as a citizen truly want to enact change in my community, it is more effective to do it myself rather than attempt to facilitate change through elected officials and legislation.

### **Why Bad Voting is Problematic: Moral Implications**

I have discussed how people tend to vote badly due to their irrationality and incompetence. Then I explored how the nature of voting presents its own difficulties and obstacles for fostering good voters. Now I want to turn to assess the deeper implications of bad voting. In this section I will examine the bad consequences that arise from voting badly, the risks

<sup>78</sup> Robert Wiblin, "How Much is One Vote Worth," 80,000 Hours, (November 4, 2016), <https://80000hours.org/2016/11/why-the-hour-you-spend-voting-is-the-most-socially-impactful-of-all/>

<sup>79</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Bush v. Gore: Law Case" Encyclopedia Britannica, (November 4, 2008), <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bush-v-Gore>.

involved in not taking due care while voting, and the moral implications of what voting badly does to our fellow citizens.

Voting badly could result in the implementation of unjust policies or authority that harm parts of the electorate. Meaning, that when the electorate votes badly by their irrationality or incompetence, the policies they put in place are at risk of being harmful without anyone noticing. When voters are not voting in an informed way, they are taking a risk on the type of policies that they put in place because they cannot know what the result will be of their selection on the ballot if it were to win. Put another way, when voters make a bad decision when voting, they are unknowingly risking casting a vote for something that could have disastrous effects on others.<sup>80</sup> In theory as this continues, the voters could continuously be selecting policies that continue to harm other groups without a consideration of how their actions affect the lives of others. This seems morally unjustified to be because if a voter is going to the polls to be in charge of the types of policy that are enacted, or the official who is going to work to serve their interests, then it seems that a voter should know who or what they are allowing to have authority. After all, the moral risks involved with not carefully selecting a policy are too high to chance due to the sheer number of lives they affect.

Now, there is another consideration that we should address here: that these bad voters could accidentally or unknowingly select a good policy. While this case is possible, I find that it is hard to wait on an accidental good outcome instead of doing the work to ensure that there are good outcomes. My response to this point is that it would be irrational to hope that eventually, every once in a while, there is an accidental good choice made when there is a possibility to increase the instances of good outcomes is attainable.

<sup>80</sup> Brennan, "Polluting the Polls," 539.



This idea further extends to say what we can and cannot require from others and their actions in society. In voting, we pose a risk of illegitimately restricting one's actions for the wrong reasons when we vote badly, and we ought not take actions that have the potential to do this. If we have a right to something, then we can rightly require other people to refrain from violating it. So if I have this right to freedom, then I also have the ability to demand that others do not infringe upon it.<sup>81</sup> To expand this further, since we live under the same democracy and are operating in a collective capacity, then we must have some mechanism in place to determine what course of action we are going to choose for society as a whole. The selection should ideally be something that respects the rights and dignity of everyone involved and allows them to live out their day to day life autonomously. So, when voting we should be doing so in a way that conforms to this idea and striving to avoid subjecting people to infringements on their rights.

Elections that put officials in power give those officials significant influence over our lives, they have the potential to determine the trajectory of how we live day to day.<sup>82</sup> Since governmental actions that derive from voting have the potential to have a profound impact on our lives, we want to make sure that something that has the potential to shape so much of it has been selected carefully and properly. When it comes to my right to determine the way that I want to live, a voting decision can illegitimately infringe upon this right. Voting badly has a higher tendency to result in policies that will not respect these crucial aspects of life due to the lack of consideration that we, as bad voters, put forth in electing them. It is increasingly important, due to the magnitude of the effect that elected officials have in our lives that we refrain from voting badly.

<sup>81</sup> Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19

<sup>82</sup> Brennan, "Polluting the Polls," 537.

We also have a moral responsibility to not cause undue harm to others. Given that voting has the capacity to facilitate serious injustices or to continue to perpetuate standing injustice, voting badly means that citizens could be complicit in allowing these injustices to happen. At the end of the day, the way that democracy is set up means that citizens are at least partially responsible for the actions of their government because they expressed their consent in who they elected to govern them.<sup>83</sup> This is also a collective issue. One person is not enough to resist the injustice committed by a government. I am not capable of forcing the government to stop their bad actions all alone.<sup>84</sup> If we vote badly because we do not know or are irrational, then we cannot even begin to make headway in trying to ameliorate the injustices that are being committed. So injustice will continue.

We cannot, in good conscience, let injustice continue because of our voting decisions. When we vote poorly and put the wrong people or policies in power, we are effectively allowing bad things to continue to happen. The first step that we can take towards stopping injustice is to acknowledge that, likely, the way that we vote now is badly done, and begin to work toward solutions.

### **Duty to Vote**

What I have described up until this point is the problem with voting in general. I have established that, in general, most people vote badly due to their incompetence or irrationality. Up until this point I have largely relied on the arguments of Chris Freiman and Jason Brennan to explain voting badly and the consequences that doing this can have on society. I agree that bad voting is a significant problem that merits our attention and that there is a ton of evidence that

<sup>83</sup> Chris Freiman, "Political Abstention and Complicity in Injustice,"

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

shows that democracy might be worse than random selection.<sup>85</sup> Given all of this evidence, both Freiman and Brennan believe that we should refrain from voting almost entirely if we are not competent enough.

This is where I disagree with their points. I do not think that simply because there is a high tendency to vote badly that we should take the easy way out and not vote. I think that voting has too much at stake and due to the way that our democracy is structured, we have a duty to vote. It should be a priority to get as many people to vote well as possible. Leaders, then, should be concerned with helping their followers vote well and encouraging good voting practices. However, this is more than a leadership problem. We all have a duty to vote well, and most of us are likely failing to fulfil this duty. We should all be held accountable to voting well, making a difference for the better, and fulfilling our duties.

My reasoning for disagreeing with the argument that since we vote badly then we ought not to vote at all is because I do not think that it follows that since something is done poorly or that it is difficult that we should give up on it and stop it altogether. Voting, in my view, is the way that we as the general public can express where we want our society to go and how we want it to move forward. It is essentially a quasi-conversation between the public and elected officials crafting the laws that are going to form the framework of our lives. Dropping out of the conversation completely seems dangerous and likely will not solve the problems that we elect officials to solve in the first place. If, morally speaking, society generally is better than it has ever been and has made progress in the treatment of others, then it seems that dropping out of voting would result in many people not being involved in progressing. But given that people will not stop voting no matter how many different people continually illustrate how many problems

<sup>85</sup> Freiman, "In Pursuit of Political Wisdom," 3.

that there are associated with it, there is a different question we should focus on. What should I, as an individual, do in regard to voting? The answer is to strive to vote well.

In my last chapter I argued that the work of past intelligent activists that got us to where we are today, their efforts and sacrifices, puts a burden on us to now continue to work toward their goals. The same argument applies here. If in the past intelligent activists have done work to ensure that we have the power to vote and engage in this type of dialogue with elected officials who are making the decisions about how we live our lives, then we need to continue to make sure that we are voting. But more than that, we need to make sure that we are voting *well*. We should not be voting with irrationality or incompetence, instead we should be striving to take advantage of our power to vote in a way that respects the past efforts of those who secured our right to vote in the first place. To do this, we need to make sure that we are weighing our options, making informed decisions, working to mediate against our bias, and are reflecting on the type of society that we want to be. In voting, then, there is a moral reflection component involved. We should be taking the time to care about the issues that we are voting on and then after that we should be taking the time to reason well about them.

Here I am also coming from the point of view that the purpose of society is to continue moral progress to keep getting better and better in how we treat others and ourselves.<sup>86</sup> If that is the case, and I think it is, then we should be aiming our actions toward this goal. Our collective and individual actions should reflect the aims that we are seeking to achieve. Voting is an expression of our will and opinion on how to handle issues that affect almost everyone in some way. With voting, we should be expressing our opinion in a way that is consistent with seeking to improve our society. This means that voting irrationally and incompetently due to a lack of

<sup>86</sup> Korsgaard, *Kingdom of Ends*, 17-18.

information will never result in our deliberate choosing of moral progress. How can a voter legitimately decide to pursue this end if they are voting in a way that does not consider the relevant facts, rationalize through the consequences, and derive their own conclusions? In my opinion, they cannot. Therefore, the solution that I see to voting badly is not to stop voting, but to make deliberate choices to ensure that we are voting well.

In an ideal world, the first step to voting well is to care about every issue that is on the ballot. Caring about the issues on the ballot means that a voter is aware of them and is moved enough to want to offer an opinion about them through their vote. If voters are to be oriented toward some good or some ideal of moral progress for society, then they should care about the issues on the ballot that are going to help facilitate or hinder this progress enough to act on them. To act deliberately to achieve some end, someone must first care about what they are doing in the first place.

After people care about the issues that are on the ballot and up for debate in their communities and larger society, they then need to act on it. To act on “it” is to vote, and to vote well there needs to be a competent level of knowledge that goes into that decision. Voting well means that voters will know the ins and outs of the policy that is being proposed by someone campaigning for election, know the consequences it could have, know the other areas of life that one policy will have on others, and know where potential bias might lie. Voters, to vote well, need to know where policy solutions are coming from, the effects they could have, who the large stakeholders are, and how all of the different factors work together to form the potential solutions presented to them. Further voters need to understand the concepts of the law or issues a candidate is discussing so that when they are asked to vote in favor of what they think the best answer is, they know which ones align with their goals the most. For example, in looking at

economic policy, the voter who votes will understand economics to a level that they themselves could read the policy brief and understand all of the details laid out within it and could discern what those details mean in the larger picture. Voters to vote well need to know what is going on and what the consequences of their choices will be.

In addition to knowing the facts of policy issues, voters also need to be aware of their own potential biases and where they could fall short. They need to be actively working to improve themselves in how they are facilitating moral progress because if we want to make sure that we are continuing moral progress we need to make sure that we are not inadvertently sabotaging ourselves due to unchecked bias. We need to constantly be checking ourselves to fight against thoughts of prejudices within our own heads to allow ourselves to be in a place to educate ourselves on how to respect others and their needs. If we fail to realize where we might have bias in our own minds then we will fail to recognize it externally, which could lead us to be complicit in the injustices that we allow to be placed on others. Instead we need to ensure that we are valuing “others as end-setters” in order to fully participate in helping moral progress.<sup>87</sup> Once a voter is aware of where they might be hindering moral progress in their own heads via prejudice and has the background knowledge on every issue, then they can fulfil their duty to vote well. Overall, once voters can check themselves and educate themselves on moral progress, they can then work to vote well for the sake of fulfilling their duties to others. In turn, voters will be voting well to contribute to moral progress for the right reasons.

### **Practical Way to Vote Well**

<sup>87</sup> Brown, “The Case for Reading the News”

Now, all of the above is what I think people should do before they can vote in an ideal world. Only in a perfect world would someone have the time, mental capacity, and resources to fully research and understand complex policy issues as well as maintain rigorous self-examination of their own prejudices. Most people will not have the capacity to do the former when it comes to voting. Virtually no person is able to fully comprehend how all of the issues on the ballot could be solved, but thankfully I believe that there is a way for people to vote well without all of the effort that an ideal theory would require. I still believe that people will need to be doing the leg work themselves on respecting others to the best of their ability, but I find that when it comes to gathering information about policy issues, we can defer to experts.

One of the biggest problems in voting is that people simply do not have the ability to fully understand all of what goes into policy, but there are people that have dedicated their entire adult lives to studying one area. There are experts in all fields that will be able to weigh in on how different policy areas will affect one another. In fact, these experts are frequently asked to weigh in on what the best course of action should be for our legislators already.<sup>88</sup> What we need to do, then, to begin voting well is to look to the experts that are already offering opinions on what the facts are and how different solutions present different outcomes. Then we need to elect candidates that will listen to what experts have said and act accordingly.

Allow me to elaborate. I do not think that it is a good idea to turn to one expert per policy issue to determine how I should cast my vote. Rather, I think that experts provide a crucial missing piece of the voting puzzle that could allow voters to educate themselves on complex issues in a meaningful way. Voters should be looking to a series of experts to provide information on what effects there could be, what alternative solutions there are, and what the root

<sup>88</sup> Valerie Heitshusen, "Senate Committee Hearings: Arranging Witnesses," Congressional Research Service, (December 6, 2017), <https://www.senate.gov/CRSpubs/045a2fbf-0ad7-434b-9496-ab85db6dae6b.pdf>

of the policy issue is so that they can use the information provided by experts to make an informed choice in voting. If, for example, I do not understand what the new economic policy is about, I can look to experts to explain to me what the policy would mean in a variety of settings without having to have the background knowledge of an economics PhD behind me. Instead I can look to experts to help fill in the missing parts of my understanding so that I am able to make an informed choice in my vote.

Deferring to experts in this sense does not mean allowing one person to then dictate all of my decisions, it is so that they are able to serve in almost a teacher-like capacity to help me to educate myself on policy issues. It is important that when we defer, we defer to experts and not to other forms of information. There is a ton of false information that is readily available for consumption that can present itself as a reliable resource. Experts, on the other hand, can be easily identified. Leaders in their respective fields are those that possess the highest degree that one can have for their subject matter. They are also those that are able to demonstrate consistent expertise on the issues they comment on and have expertise working in their field. They are the people who have already been identified as those who are credible enough to teach others about their area of expertise. These are people that are selected by the legislative branch to speak at senate hearings, they are professors at universities or graduate schools, and they are the ones that are leading how other experts in the same area engage with the subject matter.

Gallup, a resource for polling experts and analyzing the current big issues, provides an easy way for people to read about what the experts are thinking on big topics. Gallup offers a range of opinions from different players in almost any domain and presents statistics and concise advice for how to approach topics and what we should think about when making decisions.<sup>89</sup> If

<sup>89</sup> Gallup, "Analytics & Advice About Everything That Matters," Gallup, <https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>



people were to consult a resource such as Gallup they would have all of the necessary information at their fingertips in seconds. They would be able to read an array and decide for themselves what they think is the best choice that they should vote after having informed themselves adequately. There are also other sources of information for those with more time and resources on their hands. A student at a university, for example, would be able to access databases of verified scholarly articles that would offer further insight and solutions to the world's problems in more depth and complexity. The most important characteristic about choosing an expert is that the voter makes sure to assess their credibility by asking themselves the questions of good traditional research design and explanation.

I also think that the deference to experts is a step in the right direction from what we have been doing to vote badly because it moves the focus of politics to the facts of the case, rather than focusing on the show that politics has become. It will be less about the image of the candidate and more about the concrete solutions they are offering. People will then be forced to think more about the content and consequences of a candidate's platform instead of focusing on how that candidate is coming across. In politics currently, we already defer many of our choices to a different type of expert that informs how we ought to vote with little thought about the actual repercussions. I am referring to voting along party lines that is undoubtedly how many voters vote. Their party essentially takes a stance and voters will vote with their party without much thought. Deferring to experts would be better because there would be a more deliberate choice in how voters vote. They would have to sift through several different expert opinions to gain the facts, and then decide for themselves the best choice toward moral progress.

One problem that is worth considering here is that it is difficult to know how to aggregate expert opinions on how to vote in an election that chooses a candidate that has ideas to enact a

wide range of policies. This is especially problematic when the experts do not even have a general consensus on an issue. There may be one candidate that has an excellent healthcare reform idea that they promise to implement while their opponent has a better idea about immigration policy. What should voters do in the case of a divided right answer when they can only choose one? This is inevitably going to be a problem when deferring to experts because it is nearly impossible to agree with one sweeping platform on every issue.

Practically speaking, I still argue that people should do their best to figure out their voting decision on an issue by issue basis so that they are as informed as they can be and they are aware of how their choice is possibly going to impact other areas of policy. It is important that voters be more aware and get their information from better, more reliable sources before making a decision as a matter of habit. Experts have devoted a significant amount of their life to reach their expert status, so we should weigh their considerations more heavily than our own because they know more and understand the issue better.<sup>90</sup> Further, there are likely experts who are better than others. We have ways of knowing which experts are better equipped than others to weigh in on a problem, such as how good a university is or the level of success an organization has had working within an issue. Voters should then be aware of the different types of experts when deferring to them to ensure that they are taking consensus from the best experts possible, whenever the opportunity presents itself. Deferring to experts should then provide us with better information and ability to make a voting decision than voting without consulting them.

When experts disagree with a candidate, though, is where I think that their personal moral compass comes in. The most important thing is that voters manage to get away from false beliefs that their reasoning abilities have fallen prey to in the past because false beliefs are what hinder

<sup>90</sup> Michael Huemer, "Is Critical Thinking Epistemically Responsible?" *Metaphilosophy* 36, No. 4 (July 2005), 527.

our ability to make an informed decision the most.<sup>91</sup> In an ideal world, candidates competing for office would change their platforms to be in line with the opinions of experts so that voters would not be forced to make reasoning concessions, but that is likely not going to happen in the near future. So, once voters have gathered the evidence and researched platform issues, they then have to decide for themselves what is the most important policy issue, assuming that they can find some consensus between a large enough portion of experts on an issue. Voters already use a ranking system to decide what issue areas are the most important to sway their voting decisions, and after deferring to experts and gaining a better grasp about what is at stake, they can continue to do the same thing. This would allow for individuals to still have their own unique perspective on policy issues while also making progress in how they make their decisions.

Voters armed with better resources and information would be able to make more rational decisions about which problems ought to be addressed first and which can be pushed to the side for a brief period. It is not ideal to have to pick and choose who to help and which problems deserve attention, but practically speaking there is little other choice. For example, let's say that after looking at numerous expert opinions, there seems to be a consensus that immigration policy is the most dire problem that the nation is facing and that the solution seems to align with a candidate that has a differing opinion on something that is not as pressing as immigration. In this case, it might be worth choosing this candidate because they have the right answer on a more pressing problem than their opponent.

Further, if voters continued to reliably defer to experts, then it could shift the way that elected officials engage with policy options. Since we know that officials are seeking the advice of experts after they are elected, they could do this before their election as well. There is a

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 522.

potential for experts to weigh in more on what are the biggest problems that need addressing. From there, ballots could contain a way for voters to rank their issue areas in order of priority and importance to them. This might result in drawing issues along party lines, but if voters are genuinely working to be more rational and make decisions based on the facts that are presented to them, then, after a period of time to allow voters to gain practice voting well, ballots could be used to rank priority issues. This in turn could then hold elected officials more accountable to solve the most pressing problems that they had the best answer for according to experts and restrict them from implementing policies that they were not as strong on.

In gaining the facts necessary to vote well from experts, it could also be useful to make use of people who already spend a significant portion of their time advocating and seeking to educate the public on issues that are on the ballot, activists. Activism in its ideal sense would be able to bridge a gap between experts and the public seeking to learn from them. If, say, people did not have the resources necessary to read scholarly articles or other academic sources that are published by experts that would serve to inform them on how to tackle complex issues, then activism could help provide access to these sources. It would make voting well even easier.

What would this look like? Activism in this sense would mean several groups of individuals who are aimed toward some goal to advance moral progress of their society in some way. They would have clearly defined mission statements that were the forefront of why they were doing the work that they were doing. In keeping with their missions, they would then provide information on their area of interest through doing their due diligence in research and vetting to provide concise and authoritative reports on their issue to the public. These reports would be able to synthesize many different expert opinions and allow them to all be found in one place to make it easier for the public to educate themselves on topics.

Taking this a step further, I think that the idea of intelligent activism and rational decision making should apply to all forms of civic engagement. Civic engagement is where we are expressing our views about what actions the state should make or refrain from making about things in our daily lives. This has a huge impact on hundreds of millions of lives, making it something that we should be rational and intelligent about before making decisions. Before we allow the state to intervene and coerce others into certain behaviors or restrict their freedoms, we should have made the decision to allow the state to do this in an informed, rational way that will help advance moral progress.

### **Objections**

There are several strong objections that I want to consider against my argument for a duty to vote. The objections that I want to consider are voting is ethically discretionary, the morally problematic component of deferring to experts, that there is no incentive for people to take the time to vote well, and that there seems to be other, better uses for our time than trying to vote well.

The first objection, that voting is ethically discretionary, is focused on the good that voting can do. The argument is that voting is not something that is mandated for us to do, rather it is something that could be good to do whenever we choose to do it.<sup>92</sup> Voting in this sense would be more of a good thing like donating to charity. It is good to do occasionally, but by no means is it something that we expect everyone to do every single time. After all, there are thousands, if not millions, of people that do not vote in every election every time that they roll around. The primary elections are notoriously low in voter turnout, and we still make do. If this

<sup>92</sup> Patrick Smith, "Against Voting Obligations," *Ethics, Left and Right*, 662.

is the case, then it seems that voting is an action that we are not obligated to do since our system has worked itself out without voting from everyone who is eligible.

My response to this objection is to first say that simply because something has worked some way in the past does not mean that it is the best way for something to happen. There is no reason to think that simply because we have managed to achieve some moral progress in our society with the voting behaviors that we currently have that we should continue to treat it as something to do every once in a while. In fact, if anything I have discussed above, voting in the way that we have been voting is certainly producing suboptimal results because we are not voting in a way that is rational or competent. I think that when we look at the way that we have structured the dialogue between the state and the people, we will find that voting is the largest form of communication between them. In this way, voting becomes a key piece of how we operate generally. If voting is the key piece of how we operate, then it becomes incredibly important in how we facilitate moral progress at all as a society. Voting becomes the biggest and most definitive way that we can show elected officials the direction that we want to go in, and if we are obligated to continue moral progress then it seems that considering voting as ethically discretionary leaves us open to failing to fulfill our duties.

Another concern that people will likely have in regard to my proposal for voting is that deferring to experts could be problematic because in voting we are expressing moral opinions on some issues. This would mean that, if deferring to experts that we would be allowing them to have a huge amount of influence over our moral choices. This is especially problematic when the goal of voting is to facilitate moral progress for society as a whole. The worry here is that when we defer to anyone for moral choices, we take the moral decision out of the hands of the actor. This would indicate that the choices we were making were not our own, and in fact were the

decisions of a small subset of the population. If we are deferring to a small population of experts what is to say that they truly know what is best for us and that they have done the work to check their own bias and to ensure that they themselves are not helping along some hugely immoral action through their justifications.

While I do see why some would be concerned about this when relinquishing some trust to experts to help us make these large decisions, I do not see this as being as big of a problem as some are anticipating. If the problem was really that we did not want to defer to anyone to make big voting decisions, then straight ticket voting would not be nearly as common as it is currently. In fact, seven states have an option on their ballots to choose all of the candidates running under one party all at once.<sup>93</sup> The fact that we already defer to large, sweeping party lines to determine how we vote in elections is evidence that we are already deferring to someone else when we are making these crucial decisions. We are already trying to take a shortcut and simply following a massive group telling us how we should feel and vote. When deferring to experts we would actually be doing a better job of choosing who we are deferring to when we are voting. We would have to evaluate the information presented to us ourselves and then make a judgement call based on what choice will lead us to the end in question. To that end, we are making a more deliberate choice in what we are voting for, rather than trusting a party to align correctly with what we believe to be the best choice. If we already defer to a party, deferring to experts for similar reasons should not merit concern.

Additionally, in deferring to experts there is no reason that I see to believe that their moral judgements are any worse than our own. In fact, they are coming from a place with the necessary knowledge to fully understand the moral decision that is at hand when we are casting a

<sup>93</sup> The National Conference of State Legislatures, "Straight Ticket Voting States" (March, 25, 2020) <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/straight-ticket-voting.aspx>

vote. Experts will better understand the stakes of making a decision and will likely be better able to articulate them to us for our education. Further, if there is no reason to suspect that experts in general are no worse than the average person, and if we are already deferring to those in large parties, then it seems that it cannot be truly morally problematic for anyone to defer to an expert to make an informed voting decision.

A third objection to a duty to vote generally is that there are no real incentives to encourage people to vote well in the way that I have articulated. This objection is also coupled with a fourth, that there are better things that we could be doing with our time rather than doing the work to vote well. Voting well requires a lot of additional individual effort to educate ourselves, find the resources, and check ourselves. If anything, there is an incentive to continue voting badly as I described above. We actually benefit from not using the mental energy of checking our biases and prejudices because it requires a ton of mental work to understand where we could have been wrong in our thinking in the past. There is also no social reward for what we are doing in private to educate ourselves toward making a good voting decision. All of these different variables together result in there being no incentive for people to change their behavior and vote well. Plus, all of the time that we spend trying to get ourselves to a level that we can actually do voting justice and vote well could be spent on activities that have a much higher pay off.

In response to this objection I argue that voting is actually pretty easy as I have articulated in deferring to experts. Once we have a group of experts that have been vetted and found to be reliable sources, it is fairly easy to choose how to vote. It could be as simple as following the median opinion and voting that way. This actually could make voting even easier than it is today for some people. Voters tend to feel that they should have some reason behind



what they choose, whether that be a party or one issue that they find one candidate to align the most with, they still need to do some researching and thinking about what their choice is going to be. In the earlier sections of this chapter I worked through the mental work, while irrational, that occurs. If they were instead looking for the median expert opinion, it would be easier to make the choice to vote than previously. Now all that they need to do is find a middle ground and pick one. The background work of doing all of the research and triple checking to make sure that these experts are legitimate authoritative sources on the subject would have already been done beforehand.

The difficulty, then, is not to incentivize people to vote because voting can be similarly as easy as it is currently with deferring to experts. The difficulty is to set up and maintain a system that would provide that background research and expert opinion. The ease with which voters are able to find the distribution of experts will determine how easy it is to vote, therefore, to make voting easier the next steps would be to find a system that was able to do this. So, the objection that there are no incentives to put in the work to vote well due to the amount of work it would take fails because voting well by deferring to experts can be just as easy when the right processes and systems are in place.

To address the latter half of the above objection regarding the difficulty to incentivize people to vote well due to a low social benefit or that there are better activities that are more worth the time that it takes to vote, I want to argue that there is a link between voting and overall happiness. There is evidence that people that engage in altruistic behaviors will lead to more overall happiness in their lives.<sup>94</sup> If voting well is going to help move toward better outcomes for everyone, then it follows that the activity of voting would be one that can make people happier.

<sup>94</sup> Stephen Post, "Altruism, happiness, and health: it's good to be good" in *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* volume 12, (2005), 70-71.

Voting, in this sense, could be considered to be a public good that people are doing out of the goodness of their hearts to show that by voting well we can increase our own happiness, but there is another way to demonstrate that voting is good for the individual's overall happiness. The act of voting itself, just simply casting a vote in an election, can lead to more happiness because of how it connects us to others.<sup>95</sup> We want to be a part of a group, and we will be happier when we have contributed to a group in some way. Therefore, even if we reject that voting is a public good or service that promotes good outcomes, voting still makes us happier overall in general. Thus, voting well is easy and it has the potential to make us happier, then we should go vote and vote well.

Though, let's just say for the sake of argument that being a good person and being happier are not what incentivize people. Those are external things and what people really care about is making sure that they, themselves, are as best off as possible, no matter the cost to others. They are not particularly concerned with the plight of others. It is not that someone who feels this way does not care at all about others, rather they just do not take the greater needs of society into consideration when deciding what to do. Voting well is still something that they should want to do. Voting well results in more optimal outcomes for everyone. So while in the beginning it could be costly to make the switch, it would pay off in the longer run because everything would be improving theoretically. As I mentioned in the last paragraph, it becomes a better and better investment to invest in the common good because it results in improvements for the individual as well. Therefore, all of civic engagement, depending on the level of involvement based on the capacity of each person, should be done intelligently and well with the aim of continuing moral progress.

<sup>95</sup> Freakonomics, "Can You Vote Your Way to Happiness?" Freakonomics, (2005), <https://freakonomics.com/2008/09/12/can-you-vote-your-way-to-happiness/>

## **Conclusion**

In this voting section I have laid out the problems currently plaguing voting. Primarily, I followed the arguments of Michael Huemer, Jason Brennan, and Chris Freiman on why people vote badly. People vote badly out of irrationality and incompetence. Voting in our society is difficult due to the complexity of our issues for a country as large as the United States. It is increasingly difficult to fully comprehend how to fit all of these issues together, and there is a ton of incentive to not even try. Further, voting badly harms society in a number of ways. It harms people by putting them at risk of imposing an unjust system of authority over them, exposing them to undue risk, and risking compliance in a system of injustice. All of this culminates, Brennan and Freiman believe, in a reason to stay away from the polls. I argue that their conclusion is wrong.

I do not see the connection between something having numerous problems as a reason to abandon it completely. I think that rather than avoiding the polls, we have a duty to vote and to vote well. We need to encourage others to vote well and improve our behavior rather than allowing it to continue to cause us to vote badly. The nature of democracy's structure merits this interpretation because voting is the most effective way for the public to communicate to elected officials what we want out of society. We should all be striving to facilitate moral progress and voting becomes the best way to do that. Therefore, I think that we have a duty to vote well and to push our society to be better and better.

To vote well, in theory, we would all need to educate ourselves to an expert level on all issues on the ballot that are of significant importance and we need to be assessing our own minds to ensure that we are not falling prey to our own prejudices and biases. This would require a

tremendous amount of work, and likely many will not be able to achieve this level of education for a myriad of reasons. Attaining the education level necessary for this type of assessment before voting would require having access to scholarly resources, it would require having the time and money to take off from earning an income to educate ourselves, and it would require a level of intelligence that is potentially beyond many citizens due to the complexity of the system we live within. It is for this reason that I have argued that we ought to defer to experts instead. These experts have dedicated their lives to studying one facet of the policy issues that we should be concerned with, and they will be able to provide the resources for us to educate ourselves enough to vote well. Experts provide a steppingstone for us to vote well without having to sacrifice a large portion of our lives to learning how to vote well.

As experts are able to make it easier for us to vote well, they also demonstrate that there is a sort of division of labor when it comes to fulfilling our duties. Experts are leaders in their field, and they are the ones that know best how to solve some of the largest problems that we are facing. We ought to listen to them when making our decisions. But there is more than that that needs to happen. Leaders are also in a position to do more to help us all vote well. The baseline of voting well is to do our best to avoid ignorance and incompetence by checking ourselves. Leaders ought to do this and help their followers be better voters. Leaders should work to make it easier to vote well for their followers wherever possible, and they ought to also practice all of the good voting practices that I mentioned above. It is important that leaders lead by example, in my view, because it shows a commitment to the principles they are pushing on their followers. All of this combined, leaders should help followers vote well, we all have a duty to vote, and engage civically, well in a practical sense to help facilitate moral progress.

## **GROUP LOYALTIES**

### **Introduction:**

In this next chapter, I want to discuss group loyalties. I will make an argument against group loyalties due to how they affect reasoning in general. To do this, I will primarily focus on partisanship and patriotism. Partisanship for my purposes pertains to the deference to the party system in the United States to make a voting decision. It is the way that many people use to make a choice in voting, and it is polarizing on almost every issue area. Partisanship is one way that we have categorized and divided ourselves to take shortcuts over forming opinions on important issues. It is the fact that this phenomenon is so widespread and prevalent that I think it is worth addressing. Additionally, patriotism for the purposes of this paper is the devotion to and significant support for one's country. Patriotism, importantly, does not have to be an active phenomenon, but it arises when triggered in conversations or when thinking about the global community. I think that patriotism is in some ways the broader application of many of the same problems that face partisanship, just on a country to country scale. This deserves our attention because the world is increasingly global and interconnected, so patriotism can influence our foreign affairs engagement.

Before moving on I want to address the following question: what do partisanship and patriotism have to do with voting and apathy? Well, in my first chapter I worked through arguments for the way that we should generally try to live our lives to facilitate moral progress. I argued that we have a duty to care about the lives of others and major issues and that we have a duty to reason well about them to be most effective in the help or progress that we do make. Then I turned to voting behavior, one of the easiest and primary ways that we as individuals are able to take part in decisions that have enormous effects on our society. The sheer effect size

makes it worth participating well to move moral progress forward, and in order to effectively do that, we need to care about the issues on the ballot, be fully informed about them, check our biases, and likely turn to experts for help. Through voting and other forms of political activity or civic engagement, we can accomplish the goal of living well through caring about others and reasoning well because voting determines that trajectory that our country can take.

Partisanship fits into all of this because it is one of the main components of voting today. It is no secret that partisanship is what determines a lot of the way that voters cast their ballots on election days. This also means that it is going to be a challenge to voting well. Voting well requires constant assessment and judgment on the sources that we use to make good voting decisions, and partisanship presents an easy avenue as it works today to fall short in reasoning well about voting decisions. There are several downsides to partisanship that prevent reasoning well, but there are also benefits to allowing partisanship to exist within our system.

Patriotism fits briefly into this framework, as I noted before, due to the global impact our attitudes toward our own country can have on others. Patriotism works using many of the same conventions as partisanship because they both use group loyalties in their reasoning and decision making before choosing a course of action. In this section, I will use partisanship and patriotism to discuss how group loyalties can cause negative effects that we should avoid. Then I will consider objections to my claims about the negative effects of group loyalties before turning to a solution for how to move toward eliminating these obstacles to our reasoning and decision-making abilities.

### **A Duty to Avoid Group Loyalties**

Group loyalties are deeply ingrained in our nature because we all want to have some sort of feeling of belonging in a group. This is what builds our social identity that becomes

increasingly important to how we feel about ourselves and others in different groups.<sup>96</sup> Social identity and the group loyalty that follows becomes an obstacle for reasoning because it gives us a motivated reason to continue to side with our same group, even when this might not be rational.<sup>97</sup> Group loyalties then cause us to reason poorly. Reasoning well about issues requires more than reading the news, going to vote, and depending on group opinion shortcuts to make decisions. We need to be reasoning well outside of all of these temptations to take the easy way out. In short, we have a duty to check what I am going to call our “reasoning blind spots” for areas where we fall short due to our group loyalties.

Why am I particularly concerned with group loyalties? Well, for two reasons. The first is that group loyalties are, as I noted above, incredibly interwoven into our identity that contribute to how we live our daily lives. This makes it difficult to overcome them even if we had the best of intentions. It also, in my view, makes them more dangerous for our reasoning because we could fail to recognize that we are falling into the trap of motivated reasoning. Secondly, group loyalties are something that we all experience. We are all a part of some group in some capacity and will therefore have some type of group loyalty. Therefore, group loyalties can be problematic for everyone and the consequences of our group loyalties on other people’s lives is worth considering.

Further, we have a duty to reason well in order to contribute to moral progress as I discussed in my apathy chapter. If we have that duty, then something that impairs our ability to reason well should not be allowed to go unchecked and unnoticed. In fact, I argue that since we have a duty to reason well, we also have a duty to not allow group loyalties to impair this ability

<sup>96</sup> McLeod, “Social Identity Theory,” Simply Psychology, (2019).

<sup>97</sup> Dan Kahn, “What is Motivated Reasoning and How Does it Work?” Science and Religion Today, (May 4, 2011) <http://www.scienceandreligiontoday.com/2011/05/04/what-is-motivated-reasoning-and-how-does-it-work/>

in a way that severely impacts the lives of others. The way forward for moral progress is to look for ways to reason well about decisions that impact the greater community and society, and certain group loyalties cause us to infringe on the lives of others in a way that is unjustified. Partisanship and patriotism are two of the main ways that our group loyalties impair our ability to reason well and unjustly infringe in the lives of others. This is because in these two groups the power of the state is involved in carrying out the decisions that we as a collective body contribute to making. When we use a governmental body to coerce others into doing something then we ought to have reasoned well through why we made the choice that we did in order for the coercion to be justified.

Before moving on I want to address a tension in this project between group loyalties and the duty to avoid being apathetic that I discuss in my first chapter. It would seem that in trying to fulfil a duty to care and a duty to reason well that we might have to show a deference to our own societies and our own groups in order to accomplish this. It would then be odd for me to advocate against group loyalties. In this chapter, I do not mean to write that *all* group loyalties are bad. In fact, there are good group loyalties. Instead, I want to argue that group loyalties cause harm to others because of their ability to cloud our reasoning abilities. I argue against allowing group loyalties to make us cause more harms or allow more risks. There is a way that group loyalties can be used to do good, to cause us to care more about others, or help us to be prompted to reason well. Group loyalties that prevent us from contributing to moral progress are the ones that we ought to be the most concerned about when making decisions that will significantly impact the lives of others.

Group loyalties that are tied to our identities can also help us to be better if we want to associate ourselves with the type of people that want to facilitate moral progress. These sorts of



groups arise from our commitments to other principles.<sup>98</sup> Good group loyalties stem from our desires to be a good person. For example, a person that is committed to being the type of person who does not lie, then as they are challenged by others to tell a lie, will see their resolve strengthened.<sup>99</sup> Here, group loyalty to being the type of person that does not tell a lie caused the person to do something good, namely not to lie. So in this sense there is a way that group loyalties can help us to do better. The difference between good group loyalties and bad ones are the types of behaviors toward which they are aimed and the outcomes they likely produce because of this behavior.

In the following sections I want to look at partisanship and patriotism to expand on how they are group loyalties and how they both feature negative consequences when it comes to reasoning and general group functioning. My goal in doing this is to demonstrate that partisanship and patriotism are preventing us from reasoning well which further prevents us from fulfilling our duty to help facilitate moral progress, therefore we should be inclined to not be partisan or patriotic.

### **Partisanship**

The biggest problem that I find with partisanship is that it detracts from reasoning well and it causes motivated cognition. Partisanship is one of the “most powerful forces structuring opinion formulation,” which allows voters to take shortcuts to making decisions that have huge implications on the lives of others in a way that is predetermined by a particular party.<sup>100</sup> In

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Glover, “Moral Resources: Moral Identity,” *Humanity: A Moral History of The Twentieth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 26

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Rune Slothuus and Claes H. de Vreese, “Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Issue Framing Effects,” *The Journal of Politics* 72, No. 3 (Jul., 2010), 642.

short, the decision, through loyalty to a particular political party, is determined not by the individual but by their group affiliation. This in turn makes it easier for individuals to remove a sense of personal responsibility when making decisions about the lives of others. It seems to me that to take such a low level of care is morally wrong given the weight of the decisions that are made through who we elect into office. In fact, partisanship can actively work against the reasoning well that I have been advocating for because of its increasingly divisive nature. These combined factors show that group loyalties can have serious repercussions on our decision making and reasoning abilities.

The primary reason that partisanship is so prevalent is that it is easier. It is easier to surround yourself with people who think, talk, and act as you do so to not challenge any of your opinions. In fact, most people actively do this and avoid conversations where they are aware that they will be met with disagreement.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, partisanship allows people to expend less mental energy researching and forming opinions, and it allows them to identify other groups of individuals that they may steer clear from or avoid deeper conversations in order to not face a challenge to their beliefs. People congregate with like-minded groups in their closest relationships where they will have similar opinions and avoid groups that do not share these opinions.<sup>102</sup> To sum up, people are social creatures. Social creatures want to fit into their groups and will take cues from their behavior rather than risk social ostracism.

Partisanship, then, adds another layer of obstacles to reasoning well because it is tied to our identity and brings in group bias because of how humans operate. Our loyalty to our political group is one of the most difficult biases to overcome because it is so central to our social identity. Social identity is how we think of our group and what is best for only the ones that we

<sup>101</sup> Diana Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

associate ourselves with and not always think of others that are in this wider group with us.<sup>103</sup> Studies on social identity have revealed that when participants were asked to identify aspects of their social identity they demonstrated how strongly they protect their groups and dislike others. It is ingrained in our nature to look for negatives in a group of which we do not claim membership and to seek out positives for our own group because it helps to elevate our own self-esteem and feelings about ourselves.<sup>104</sup> It is a natural part of how we divide ourselves and protect our self-esteem.

We continue this phenomenon with group loyalty to parties, causing us to further shy away from engaging with the other group because it causes us to engage with a group that we already see negatively. We are motivated in our reasoning, then, to not hear the other side and come to conclusions we have already reached because of our group loyalty and its relation to our social identity. It is easier to think about the people and issues that are most salient to us, and it is much more difficult to reflect on what may be best for the whole when we live in a country that is so large, complex, and diverse. In short, we want to stick with *our* groups and with *our* arguments because they are part of this social identity that is important to us.

This can be problematic when we start to look at what actions this behavior turns into, voting, activism, and other forms of political involvement. Studies of voter demographics have shown that the most consistent group to visit the polls on election days are older, white professionals. These groups are also the least likely to engage in discussions with people from other sides of issues and of differing opinions.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, studies that examined the likelihood of discussion about differing political views found that voters in general are likely to

<sup>103</sup> McLeod, "Social Identity Theory"

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*, 33.

only engage in political discussions with people with which they have a higher connection.<sup>106</sup>

The effect of this behavior is that increasingly people are not seeking out differing outlooks and are increasingly putting themselves in an echo chamber of their own perspectives because they are only talking with people that they know will agree with them. The most consistent voters are the ones that are having the least diverse discussions and are the most predisposed to motivated reasoning. Partisanship empowers the most consistent voter to use motivated reasoning to make decisions about what is on the ballot instead of reasoning well.

The group loyalty that derives from partisanship forces people to make decisions on a group basis instead of using reasoning and logic. Contained within our social identities there are social costs that are associated with going against the group opinion, which in turn then causes us to use motivated reasoning to support the group opinion as a “defense mechanism” against these potential social costs.<sup>107</sup> This means that our decision making capacities are clouded by these phenomena and we will be inclined to not only agree with our group, but will also be inclined to put up defenses for reasoning well about issues when we get an inkling that we may be wrong.

Partisanship also causes voters to defend their group, sometimes to an extreme, to avoid the blow to their social identity by refusing to see another opinion or increasing hostility. Studies have shown that partisanship makes people partial to the information that is coming from their own party,<sup>108</sup> so it makes it more difficult to motivate them to seek out information on both sides and evaluate them fairly. Additionally, other studies have shown an increase in racist mentalities due to increasing partisanship. Over the past decade, these studies of group tolerance have demonstrated an increase in intolerance and hostility from whites toward other minority groups

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>107</sup> Dan Khan et al. “Motivated Numeracy and Enlightened Self-Government,” *Behavioral Public Policy* 1, 2.

<sup>108</sup> Gary Jacobson, “Partisan Polarization in American Politics,” in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (December 2013), 691.

and an increase in the level of hostility with which they regard minority groups.<sup>109</sup> This, in turn, increases the polarization between parties, fostering a stronger sense of “us versus them” mentalities, which then results in more gridlock between the two sides as they fight for control over one another. Then, the part of our social identity that motivates us to find fault in other groups kicks in and we begin to make decisions from a position of motivated reasoning to protect ourselves and our egos.

Partisanship, then, appears that it will prevent us from exercising a healthy amount of open mindedness. Open mindedness is hindered by partisanship because of the reasons that I listed above, and when we do not practice open mindedness we will find that we reach suboptimal conclusions.<sup>110</sup> Partisanship in this way could be causing us to select worse policies than we would if we were forced to be open minded about the decisions we were making. Instead, partisanship seems to make it incredibly easy to not consider the other side, and not only that, but to refuse to consider the other side with confidence. It not only means that we do not think that there are multiple answers to one policy question, but that we think that the other side is consistently wrong. Not that they have a different answer, but that they are completely wrong about it.<sup>111</sup> This seems irrational to me. The likelihood that not only is my side correct, but the likelihood that the other side is completely wrong seems too low to be a rational way of making choices. This is where open mindedness is necessary. We need to stop thinking of one side as those that cannot ever make the right decision and think of it instead as a different decision.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>110</sup> Helene Landemore, “What Does it Mean to Take Diversity Seriously? On Open Mindedness as a Civic Virtue,” in *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* (January 2019), 3.

<sup>111</sup> Joshi Hrishikesh, “What Are The Chances You’re Right About Everything? An Epistemic Challenge for Modern Partisanship,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Economics* (2020), 13-14.

Partisanship, when it encourages us to close ourselves off from others, encourages us to not care about all others. Partisanship makes it easier for us to feel justified in not considering and caring less about the other side because we can write them off as having consistently making the wrong decision or as not knowing how to make a decision at all. It is not uncommon to hear phrases thrown around about how one side or the other is useless, dumb, or incapable of making a decision because they are clouded by some delusion or another.<sup>112</sup> This aspect of partisanship is likely caused by the increasing need to prove that the other side is wrong and to push people closer to their own sides to create more party unity. The cost of this behavior is a lower incentive to genuinely consider the arguments of the other side because we are starting from a perspective that they are *already wrong*. We are not ever going to have constructive dialogue or open mindedness if this is the attitude with which we are approaching the discussions about the future.

To tie partisanship back to voting behavior, there has been a rise in recent years of the partisan voter. The partisan voter has shown an increase in intolerant mentalities, a decrease in group cohesiveness, and a decrease in effectiveness more generally. In my last chapter I noted that one way that voters vote badly is to vote using different types of heuristics. Partisanship is another heuristic that voters are using to make decisions when casting their votes. My concern is that this mechanism for determining how one should vote is irrational and actually leads to bad consequences. This voting behavior results in voters voting poorly rather than working toward them voting well.

If partisanship is breeding intolerant mentalities, then it is breeding another layer of irrationality when it comes to making decisions. When I discussed voting, I argued that people must vote well rather than simply vote at all. If a tool that people are using to decide how to vote

<sup>112</sup> Matthew Levendusky and Neil Malhotra, "Does Media Coverage of Partisan Polarization Affect Political Attitudes," in *Political Communication* 33, (July 27, 2015), 285-286.

on certain issues has been proven to foster immoral thoughts about others in the group, then partisanship cannot lead to voting well because it will cause people to vote on issues in ways that harm others. My claim here is that if a growing number of people are experiencing a heightened sense of us versus them and a heightened sense of hostility to the opposing side, then they cannot make a good voting decision because their logical reasoning will be clouded by this bias. This then, results in bad voting, and bad voting is morally blameworthy. Therefore, we should avoid partisanship in the way that it contributes to these negative mentalities and increasing division between groups.

### **Patriotism**

Now, to discuss patriotism. Patriotism has many of the same characteristics of group loyalties that I addressed for partisanship. In this chapter, I am mainly concerned with what some experts have called “blind” or “uncritical” patriotism. Uncritical patriotism is “an unwillingness to both criticize and accept criticism” of a country or its leaders.<sup>113</sup> Other forms of patriotism that fit into a similar mold are symbolic and national pride patriotism because they too include some inability to rationally reflect and criticize a country or its leaders. These ideologies also show hostility to any other groups that do not have the same adherence to their support of their country.<sup>114</sup> This aspect of group loyalty to one’s country is rooted in not reflecting and analyzing the types of policies enacted by legislatures and actions taken by leaders. In this section I want to show how patriotism has negative effects on our ability to reason well due to our group loyalty to our country. To do this, I will examine first how patriotism is tied to our social identities to

<sup>113</sup> Leonie Huddy and Nadia Khatib, “American Patriotism, National Identity, and Political Involvement,” in *American Journal of Political Science* 51, No. 1 (Jan. 2007), 64.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

explain why it is so deep-rooted, then I will expand upon the negative consequences that patriotism causes, and finally I will turn to potential benefits to patriotism.

Social identity is the idea that we have group identities that we are aware of and have certain associations because of our membership within a particular group. In this way, we have a national identity that is one aspect of our social identity because we are aware of our membership within a nation and because we have associations and other attachments to our membership.<sup>115</sup> In short, we all know that we are Americans and we have an association to our country through some other means, such as where we live, flying the American flag, or engaging in civic activities (such as voting). It is these group associations that lead us to include them within our own social identities. Patriotism causes us to show our support for our American systems and leaders without necessarily agreeing with every single action they take. Importantly, this national identity is not contingent upon “an endorsement of a specific political ideology” or set of policies.<sup>116</sup> In short, we do not need to all think the same way to be patriotic, but we do have to associate ourselves within the same broader group, although our association to this broader group does carry some common ways of thinking that may not be the best for our reasoning capacities. Patriotism causes us to have part of our social identity tied to our nation, which creates a group loyalty surrounding the actions of leaders and the direction of the country.

Here, I think that it is important to note that patriotism in this way is associated with groups that tend toward forcing the maintenance of the status quo and tradition.<sup>117</sup> However, we are all subject to feelings of patriotism, regardless of where our political ideology falls.

Patriotism is not only a form of identification with a group, but it is also a mechanism to satisfy

<sup>115</sup>Ibid, 65.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 64.



some of our psychological needs. It establishes a sense of belonging by creating a sense of “we,” which is something that humans inherently need.<sup>118</sup> In this sense, patriotism carries a significant amount of power because of its ability to bring people together and give them a sense of comfort from being within a group. We are all going to need to feel that we belong and are secure in our memberships on some level.<sup>119</sup> It is for this reason that patriotism is dangerous because it can be used to sway group members perceptions and abilities to reason well.

If patriotism causes people to be less inclined to criticize and accept critiques of both their actions and those of their leaders, then it lessens their ability to reason well about issues related to policy of their country. This, I argue, causes them to fail to sufficiently see and care about the lives of others and fail to reason well about problems in their lives because they will be hindered by a subconscious association with a country. It seems, to some, that if we were to object or criticize the doings of officials or the systems in place, that we would be unpatriotic, and therefore against the group that provides such comfort to us in our belonging.<sup>120</sup> Patriotism in this sense is used, then, to “regulate speech, behavior and acceptable positions” within the context of group membership. It is used to say that anyone going against the grain is therefore against the country and that this kind of behavior is unacceptable.<sup>121</sup> But should we tolerate this? Is this a good idea when hundreds of millions of lives are at stake? To refuse to engage in a dialogue about what is wrong because it goes against a group norm? I would argue that no, we should reassess patriotism and its effects on our lives. In this sense patriotism is used as a

<sup>118</sup> Michael Bader, “The Psychology of Patriotism,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 87, No. 8, (2006), 583.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 584.

<sup>120</sup> Alex Nowrasteh, “The right has its own version of political correctness, It’s just as stifling,” Washington Post, (December 7, 2016), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/12/07/the-right-has-its-own-version-of-political-correctness-its-just-as-stifling/>

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

mechanism to dissuade people from using other reasoning capabilities and to potentially question the status quo. Patriotism is then used to stifle good reasoning in a way.

Before moving on I want to address some weaker claims about patriotism. There are also more modest claims that patriotism or nationalism should have some influence on policy-making decisions and political behavior. Instead of being a guiding factor in a decision, this claim argues more that it provides motivation to put effort into policy decisions or a way to think about some of the policy options. I want to argue that patriotism in this sense is not a great way to make decisions either. If patriotism was used as an influencing factor in earnest when making policy decisions, then we would not see nearly as much division because if people were allowing their pride or care for their nation to make a decision then the decision would be more aimed at what is best for everyone on balance, not what is best for them. I think that patriotism, even when used modestly, is used as a cop out to use better more rational arguments for making a decision. There is likely going to be a better way to argue for the same points that provides a better foundation for a logical argument than appealing to even weaker claims about patriotism. Instead, the more moderate claims about patriotism ought to refer instead to community obligation to those that are closest to them.

But what specifically does patriotism do? Patriotism causes us to be more closed off from differing opinions and asserts group dominance to crush open mindedness and healthy discourse. An article in the Washington Post calls the patriotic mindset, “patriotically correct.” In being patriotically correct one appeals to “a full-throated, un-nuanced, uncompromising defense of American nationalism, history, and cherry picked ideas,” and adheres to the idea that everything that is wrong in America can be fixed by just being a little bit more patriotic.<sup>122</sup> Patriotism in this

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

sense is the use of the appeal to a group membership to quash the open discussion and critique of the status quo. People appeal to patriotism, or rather accusing people of lacking in patriotism, as a weapon in the public sphere to show that not only are their ideas wrong, but they are anti-American in some way. Patriotism, then is used to stifle discussion and attack opponents through ad hominem attacks instead of healthy discourse.

Outside of attacking people using patriotism when they are opting to critique the status quo or the actions of leaders, patriotism as a defense mechanism causes people to reason incredibly poorly. It seems that those who are patriotically correct cannot apply the same principles across the board on policy issues, causing their attacks to not only be off the mark but also irrational. Take poverty in America. It seems that the patriotically correct are quick to blame economic dislocation and expanding global markets for the poverty that poor white Americans are facing, but cannot apply the same reasoning to other minority groups.<sup>123</sup> It is this inability to apply the same reasoning to a problem to different ethnic groups in the name of patriotism and bolstering the American identity that leads to a huge failure in reasoning. Patriotism in this sense leads people to falter in their reasoning because when addressing these issues, they are motivated to champion their patriotism over logical reasoning due to how important patriotism is to our social identities.

When patriotism becomes a driving force for how a large portion of a population reasons through issues, group dominance emerges. National pride can lead to “ethnocentric and xenophobic regard for others” in societies that operate on a “strongly hierarchical social system.”<sup>124</sup> The United States is one of those societies that operates on a very strong social

<sup>123</sup> Nowrasteh, “The right has its own version of political correctness, It’s just as stifling”

<sup>124</sup> Yesilernis Pena and Jim Sidanius, “U.S. Patriotism and Ideologies of Group Dominance: A Tale of Asymmetry,” in *The Journal of Social Psychology* 142, No. 6, (January 2003), DOI: 10.1080/00224540209603936, 782-783.

hierarchy. Our social system was established by “military conquest and the subsequent subordination” of minority groups that still persists.<sup>125</sup> This means that in the minds of these groups, there is one group that is dominating the others, and that group is going to feel stronger ties to patriotism because it is easier to feel good about being a member of a particular group when that group is dominating over others. Which, in turn has led to increased racism in white people.<sup>126</sup> Studies have found that increases in feelings of patriotism are related to, not only higher levels of hostility from white Americans, but to feelings of group dominance and more feelings of ownership over one’s country.<sup>127</sup> This is problematic because first, it is wrong to foster these types of attitudes toward others, and secondly because group dominance causes the interests of the minority groups to be overlooked and cast aside of the prevailing dominant group decides the direction of the discussion. Meaning, that there is no way to reason well through issues because one or more sides will not take other sides seriously in discussions.

All of this combined to me says that patriotism, like partisanship, is incredibly problematic for good civic engagement and voting because our group loyalty that underlies both of them causes us to fail in our reasoning in some way. It is difficult to vote well on issues when one is experiencing the psychological pulls of patriotism and when patriotism is causing some groups to feel more shut out of the conversation. To me, our group loyalty to patriotism clouds our ability to think critically and use our reasoning skills to understand how to vote well and make good, justified decisions.

It is, then, wrong to let group loyalties have such an influence on our decisions when they are about the lives of others. Group loyalties that use the power of the state to accomplish their

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 783.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 784.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 788.

ends, like partisanship and patriotism, should not be used. If we ought to be striving toward moral progress through intelligent activism, which is the use of logic and critical thinking, then a distortion of our reasoning abilities does not allow us to make deliberate decisions toward bettering the lives of others. Group loyalties, since they place such an emphasis on privileging our own groups, do not allow us to fulfil a duty to care or a duty to reason well. We cannot move toward caring out the lives of others to the point where we are motivated to help them if we are stuck thinking that it is okay for one group to be better than the other simply because we hold membership in one.

A duty to care requires that we search out the other sides and work to empathize with them to understand what obstacles they are facing and how we can help them. Group loyalties such as partisanship and patriotism give us an excuse to write off the other side's problems as a manifestation of their own doing. It does not force us to recognize that there are problems that we could be part of for other people, instead it allows us to shy away from these discussions. Making it socially acceptable to not engage and remain deliberately ignorant. If we are going to elect officials to make changes in our lives that coerce people to behave a particular way, then we ought to have made those choices ethically and with a clear mind instead of taking shortcuts that are logically bound to fail because of how they distort our thinking.

The nature of political participation carries risk of harming others because of how associated group loyalties can distort our thinking. As I noted above, there is a higher risk of tension between groups, a decreased willingness to hear the other side, and a general decrease in group cohesion when we allow group loyalties to influence our decisions about how the state should operate in our lives. These decisions are not ones that we should take lightly, and that is part of the reason for the increased tension and hostility between groups, but we should also be

aware of the risks we may be imposing on the lives of others. When we fail to see all sides of the equation due to our group loyalty, we can make things worse off for everyone involved unknowingly. Since we are not aware of what the other options are and other facts that should be taken into consideration because we are focused on our memberships, we cannot make an informed decision about what is best for us and for everyone else. In this sense, we should not let group loyalties distort our thinking because they can undermine even our own objectives.

### **Objection**

I have spent the last two sections examining the negatives and detrimental consequences of partisanship and patriotism as group loyalties, but there are some benefits to group loyalties that deserve to be addressed as well. Primarily, group loyalties do have various benefits that have kept them around all this time. In this section I will consider the strongest objection to the claim that the duty to avoid being partisan or patriotic is not outweighed by other considerations.

The main objection to my argument against group loyalties is that they are necessary for community and group mobilization. The point here is that our society is structured around mass involvement, and group loyalties that facilitate that are a good thing. Therefore, even if there are negative consequences to having group loyalties that cause us to reason poorly, they are still good on balance. This makes group loyalties and all that comes with them justified overall and we should not be as concerned with the negative effects that they may have in cases like partisanship and patriotism. Afterall, if we did not have group loyalties, then we would have much less to work with in terms of facilitating moral progress.

In response to this objection I argue that the reason they are more problematic than their potential benefits is because it is wrong to allow group loyalties to influence us and how we live

when using the coercive power of the state. When we are operating and making decisions on the basis of our loyalty to our political party or to our country, we use the government to enforce our views. Partisanship and patriotism are inherently the way that we view how the state should operate, which impacts the lives of over three hundred and thirty million people. This alone is enough to warrant careful consideration of the types of people we put in power and the attitudes we deem acceptable in our treatment of others. When we are basing our decisions on group loyalty in this way, they cause excessive moral risk, and it is wrong to use the coercive power of the state in a morally risky way.

To put this to an example, think about refugees in the United States. There is evidence that in the long run, allowing more refugees into the country and allowing them to start their lives in our country is in the USA's best interest. On almost every empirical scale, allowing refugees the opportunity to thrive here is better for them and for us. They create jobs, stimulate the economy, and enrich their communities as a whole.<sup>128</sup> They do not drain welfare resources or have a higher likelihood to commit a crime.<sup>129</sup> Fleeing violence does not discriminate, it affects everyone in the area. Meaning that refugees are largely like us and just as capable of benefiting our communities. From this evidence alone the United States, if reasoning well, should be willing to allow a large number of refugees into the country to provide a safe place for them to rebuild their lives. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

<sup>128</sup> Dany Bahar, "Why Accepting Refugees is a Win-Win-Win Formula," Bloomberg, (June 19, 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/06/19/refugees-are-a-win-win-win-formula-for-economic-development/>,

<sup>129</sup> Tanvi Mirsa, "For the Last Time, Here's the Real Link Between Immigration and Crime" City Lab, (February 6, 2019) <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/02/crime-immigration-city-migrants-refugees-state-of-the-union/582001/>

Over the past decade or so, the number of refugees that have been allowed into the country has drastically declined.<sup>130</sup> Why? The answer is due to group biases that come from our social identities and group loyalties. Refugees come from a group that is foreign to us in the United States, and it is therefore hard for us to look at the facts and reason from them what we should do. Instead, many Americans fall into their motivated reasoning traps that allow them to see refugees as “other” and as an “outsider” that will not be able to acclimate to their culture and society.<sup>131</sup> This causes them to not want to allow refugees into our country, even though everyone involved benefits from their entry on balance.

Now, refugees have not only had to flee their homes due to the threat of violence, but they are also met with nowhere to go. Due to policies such as “metering” and Migrant Protection Protocols, less and less people are allowed to even begin the process of gaining entry to the United States. Instead, they are forced to wait on the opposite side of the U.S.-Mexico border where they are exposed to the same violence and crime that caused them to flee in the first place.<sup>132</sup> It is policies like this that have put thousands of lives in danger and have caused people to live for years in despicable conditions in border towns. Group loyalties caused us to allow the state to force people into this situation instead of helping them escape the violence against their lives. Group loyalties when using the coercive power of the state allowed us to not only mistreat other human beings, but also caused us to make a decision that is worse off for every party involved because of our own preconceived notions and biases.

<sup>130</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, “Key Facts about Refugees in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>

<sup>131</sup> Alan Gomez, “Fewer Americans Believe the U.S. Should Accept Refugees,” USA Today, (May 24, 2018), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/05/24/fewer-americans-believe-united-states-should-accept-refugees/638663002/>

<sup>132</sup> International Rescue Committee, “What happens to asylum seekers stranded at the U.S.-Mexico border?” (February 28, 2020) <https://www.rescue.org/article/what-happens-asylum-seekers-stranded-us-mexico-border>



Therefore, I would argue that the benefit of mobilization for communities is not enough to outweigh the consequences of group loyalties when there are situations such as the refugee crisis that emerge. The refugee crisis is an example of why we should not allow group loyalties to distort our thinking. It makes the situation worse off for everyone involved. The refugee case shows that when a powerful group is able to sway the way that the state operates without first caring about the lives that they are putting at risk and reasoning well through all of the facts from both sides, they can actually make themselves worse off along with other groups. If group loyalties have this kind of power over our decisions, that we would be willing to make ourselves worse off to hurt another group that is unfamiliar to us, then we ought to be actively working to combat them. This is a risk that we should not accept in our decision-making process.

### **Conclusion**

Now, it remains to be said what to do about group loyalties. In this section I will first explain what I think should be done in an ideal situation to combat our group loyalties so that we are able to reason better. In this section I will outline what I think we should do in an ideal world, and then offer more practical solutions to making progress on how we interact with group loyalties.

Given everything that I have considered thus far about group loyalties pertaining to partisanship and patriotism, I am inclined to argue that we should be actively working toward eliminating it from our system entirely and work toward finding ways to combat it within ourselves. We know that group loyalties are inherent in our nature, but it does not necessarily follow that we then have to allow them to dictate what happens in the lives of others. In fact, I would argue that since we know that we have this potential for problems it would be irresponsible to do nothing about it. Now that we know that we are predisposed to impairments

in our reasoning due to social identity and group loyalties, we have a responsibility to actively combat them to move toward better reasoning abilities.

In an ideal world people would not need to group themselves together by some sweeping set of stances on issues or on the basis of their citizenship, instead they would be able to take a more involved approach to consider every issue on the ballot and every elected official before making a decision. In an ideal world, partisanship and patriotism would not be a necessary motivator to civic engagement because people would not succumb to the temptations of their social identity and to take short cuts that the party system allows. They would, instead, be more inclined to check their group identity biases and confirmation biases before making decisions. In this case, then, ideally, we would not have partisanship or patriotism at all because it is irrational to rely on a group opinion to explain an individual's stance on a wide array of disparate issues. Therefore, in an ideal world people would be aware of where their motivated reasoning steps in and causes them to make irrational decisions based on identities and loyalties, and instead of allowing those influences to triumph they would work to combat them through careful evaluation and fact checking.

So, ideally, we would be able to work toward ridding ourselves of the major reasoning failures, but more practically I am aware that this is a long way off. Right now, I think that the best things that we can do to work toward reasoning well and moral progress is to first be aware that our group loyalties and social identities that accompany them are doing work in the background of our reasoning. Once we are aware that this is a phenomenon and that we are all susceptible to falling short, then we can do the mental work it takes to assess our decisions. In that way we will be creating a demand for more fact checking, better reporting of issues, and giving political parties responsible for much of how people consume information less powerful.

Instead, the system would pivot to focus on issue areas specifically, there would be less ability for political parties to cover all of the subjects because we would be demanding more from them as far as spelling out their plans and verifying their claims. There would be more of an emphasis on what the facts are telling us to consider rather than considerations of who is presenting the facts to us.

Shifting the focus from who is doing what and highlighting group divisions will give our subconscious dependency on group loyalty and divisions less power, and therefore less hold over our thought processes. We can reason better when we work to minimize the considerations that used to lead us astray, I argue. This then would allow us to continue to make more and more progress toward combating the distortion of our reasoning capabilities and facilitating more moral progress.

## CONCLUSION

I have just worked through my arguments that are aimed at explaining how to better engage civically. Bettering civic engagement begins with fulfilling our duties to others in how we ought to behave in our communities. The type of action we take, deliberate or not, matters, and we should strive to maximize the amount of good deliberate actions we take. Primarily, this means working toward moral progress by not falling into an attitude of apathy. We need to take care to avoid apathy by fulfilling a duty to care and a duty to reason well so that we are able to participate in deliberately moving moral progress forward. As the beneficiaries of past moral progress, we ought to be the ones to continue to move it forward so that others in the future are able to be included. The way that we should then be engaging in our communities should be aimed at this goal with considerations of how to fulfil duties in mind when making decisions.

The best way that we collectively take deliberate actions that are going to help facilitate moral progress is through voting. Voting is not only an expression of what the public wants, but it also reflects the type of actions and officials that we deem acceptable. Most importantly, voting and the choices of the representatives voting selects, are responsible for how people are able to live out their daily lives. It is through casting a vote that we enable the state to make decisions on our behalf and intervene in the lives of others. Not only should we be worried about non deliberate and deliberate actions, but when it comes to voting we should also be worried about making the wrong deliberate action and causing more problems instead of working to alleviate them. That is one of the current problems that plague voting, voters are voting irrationally. They are not reasoning through how to solve issues on the ballot for a myriad of differing reasons. In addition to irrationality that causes voters to misstep when thinking about

their voting decision, they also are incompetent when it comes to understanding how the different solutions proposed by different candidates will work themselves out. The United States system serves over three hundred million people, making it incredibly large and complex. There are people who invest their entire lives into studying one aspect of the system, and they sometimes have trouble figuring out policy solutions.

The irrationality and incompetency of voters leads me to the conclusion that instead of trying to vote as they normally would, voters should shift their focus to voting along the lines of expert opinion. In my voting chapter I call this deferring to experts. If there are people who have spent their entire lives working toward understanding as an aspect of our system to the point that they and their peers feel that they are competent enough to weigh in on it and offer advice, then voters should want to heed it. Voters do not need to do this blindly though, they ought to consider several expert opinions and then decide which is the solution given the types of arguments and considerations each expert has presented. The pushback on this idea is that I, as the voter, do not want to be giving up my power of decision to a set of experts. They may all swing to a certain ideology or have biased interests that come into play when they are offering their opinions and that seems risky when we consider how important voting is to the future of the country. But there is no reason to believe that experts are any less likely or equipped to choose the right thing, in fact, they are better positioned to choose better because they have a better grasp on the subject matter. Deferring to experts in order to better understand the issues at hand and make a better, more informed, deliberate action is a way to vote well.

The worry about how experts might taint their opinions when delivering them to the public comes from our group loyalties and our innate refusal to abandon them. Group loyalty comes from our social identity. Social identity is the part of our identity that we gain from our

membership within a particular group. Importantly, our social identity is closely held, and we put a significant weight in maintaining our good feelings about the groups that we share membership. We look for ways to make our groups look better compared to other groups, which influences the way that we assess and digest information that is presented to us. This means that when we are asked to make a voting decision, we are looking for cues for how to decide along the lines of our groups. Partisanship is the driver of this behavior. Partisanship causes us to want to vote along party lines and adhere to the types of policies that our party is dedicated to without much more assessment of what those policies would actually do.

Partisanship causes people to refuse to see the other side of the equation which stifles reasoning skills. If we come to the discussion already assuming that the other side is wrong about something, then we are not going to be open to hearing their points with an open mind and genuinely consider them. It is wrong to allow our group loyalty to get in the way of evaluating the claims on both sides of a discussion, and it is wrong to allow our group loyalty to make us irrational decision-makers that could result in worse choices for the whole. Further, partisanship is not alone in how this works. Patriotism also has a similar effect on how we engage in discussions about issues that reach beyond our lines drawn on a map. What these group loyalties do that is particularly harmful is that they use the power of the state to coerce and intervene in the lives of others in a way that can limit their freedoms and cause harm. Group loyalty to a cause that has the ability to affect the lives of others in this way must be carefully evaluated and checked before coming to any decision.

Overall, the goal of this thesis was to offer a better way to be civically engaged because the way that these issues allow the state to intervene in our lives needs to be examined carefully to ensure that we are making choices that help moral progress continue and improve the lives of

others. In this thesis I do not make attempts to lay out what the decisions toward moral progress should be, instead I wanted to explain that the way that we approach issues related to civic engagement need reassessment and improvement. Now, this thesis could serve as a framework for how to approach these topics in a more deliberate and rational way that is more likely, in my opinion, to lead to an increasing amount of moral progress.

With the 2020 election fast approaching, I have been thinking of ways that I can implement the arguments that I have made in this thesis in my own life. I know that most of the problems that I covered in this project are not going to change overnight, and that the amount of effort that are required to fulfil all of these duties will not immediately be filled due to other restraints, but I do think that there are some small changes that can happen right now to get on a better path than before. There are changes that can be made for the arguments in each chapter.

To avoid apathy and work toward fulfilling my two duties to others, I can start to be more engaged. Paying more attention to the types of problems that other people are facing and speaking out about can go a long way. Caring about the lives of others can start by paying more attention to the issues that they are the most passionate about and affected by. To do this, I should be reading the news to find out what issues are going to have the biggest impact in the next election cycle. Another way to do this is to even take to social media to see what types of posts people are making, assuming that I have a diverse enough group of people that I follow to give me a good enough sample. I can also make a point to learn about the lives of others who are completely unlike myself which would allow me to gain a more diverse insight into the problems that different groups are facing and not just the groups that are the closest to me.

Then, I can do my homework and due diligence to research, fact check, and learn as much as I can on a handful of these issues so that I am better equipped to make a good decision

about how to vote in upcoming elections and how to be a better ally generally. After learning about the problems that are hurting others in my community, I am in a better position to see ways to help them. I cannot begin to help others and care for them if I do not know where or what to look for in the first place. The key here is that I should pick *some* issues to take a deep dive into, not all of them. Trying to tackle all of the problems that others are facing because I care about their lives is not a realistic starting goal. It would be overwhelming to take a duty to care about the lives of others, but we can all do our part to find ways to care more about the lives of others. The idea is to start small and add more over time.

To build on the points above when voting, I can do a better job of being a more informed and more rational voter on a set of issues. Now that I can take more steps to find issues that are hurting the people in my community, I have established an area to work within for voting. I can then focus on a handful of issues instead of trying to understand all of them. I should then research them heavily, looking at both sides, and searching out expert opinions on them. Trying to find data on the source of the problem, parallel problems that have been solved in other places, and understanding practical solutions are all of the considerations that I should take into account when doing my research. Experts are going to have weighed in on all of these considerations in almost any problem area that I choose. Assuming that I have taken care to find expert opinions and data from research institutions that do not have an explicitly political goal like some news outlets, I can then begin to start forming my opinion. Before deciding on a stance on an issue I should then make sure to evaluate myself and where I might succumb to subconscious bias and irrationality. Now that I am aware of where these pitfalls are, I can deliberately check them before making a decision.



Checking my group bias is where my group loyalty chapter comes in handy. Now that I have a set of issues that I care about because I care about my community and have researched them to the best of my ability, I can look at my groups. If I am going to be making decisions on a ballot that have the ability to infringe on the lives of others, I need to make sure that the decision that I reach is as pure as it can be. By pure, I mean that it is as unbiased and as rational as possible. When considering my group loyalties, I can start to list out the groups that I am a part of and rank them for importance to my identity and where I might allow them to influence voting decisions. After I have deliberately made myself aware of these, I can turn to the research that I did and find what others are saying about the same topic that do not belong to my group. Then, I can assess their arguments knowing that I am going to fight them harder because of my group membership, so I will be aware to be open minded and accepting. I find that being aware of areas of weakness and being deliberate about mediating against these effects can be helpful in making progress toward overcoming those pitfalls.

There are gaps in some of my work and there is room to build upon these ideas as well. Each of the three sections of my thesis has room for improvement that was not covered here. In apathy there is a deeper consideration of the types of things that ought to motivate us. Within voting, there are still questions over what a system of deference to experts would really look like and how to make sure that it is accessible to everyone so that no one is disenfranchised by the shift that this would cause in voting behavior. Group loyalties could be expanded to provide a systematic way for us to check our motivated reasoning when it comes to our group membership and social identity.

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