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ARTICLE

Having enough of a say

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Abstract
Political Equality is the view that, in political matters, everyone should have an equal say. Political Sufficiency is the view that, in political matters, everyone should have enough of a say. Whereas Political Equality is concerned with relativities, Political Sufficiency is a matter of absolutes. It is natural to assume that, to justify 'one person, one vote', we must appeal to Political Equality. We argue that this is not the case. If Political Equality justifies 'one person, one vote', so does Political Sufficiency. Moreover, there is reason to prefer Political Sufficiency to Political Equality.

Keywords: political equality; political sufficiency; democracy; one person; one vote; positional goods

1. Introduction

'One person, one vote' is, for many political philosophers, a datum. In a sense, this is natural. After all, we are all familiar with historical examples of undemocratic deviations from 'one person, one vote': disenfranchisement of everyone but the king; of the propertyless; of women; and of Black people. Now, the reason many political philosophers take 'one person, one vote' to be a datum is that they believe everyone should have an equal say. Let us refer to this view as *Political Equality*.[1] However, one does not have to support Political Equality to object to the historical instances of disenfranchisement mentioned above. One can also object to such instances if one believes that everyone should have enough of a say. Let us refer to this view as *Political Sufficiency*. This is the first aim of this paper: to argue that, to object to such grave forms of political inequality, one does not have to be a political egalitarian. To a political sufficientarian, they are objectionable because not everyone has enough of a say. This is important because such forms of political inequality are often appealed to in justifying Political Equality.

[1]Proponents of Political Equality include: Cohen (1989), Brighouse (1996), Christiano (1996, 2008), Anderson (1999), Kolodny (2014b), Viehoff (2014) and Peña-Rangel (2022).

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Now, the same is true when it comes to 'one person, one vote'. To justify 'one person, one vote', one does not have to support Political Equality. If Political Equality justifies 'one person, one vote', then so does Political Sufficiency. We provide this argument in two steps. First, we argue that there is good reason to believe that Political Sufficiency justifies 'one person, one vote'. The reason is that the vote – or political influence more generally – is a positional good. Positional goods are special in the sense that the absolute value of the good to you depends on how much others have of the good. Education is an example. The absolute value of your master's degree is much higher in the case where everyone else has a bachelor's degree than in the case where everyone else has a PhD degree. The absolute value of a positional good depends on one's relative position in the distribution of that good. It is precisely for this reason that deviating from 'one person, one vote' is likely to result in some not having enough of a say. If so, Political Sufficiency justifies 'one person, one vote'. But it is important to stress that it justifies it in a different way than Political Equality. Whereas Political Equality justifies 'one person, one vote' because it gives everyone an equal say, Political Sufficiency justifies 'one person, one vote' because it gives everyone enough of a say. The former is a matter of relativities, the latter is a matter of absolutes. Now, some might be sceptical that a small deviation from 'one person, one vote' leads to some not having enough of a say. Here the conditionality of our argument put forward above becomes important: we will argue that, *if* Political Equality justifies 'one person, one vote', then so does Political Sufficiency. By discussing three prominent justifications of democracy, we argue that if a small deviation from 'one person, one vote' is in line with Political Sufficiency, it is also in line with Political Equality. In other words, if a small deviation from 'one person, one vote' is significant enough to violate Political Equality, it is also significant enough to violate Political Sufficiency. This is the second aim of our paper: to show that there is good reason to think that Political Sufficiency justifies 'one person, one vote'. And that, in any case, if Political Equality can justify 'one person, one vote', so can Political Sufficiency.

The third, and final, aim of our paper is to argue that there are separate reasons to prefer Political Sufficiency to Political Equality. The first reason is that, from the point of view of Political Equality, giving no one a vote is as good as giving everyone one vote. But this seems to speak against the intuitive value that we accord democracy. Political Sufficiency does not believe that the two are equally good. Since it is concerned with absolutes, giving everyone one vote is better than giving no one a vote. Thus, Political Sufficiency better captures the intuitive value of democracy than Political Equality. The second reason is that Political Sufficiency is favoured by Occam's razor. The main upshot of our paper is that there is good reason to support Political Sufficiency, and much less reason to support Political Equality than many democratic theorists think.

2. What is Political Equality and Political Sufficiency?

In discussions on distributive justice, it is common to distinguish between *Equality* and *Sufficiency*. Equality is a view concerned with relativities: it is a matter of how much people have in relation to each other. When everyone has equal amounts of

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whatever is the proper currency of distributive justice, Equality is satisfied. That is also the case if the amount amounts to zero. Sufficiency, on the other hand, is a view concerned with absolutes: what matters is that everyone has enough, not necessarily an equal share. There is a threshold point – where everyone has enough – above which whatever is the currency of justice takes on a morally different meaning. Providing goods below the threshold is morally incomparable to providing goods above the threshold. In this sense, Sufficiency is discontinuous. Standardly, Sufficiency is taken to be committed to two theses, namely the positive and the negative thesis. The positive thesis maintains that it is of central moral importance that everyone is above some critical threshold. The negative thesis maintains that once everyone is above this critical threshold, inequalities are justice-irrelevant (Casal 2007). Egalitarians are not committed to such thresholds. Their view is, in that sense, continuous. In short, we can say that, whereas egalitarians are concerned with eliminating inequality, sufficientarians are concerned with eliminating insufficiency.

Now, these views can also be formulated in relation to political matters:

Political Equality: Everyone should have an equal say.

Political Sufficiency: Everyone should have enough of a say.

What is true of Equality and Sufficiency in general is also true of Political Equality and Political Sufficiency. Political Equality is concerned with relativities: if a procedure gives anyone a say, it should give everyone an equal say. If you have a vote, I should also have a vote. But Political Equality is also realized if none of us have a say. In that case, we are still equally well off in reference to the value of having a say. Political Sufficiency is not concerned with relativities, but absolutes. It is satisfied when everyone has enough of a say. In terms of the positive thesis, it is of central moral importance that, in political matters, everyone has enough of a say. In terms of the negative thesis, once everyone has enough of a say, inequalities in deciding political matters are of no, or at least different, concern. On Political Equality, political injustices are inequalities. The central reason for egalitarians to object to an existing distribution is that someone has *less than* others. On Political Sufficiency, political injustices are insufficiencies. Thus, the central reason for sufficientarians to object to an existing distribution is that someone has less than enough, in reference to what any person is entitled to. As is clear, the two views are different. These remarks suffice for now. We will say more about the two views as we move along.

3. Well-known Political Injustices

We are all familiar with the paradigmatic examples of injustices when it comes to having a political say: the dictator who decides everything by himself; the sexist society in which women are excluded from the franchise; the racist society in which Black people are denied the right to vote; the oligarchic society in which only the rich decide. These are obviously political injustices. Any theory of political matters – or, we might say, any democratic theory – must capture such injustices: must explain, precisely, why they are injustices. This we take for granted.

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Now, one might think that Political Equality most naturally explains the paradigmatic examples of political injustices. After all, it is easy to see why, say, the racist political society is politically unjust. Since not everyone has an equal say, Political Equality is violated. Indeed, such paradigmatic examples of political inequalities are sometimes pointed to when justifying Political Equality. For instance, Christiano (2004: 275–276) says, 'If someone's judgment is not permitted a hearing in society, then the interests described above will be set back. Anyone who is excluded from participation in discussion and debate can see that his or her interests are not being taken seriously and may legitimately infer that his or her moral standing is being treated as less than that of others. So justice, which requires public equality, demands equal respect for the judgment of each' (see, also, Christiano 2008: 88; cf. Blau 2023: 33).

But we do not have to turn to Political Equality to explain why the paradigmatic examples are politically unjust. Political Sufficiency can also explain why this is the case. An analogy may be helpful at this point. *Relational egalitarianism* is a theory of justice according to which justice requires that people relate as equals (see e.g. Anderson 1999; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018; Scheffler 2005). Justice, for relational egalitarians, is thus a matter of how we relate to each other. Acknowledging that everyone has equal moral worth and equal moral standing is integral to relational egalitarianism. This commitment easily explains why racism, sexism, and related phenomena are unjust: because the denial of equal moral worth integral to these phenomena is constitutive of relational inequality. Many relational egalitarians point precisely to such paradigmatic injustices to support their view (Anderson 1999: 295; Scheffler 2003: 22). But, as has recently been argued, there is a relational alternative to relational egalitarianism, namely *relational sufficientarianism*. This is the view that justice requires that people relate as sufficients (Lippert-Rasmussen 2020, 2021; Bengtson and Nielsen 2023). It is also integral to relational sufficientarianism to acknowledge that everyone has equal moral worth and equal moral standing. Thus, relational sufficientarians also object to paradigmatic injustices such as racism and sexism. They are objectionable because they deny everyone's equal moral worth and therefore make some relate to others as insufficients. To object to such relational inequalities, then, we do not have to be relational egalitarians. We could also be relational sufficientarians. This is dialectically important: it means that appealing to such paradigmatic relational inequalities cannot explain why we should be relational egalitarians as opposed to relational sufficientarians (Bengtson and Nielsen 2023: 907).

The same is true when it comes to these paradigmatic political inequalities. It is true that Political Equality can explain why they are politically unjust: these political societies are unjust because they fail to give everyone an equal say. But Political Sufficiency can also explain why they are politically unjust: they are unjust because they fail to give everyone enough of a say. We do not have to know exactly what it takes to have enough of a say to determine that, if you are denied the vote because of your race, sex, etc., you do not have enough of a say (cp. Lippert-Rasmussen 2022). We believe that Political Equality receives much intuitive support because it is assumed that we need Political Equality to object to these paradigmatic political

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injustices.[2] But, as we have just seen, we do not need Political Equality for these purposes. This is important to keep in mind. It means that more must be said if we want to justify Political Equality.

4. One Person, One Vote and Political Sufficiency

In this section, we will argue that there is good reason to believe that Political Sufficiency justifies 'one person, one vote'. And then we will explain, by looking at a possible objection the political egalitarian may raise against the political sufficientarian, why Political Equality and Political Sufficiency are similarly positioned in relation to 'one person, one vote'. This latter argument, which we provide in section 5, we refer to as the Conditional Argument. So we may call the argument we provide in this section the Positive Argument.

The paradigmatic inequalities that we considered in the previous section are particularly grave examples of political injustice. Perhaps, one might think, this helps Political Sufficiency in the sense that, when it comes to such grave inequalities, it is clear why there is a lack of sufficiency. But there can be political inequalities without these being racist, sexist, etc., and where it is not as clear that they are insufficiencies. And so one might think that even if Political Sufficiency can take us some of the way, it cannot take us all the way to 'one person, one vote'. This is why we should still prefer Political Equality. After all, as Kolodny (2023: 291) points out, 'sometimes [in political philosophy] it is just assumed that our task is to construct a political philosophy for a liberal democracy, where some principle of one person, one vote is, like the injustice of chattel slavery, a 'fixed point''. And so, if Political Sufficiency cannot justify a system of 'one person, one vote', this speaks against Political Sufficiency, and in favour of Political Equality (since it is clear why Political Equality justifies 'one person, one vote').

[2]One might object that even if Political Sufficiency can also explain what's wrong in these paradigmatic cases, Political Equality still provides the better explanation of the wrongness. Consider a minority group – the Greens – that has recently achieved voting parity after several decades of disenfranchisement. As a member of the Greens celebrates with one of her own, she spots Blue, a member of the majority, passing by. Green turns to Blue and proclaims this recent political development "a long overdue victory for justice – finally an acknowledgement that we are all equals, entitled to an equal say". Blue responds: "Do not kid yourself: you and I might be moral equals, but you and I are not entitled to an equal say. People like you are just entitled to a sufficient say; it just so happens that, because votes are positional goods, there is no distribution of the franchise short of equality that will do that for you." One might think that, in this case, Green would still have a reasonable complaint. And that complaint seems best captured by Political Equality. We have two responses. First, the way the example is framed stacks the cards in favour of Political Equality (and against Political Sufficiency). Blue says that "people like you (Green) are just entitled to a sufficient say". It makes it sound as if the say Green is granted is less than the say Blue is granted. But that is not the case on Political Sufficiency: everyone is "just" entitled to a sufficient say. Responding to their equal moral worth requires, according to Political Sufficiency, that they both be given a sufficient say. Second, our intuitive response to the example may be driven by the fact that Greens have just achieved voting parity *after several decades of disenfranchisement*. We might think, then, that Greens are owed compensation for this historical disenfranchisement, such that they should have more of a say than Blues. If that is the case, then it is not clear how the case speaks in favour of Political Equality (which simply says that they should have an equal say). We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection.

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An essential distinction for our argument is between *positional* and *non-positional goods*. Positional goods, Brighouse and Swift (2006: 474) explain, 'are goods the absolute value of which, to their possessors, depends on those possessors' place in the distribution of the good – on their relative standing with respect to the good in question'. Take the positional aspects of education. The labour market value of you having, say, a master's degree depends on the educational qualifications of the others in the market. If you are the only one with a master's degree, and everyone else has a bachelor's degree, your market value will be high. Relative to everyone else in the distribution, you have a higher level of educational qualification. Suppose, instead, that you are the only one with a master's degree, but everyone else has a PhD degree. In that case, your market value will be low. Relative to everyone else in the distribution, you have a lower level of educational qualification. As this illustrates, the absolute value of your education depends on your place in the distribution of education.[3] This is what is characteristic of positional goods: that absolute value depends on relativities. Non-positional goods, on the other hand, are different. The absolute value of a non-positional good does not depend on how one is placed in the distribution of the good. You can enjoy being in good health even if others are also in good, or perhaps even better, health.[4] You can enjoy the good of being well-fed even if others have better access to food than you do. And you can enjoy good housing even if someone else's house has an extra bedroom.

When it comes to non-positional goods, the sufficientarian story is quite simple. Since it is absolute level, and not relative position, that matters in relation to enjoying such goods, it does not matter in itself whether everyone has equal amounts of such goods. Even if they do not, everyone might have enough of such goods. As Axelsen and Nielsen (2015: 420) point out, 'it seems wrong to say that people need *equal* levels of housing, health, or security to be able to lead successful lives. For example, one is not under pressure that would impair any normal person in their pursuit of a successful life simply because one has a less perfectly enhanced health than others'. In short, sufficientarians have no problem with non-positional goods being distributed unequally as long as everyone has enough of such goods.

However, the story is more complicated when it comes to positional goods. Remember that sufficiency is a view concerned with absolutes: it is a matter of you, in an absolute sense, having enough (and not a matter of how much you have compared with others). But, as we mentioned above, positional goods are special in this respect since one's absolute position is determined by one's relative position. 'By their very nature positional goods bring together [absolutes and relativities]' (Brighouse and Swift 2006: 474). The absolute value of a positional good depends on one's relative position in the distribution of that good. When it comes to positional goods, whether you have enough of the good in an absolute sense thus depends on

[3]This is not to deny that education also has nonpositional value. As Brighouse and Swift (2006: 482) explain, 'It [education] enables us to flourish in ways that have nothing to do with our competitiveness in labor markets. The educated person has a world of culture, complexity, and enjoyment opened to her, engaging in which is valuable in ways that are not competitive.'

[4]Health is complicated in the sense that it may also have positional value (Brighouse and Swift 2006: 479). But even if so, it clearly has nonpositional value as well.

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how much others have. This means, as Ypi (2012: 111) eloquently puts it, that when it comes to positional goods, 'equality and sufficiency cannot be kept apart'.

Importantly, political influence, the good with which Political Sufficiency is concerned, is a positional good (Axelsen and Nielsen 2015: 419; see also Rawls 1993: 356–363). The absolute value of your political influence depends on how much political influence others have. Suppose that you have one vote, whereas everyone else does not have a vote. In that case, you are the dictator. Suppose, instead, that you have one vote, whereas everyone else has two votes. In that case, you are the low-born. Although you have the same token amount of political influence in the two scenarios – namely, one vote – you enjoy the good of political influence to extremely different degrees. And this is precisely because political influence is a positional good.

Now, it is reasonable that, when it comes to a positional good like political influence, only an equal distribution, such as 'one person, one vote', secures sufficiency. Brighouse and Swift note this relation between enough and equality in saying that, 'in competitive contexts, it seems plausible both that only a fair chance is enough of a chance and that only an equal chance is a fair chance' (2006: 476). This needs further unpacking, however. The positionality of political influence is not tied to its competitive context alone. Rather, it is an integral part of the value of the good. To see this, consider a simple cake division scenario, where two self-interested individuals are deciding how to divide a cake between them. Here, two different modes of positionality can occur. First, because cake resources are not unlimited, how much cake each person has effectively depends on the other person's share. If A takes more than half of the cake, this necessarily leaves less than half to B. This aspect of positionality is extrinsic to the good in question (the value of cake holding). It is a contingent consequence of the competitive context of scarcity, i.e. the fact that there is a limited amount of cake to be distributed. If there was no scarcity in cake resources, there would be no positionality in the distribution. The second mode of positionality is intrinsic to the value of political influence. How much say over the cake-dividing decision each person has naturally depends on the say of the other. If A has more voting power than B in the decision process, the choice of how to divide the cake is effectively and exclusively up to A. If A has the major part in the say, it makes little difference how much voting power B has in absolute terms (whether it is 49% or 1% of the votes). Because of the intrinsic positionality of political influence, the unequal say effectively involves the possibility of full dominance for A and no influence for B. Whether the first mode of positionality derived from scarcity involves relevant insufficiency (e.g. in cake holding) depends on contingencies about absolute levels (e.g. how large the cake is and how much cake each person needs). But the intrinsic positionality of political influence implies that inequality in political say necessarily involves insufficient say. This intrinsic mode of positionality is the most important aspect for understanding how having enough of a say grounds 'one person, one vote'.

A further derivative aspect of the positionality tracks the symbolic dimension of the right to vote (Wall 2007: 430–431). Giving some one vote while giving others two votes easily conveys the message that the former are lesser citizens, worsening, in an absolute sense, the former's societal status and self-respect (Axelsen and Nielsen 2015: 419; see also Satz 2007). This might not be *directly* objectionable from

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the perspective of sufficient political influence. Critics might object that as long as everyone has enough of a say (i.e. one person, one vote), our account here does not ground an entitlement for everyone to be treated and regarded as social equals. This objection should not worry us too much. Since social status is likely to be positional in a way very similar to political influence (Nielsen and Axelsen 2017), and because sufficientarians about political influence are arguably also sufficientarians about social status (or, in any case, could be), the potential negative spill-over from unequal say to social inferiority certainly gives us reason to support 'one person, one vote' from a sufficientarian perspective. The fact that this additional reason is derivative makes no difference for our argument.

We can further bolster this argument – that Political Sufficiency likely requires an equal distribution of political influence – with the following. On the view of Political Sufficiency we have in mind, an inequality in political influence cannot be compensated by a reverse inequality in, say, well-being. Thus, one cannot say that, although you do not have enough of a say when it comes to political influence, you have more than enough when it comes to well-being such that, overall, you do have enough. We are inspired here by Axelsen and Nielsen (2015: 413) who argue that, on their account of sufficiency, several thresholds exist *horizontally*. On their conception, what is important is freedom from duress: to be free from significant pressure against succeeding in central aspects of human life. When one is free from such pressure, one has enough. But, importantly, there are different aspects of human life that are all part of being free to lead a successful life, and this is why there are several thresholds horizontally. 'This means', Axelsen and Nielsen (2015: 414) explain, 'that one cannot make simple trade-offs and make up for a lack in one central dimension by giving someone a larger amount of another. Thus, the contributions made by each of these central freedoms (or capabilities) to the possibility of pursuing a successful life are *inconmmensurable*.' This idea of incommensurability between the different dimensions constitutive of a successful life explains why, according to Political Sufficiency, we cannot compensate an inequality in political influence by a reverse inequality in, say, well-being. These are simply incommensurable dimensions, so we cannot speak of "overall standing" in the sense that even if one is below in some dimension, one can have enough overall. An insufficiency in one dimension – e.g. political influence – cannot be compensated by having more than enough in another dimension. This speaks further in favour of why Political Sufficiency might justify 'one person, one vote'. Achieving Political Sufficiency is solely a matter of how political influence is distributed among people in society. If some do not have enough of a say in political matters, we cannot mitigate this by giving them more in another dimension. When we add to this that, as explained above, political influence is a positional good, it looks likely that, to achieve Political Sufficiency, everyone should have an equal say.[5]

[5]As we pointed out earlier in this section, the good with which Political Sufficiency is concerned is political influence. Now, it is common for political egalitarians to understand political influence broadly. It is not only a matter of formal equality, such as 'one person, one vote', but also informal equality: equality in one's ability to shape and influence how others interact with those institutions (e.g. Kolodny (2023: 383) takes informal equality of opportunity to consist "roughly in the availability of resources, such as wealth and leisure, to apply to the legal or procedural structure to acquire information or influence the votes of others or the decisions of officials"). For instance, large wealth inequalities may easily lead to inequalities in informal

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At this point, one might object that this is so only because equality and sufficiency cannot be kept apart, so why should this speak in favour of sufficiency (and not equality)? We agree with this objection in the sense that our argument in this section does not show that we should prefer Political Sufficiency to Political Equality. We go into that question later in the paper. For now, our point has been to show that there is good reason to believe that Political Sufficiency can justify 'one person, one vote'. This shows that one does not have to support Political Equality to support 'one person, one vote'. So what our argument shows is that Political Equality does not have an advantage – which one might otherwise have suspected – in this respect. Justifying Political Equality requires more than showing that it can justify 'one person, one vote', since Political Equality and Political Sufficiency are not different in this respect.

5. The Conditional Argument

So much for the Positive Argument. At this point, one might say that there is the following problem with Political Sufficiency justifying 'one person, one vote'. We can imagine small deviations from equal political influence that do not seem to threaten that everyone has enough of a say. Consider:

> *Little Democracy*. Everyone has one vote, except Little, the only member of a persistent minority, who has two votes.

Suppose there are five million eligible voters in Little Democracy. That Little has two votes, and the rest have one vote, does not seem to entail that the latter do not have enough of a say. But it is a deviation from 'one person, one vote'. So, if Little Democracy is not objectionable according to Political Sufficiency, it seems that Political Sufficiency cannot justify 'one person, one vote'. Moreover, Political Equality can explain why Little Democracy is objectionable: it is objectionable precisely because not everyone has an equal say. Thus, whereas Political Equality can justify 'one person, one vote', Political Sufficiency cannot.

To this objection, we have one shorter and one longer reply. Let us begin with the shorter one. First, we think Little Democracy trades on the fact that Little is said to be the only member of a persistent minority. The thing with persistent minorities is that they are consistently outvoted, and never get it their way. But then one might suspect that Little actually does not have enough of a say, even when granted an

influence (e.g. Christiano 2012; Kolodny 2023: ch. 31). Now, our aim in this section has been to show that there is good reason to believe that Political Sufficiency can justify 'one person, one vote'. This is not meant to suggest that we adopt a narrow understanding of political influence on Political Sufficiency. Having enough of a say is a matter of both formal and informal influence. One might wonder how this squares with the pluralist sufficientarian view we have appealed to in this section: is it an implication that equality in other dimensions than political influence may be required to secure sufficiency in relation to political influence? Yes, to illustrate: it might be that at least rough equality in relation to how money is distributed is required to secure sufficient political influence for everyone. As this interestingly shows, achieving sufficiency in one dimension (e.g. political influence) might require (rough) equality in another dimension (distribution of money), where the latter dimension itself has an independent threshold of sufficiency. We thank an anonymous reviewer for helpful discussion on this point.

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extra vote. The good of interest, one might say, is not the voting per se, but the political influence attached to the vote – i.e. in defending 'one person, one vote', we are more fundamentally referring to the value of 'one person, one unit of influence'. That extra vote will not change the fact that Little is consistently outvoted. So, if we consider directly the distribution of the good of political influence rather than votes, Little effectively may have both an insufficient amount and less than others. If so, then Political Sufficiency might not, after all, be satisfied in Little Democracy, just as Political Equality also might not be. This was the shorter reply.

Perhaps we should simply assume, then, that the person getting the extra vote in Little Democracy is not a member of a persistent minority. We should assume instead that the person is simply a random individual in society. So, suppose Random is granted two votes, whereas everyone else is granted one vote. Let us refer to this version as *Random Democracy*. This brings us to our longer reply: what we refer to as the Conditional Argument. We want to argue that *if* Political Equality justifies 'one person, one vote', so does Political Sufficiency. The conditionality of that statement is important. What we want to argue now is that, if Random Democracy does not violate Political Sufficiency, then neither does it violate Political Equality. In other words, if Political Sufficiency does not justify 'one person, one vote', then neither does Political Equality.

We will start with the observation that, if Political Sufficiency is realized in Random Democracy, that is because Random's having an extra vote is too insignificant to change the fact that everyone has enough of a say. But if it is insignificant when it comes to Political Sufficiency, we will argue, it is also insignificant when it comes to Political Equality. To see why, we have to turn to the justifications that may underlie Political Equality and explain why everyone must have an equal say. That is, we must turn to prominent justifications of democracy. We cannot here go through every potential justification that may underlie Political Equality. But we will go through three prominent justifications. And we take it that our arguments in relation to these justifications apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other justifications that may underlie Political Equality as well.

A common justification of democracy is that everyone should have an opportunity to protect their interests (Goodin 2007: 50; Miller 2009: 216; Bengtson and Lippert-Rasmussen 2021: 575). If this is to underlie Political Equality, we must assume that everyone should have an equal opportunity to protect their interests. Now, either Random Democracy is insufficient to generate unequal opportunities for interest protection, or it is not. One might think that it is insufficient since, even if Random has an extra vote, in an election with 5,000,000 voters, it makes such a miniscule difference that it might not constitute a relevant inequality in opportunity for interest protection (cp. Brennan and Freiman 2023: 63; but see Barnett 2020). In that case, Random Democracy does not violate Political Equality. Or, suppose, instead, that the extra vote is sufficient to generate a relevant inequality in opportunity for interest protection between Random and the other voters, such that Random Democracy does not satisfy Political Equality. If that is true – that the extra vote is the difference-maker between relevant equality and inequality – then it should also be the difference-maker between relevant sufficiency and insufficiency. After all, as we pointed out earlier, when it comes to positional goods, 'equality and sufficiency cannot be kept apart' (Ypi 2012: 111). If the extra vote to Random fails to

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provide the other voters with an equal opportunity for interest protection, it also fails to provide them with a sufficient opportunity for interest protection. In that case, Random Democracy satisfies neither Political Equality nor Political Sufficiency.

Another prominent justification of democracy appeals to *self-government*. It comes in different versions. One distinction is between *negative* and *positive self-government*. In the former, democracy plays a protective role; it protects one from unfreedom. In the latter, democracy secures a good, that of being the author of one's life (Lovett and Zuehl 2022: 471–473).[6] Another distinction is between *individualist* and *collectivist* views. On the former, what democracy protects or promotes is individual self-government. On the latter, what democracy protects or promotes is collective self-government.[7] These two distinctions cut across each other and provide four different self-government views. Let us start with the individualist views. In relation to these views, we can make the same points as we did in relation to the interest protection view. Either Random Democracy is insufficient to make some unequally self-governing, or it is not. What speaks in favour of the former is that it is not clear that being granted a vote makes a difference to the individual's self-government to begin with. After all, the individual is simply one out of many millions of voters (see e.g. Christiano 1996: 19, 24–25; Brennan 2011: 99; Saunders 2011: 281; Miklosi 2012: 499; Kolodny 2014a: 208–209; Viehoff 2014: 351). But if so, then Random Democracy arguably does not make a difference to any individual's self-government either, in which case it does not threaten Political Equality or Political Sufficiency. Or, instead, Random Democracy makes some unequally self-governing. It makes Random more self-governing than the rest of the voters, and thereby violates Political Equality. But if so, and because the vote is a positional good, Random's extra vote also diminishes the absolute value of the other voters' vote such that they no longer have sufficient self-government, and therefore not enough of a say. This may, in some sense, sound too easy for Political Sufficiency. But if so, that is only because it is already assumed that Political Equality takes precedence over Political Sufficiency. And that would be to unfairly disadvantage Political Sufficiency. If political influence is a positional good, then Political Equality and Political Sufficiency are similarly situated in relation to these justifications. Again, if Random Democracy makes a relevant difference to self-government, that is the case both when it comes to inequality and insufficiency.

Let us now turn to the collectivist views, i.e. the views on which individuals should be given a say because it protects or promotes collective self-government. We can cover this quickly. As Kolodny (2014a: 209) explains, the problem with appealing to collective self-government when justifying giving individuals a say, is that it is not clear why the collective must be democratic to be self-governing. If so, appealing to the collective should help neither Political Equality nor Political Sufficiency.

[6]For a negative view, see e.g. Abizadeh (2008), Stilz (2019), Wilson (2021, 2022). For a positive view, see e.g. Lovett and Zuehl (2022).

[7]For an individualist view, see the references in the previous footnote. For a collectivist view, see Altman and Wellman (2009).

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A third prominent justification of democracy is the *relational egalitarian* view that democracy is valuable because it is a constituent part of citizens relating as equals (Anderson 1999; Kolodny 2014b, 2023; Viehoff 2014; González-Ricoy and Queralt 2018; Wilson 2019; Ingham 2022; Lovett and Zuehl 2022; Peña-Rangel 2022).[8] This view, like the self-government view, also comes in a negative and a positive version. According to the negative view, democracy protects us from objectionable unequal relations (Kolodny 2014b, 2023). According to the positive view, democracy constitutes egalitarian relationships similar to friendships (Viehoff 2014). This is because unequal power is constitutive of objectionable unequal relations (re the negative view), and equal power is constitutive of valuable equal relations (re the positive view). Now, either Random Democracy constitutes a relevant power inequality, or it does not. Starting with the latter, and as noted above, the power provided by *one* vote is miniscule in elections with many millions of voters. If so, it is hard to see why the difference in power between Random and the other voters is sufficient to constitute objectionable unequal relations or detract from valuable egalitarian relations. In that case, Random Democracy does not violate Political Equality. Or, Random Democracy does constitute a relevant power inequality between Random and the other voters; it constitutes objectionable unequal relations. But if the extra vote makes for a power difference such that people fail to relate as equals, it arguably also makes people fail to relate as sufficients, cf. the distinction between relational equality and relational sufficientarianism put forward earlier. Again, 'by their very nature positional goods bring together [absolutes and relativities]' (Brighouse and Swift 2006: 474). Just as, on Political Equality, the power inequality makes for relational inequality, on Political Sufficiency, the power inequality makes for an absolute deficiency constitutive of relational insufficiency.

We have seen, with regard to three prominent justifications of democracy, that if Random Democracy violates Political Equality, then it also violates Political Sufficiency. In other words, if Political Equality justifies "one person, one vote", then so does Political Sufficiency. Of course, there are other justifications of democracy as well (see e.g. Arneson 1993; Christiano 2008; Pettit 2012). Space limits preclude us from discussing these in depth. But we suspect that our arguments in relation to the three discussed justifications may apply to these as well: either they explain why Random Democracy violates Political Equality, in which case they also explain why Random Democracy violates Political Sufficiency, or they do not explain why Random Democracy violates Political Equality.[9] There is this symmetry precisely because the vote is a positional good,

[8]For an instrumentalist relational egalitarian justification of democracy, see Motchoulski (2021). For criticism, see Zuehl (2023).

[9]An anonymous reviewer notes that what grounds Political Sufficiency might also make a difference to the claim that Political Sufficiency justifies 'one person, one vote'. Consider Mill's defence of plural voting: '[i]t is a personal injustice to withhold from any one, unless for the prevention of greater evils, the ordinary privilege of having his voice reckoned in the disposal of affairs in which he has the same interest as other people. If he is compelled to pay, if he may be compelled to fight, if he is required implicitly to obey, he should be legally entitled to be told what for; to have his consent asked, and his opinion counted at its worth, though not more than its worth' (Mill 2010: 166). (For an argument that Mill in fact justifies electoral voice in two complementary ways, see Turner 2024). Following Mill, we might think that having a sufficient say is just having enough of an opportunity to manifest one's consent, or enough influence consistent with the

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and it is in the nature of positional goods that they bring together absolutes and relativities; that they tie together equality and sufficiency.

6. Why You Should Support Political Sufficiency

In the previous section, we have, by exploring common justifications of democracy, argued that if Political Equality justifies "one person, one vote", then so does Political Sufficiency. Key to this argument is that the distributive good to which votes relate is political influence, and that political influence is a positional good. It follows from this that inequality in political influence is also, already, insufficiency. From this we might draw a conclusion of overdetermination regarding the 'one person, one vote' slogan. When distinct political theories support the same outcome – in this case, 'one person, one vote' – this should simply strengthen our confidence in that principle.[10] No more may be needed for political guidance. But philosophically, this only takes us halfway to our destination. We want to know not only *what* to do, but also *why* we should do it. We want to enquire into our reasons for the slogan in order to compare, theoretically, Political Equality and Political Sufficiency. In this section, we will thus argue that there are theoretical reasons to prefer Political Sufficiency to Political Equality.

The first reason is that Political Equality cannot explain why giving everyone one vote is preferable to giving no one a vote, but Political Sufficiency can. Consider:

None. No one has a vote.[11]

All. Everyone has one vote.

From the point of view of Political Equality, None and All are equally good.[12] They both make sure that everyone has an equal say. But, intuitively, it seems clear that All is preferable to None (Lovett and Zuehl 2022: 469). Political Equality has this implausible result because it is concerned with relativities: how much of a say people have in relation to each other. The relevant contrast to a just distribution of political

appropriate worth of one's voice. And it is not clear that either of these requires equality in votes. Two responses. First, to us, it is also not clear that they do not require equality in votes. For all that has been said, it might be that having enough of an opportunity to manifest one's consent is to have an equal opportunity to do so. Second, our argument in this section is conditional: if Political Equality justifies 'one person, one vote', then so does Political Sufficiency. Importantly, we can raise the point raised by the reviewer in relation to Political Equality as well: what grounds Political Equality might also make a difference to the claim that Political Equality justifies 'one person, one vote'. If Mill's view grounds Political Equality, it is not clear that the view requires equality in votes. We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

[10]A useful analogy might be Cass Sunstein's *incompletely theorized agreements* (Sunstein 1995).

[11]You might wonder how that would work. One way might be if those currently alive in society are governed by the rules laid out by those who are now dead (government by the dead hand of the past) (Kolodny 2023). Another, more imaginative, option is the following proposed by Lovett and Zuehl (2022: 469–470): 'Imagine a reliable deity creates an algorithm for morally impeccable legislation: input current social conditions and it produces perfectly just laws'. In fact, Lovett and Zuehl (2022: 470) say that the latter is just a high-tech version of the former. It is not a problem, for our purposes, if neither is particularly likely. Possibility suffices.

[12]Estlund (2000: 136, 148–149, 153–156; 2008: 195) raises such a levelling down objection to Political Equality.

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influence from the perspective of Political Equality is an unequal distribution of votes. But such a distribution is absent in both None and All.[13]

Political Sufficiency does not imply that None and All are equally good. According to this view, All is preferable to None. The reason is that Political Sufficiency is concerned with absolutes: that everyone has enough of a say. For Political Sufficiency, the relevant contrast is insufficient political influence – that some do not have enough of a say. This insufficiency is present in None, but not in All. The problem in None is precisely that no one has enough of a say.[14] No one has a say. But that is not the case in All. In All, everyone has one vote. Everyone has, in an absolute sense, enough of a say. To reinforce the claim from the previous section, everyone has enough of a say in part because they have the same as others, but that is important only due to the positionality of the good in question. Political Sufficiency thus appreciates All conjunctively: it says that All is preferable to None because everyone enjoys effective political influence (absolute component), *and* no one suffers the insufficiency of having less influence than others (positional component). All is, therefore, preferable to None, and for sufficientarian reasons. It seems, then, that Political Sufficiency better captures the intuitive value of democracy than Political Equality. This is one reason to prefer Political Sufficiency to Political Equality.[15]

[13]This also points to a useful response to the following worry. Recall the example with the Greens and the Blues discussed in footnote 2, in which the Greens have just secured voting parity after several decades of disenfranchisement. What sort of explanation can be given to Green such that we can be fairly confident that inequalities in political influence are mainly objectionable on sufficientarian grounds? Two responses. First, some inequalities in political influence might be objectionable on both egalitarian and sufficientarian grounds. Indeed, that was why we argued, in section 3, that one does not have to be a political egalitarian to object to well-known political injustices; these are also objectionable according to Political Sufficiency. Second, we can pose a counter-question to Political Equality on behalf of Political Sufficiency: what sort of explanation can be given to Green such that we can be fairly confident that Political Equality is better secured in All than in None? We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection.

[14]This also illustrates why it is not the case that the positional goods argument shows that Political Sufficiency is ultimately grounded in Political Equality. If that were the case, None should be unobjectionable according to Political Sufficiency. But it is not.

[15]One might agree with our argument that Political Equality is consistent with no one having a say (None), but maintain that it is not obvious how the view thereby fails to capture the intuitive value of democracy. Take lotteries. According to Manin (1997), lotteries are the paradigmatic democratic method of selection. But lotteries are compatible with no one having a say. Is Political Sufficiency compatible with lotteries? If it isn't, does this speak against the view? We have three responses. First, it is common to distinguish between democracy and lottocracy. For instance, Kolodny (2014a: 208) says, 'Indeed, if individuals had interests in control, then that would seem to argue not for democracy, but instead for a lottery for control'. Following this distinction, lotteries are not the paradigmatic *democratic* method of selection. (However, others disagree. Guerrero's (2024) new book is titled 'Lottocracy: Democracy Without Elections.') Second, the objection maintains that 'lotteries are compatible with no one having a say'. But then why have a lottery? Isn't that to draw out some who will then make the decisions (instead of deciding that through election)? It seems to us, not that lotteries give no one a say, but that they give everyone a chance at getting a say. Third, in terms of whether Political Sufficiency is compatible with a lottery, that might depend on the circumstances. Suppose we had to choose between (i) a system in which half of the people were enfranchised, and the other half of the people were not, and (ii) a lottery where those drawn will be given a say. According to Political Sufficiency, (ii) might be preferable to (i). If we cannot give everyone enough of a say, it might be better to give everyone the chance of enough of a say than to give some enough of a say and others no say. But if we could enfranchise everyone and this would secure that everyone would have enough of a say (which might not be the case in present democracies due to the inequalities in informal influence),

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This reason does not necessarily completely defeat Political Equality, however. It runs parallel to Parfit's well-known *levelling down objection* to distributive egalitarians (Parfit 1991), to which egalitarians have several possible replies (see e.g. Temkin 1993, 2003).[16] In general, advocates of Political Equality might respond that while the ideal is indeed motivated by relativities, it need not be naively negligent of absolutes. We might interpret the ideal to say that it matters both that people have justice-relevant goods and that the distribution of the goods they have is equal. We can call that view Positive Political Equality. According to Positive Political Equality, All is preferable to None, and so the first reason might not apply. But it can be difficult to see why we should accept Positive Political Equality without already presupposing a sufficientarian element. Why, the question remains, should it matter from an egalitarian account that anyone has anything in the first place? Positive Political Equality might be a plausible ideal, but it can hardly be founded on egalitarian premises alone. It seems to require an absolute component (as in Political Sufficiency). Maybe advocates of Political Equality are simply more sufficientarian than the literature on democratic equality has so far acknowledged.[17]

At this point, one may object in the following way. It might be that Political Equality is vulnerable to a levelling down objection, because of its lack of an absolute component, but Political Sufficiency is vulnerable to the following problem, stemming from its absolute component. Suppose everyone in society has one vote. Political Equality and Political Sufficiency are satisfied. Now, suppose we keep adding people to this society. We also grant them one vote. Call this *Expanding Democracy*. It seems that, at some point, the people in this society do not have enough of a say in an absolute sense (because there would be so many people that the effect of their vote would be so miniscule). So Political Sufficiency would be violated, because not everyone would have enough of a say, but Political Equality

then that would be preferable to a lottery according to Political Sufficiency. Is that a problem for Political Sufficiency? We don't think so. Being aware that more could be said here (which, for reasons of space, will have to wait for another occasion), it doesn't strike us as undemocratic that it is preferable, if possible, to give everyone enough of a say than to give everyone the chance of enough of a say. We thank an anonymous reviewer for asking us to reflect on this intriguing question.

[16]One response, suggested by an anonymous reviewer, goes as follows. We have been assuming a bipartite view of equality, according to which the distribution is better insofar as the distribution of the relevant currency is more equal (or less unequal), and worse insofar as it is less equal (or more unequal). But egalitarians may avoid political levelling down by assuming a tripartite view, on which a distribution may be either good (because equal), bad (because unequal) or neutral (because neither equal nor unequal). Equality seems to have this structure in other contexts. Suppose that treating your children equally is partially constitutive of the value of being a good parent. Imagine now three situations: Parent A has two children whom they treat equally, Parent B has two children whom they treat unequally, and C has no children. It seems plausible to say that A is a good parent, B is a bad parent, and C is neither a good nor a bad parent. This tripartite view seems able to avoid the political levelling down objection (that None and All are equally good): it can hold that All is better than None since All is good qua equal, and None is neutral qua neither equal nor unequal. Two responses. First, there is an important disanalogy between the parent C case and the None case. In the former, C's "child" does not exist. In None, everyone who does not have a say exists. So just because the former is neutral (if we assume this is true), we cannot simply assume that the latter is neutral as well (as opposed to bad). Second, the tripartite view is not a plausible solution in the political context. It implies that None – where no one has a vote – is neutral. But it clearly seems that we should want more from a democratic principle: None should be judged as bad precisely because no one has a vote.

[17]This seems to be Blau's (2023) view of the literature.

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would not, because everyone would have an equal say. This speaks against Political Sufficiency.[18]

We have the following response. If (as the objection goes) Expanding Democracy would imply that, at some point, not everyone would have enough of a say, the reason must be either that no one has enough of say at this point, or that some people have enough of a say, while others do not. Both disjuncts are possible because (as we elaborated in the discussion of Little Democracy) votes are not necessarily equivalent to effective political influence (see also Wodak 2024). But none of the disjuncts seem to relevantly threaten Political Sufficiency. If the second disjunct is true, such that some, but not others, have enough of a say, then Expanding Democracy would certainly violate Political Sufficiency, but it would also effectively violate Political Equality, in which case the objection does not disadvantage Political Sufficiency relative to Political Equality. If, on the other hand, the first disjunct is true, such that no one has enough of a say, the case seems now relevantly similar to our previous reason for objecting to Political Equality. To reiterate, it seems very problematic if no one effectively has a say. All this points to, then, is that there might be reasonable limits to the size of a justifiable demos, but this is not at all counterintuitive.

The second reason for favouring Political Sufficiency over Political Equality revisits our intuitions elicited in the Random Democracy case above. Consider the following adjustments to the case:

Random+. Everyone has only one vote, except Random who has two.

Random–. Everyone has two votes, except Random who has only one.

According to Political Equality, also in the positive form, Random+ and Random– are comparably unjust. Note that Random+ is simply a restatement of Random Democracy, and recall that we have so far been agnostic about whether this is unjust according to the two theories. The aim of our conditional argument was to show, merely, that *if* Random+ is problematic on egalitarian grounds, it is also problematic on sufficientarian grounds. However, Random– seems intuitively worse than Random+. The key reason, we conjecture, is that whereas it is unclear whether anyone has an insufficient say in Random+, it is much more prevalent that Random has an insufficient say in Random–. *If* there is such a difference, it is more difficult to account for from the perspective of Political Equality. According to Political Equality, the two scenarios are equally bad – i.e. each involves a comparably unequal distribution of a justice-relevant good – but intuition pushes us towards the sufficientarian explanation that Random does not have enough of a say in the latter case, whereas it is less obvious that everyone else does not have enough of a say in Random+.

One might think there is a straightforward response on behalf of Political Equality which implies that Random– is worse than Random+. When evaluating states of affairs, such as Random+ and Random–, from the point of view of Political Equality, we should take the perspective of the relatively disadvantaged (those with

[18]We thank Jens Damgaard Thaysen for raising this objection.

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the least influence) and compare how many people are better off than they are. In Random+, each person with one vote (the relatively disadvantaged) is worse off in comparison to only one person. In Random–, Random (the relatively disadvantaged) is worse off in comparison to everyone else. On this view of Political Equality, then, Random– is plausibly worse than Random+.[19]

Even if this version of Political Equality can escape the Random+/Random– example, it runs into other problems. Consider:

Random+. Everyone has only one vote, except Random who has two.

Dictator. Everyone has 0 votes, except Dictator who has one.

This version of Political Equality says that, when evaluating states of affairs, we should take the perspective of the relatively disadvantaged and compare how many people are better off than they are. In Random+, that is one person. In Dictator, that is one person. This view, then, ranks Random+ and Dictator as equally good. But that is clearly implausible. Since Political Sufficiency is a matter of absolutes, it avoids this result. Dictator is worse than Random+ because, in the former, everyone except one person does not have a say; that is not the case in Random+.

The third, and final, reason why you should prefer Political Sufficiency is that it is, surprisingly, more theoretically economical than Political Equality. By this, we do not mean to imply that the route to 'one person, one vote' is shorter from Political Sufficiency than from its egalitarian alternative. Indeed, if one has already accepted equality as the distributive standard for political goods, then 'one person, one vote' seems necessarily implied. Rather, what we are suggesting is that Political Sufficiency is more theoretically economical in a normative sense, because sufficiency as a distributive ideal is much less normatively contestable. To see this, consider the case of Sexist Politics, where women are excluded from the demos. In this scenario, women are not eligible to run for parliament and the voices of women are not given consideration in political deliberation. What is essentially the injustice involved? From the perspective of sufficientarianism, the answer is straightforward. The women in the case suffer from the grave injustice involved in being deprived of the effective opportunity to influence decisions that will affect their live prospects. Systematically having less than others in that domain is, for reasons of positionality, always insufficient. The structure of the normative argument is the same from the perspective of sufficientarianism for political as for other goods. If we were overseeing insufficiency in food supply rather than political goods, the argumentative structure would be similar, the only change being the difference in positional quality of the good. People need sufficient food supply to have a good enough opportunity set, and this is what grounds their entitlement to food supply as well as our political obligation to allocate food supply accordingly. Similarly for political goods. Sufficient political influence – i.e. having enough of a say – is a central part of the opportunity set to which people are entitled. By not accommodating that, we fail to fulfill our obligations of justice. As it happens,

[19]We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this response on behalf of Political Equality.

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however, sufficient political influence is impossible without an (at least roughly) equal distribution of influence, such as through voting, as we have seen.

The normative route around Political Equality is iffier. It is, it seems, less normatively economical than its sufficientarian counterpart, in the sense that it needs more contestable steps of argumentation, unless the strictly egalitarian basis is already presupposed from the beginning. What could Political Equality say about the injustice in Sexist Politics? The injustice cannot simply be that women have less of some relevant good than men. If that were the case, it would allow levelling down. But, as mentioned, perhaps the relevant position is Positive Political Equality, according to which the relevant injustice is that the women are deprived of something important, and that this something should be distributed equally. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that this can be grounded without any sufficientarian element. This does not yet establish Political Equality. The problem is that we still need a good explanation of why an equal distribution is the patterned requirement. Consider some egalitarian contenders for providing that missing link.

First, maybe an equal distribution is non-instrumentally valuable so that it is in some sense tragic, from the perspective of distributive justice, when justice-relevant goods are allocated unequally. But this seems highly contestable. Food supply is an important, relevant good but it does not seem to call for an equal distribution. Why should other goods be different, if you think it is the equal distribution by itself that matters? Second, maybe an equal distribution of political goods is necessary for respecting every individual's equal moral worth, which is not similarly the case for an equal distribution of non-political goods, such as food supplies. This is more plausible. The problem with this second explanation is that it gives no good reason to favour Equality over Sufficiency at the fundamental level. Egalitarians are in no privileged position to claim the ideal of basic moral equality (Frankfurt 1997). Moreover, and relatedly, once we move into the domain of relational accounts of justice, the need to justify the choice of equality over sufficiency is reintroduced (Bengtson and Nielsen 2023). Third, maybe egalitarians can, in a way similar to sufficientarians, explain the equality element by pointing to positionality. But this seems peculiarly backwards. Recall that positional goods are goods whose absolute value for a person depends on the relative share for that person compared with what others have. If that is the justification, it seems to put emphasis on the importance of the absolute, not the relative, standing, and hence offers a fragile basis for an ideal of *equality*. It seems, to put it bluntly, like labelling a concern with absolutes in comparative terminology. Thus, whereas more is needed to establish the normative framework of how Political Equality leads to 'one person, one vote', the Political Sufficiency framework is more normatively economical. This thus adds an Occam's razor-like (pro tanto) argument in favour of Political Sufficiency.

In sum: there is good reason to support Political Sufficiency, and much less reason to support Political Equality than many democratic theorists think.

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