

KNOWLEDGE AND DEMOCRACY: ARE EPISTEMIC VALUES ADVERSARIES OR ALLIES OF DEMOCRACY?

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ABSTRACT

In this article I argue that including relaxed epistemic values in the justification of democracy through a pragmatist and non-monist approach is compatible with the democratic values of self-rule and pluralism (which are often seen as incompatible with “political truth”). First, I contend that pragmatist epistemology offers a more suitable approach to politics instead of the correspondence theory of finding “the one truth”. Secondly, I argue that instead of choosing between monist (purely epistemic or procedural) accounts of justification of democracy we should see epistemic values as part of a hybrid interpretation. Thirdly, I argue that epistemic values in democracy should be interpreted in a non-demanding way. Fourth and corresponding to previous points, I claim weak political cognitivism is phenomenologically most plausible for the democratic participant. I then continue to show that both the values of autonomy and pluralism, which are often considered antithetical to truth-claims, can be accommodated and even enhanced by epistemic values in the justification of democracy.

KEYWORDS

Epistemic democracy, Deliberative democracy, Pragmatism, Proceduralism, Reasonable pluralism

INTRODUCTION

A critique often made against the justification of democracy (as majoritarian self-government of and by the people) is that the “crowds” are not the best rulers over themselves, even if democracy has other virtues such as treating people equally and preserving their liberty. The supposed epistemic deficiency of democracy (a descriptive-explanatory claim) is frequently combined with the claim that since good decisions need expert knowledge, the right to rule or to shape public opinion should be somehow tied to competence (a normative claim). This line of thought can be traced back to as far as Plato who argued that a competent ruler should not beg for less competent people to let him rule (as it would arguably be in democracy) and used the analogies of a wise captain and a physician to demonstrate that the experts

should not beg for people to let them do what they do best (Plato, 2000, paras. 487–489c).

Contemporary critics of democracy tend not to outright reject democracy, but rather argue for the need for more epistocratic traits in politics (*epistocracy* meaning the “rule of the knowers”) and for *limiting* democracy and therefore the impact of ignorant voters (Brennan, 2014, 2016; Somin, 1998, 2016). They often appeal to empirical studies concerning the (rational) ignorance and/or irrationality of voters which they try to demonstrate by examples of how little individual voters know about the economy, structure of the government, budget etc: citizens are arguably not knowledgeable enough but also not (interested in) giving their best cognitive effort when making political decisions (Caplan, 2001), yet are not self-interested but rather vote for what they erroneously perceive as national well-being (Caplan, 2007, pp. 148–151). Citizens are seen as uninformed, lacking time and interest to make informed political choices, and being to a great extent involved in rationalizing their views due to social identities and partisanship (Achen & Bartels, 2016; Lippmann, 1998, pp. 55–57). They have incoherent and arbitrary political opinions since they (us) mainly think in combining stereotypical cognitive habits with pseudo-environments or “pictures in our head” which might not correspond with the real world (Lippmann, 1998) or as Schumpeter famously announced “Thus the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again.” (Schumpeter, 2005, p. 262). The overall argument throughout time is that since democratic citizens are epistemically lacking, one should limit their power in favor of “the knowers”.

Others hold more optimistic views about the relationship of epistemic values and democracy, arguing that democracy either is already epistemically adequate or that it could be - provided some democratic changes are made. The wish that democracy would “discover truth”, “reduce disagreement” among participants of deliberation, and the fear that “contemporary politics dominated by superficial television campaigns and political advertising” is not able to offer “more thoughtful and effective political choices” has been *a part* of the motivation for advocating deliberative democracy (Shapiro, 2003, p. 22), especially for the proclaimed “epistemic turn” in deliberative democracy (Estlund & Landemore, 2018; Landemore, 2017). Arguing that “the best defense of public deliberation is that it is more likely to improve the epistemic quality of the justifications for political decisions” (Bohman, 1996, p. 27) or asserting that although it is mistaken, the “epistemic justification strategy (EJS)” is the most influential account of the justification of deliberative democracy (Blum, 2014, pp. 47–66), is in sharp contrast with the previously described critique of epistemic deficiency of democracy. This contrast leads some to claim that deliberative democracy is not an epistemic cure for democracy but is in fact *especially* far-

fetches as it places too high demands on citizens while overlooking their ignorance and irrationality (Posner, 2005, pp. 107–111; Somin, 2010).

The *descriptive-explanatory* question „*Is democracy sufficiently epistemically successful, and if so, then through which mechanisms or processes?*” and the proposed answers are interesting in themselves but relevant to the problem of *justification* of democracy only if we assume an affirmative answer to the *normative* question „*Should the justification of democracy be based partly on epistemic values?*” (Cohen, 1986, 2009; Erman & Möller, 2016; Estlund, 2008; Landemore, 2017; Prijić-Samaržija, 2018). Claiming that “it must count in favor of a social decision procedure that it tends to produce the better decision” (Estlund, 2008, p. 98) might seem as non-controversial as stating that knowledge and informed decisions are good, *ceteris paribus*. However, the appeal to epistemic values or truth-tracking of democracy is claimed by some theorists to be more compatible with epistocratic elitism, anti-pluralism and exclusion of some people rather than with the democratic values such as self-rule and pluralism (Blum, 2014; Fleuß, 2021; Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017; Mouffe, 1999, 2005; Saffon & Urbinati, 2013; Urbinati, 2014) which is why they argue to base the legitimacy of democracy in the fairness of its procedures, i.e. choose proceduralism instead of any substantive standards (such as egalitarianism of outcomes, GDP, or peace-preservation).

In this article I focus on the normative question and focus on two central democratic values that are arguably in conflict with the “search for truth”: self-rule or autonomy and respect for pluralism of political views. I will argue first that some amount of epistemic quality of decisions is a necessary – although not a sufficient – condition for the justification of democracy. Secondly, including epistemic values does not imply that political questions have one uncontroversial and easily demarcated true answer that can be discovered as is sometimes suggested (Arendt, 1967; Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017). Rather it might imply a wider notion of epistemic benefit which includes choosing the less wrong among strictly speaking incorrect options, being reason-responsive, the educative value of democracy enhancing the knowledge and understanding of individuals, and other social epistemological benefits.

While Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti in his systematic critique of epistemic values in democracy concludes that an epistemic account of democracy is less coherent with core democratic values (due to the monopolizing nature of truth) than proceduralism (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017), I argue that this is significant only in the case of a strict and monist interpretation of *epistemic accounts* of democracy (i.e. purely instrumental epistemic views as opposed to hybrid/dualist/pluralist views which combine both epistemic and procedural values). We can include *epistemic arguments* in the justification of democracy as part of a whole with room left for other normative values, rather than choose between monist (purely procedural or epistemic) accounts. Furthermore, recognizing the epistemic dimension of democracy offers

valuable insights in the nature and possibly more meaningful interpretations of the core democratic concepts of autonomy and pluralism which it not only conflicts with, but also complements.

1. A MODERATE UNDERSTANDING OF EPISTEMIC VALUES IN DEMOCRACY: NON-MONIST AND PRAGMATIST UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICAL COGNITIVISM

Appealing to a certain sense of “truth” in politics is argued to be both conceptually and historically problematic, despotic and unfit to the political sphere where debate, consent and representation of different viewpoints is valued (Arendt, 1967). The politics of a proud *possessor* of truth of Plato is coherent with the world of a totalitarian demi-god, while the seeker of truth like Socrates is modest (Popper, 2013, Chapter 7). “A continuing shared adherence to one comprehensive doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power, with all its official crimes and the inevitable brutality and cruelties, followed by the corruption of religion, philosophy, and science” while a permanent pluralism of reasonable opinions is a fundamental fact of political sociology in free democratic countries (Rawls, 2001, pp. 33–34). When this understanding of an exclusionary and anti-pluralist conception of possessing truth is attributed to epistemic democrats, some argue that it treats politics as finding out the solution to pre-given problems, leads to epistocracy, is antithetical to self-rule and that pluralism “constitutes a problem for epistemic theories of democracy because, if it exists, the truth is by definition one” (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, pp. 13–19).

Traces of these kind of thought can be found in the epistemically instrumental critiques of democracy which compare it with plumbing and medicine (Brennan, 2016, p. 139) or focus on the public’s knowledge about the economy (Caplan, 2007) as if the problems and “correct answers” in politics – if there are any – would be uncontroversial and all that is relevant in democracy. However, this purely instrumental monist account is not the only understanding of epistemic values in the justification of democracy. I propose relaxing the appeal to epistemic values in four ways: appreciating hybrid or dualist acceptance of multiple values instead of monism, affirming a pragmatist account of epistemic values in politics instead of a correspondence theory of truth, appealing to epistemic values on multiple levels of democracy including not only short-term outcomes, but virtues cultivated, habits, the epistemic benefits of employing cognitively diverse people, the coherence of democratic deliberation with folk epistemological norms, tendencies, the educative effect of pluralist reason etc. and fourthly, in line with previous propositions, affirming *weak* political cognitivism.

1.1. *Appreciating epistemic values in democracy can reject the correspondence theory of truth, value monism and perfectionism*

Affirming that politics has an epistemic dimension and that epistemic values can be included in the justification of democracy need not amount to claiming that a form of government is justified by the virtue of attaining "the one political truth", is based *only* on that or that the problems exist beforehand. Assuming a role of epistemic values in politics does not need affirm a correspondence theory of truth, defining a statement being "true" as it "corresponding to a mind-independent reality" which the critics of epistemic arguments of democracy seem to assume. Instead, it would be useful to adopt pragmatist epistemology in which truth is not a metaphysical, permanent and mind-independent correspondence to the real world, but something fallible that is aimed at through inquiry, reason-giving, debate, thought experiments, practical experience, criticism and feedback, and which therefore offers a more suitable understanding of epistemic values in a deliberative and moderately epistemic democracy. Instead of either affirming the correspondence theory of attaining *the* Truth or alternatively affirming deep pluralism, pure proceduralism, the divisiveness and unpolitical nature of truth-claims and therefore disregarding epistemic values in democracy, we can opt for the pragmatist "truth" as a relevant concept to political epistemology. The pragmatist understanding can be easily tied to the epistemic value of democracy (Anderson, 2006; MacGilvray, 2014; Misak, 2000, 2008; Talisse, 2007), especially in the context of deliberative democracy. When assessing the suitability of epistemic values in democracy, we are not obliged to take the monopolizing accounts that suppose a correspondence theory of truth as reference point when discussing the epistemic values of democracy.

Secondly, the critics of epistemic democracy sometimes present it as a one-dimensional view of solely epistemic justification of democracy and try to refute it by bringing out that the view would be contingent on external factors and possibly lead to epistocracy. The argument is illustrated nicely by the claim that "because epistemic theories of democracy do not treat political participation as a normative value in itself but *only* as an instrumental means for producing epistemically correct outcomes, their commitment to democratic institutions is ultimately only contingent and, therefore, necessarily compatible with the idea that nondemocratic institutions might in some circumstances be superior to democratic ones, according to their own criterion." (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, p. 18, emphasis added). What is at stake here is whether, due to this contingency, a purely instrumental account warrants less stable support for democracy. A change in a society from instrumentalism towards proceduralism would in Pippa Norris's view constitute enlightenment, although others add a caveat that deeming some amount of instrumentalism related to generally accepted goals is compatible with democracy and only a full dependency of specific policy outcomes would be problematic (Landwehr & Leininger, 2019, pp. 2-4,16). The explanatory power of solely epistemic interpretations of democracy is lacking

many things: the epistemic superiority of deliberative democracy, generating motivation to participate, the process of will-formation and the intrinsic worth of taking citizens' views into account in public deliberation as a form of discussion (Blum, 2014). Furthermore, *even if* democracy could be proven to have epistemic advantages, these should be disregarded when it comes to the justification for democracy, because this is a "mutilation of politics" through contingent and "merely instrumental" not internal reasons (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, pp. 12–13), democracy would become "disfigured" and "unpolitical" (Urbinati, 2014).

If the only values relevant to justify a form of government would be epistemic ones, then if any form of government – such as some form of epistocracy – were to be perceived as more successful than democracy in producing knowledge, the justification of democracy would be rendered insufficient. This contingency of epistemic arguments for democracy and the possibility of leading to epistocracy is both a reason for some thinkers to avoid epistemic arguments even if they do not exclude the possibility of democracy being epistemically the most successful form of government (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017) and for others who are less committed to full-fledged democracy and find democracy as we know it epistemically unsatisfactory, to advocate for greater epistocratic traits in the political system (Brennan, 2016; Caplan, 2007; Lippmann, 1998; Somin, 2016).

One might offer an *a priori* choice between the two contrasting aims of *either* adhering to democratic commitments *or* aiming to increase the likelihood of true beliefs (Schwartzberg, 2015, p. 9). Pure proceduralists might demand one to choose one foundation that democracy "ultimately depends on" or "falls back on" and see it as problematic and "paradoxical" when the epistemic democrat David Estlund combines procedural and epistemic values (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017). However, is the choice between two monist accounts of politics (a pure proceduralism and a pure epistemic account of democracy) not a false dilemma? Appreciating the epistemic value of democracy does not commit one to the claim that democracy is justified only by its epistemic merit. Rather, theorists use various vocabulary to propose explicit procedural limitations: some seek to only include procedurally fair, qualified positions when choosing the epistemically most promising (Estlund, 2008), combine procedural fairness and substantive epistemic quality as both being legitimacy-generating (Cerovac, 2020, 2021), see the appeal to the epistemic value of democracy as a necessary though not sufficient component of justification of democracy (Landemore, 2013, p. 8). Others use epistemic arguments to limit the scope of potentially legitimate deliberative democratic decision-making while not making claims that the epistemic criteria are alone sufficient for legitimacy (Peter, 2016) or emphasize the importance of other democratic values as well, argue that the epistemic authority of experts does not translate to absolute political authority (Prijć-Samaržija, 2018, pp. 188–197, 218–239). A specific author such as Plato, Mill, Condorcet, Caplan, Somin, Brennan or even Estlund and Landemore may in

some work present a too narrow view of the justification of governance or democracy that overemphasizes the epistemic part of the justification. In that case criticizing their monist epistemic justifications would be appropriate. Yet, if our aim is to reason about the best place (if any) of epistemic values in democracy, we should focus on the views we deem more plausible. If we do not ascribe to a foundationalist monist justification of democracy, then including epistemic values in the justification of democracy does not lead to a one-dimensional epistemic conception of democracy. Otherwise, one could similarly object to any appeal to the value of self-rule of the people in theories of liberal democracy: after all, self-rule could be understood narrowly and used in the populist discourse to argue against any procedural standards, constitutional limitations which protect the liberties of more vulnerable people and generate stability etc. and be used to concentrate power in the hand of some part of the people (the “real people”). The claim that in addition to epistemic values procedural ones are necessary as well is not an embarrassing confession to many theorists, but something they have already explicitly expressed. Even if that were not the case, it would be more interesting to focus on the strongest cases for the inclusion of epistemic values in the justification of democracy which seem to be non-monist.

The criticism of “epistemic” justifications of democracy offers many valuable insights. Yet it would be misleading to frame the debate as a choice between comprehensive accounts (based solely on either epistemic values, self-rule, proceduralism etc. in a monist manner), and refraining from any appeal to the epistemic value of democracy is hasty. The epistemic value of democracy should not be described as “epistemic *accounts*” (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, pp. 12–13), “the epistemic translation of democratic politics” (Urbinati, 2014, p. 230) or the “epistemic justification strategy of deliberative democracy” (Blum, 2014). It is more fruitful to talk about *epistemic arguments for* (arguments that at least partly appeal to epistemic values in the justification of democracy) rather than full-fledged *epistemic accounts of* (accounts that base the justification of democracy solely on its epistemic dimension) democracy. Using epistemic arguments only as *one part* of the whole normative theory of democracy is less vulnerable to the critique that is aimed at using epistemic arguments as the *whole* (necessary and sufficient) justification of democracy.

Instead of the false dilemma of choosing either to only appreciate epistemic values and forget others such as self-rule, pluralism, participation, equality, fairness of procedure or wholly deny the value of the epistemic dimension, we could seek an articulation of the problem that rejects the either-or choice between epistemic and ethical-political values in the abstract level, and favors solving the problem context-dependently in specific situations.

A “situational hybrid model” means we would take into account in specific contexts the relevant factors of possible epistemic harm of privileging political values (e.g. positive discrimination) and the political harms of preferring epistemic values

(e.g. not reducing systemic social inequality between genders, races or ethnicities by epistemically sub-optimal positive discrimination). Affirming this flexible approach in both short-term and long-term perspectives, avoiding the false dilemma between democracy and truth, and the abstract choice between epistemic and ethical values could allow "epistemic paternalism" in some cases and not in others. Thus a context-dependent approach like this could mean in practice that when discussing measures such as positive discrimination we take into account both short and long-term epistemic consequences, and possible systematic long-term ethical effects. (Prijić-Samaržija, 2018, pp. 158-161, 240)

Thirdly, we can further relax the stringency of the necessary epistemic benefits of democracy if all bets are not placed on attaining the political truths corresponding to reality. If we agree that public scrutinizing of decisions, reason-giving, deliberation, cognitive diversity, fact-checking etc. are generally epistemically beneficial in non-political issues, we do not need to attain the specific truth or reach a consensus in each political issue in order to make an epistemic claim. Instead of this, we could appeal to the overall tentative epistemic benefits of the decision-making procedure through the democracy/jury analogy in "epistemic proceduralism" (Estlund, 2008) or to the power of cognitive diversity (Anderson, 2006; Landemore, 2013; Landemore & Elster, 2012). Furthermore, we can appeal to the understanding that our "folk epistemological" individual doxastic criteria (believing something entails believing some *content*, taking it to be true and taking oneself to respond appropriately to evidence and reasons) is only coherent when we also commit ourselves to corresponding social and institutional epistemic norms in the cognitive environment where unjustified beliefs will – more likely than not – in time be corrected as only democracy enables (Talisie, 2013), or to the use of experts and the division of cognitive labor in democracy (Cerovac, 2016; Moore, 2021; Schudson, 2006).

Similar relaxed hopes can be assumed in the aspects of frequency, cultivating epistemic virtues, time and exactness of arriving at "more correct" decisions, not seeing the epistemic value only in an immediate exact decision in a short-term instrumental manner. Alleviating every third danger would be better than alleviating every tenth danger. Making an informed decision on every second big topic would be better than every sixth. A general slow educative influence of participating in democracy would be better than no educative aspect due to lack of participation. Democracy as a form of government increasing the probability of "getting it right" would be valuable and the instrumental side of epistemic value in democracy could well be seen as "probabilistic" (Landemore, 2013, p. 8). The epistemic value of democracy might be plausibly based on its ability to usually produce epistemically superior decisions by virtue of its formal components that usually produce better decisions, even if we cannot agree on a comprehensive substantive standard like utilitarianism or following some religion (Cerovac, 2020, pp. 181-184). Furthermore, if all democracy would do is to get "far enough" from the incorrect answers

or tend to retrospectively correct them, it would still be epistemically beneficial. Democracy is known for its ability to correct its mistakes (Galston, 2018, p. 18; Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, p. 22), and retrospective voting, aka “throwing the bums out” in the case of elected officials is the basis of a minimalist conception of democracy which emphasizes the *ability to not re-elect* perceived failed leaders (Achen & Bartels, 2016, pp. 90–115; Oppenheimer & Edwards, 2012, pp. 202–219; Riker, 1988, pp. 8–11, 241–246). Lastly, rather than interpreting epistemic value as a direct instrumental short-term account of one decision being true, we can take into account lessons from social and virtue epistemology, and focus on plurality of epistemic values such as epistemic responsibility, basing beliefs on evidential proof, empirical adequacy, making rational assumptions, offering promising hypotheses, reason-responsiveness, giving justifications etc. (Prijic-Samaržija, 2018, pp. 61–69) or to include more dynamic and broader understanding talk instead of virtues about the epistemic dimension of pragmatist democratic habits (Frega, 2019).

What the monist interpretations win in coherency and simplicity, they lose in agility in adopting to different situations and, as I later argue, accuracy in terms of reflective stability concerning the participants’ perspective. Adopting a pragmatist and non-monist account of epistemic democracy helps us enable these and other possible relaxations of epistemic demands.

1.2. Weak political cognitivism: assuming primary bads and basic values in democracy

Do the previously presented arguments concerning relaxed non-monist epistemic aspirations of democracy also apply to *normative issues* and can normative political cognitivism be adopted without betraying democratic pluralism? Normative truth-claims in politics have been perceived as especially dangerous (tyrannic or epistocratic) to democracy and various authors warn us against them (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017; Mouffe, 1999; Müller, 2016). Yet democratic politics is not confined to interpreting empirical facts, but deals with values as well.

In order to establish that some correctness concerning normative claims is significant for the justification of democracy, we can modestly propose that it would speak in favor of a form of government or decision-making procedure to tend to weed out the very worst understandings and decisions. Context-independent “basic values” as preserving human life, *ceteris paribus*, (Landmore, 2013, pp. 215–217) give some basis for this, and corresponding normative claims can be treated as “pre-given” – meaning, we do not need to prove them in the context of the justification of democracy. This suggests some pre-given questions like “How to avoid and prevent unjustified physical harm to people?”, “Is it sufficiently prevented?” etc. The avoidance of the very worst outcomes such as Estlund’s list of preliminary “primary bads” including famine, war, economic collapse and genocide (Estlund, 2008, pp. 160–163) can also be a starting point for epistemic democrats. Evaluating the legitimacy of a

form of government partly through criteria such as decreasing famines, easily avoidable wars, outbreaks of disease, anthropogenetic environmental catastrophes, genocide and other gross violations of human rights corresponds more plausibly to the phenomenology of being a democratic citizen than pure proceduralism by which only majoritarian votes and fair procedures matter (or pure epistocracy without general participation, for that matter). The possibility of state-capture by ruling elites which has been mentioned as one of the weak spots of proposed epistocratic corrections to democracy (Bagg, 2018; Popper, 2013, Chapter 7) is also relevant only if we presuppose the normative stance that state-capture is not preferable. Therefore, affirming the existence of basic normative values and primary bads is a more reflectively stable and non-revisionist democratic theory from the participants' perspective.

The question remains whether democracy *produces* or *assumes* these "normative truths" (I suspect both), but in accordance with pragmatism I claim these basic values must be granted. Democratic theorists should not deny that it is preferable to avoid primary bads, *ceteris paribus*, unless they deny the most common basic normative values, which are widespread in democratic countries, and in which democratic theory is grounded. One could not justify epistemic nor procedural democracy to someone not affirming these basic values - justifying democracy to a die-hard Stalinist or a white supremacist terrorist *on their terms* and appealing only to their values would lead to less success than playing chess with a pigeon. We need the Rawlsian assumption of reasonably socialized people for *any version* of democratic legitimacy. A pragmatist insight, supported by the Wittgensteinian understanding of language, is that when inquiring about morality we are always somewhere and our beliefs, although historically developed, are in fact there. The possibility of inquiry always assumes background beliefs which are not questioned in a certain context. Merely writing down on a piece of paper that one doubts is not really doubting but merely demonstrating "paper doubts" as Peirce called them (Misak, 2000, pp. 50-52). Verbally questioning whether avoiding famines, wars and genocide would be a valuable part in a form of government is a "paper doubt" in the context of democratic theory. Hence, if there are decision-making procedures that are normatively worse in these criteria, then others which produce such outcomes less often are better by virtue of not being as wrong. If some way of government systematically produces fundamentally normatively unacceptable answers and corresponding consequences then this speaks against this way of government. Accordingly, at least the so-called weak version of political cognitivism should be granted (Landemore, 2013, pp. 211-213).

2. SELF-RULE, AUTONOMY AND EPISTEMIC VALUES IN DEMOCRACY

The involvement of misinformation, ignorance or manipulation in public will formation and decision-making is part of the reason a lot of opinion leaders and scholars alike find it difficult to accept Brexit, the populist and authoritarian shift in European countries and other outcomes of procedurally fair elections in the last decades as properly democratic or unproblematic to democracy. Why are researchers interested in arguing for the epistemic value of testimony in deliberative democracy (Chick, 2022), seeking institutional design which would balance the epistemic and normative values of democracy, the expertise and broad participation (Krick, 2021), acquiring knowledge about the impact of the fast-spreading false information in the outcomes of elections (Brown, 2018), studying misinformation in democracy and how to effectively correct it (Jerit & Zhao, 2020) if not due to the assumed importance of epistemic values in democracy? Coincidentally, talk about the “post-truth era” and measuring the decline of the informational effect, i.e. the extent to which people change their political views when acquiring relevant information (Ahlstrom-Vij, 2021), becomes practically relevant only when assuming that epistemic values *should* play some part in forming a political opinion and decision-making. The presupposition of the ignorance and irrationality of the voters is part of the argumentation by some authors who affirm the importance of epistemic values in governance to pursue a minimal government (Somin, 1998), minimalist understanding of democracy (Schumpeter, 2005), more inclusion of experts in government (Lippmann, 1998) or more broadly to strengthen the rule of the arguably most competent, i.e. introducing some epistocratic tendencies (Brennan, 2016; Mill, 1861). Advocating an epistocratic tilt is indeed one possible conclusion from tying epistemic values to democracy, and would certainly reduce the self-rule aspect of democracy.

One core argument *against* including epistemic values in the justification of democracy is that this would depoliticize democracy, making it inappropriately and inaccurately resemble technical problem-solving rather than decision-making (Fleuß, 2021, pp. 43–44; Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, p. 13) while actually one of the key questions of politics is the normatively-laden ‘*what is a problem* (to be solved)’; the idea of autonomy is inherent in democracy and to claim otherwise would be revisionist (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, p. 15). Arguing for almost pure instrumentalism and treating democracy like a tool such as a hammer (Brennan, 2016, pp. 67, 139) clearly is oversimplifying enough to warrant this criticism. The tension between expertise and democratic equality is undeniable, because “If there is such a thing as expertise and if expertise touches on matters relevant to policy decisions in a democracy, then some people (experts) have more relevant information than others to bring to the table and this gives their voices disproportionate weight.” (Schudson, 2006, p. 494). Thus, monist proceduralists argue that including epistemic arguments

in the justification of democracy is incompatible with autonomy of the people, because epistemic arguments are seen as instrumentalizing democracy and subjugating it to epistemic values: it is an attempt to take away self-rule as one of the most essential parts of democracy, a “radical attempt to depoliticize democracy by making it a chapter in the search for truth” while “democracy pertains to liberty, not truth” (Urbinati, 2014, pp. 96, 104) and, correspondingly, epistemic democracy is an “oxymoron” (Saffon & Urbinati, 2013, p. 6).

On the one hand, it would clearly not be appreciative of autonomy to only take into account a (tendency to) presumed substantive correctness and ignore whether people have expressed support to the proposed idea or decision (e.g. by electing officials, voting in a referendum, participating in public debates or demonstrations, or at least by passive acceptance). Even if there would be decisions in politics that are more correct or incorrect, in order for the process to embody democratic self-rule people should get to choose between them (or to elect representatives who would choose). Both “truthful” and “democratically decided” might be valuable characteristics of a solution, yet there remains a difference and a possible conflict between these concepts. The well-rehearsed argument of a benevolent and competent dictator (producing good outcomes) still not being a democrat exemplifies the point (Christiano, 2003, p. 45).

Are these shortcomings of an epistemic *account* of democracy fatal for any inclusion of epistemic values? The critique of reducing democracy to problem-solving is most accurately aimed at an understanding that democracy should follow an external truth discovered by experts (in the manner of correspondence theory of truth) or defer to it, rather than at an understanding that sees the pursuing and constructing of knowledge as one dimension in democracy. The criticism of reducing democracy to a strictly cognitive task is based on assuming that epistemic democrats are “construing politics *exclusively* as a way of finding the “correct” solutions” (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, p. 14, emphasis added) and this critique applies to a monist instrumentalist understanding of democracy where democracy is taken to be (not) justified solely based on the epistemic quality of its outcomes. On a closer look, what contradicts self-rule here is the leap from someone having political knowledge to them therefore having political authority over others. This is called the “authority tenet” in the literature of epistemic democracy, and is affirmed by epistocrats but not necessarily by epistemic democrats (Cerovac, 2020) who might affirm epistemic values as only a part of the justification of democracy, describing the authority tenet as the “expert/boss fallacy” (Estlund, 2008, p. 39). Similarly, acknowledging some role of experts in democracy does not necessarily mean advocating blind deference but rather an inclusion and consultation of their specific knowledge in limited capacities within the democratic framework (Cerovac, 2016; Kitcher, 2001; Moore, 2021; Prijić-Samaržija, 2011; Schudson, 2006). The epistemic task of democracy must not be understood as justifying a decision to some set of people (nor on those

people taking part of an exclusive deliberative forum, excluding most other people), but rather to argumentatively address *all of those people* whom justification is owed due to their political membership and in terms they can understand (Lafont, 2020, pp. 98–100, 163–170) and so the epistemic quality of the decision as an outcome is not enough.

Tensions between different values are common: there will always remain some between private autonomy (the appreciation of which can also be paraphrased as a supposed liberal substantive truth) and public autonomy, liberalism and democracy (Mouffe, 2000, pp. 8–9), the economic short-term and ecological long-term (e.g. using fossil fuels vs. preserving environmental values), but that does not prove the incapability of co-existence of these values. In science the epistemic and intrinsic values might conflict with ethics, majority rule and with the market economy which pushes research to produce something profitable rather than advance fundamental scientific knowledge or satisfy intellectual curiosity (Mittelstrass, 2012). These tensions are considerable, perhaps troublesome, but not necessarily indicating a mistake in the theory. We can take into account the admitted tension between appreciating *epistemic* values and the traditional *ethical-political* values of democracy without casting aside the idea that epistemic values fulfil some role in the justification of democracy. Fulfilling a role in a whole structure does not mean tensionless harmony. Similarly, there is tension between the roof and the walls of a house: if the former is too heavy, the latter will collapse; walls are necessary but not sufficient to a house, yet this does not demonstrate that the roof or the walls are unsuitable as a part of the whole (a house). If a part (epistemic values or solely truth) is confused for the whole and overemphasized, the weight of epistemic values in the justification of a political system will be too heavy and bring down the whole structure of justification of democracy. If one element (procedural fairness) is a necessary part of democracy, it does not mean that is all there is to it.

2.1. Epistemic values and self-rule as allies

In addition to accommodating self-rule and epistemic values as agonistic to each other but both still necessary, epistemic values in democracy can be complementary to the concept of self-rule. In short, the aggregation of current preferences (as something “given”) of the people to form a majority is a too minimalistic understanding of self-rule in democracy, and dismisses the process of will-formation through debates in a society, the hope to base one’s decisions on more-or-less accurate information, public discussion, and openness to other views.

Value judgments alone do not suffice in answering many political questions. In our political decisions value judgments are intertwined with judgments about current facts and the effect that the proposed decisions would have on future facts: a stance on immigration policy might be tied to an opinion concerning either shortage of work force or jobs, and how specific policies would affect this, the argued relative

crime rate of locals and immigrants. A stance on climate policy rests partly on the belief about whether there is a scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate disruption towards the worse and whether there are tangible ways to alleviate the climate crisis. This is far from saying that political stances are uncontroversially deduced from facts, somehow bypassing values, based on pure rationality or that they should come without the burden of reciprocal reason-giving, respect, openness to fallibility, deliberation and other epistemic or civic virtues. My claim is that political decision-making consists in combining facts and applying various kinds of reasoning (deductive, inductive, abductive), intuition, feelings, listening to others, expressing oneself, weighting and combining different aims and values, balancing personal interests with perceived societal goods etc.

Therefore the epistemic dimension plays a role in self-rule. If there is relevant accurate information readily available, the political culture and corresponding civic education encourages reason-giving and fact-checking in addition to appealing to values, people have the time and possibility for both private and public deliberation, then political decision-making embodies the self-rule principle in a more meaningful way than an unreflective aggregation of uneducated guesses based purely on value judgments would. Correspondingly, if the judgments about current facts or predictions about the outcomes of decisions are systematically incorrect, and if the people, when given further information or time to deliberate, would quickly change their mind, then their decisions are *partly* based on epistemic deficiency, and could differ if they would be based on more accurate information (even if there is no change in value judgments). Democracy should not and will not reach an end-point where further deliberation and facts could not change one's opinion, but the more informed, well-reasoned and both privately and publicly deliberated decisions are, the more meaningfully they embody the self-rule of the people. It is plausible that most democratic citizens do not admit to wanting not to understand something. Surely, we are all influenced by post-fact rationalization, various cognitive biases, self-interest etc., but as democratic citizens we seek our decisions to be as publicly justifiable as possible. As democratic citizens we mostly do not present our views as our individual prejudices: we offer our claims as publicly justifiable reasons and hence are interested in reason-giving and in assuring our own views are backed by reason we would accept upon some further deliberate. Claiming otherwise would lead to either an error theory or a theory of democracy which undervalues the role of public justification. Thus the epistemic values of democracy are valuable both for the individual democratic citizen and for the public.

As Christian Rostbøll explains, epistemic values and freedom *complement* each other if we do not understand the relevant freedom in democracy as “substantive independence” or privatistic retreat from the convincing power of arguments, information and public discussion: this understanding would make my decisions as arbitrary as they would be irrelevant. The minimalist “decisionistic” understanding of

collective preferences which sees the main value of my choices that they are *my* choices, and the accompanying retreat from discussion is a greater threat to democracy than the incorporation of epistemic values. A more relevant dimension of freedom in democracy instead of “substantive independence” is “procedural freedom” or deliberative freedom of autonomous preference formation, meaning being free to decide for ourselves based on as much available facts and arguments as possible. Appreciating epistemic values does not lead us to paternalism or epistocracy that presumes an identifiable normative independent standard, nor do we need to substitute someones actual views. Rather, it is to say that we only figure out our preferences through participating, publicly gathering information, debating or listening to debates, using our critical faculties to challenge uncritically formed opinions etc. (Rostbøll, 2008, pp. 163–164; 107)

A similar conclusion has been reached in different theoretical approaches: Lafont with her “participatory deliberative democracy” sees politics more meaningfully connected to the self-rule aspect if it focuses on and draws from the actual deliberated, considered, participatory public opinion (which does not assume an overdemanding conception of activist participation) and not based on a “pure” or pre-deliberative understanding of current preferences at any given time (Lafont, 2020, p. 24). König connects the concept of ignorance in the existentialist philosophy with epistemic democracy: if wanting to be free involves wanting to know, being in dialogue with and open to the world, embracing fallibility etc. then various forms of active avoidance of knowing (forms of ignorance) contradict existentialist freedom. Four forms of ignorance in existentialist literature correspond to interpretations of democracy which mistakenly hope to avoid tensions and the burden of figuring out the political will: conformism and elitist democracy, dogmatism and populist democracy, fatalism and quietist democracy; solipsism and nihilist democracy (König, 2021). Interpreting epistemic autonomy in democratic decision-making as *only* subjective value judgments which have no relation to facts or reasoning would lead to epistemic egoism which is not a good approach to decision-making in the context of persistent disagreement (Prijić-Samaržija, 2018, pp. 233–239). The pragmatist philosophers Robert Talisse and Cheryl Misak also connect the fallible epistemology of wanting to know, inquiring, taking into account experience, giving reasons, yet remaining modest in truth-claims with the appreciation of democratic equality, moral inquiry, the need to justify democracy (Misak, 2000, 2008; Talisse, 2003, 2013). The message this list ought to convey is that interpretation of self-rule in democracy being connected to a wish to know, aim at fallible truths etc. is widespread enough that an interpretation of “pure self-rule” as aggregating first preferences cannot be taken for granted as the basis of autonomy in democracy (and thus cannot be used to easily dismiss epistemic values).

Perhaps this interpretation of autonomy is epistemically too demanding or limits the liberty of citizens? It is a serious concern whether these kind of interpretations

or an emphasis deliberation lead to imagining an idealized “homo democraticus” filled with the need to discuss democratic politics by reason-giving, and downplaying the conflictual nature of politics (Matan et al., 2021). Every added criteria admittedly limits liberty somehow and overreliance on one criterion (be it majoritarian self-rule in populist discourse or epistemic values in epistocracy) is misleading, but I hold that understanding self-rule partially connected with reason-giving and epistemic values enhances liberty in other ways and thus compensates the possible harms. The excessive demands of the argument are not pre-given, but rather another object of discussion - as is whether it has to be interpreted in an activist manner which might “take too many evenings” or in a less demanding way (Lafont, 2020, pp. 170–188). The dangers of excessive demands being made by epistemic democracy are reduced by the previously described relaxed expectations, particularly regarding the non-monist nature of democratic legitimacy, but also in terms of pragmatist epistemology, the probabilistic, imperfect and sometimes retrospective nature of epistemic benefits of democracy, and the inclusion of social and virtue epistemology. Moreover, the criticism based on democracy’s ‘over-demanding’ tendency is weakened by the fact that radical proceduralism which rejects political truth or correctness still acknowledges the cognitive demandingness of democratic participation (Fleuß, 2021, p. 114). Moreover, it utilizes the concept “full autonomy”, which at the intersubjective level assumes something like the Habermasian communicative rationality. That is to say, being “free from deception, self-deception, political power, and strategizing” (Dryzek, 1998, p. 120) is assumed to be part of the cognitively demanding participation which plays an educative role and is the basis of “radical proceduralism” which at the same time rejects “political truth” or correct answers (Fleuß, 2021, pp. 112–114). If on an individual level independence is understood as avoidance of *blind deference*, being open to interaction and understanding of other people’s ideas, and to critical reflection upon them, then independence is perfectly compatible with a deliberative ideal which aims to increase judgment accuracy (Landemore, 2013, pp. 153–154).

In conclusion, although epistemic values are in some tension with democratic self-rule, I propose that wishing this tension away by affirming pure epistocracy would override self-rule, while subduing epistemic values fully to purely ethical ones such as an exaggerated individual autonomy amounts to anti-social retreat from discussion. Epistemic values understood in a broader way than “deferring to truth” enhance the self-rule aspect of democracy by making it more meaningful. Uninformed, misinformed, or badly reasoned decisions which are compatible with being deceived, actively ignorant, or blindly deferring either to others or to one’s own gut-feeling - all these embody autonomy in some minimal sense, yet not in the *fullest* sense.

3. EPISTEMIC VALUES AND PLURALISM

The second persistent problem with connecting epistemic values and democracy is the supposed incompatibility of truth-claims and pluralism. Appealing to a correspondence theory truth as the only basis for the justification of democracy can easily be seen as antithetical to pluralism or tyrannic (Arendt, 1967; Popper, 2013). This understanding of overreliance to strict truth can find a counterpart in political communication: the more hegemonic, closed, monist, continuous and without distinctions communication is, the more is it potentially totalitarian, less pluralist and anti-democratic (Selg & Ventsel, 2020, pp. 155–159). Even agreeing on some basic normative “truths” or primary bads in democracy has clear implications on the meaning of doctrinal pluralism in democracy: if we take for granted some basic values and normative outcomes, either in the form of the avoidance of primary bads or cultivating the democratic values of equality, liberty and collective self-rule, it follows that worldviews which systematically harm or oppose those, should be discouraged or even disqualified from discussion - this, however, is clearly antithetical to a “simple pluralism” with no boundaries. Therefore, epistemic arguments for democracy are presumably incoherent with valuing pluralism and legitimacy of dissent - even if latter would be grudgingly accepted as permanent sociological facts, they would not be treated as valuable in themselves, but as problems to be solved (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, pp. 18–19).

3.1. *Simple pluralism vs reasonable pluralism and pluralist reason*

Many deliberative democrats avoid epistemic arguments since they wish to accept reasonable pluralism, honor reciprocal respect and because appealing to “truth” is perceived as antithetical to reasonableness and pluralism (Landemore, 2017, pp. 279–282). At the same time, even John Rawls who emphasizes the importance of avoiding treating any doctrine as true, argues that any appeal to reason must entail the exclusion of some views. „Reasonableness” is the central part of the consensus on some basic premises that public justification needs to start from. Any reasonable political conception must restrict which comprehensive views are permissible, and the basic required institutions will discourage and even exclude some comprehensive views (Rawls, 2001, pp. 27, 153). Following this understanding, one should avoid claiming the “truth” of any doctrine in order to avoid sectarianism and preserve liberalism, and rather one should opt for “reasonable pluralism”, which would make “reasonable” a core concept of political justice and of democratic citizenship (Rawls, 1996, pp. 128–129). Although Rawls sees “reasonable-ness” mainly as a moral concept about reciprocal expectations between free and equal citizens, not epistemological *per se*, he acknowledges it having epistemological elements (Rawls, 1996, p. 62) and takes time to differentiate it from both truth and rationality (Rawls, 2001, pp. 184, 6–7).

It would be most coherent with simple pluralism to claim that “the outcome of a majority decision is understood merely as the contingent result of the fact that opinions and preferences happen to be distributed in such a way that a majority of votes could be gathered for a specific proposal” (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, p. 20), democracy is procedurally fair and that is all one can unproblematically say (Saffon & Urbinati, 2013; Urbinati, 2014). Yet two problems arise with simple pluralism: first, why would one waste time on trying to understand, deliberate and give reasons concerning politics if all that matters is how preferences happen to be distributed? From the participants’ perspective, including epistemic values and corresponding limits to pluralism makes more sense of why people are deliberating, discussing publicly and considering how to vote. Secondly, on which basis would one exclude extremist ideologies such as Stalinism or Nazism from public debate?

In “Democracy without shortcuts” Lafont scrutinized the problems of pure proceduralism (“the procedural shortcut”) which would allow simple pluralism, deeming it revisionary and not suitable from the participants’ perspective, because we argue in politics thinking we *do* have reasons for our beliefs and use them to convince other people. “Deep pluralist” conceptions of democracy are an “error theory”, meaning they assume citizens misunderstand what they are doing and hence the theory becomes reflectively unstable as democratic citizens could not hold these views while participating and giving reasons. Deliberation does not need to attain the “consensus on a single right answer”, but only produce “a settled view on the proper answer (or range of answers)”. (Lafont, 2020, pp. 34–45)

Secondly, does simple pluralism have anything to say against extremist worldviews that do not honor any reciprocal reasonableness, equality or liberty and human rights? The absolute moral non-cognitivist (pure liberal) who treats moral claims as simply individual preferences has little to say against the torture of children, against the Schmittian, the Nazis, or against people neglecting someone’s opinion due to their gender or class. Conversely, the pragmatist can appeal to reasonable discussion with respect for different viewpoints in order to properly aim for truth, and their second-order epistemological commitments give additional force to their first-order substantive arguments (Misak, 2008, pp. 12, 102–108). The pragmatist acknowledges the “ground” of background beliefs when dealing with moral inquiry in democracy, yet the “ground” of a purely pluralist proceduralist majoritarianism is more ambiguous. If we take seriously the core values of democracy, then the most suitable understanding of pluralism is not an unconstrained “anything goes” which would oblige us to accommodate neo-nazis, Stalinists, other anti-democratic worldviews and also pseudoscientific conspiracy theories. Rather, we could opt for *reasonable pluralism* which entails excluding some views as not reasonable if they deny the reciprocal duty to respect the rights of others etc. One possible solution for this and for the reflective instability accusation against proceduralism is to mentally divide the spheres of first-order and second-order reasons, and

correspondingly the same person arguing in different levels of abstraction as a democratic citizen (aiming for truth, making substantive claims) and a democratic theorist or philosopher (recognizing the disagreement and the contingencies of our lifeworlds where we make substantive claims from), engaging in Rortyan self-reflective irony (Fleuß, 2021, pp. 125–130).

Joshua Cohen argues against the avoidance of "truth" by Rawls with the argument that it only makes theoretical sense to appreciate public reasoning in democracy and argumentation of any kind while disagreeing with each other when we recognize that "truth" has *some* place in politics. Furthermore, the usage of "truth" does not provoke disagreement: rather, it is one way to express the already existent persistent doctrinal disagreement which will not disappear substituting truth with another word. What is divisive and controversial about claims of epistemic value of political positions is not the semantics, but the claim that there is *one* truth (the "singularity argument"), that truthfulness is *sufficient* as the basis of public reason (the sufficiency argument, recalling the authority tenet or expert/boss fallacy as defined earlier), and that truth-claims demand the *display* of too-deep justifications of one's philosophical commitments (the limited display argument) (Cohen, 2009). The dividing line between asserting reasonable (i.e. not pure, absolute) pluralism and appealing to some truth is very foggy. It is illustrated by the fact that Rawls divided the political debate into one sphere of reasonable pluralism and another sphere where objections would be unreasonable such as in contexts where we should rely on "the methods and conclusions of science when these are not controversial" (Rawls, 2001, pp. 89–90) and the latter restraint to public reasons has even been interpreted as a possible justification for epistocracy (Baccarini, 2021, pp. 379–381).

Estlund holds that it suffices if democracy in the long run produces reasonably good epistemic outcomes among those that satisfy the requirement of *acceptability among qualified points of view* (Estlund, 2008, pp. 22, 42, 98), meaning he affirms a kind of reasonable pluralism. Many political philosophers hold that public discussion should rely on a specific reasonable discussion over political matters and on restricting which kind of judgments or preferences should be accepted as part of the public discussion (Miller, 1992, pp. 81–82). Agonist democrats see proper political existence as antagonistic and might oppose to the word "reasonable" (instead of "political") as they view the attempts to force reason on politics as depoliticizing by confusing rationality and morality with political decisions (Selg, 2012, pp. 92, 99). Yet even agonist democrats admit that *not all views* should be tolerated in democracy if these views blatantly reject the "conflictual consensus: consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, dissent about their interpretation" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 121). The exclusion of some unreasonable views is apparently commonplace among democratic theorists, not only among those who use epistemic arguments. Maintaining that pluralism is incompatible with the use of epistemic arguments for democracy would lead to defending *simple pluralism*, arguing

that all views need to be accommodated and treated as if reasonable in democracy. It is up to debate whether it is more controversial in democratic theory to add the qualification "reasonable" to pluralism or to include views irrespective of whether they are anti-democratic, anti-humanist, or an error theory from the participants perspective who aims to give, and to listen to, reasons in political debates when forming their beliefs.

In addition to reasonable pluralism, epistemic democrats appreciate pluralist reason: the educational value of it in deliberation has been emphasized by many theorists who are either epistemic democrats themselves or from whom epistemic democrats often draw ideas (Anderson, 2006; Aristotle, 1998; Dewey, 1981; Landemore, 2013; Landemore & Elster, 2012; Mill, 2009; Misak, 2000). In contemporary theory, epistemic benefit is usually not seen as an aggregation of the first opinions of individuals, or as resembling the Condorcet Jury Theorem with its strict and hardly defensible premises (Dietrich & Spiekermann, 2013), but as a product of open discussion between different viewpoints in a broadly construed deliberative democracy. Aiming at truth in political deliberation does not commit us to the antipluralist view opposing post-decision dissent, sometimes attributed to Rousseau due to his claim that "When, therefore, an opinion opposed to my own prevails, that simply shows that I was mistaken, and that what I considered to be the general will was not so" (Rousseau, 2002, p. 230). Rather, it is commonplace to admit that decisions produced in democracy will benefit from the epistemic diversity of participants, public discussions, dissent, involve immense collective deliberation and feedback mechanisms.

The claim that appreciating epistemic values means that we should only recognize one point of view as legitimate after a vote, and aim therefore to overcome pluralism (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, p. 19), is not relevant if we appreciate dissent, openness to reconsideration and other social epistemological values as crucial in both finding out better solutions; and if we see deliberation as part of exercising the freedom of figuring out what we really think (Rostbøll, 2008), as part of pluralist reason, affirming the pragmatist rather than the correspondence theory of truth, and relax the overall demandingness of epistemic values in democracy.

CONCLUSION

To answer the title, knowledge and democracy are both adversaries and allies: we should be aware of the downsides and the epistocratic slippery slope of reducing democratic values like autonomy, equality, liberty and pluralism to a strict conception of political truth; yet we must also appreciate the upsides of modestly including epistemic values in the justification of democracy. To make this case I have argued firstly against framing epistemic values in the framework of a correspondence theory of truth, and have recommended instead a pragmatism in which truth is something

aimed at through fallible inquiry, responding to reason, experience etc. Secondly, we should include epistemic *arguments* while rejecting the choice between two monist justifications of democracy – purely procedural and purely epistemic *accounts* – and opt for a hybrid view which appreciates both sets of values, thus rejecting the problem of value trade-offs on an absolute abstract level and leaving it to context-dependent specific situations. Thirdly, we could relax the demandingness of epistemic values by appreciating tendencies, probability, retrospective correction, and virtue epistemology or the epistemic dimension of pragmatist democratic habits. Fourth, since democratic theory as moral inquiry is not “a view from nowhere”, it is best grounded on weak political cognitivism that recognizes the need to avoid primary bads such as war, pandemics and genocide, and appreciates some basic values such as the preservation of human life.

Furthermore, although there is a tension between the values of “getting it right” and making an autonomous decision, that tension is not sufficient to disregard epistemic arguments for the justification of democracy. A certain amount of epistemic values, such as basing one’s political views on correct facts, being reason-responsive and reason-giving, and participating in a self-reflective process of opinion-formation even *enhances* the concept of self-rule (as in Dryzek’s “full autonomy” or Rostbøll’s “deliberative freedom”), since “making a democratic decision” is more meaningful if it is not misinformed, arbitrary or solipsistic.

The inevitable pluralism of views in a democratic society does not necessarily oblige us to incorporate *simple* pluralism in the justification of democracy so that every advocate of hate could spread their message. Pluralism might not mean unbound relativism nor nihilism, and some qualification or reasonableness is expected in a variety of approaches to democracy from Rawls to Mouffe, not only in the ones that explicitly appeal to epistemic values. Furthermore, pluralism and continued disagreement plays a vital, educational or even central role in many theories about the epistemic values in democracy, meaning that appreciating epistemic values is coherent with both *reasonable* pluralism and pluralist reason.

A further dimension not addressed in this article is that, in order to counter the populists claim to absolute truth and the epistocrats’ call for more elitist control, perhaps the deliberative, radical, liberal and other democrats in their aim to avoid possible harms of overreliance on “one political truth” should not overcompensate by retreating the epistemic terrain altogether. This move would be a dangerous mistake of leaving epistemic values solely in the hands of the simplistic and in the long run anti-democratic attitudes of populism or epistocratic elitism.

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