

MURDERERS ON THE BALLOT PAPER
BAD APPLES, MORAL COMPROMISE, AND THE
EPISTEMIC VALUE OF PUBLIC DELIBERATION
IN REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACIES

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EPISTEMIC DEMOCRATS argue that the legitimacy of democratic authority partially depends on the ability of democratic states to make the correct decisions—the decisions that better promote the common good—more effectively than antidemocratic alternatives. In this paper I argue that epistemic democrats typically overlook the centrality of party politicians to representative democracies. The democratic choice of policy is mediated through the democratic choice of politician.

This paper will defend two core contributions. In a critical direction, the first core contribution is to put the democratic process of politicians competing for votes in elections at the center of political theorizing. Epistemic democrats risk forcing this central characteristic of representative democracy to have an ad hoc fit with their preconceived models of direct democracy. In particular, epistemic democrats overlook the active possibility that a competent public could still yield bad outcomes because of how bad apples behave in the legislature and how conscientious politicians should react. This paper shows that conscientious politicians should compromise with each other in order to gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to stop the murderers on the ballot paper from winning and wielding political power with killer consequences. So the active possibility of the worst politicians on the ballot paper winning and wielding political power as they wish potentially spoils the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence for the rest of us. Rather than promote the truth, a conscientious politician should compromise the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence with whatever rhetoric, lies, and bullshit will gain the alliances and votes necessary to resist the bad apples, whether the bad apples are inside or outside her political party.

As a moral agent, a party politician with personal integrity may feel compelled to promote her moral convictions, and compromising on those moral convictions may compromise her personal integrity. However, to see only that

moral compromises compromise personal integrity is to overlook whether compromises may cultivate a different type of integrity. A politician, as an elected representative, should cultivate her “democratic integrity” and take responsibility for protecting the material interests of those she represents. An uncompromising politician who prioritizes her personal integrity as a moral agent neglects her democratic integrity as an elected representative.

The bad apples in the legislature provide a powerful reason to construct a less idealized and more realistic model of deliberation. If a model of deliberation is to help show how democracy outperforms antidemocratic alternatives, it must become much more sensitive to the weighty profession-specific obligations of politicians in representative democracies to resist the bad apples.

In a constructive direction, the second core contribution is that deliberation is potentially useful for discovering how to resist the bad apples. This paper will show that a potential epistemic value of public deliberation in *representative* democracies is that it can empower politicians to discover what I call “deliberated compromises.” It allows politicians to persistently know what moral compromises to advocate for in order to resist the bad apples. Deliberation can empower politicians to know which moral compromises will gain the alliances and votes necessary to resist bad apples in light of the constantly changing range and intensity of political sentiments among the public. The bad apples problem provides a powerful reason for more realistic models of deliberation to redirect themselves away from the public promoting truth and toward politicians promoting compromise.

1. REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

1.1. *Politician Incompetence*

Epistemic democrats argue that the legitimacy of democratic authority partially depends on the ability of democratic states to produce the correct decisions more effectively than antidemocratic alternatives.¹ Broadly speaking, they argue that aggregating competent votes in elections and voicing diverse views in public deliberations can empower democratic states to discover the correct decisions. As aggregative epistemic democrats, Robert Goodin and Kai Spiekermann have defended the Condorcet Jury theorem, showing that if only competent people

1 Cohen, “An Epistemic Conception of Democracy”; Coleman and Ferejohn, “Democracy and Social Choice”; Anderson, “The Epistemology of Democracy”; Estlund, *Democratic Authority*; Landmore, *Democratic Reason*; Schwartzberg, “Epistemic Democracy and Its Challenges”; Goodin and Spiekermann, *An Epistemic Theory of Democracy*; and Cerovac, *Epistemic Democracy and Political Legitimacy*.

vote, and they vote independently, the competent majority is exponentially more likely to choose the correct decision than a competent minority.² As a deliberative epistemic democrat, H el ene Landemore has defended the Diversity Trumps Ability theorem, showing that if a cognitively diverse public spreads the effective problem-solving heuristics scattered among its members during deliberations, the diverse public is more likely to choose the correct decision than a more cognitively able but less cognitively diverse group of experts.³ Whatever the particular mechanism might be, epistemic democrats provide an attractive ideal that enables them to evaluate the political competence of the public and to aspire toward institutional reforms that should promote their political competence more fully. Against epistemic democracy, epistocrats (those who advocate for expert rule) argue that the public is too politically incompetent to make epistemic democracy a realistic ideal.⁴ In defense of epistemic democracy, epistemic democrats argue that the public can and should become politically competent enough to make epistemic democracy a realistic ideal.

In a different direction, I am primarily concerned with a more neglected set of assumptions. The first core contribution of this paper is that epistemic democrats typically overlook the centrality of elected politicians in representative democracies. I will therefore explore whether the assumptions about *politician* competence rather than *public* competence are realistic. Even if epistemic democrats were to assume a fully realistic model of the public, they would still risk a utopian ideal if they assumed a hopelessly optimistic model of elected politicians. The incompetent politicians in the legislature potentially spoil the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence during elections.

In practice, representative democracy rather than direct democracy is typical. Representative democracies typically contain political parties as useful instruments for elected politicians to win elections and govern effectively. Political parties typically unite around common political agendas during elections, but they contain persistent internal divisions with divergent political traditions, policy preferences, and political aspirations among their members. Representative democracy fundamentally changes the type of choices that competent voters must make. They cannot directly choose a policy: they directly choose a politician and indirectly choose a policy. In other words, the democratic choice of policy is mediated through a democratic choice of politician.⁵ The political

2 Goodin and Spiekermann, *An Epistemic Theory of Democracy*, 17–36.

3 Landemore, *Democratic Reason*, 89–117.

4 Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*; Lopez-Guerra, *Democracy and Disenfranchisement*; and Brennan, *Against Democracy*.

5 Even with referendums, the contributions of party politicians seeking to win the next election typically still influence the referendum result.

competence of the public risks pushing against the political incompetence of politicians. Competent voters are less capable of choosing good policies if it is mediated through a choice of bad politicians.

Epistemic democrats typically assume that representative democracy is not fundamentally different from direct democracy.⁶ Perhaps epistemic democrats can argue that if a large legislature is constituted correctly, many if not most of the epistemic benefits of public deliberation spill into or are cultivated within the legislature itself.

Epistemic democrats might argue that the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence in representative democracies will probably elect competent politicians. In particular, Goodin and Spiekermann have argued that the difference between representative democracy and direct democracy partially depends on how politicians conceive of their role as elected representatives.⁷ First, they argue that competent voters should elect a delegate-style politician who votes in light of the judgements of those she represents rather than a trustee-style politician who votes in light of her personal judgements. In the spirit of Condorcetian democracy, a delegate-style politician is probably a competent politician because the majority judgement of those she represents is exponentially more likely to be the correct judgement than the minority judgement or her personal judgement.

Second, Goodin and Spiekermann have argued that the epistemic benefits of deliberation in the legislature will probably improve the competence of politicians. Even if elections do not always elect competent delegates, deliberation in the legislature will induce competence in otherwise incompetent politicians.⁸ Once enough politicians are competent, the aggregation of votes in the legislature probably produces the correct policies, as a competent majority in the legislature is exponentially more likely to be correct than a competent minority.

Landemore has rejected that representative democracy is merely a feasible second best to the unfeasible ideal of direct democracy, arguing that it has particular epistemic advantages.⁹ However, Landemore rejects that representative democracy has the elitist epistemic advantage of electing the more capable and competent people to political office. Following political scientist Nadia Urbinati, Landemore has argued that representative democracy has the more egalitarian epistemic advantage of constructing a feedback loop between the

6 Estlund, *Democratic Authority*, 160–61; Landemore, *Democratic Reason*, 4; and Goodin and Spiekermann, *An Epistemic Theory of Democracy*, 254–59.

7 Goodin and Spiekermann, *An Epistemic Theory of Democracy*, 254–46.

8 Goodin and Spiekermann, *An Epistemic Theory of Democracy*, 256–59.

9 Landemore, *Democratic Reason*, 10, 105–6.

people's inputs and the proposals of the representative assembly.¹⁰ This process provides the time necessary for the public and the politicians to revise and refine their judgements, cultivating a reflective type of wisdom regarding the policy preferences of the public and the policy decisions of the politicians.

Contrary to these epistemic democratic expectations, I argue that a critical mass of party politicians in the legislature potentially spoil the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence for the rest of us. Political philosopher Patrick Tomlin has argued that otherwise able groups can become unable to perform collective actions if a critical mass of their membership remains unwilling to contribute enough.¹¹ He has provided a hypothetical case of one hundred soldiers who need everybody to follow their orders if they are to cross a river. However, there are always three or more soldiers who are able but unwilling to follow their orders. So the few able but unwilling soldiers translate into a willing but unable unit. Similarly, a representative democracy needs enough competent voters and enough competent politicians if they are to produce the correct decisions. However, as explored next, there are potentially more than enough politicians who are able but unwilling to promote the correct decisions. First, the worst politicians on the ballot paper—the bad apples—are typically unwilling to promote the correct decisions. Second, a conscientious politician is not always willing to make the correct decision if it may cost her the next election. Third, a conscientious politician should become willing to compromise on promoting the correct decisions in order to gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the bad apples. So a critical mass of incompetent politicians in the legislature (including both the bad apples and the conscientious politicians seeking to win the next election and resist the bad apples) potentially translates into an incompetent representative democracy despite widespread public competence.

1.2. *The Primacy of Electoral Competence*

The ordinary incentives of party politicians competing for votes in representative democracies can significantly blunt the effects of widespread public competence for practical reasons. It is not infeasible for bad politicians to win votes during elections. Good campaigns can elect bad politicians. In order to distinguish between the complex virtues and vices of politicians, it is helpful to distinguish between ethical, epistemic, and electoral competence. Ethically competent politicians are principled and pragmatic enough to do good and avoid harm reliably. Epistemically competent politicians are empirically informed and epistemically

10 Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*.

11 Tomlin, "Should We Be Utopophobes about Democracy in Particular?"

rational enough to know the truth reliably. Electorally competent politicians gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to win the next election reliably. The circumstances of politics give electorally competent but epistemically or ethically incompetent politicians a competitive advantage over ethically and epistemically competent but electorally incompetent politicians. In particular, hypocrisy often gives politicians a competitive advantage. Politicians frequently do not practice what they preach. First, partisan politicians are prone not to practice what they preach consistently, especially if consistency would disadvantage their political party and inconsistency would advantage their political party. Partisanship has many moral virtues and socially good consequences.¹² Nevertheless, partisanship does risk some moral vices, and hypocrisy is one of them. Second, careerist politicians are disposed to preach the party line and practice whatever they expect to progress their professional careers.¹³ Third, Machiavellian politicians are willing to preach virtuous principles and practice whatever they expect to give themselves more political power and personal glory, however ugly.¹⁴ Whatever their motivations might be, electorally competent politicians often preach whatever rhetoric, lies, and bullshit they expect to win critical votes during elections and then practice whatever advances their narrow group or personal interests when in office.

Epistemically incompetent politicians are bad, but ethically incompetent politicians are typically among the worst. An ethically competent but epistemically incompetent politician is typically willing to do good, but she is frequently unable to know how to do good. She often fails to do good, but she is well intentioned. In contrast, an ethically incompetent politician is typically unwilling to do good and willing to do harm. She is willing to promote her own personal good, whatever harm she may do in the process. Ethically incompetent politicians are typically among the worst politicians on the ballot paper. When the infamous bank robber Willie Sutton was asked why he robbed the bank, he is rumored to have answered “because that’s where the money is.” Similarly, some ethically incompetent politicians are on the ballot paper because political office is where the power is. Lacking any significant principled convictions, cult leaders typically advocate for whatever populist policies help to cultivate a personally pleasurable cult of personality. Alternatively, corporatists publicly advocate for whatever populist policies allow them to profit from a kleptocracy or a chumocracy behind closed doors. They redirect significant public resources toward themselves, their family, close friends, or political allies

12 Muirhead and Rosenblum, “The Ethics of Partisanship.”

13 Weber, “The Profession and Vocation of Politics.”

14 Machiavelli, *The Prince*.

to the significant disadvantage of the public. Whatever ethically incompetent politicians might do, they are badly intentioned, and they frequently advocate for harmful policies in cynical campaigns.

It is not always very easy for conscientious politicians to win votes during elections. Good politicians can lose with bad campaigns. Representative democracy has selection effects. In other words, elections select party politicians who are able to gain the alliances and votes necessary to win the next election. Those able to do whatever is necessary to win gain a competitive advantage over those who are unable. Representative democracy also has treatment effects. In other words, elections induce a willingness in politicians to win the next election by any means necessary.¹⁵ They must become willing to cultivate the fragile electoral support and internal alliances within their divided political parties and the fragile electoral support and external alliances with sympathetic voters and politicians across party lines. Those willing to win by any means necessary gain a competitive advantage over the unwilling. The circumstances of politics shape the behavior of conscientious politicians. As explored next, a conscientious politician must cultivate a pragmatic type of sensibility toward how to win the next election.

In order to win critical votes, a conscientious politician must become sensitive to the opinions of a critical mass of her political alliances and electoral support, however ignorant, misinformed, or irrational they might be. In practice, a generally competent public will still contain many ignorant, misinformed, irrational, and otherwise incompetent people, and generally competent people will still have particular knowledge gaps, particular false and irrational beliefs, and other particular incompetencies. So a conscientious politician often does not need to promote empirically informed and epistemically rational judgements about how to do good in order to win the next election. She needs only to confirm whichever ignorant, misinformed, and irrational opinions a critical mass of her political alliances and electoral support accept. Worse, a conscientious politician must occasionally avoid empirically informed and epistemically rational judgements about how to do good in order to win the next election. If she constantly contradicts the incompetent opinions of a critical mass of her political alliances and electoral support, she risks losing the next election. Whatever electoral strategies may win, a conscientious politician cannot consistently prioritize the truth over vote accumulation if she wishes to remain a politician.

It is implausible to presume that there are no conscientious politicians in the legislature and that the bad apples comprise a majority. However, the

15 I assume politicians should continue to obey the law.

legislature potentially lacks a critical mass of conscientious politicians and potentially has a critical mass of bad apples. Too few politicians are Goodin/Spiekermann-style delegates or are willing to participate in Landemore's wisdom-inducing feedback loop. So there are potentially too few conscientious politicians in the legislature and too many bad apples for the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence to spill into the legislature.

2. THE BAD APPLES

With the pragmatic sensibilities of party politicians who are focused on winning the next election in the background, I will defend the profession-specific obligation of politicians to protect innocent people from the bad apples in the legislature. Politicians are not purely self-interested vote grabbers. As fellow humans, politicians contain a similarly complex bundle of self-interested and public-spirited motivations as everybody else. However, despite their similar motivations, it has been long recognized that the will of the voters and the will of the politicians frequently differ.¹⁶ Rather than judge the different wills of politicians harshly, I will argue that their wills *should* differ. Politicians should become sensitive to their profession-specific obligations, even if they might be significantly different from the ethical obligations of voters. As an elected representative, a politician can and should cultivate a professional type of sensibility toward how she can protect innocent people from the bad apples in the legislature.

What should conscientious politicians do about the bad apples? I will argue that the active possibility of the bad apples winning and wielding political power as they wish has ripple effects across how all politicians should behave. The circumstances of politics should shape the ethical obligations of politicians. So politicians competing for votes also should significantly blunt the effects of widespread public competence for principled reasons. Perhaps enough conscientious politicians win elections for the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence to potentially spill into the legislature. Nevertheless, politicians are ethically obliged to make it harder for the bad apples in the legislature to significantly harm innocent people. As a consequence, a conscientious politician should prioritize electoral competence over ethical and epistemic competence. Whoever she believes the bad apples are, she should typically prioritize whatever it takes to gain the internal and external political alliances and the electoral support necessary to resist them, even if she must compromise

¹⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, 57.

the ability of the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence to spill into the legislature to do it.¹⁷

Epistemic democrats wish representative democracies to promote the truth. Indeed, the truth is a highly valuable good. Nevertheless, politicians have many weighty ethical obligations, and some of them might conflict with their ethical obligation to promote the truth. No politician is ethically obliged to promote the truth regardless of the consequences. Following political philosopher William Galston, the first priority of politics is to avoid the worst.¹⁸ The public does not need to gain the best outcomes in order to live lives they consider good, but they must avoid the worst outcomes to live lives they consider good. They must avoid civil war, famine, economic collapse, and comparable catastrophes to live good lives. In order to avoid the worst outcomes, party politicians are ethically obliged to resist the bad apples, whether the bad apples are inside or outside their political parties. So, epistemic democrats risk being too insensitive to the conflicting obligations of politicians. A persistent ethical obligation of politicians is to promote whatever moral compromises are necessary to make the bad apples significantly less powerful and to avoid whatever uncompromising truths might fail to gain critical alliances and votes. Among the many weighty reasons to promote moral compromises in politics, the ethical obligation to resist the bad apples is a particularly powerful reason. The ethical obligation to resist the bad apples provides a particularly powerful reason to prioritize whichever compromises will gain the alliances and votes necessary to resist the bad apples and avoid whichever compromises may compromise those compromises.

2.1. *Thou Shalt Not Lie!*

Politicians often lie—and frequently out of moral vice rather than for some greater good. However, epistocrat Jason Brennan has shown that it is not always wrong for politicians to lie.¹⁹ It is plausible to presume that lying is generally wrong, but an absolute prohibition against lying is highly implausible. In particular circumstances, it is not wrong to lie. If there is a known murderer at your door, and she asks if you are hiding your neighbor in your house, it is morally permissible to lie to the murderer in order to protect your hidden neighbor. It is not wrong to lie to murderers at the door. In his characteristically colorful style, Brennan has argued by analogy that if there are murderers at the ballot box and they will knowingly vote for badly intentioned policies that will directly kill

17 Whether conscientious politicians should break the law to resist the bad apples exceeds the scope of this paper.

18 Galston, “Realism in Political Theory,” 394.

19 Brennan, “Murderers at the Ballot Box.”

many innocent people, it is morally permissible for politicians to lie to them. In order to save innocent lives, it is morally permissible for politicians to lie about their support for the killer policies in order to win the election and then to oppose the killer policies when in office.

Similarly, Brennan has argued by analogy that if there are ignorant voters at the ballot box and they will unknowingly vote for well-intentioned policies that will nevertheless significantly harm many innocent people, it is still morally permissible for politicians to lie to them. If a conscientious politician honestly and openly opposes the harmful policies during elections, she may risk losing the election to an honest supporter of the harmful policies. In this scenario, her honest choice is a bad choice. The honest choice passively contributes to the harm of many innocent people: the conscientious politician can avoid that harm if she lies during the election. The dishonest choice is the better choice in this case: it actively contributes to avoiding significant harm. The conscientious politician should lie about her support for harmful policies during the election in order to win the votes and then should oppose the policies when in office in order to avoid the harm. She could even lie about her opposition to the harmful policies when in office and preach that circumstances have made her support for the harmful policies ineffective or infeasible. This shows that it is not always wrong for a politician to lie to ignorant voters at the ballot box. If anything, politicians are ethically obliged to lie to ignorant voters at the ballot box if lying is likely to avoid significant harm.

In a different direction, there are other ethical reasons for politicians to compromise the truth in politics. Rather than politicians merely reflecting or reacting to the moral and epistemic vices of the voters, politicians themselves have particular moral and epistemic vices to which the more conscientious among them should react. Suppose there are murderers on the ballot paper, and they knowingly advocate for badly intentioned policies that will directly kill many innocent people. In that case, it is morally permissible for a conscientious politician to preach whatever compromised truths will gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the murderers on the ballot paper and to save innocent lives.

Similarly, suppose there are ideological politicians on the ballot paper, and they unknowingly advocate for well-intentioned policies that will nevertheless significantly harm many innocent people. The ideologues put the lives, liberties, and happiness of hundreds, thousands, and millions of people at risk with their irresponsible misuse of state power in wars, policing, the courts, prisons, and elsewhere. The ideologues could intensely support wars of aggression with violent blowback, militarized policing, harsh sentences for nonviolent crimes, and do little about prison violence. Alternatively, the ideologues may intensely

oppose defensive wars, defund policing, support soft sentences for violent crimes, and wish to abolish prisons. Whatever the ideologues might wish to do with political power, it is morally permissible for a conscientious politician to preach whatever compromised truths will gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the ideologues and thereby avoid significant harm.

If a conscientious politician were to honestly and openly support the uncompromised truth during elections, she may risk losing the alliances and votes necessary to resist the ideologues. In other words, the uncompromised truth is a bad choice: choosing the uncompromised truth passively contributes to the empowerment of the ideologues that the conscientious politician may avoid if only she compromises on the truth to gain critical alliances and votes. The conscientious politician should compromise on the truth in order to gain the alliances and votes necessary to resist the ideologues. So it is not always wrong for a politician to compromise on the truth when ideologues are on the ballot paper. Compromising on the truth is the better choice if it actively contributes to resisting the ideologues. If anything, politicians are ethically obliged to compromise on the truth when ideologues are on the ballot paper in order to gain the alliances and votes necessary to resist the ideologues.

Whatever the epistemic democratic analysis of representative democracy might be, epistemic democrats should become much more sensitive to the fact that party politicians have many more ethical obligations beyond the ethical obligation to promote the truth.²⁰ Even if diverse deliberations and vote aggregation during elections do filter out many of the bad apples from the legislature, not all of the bad apples are filtered out. There are potentially enough partisans, careerists, Machiavellians, cult leaders, corporatists, and ideologues on the ballot paper to allow very harmful policies to succeed, whichever political party might be in government. So a politician should prioritize her ethical obligation to protect innocent people from the bad apples even if she must compromise the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence in order to gain critical alliances and votes.

If and when the ethical obligation to resist the bad apples overpowers the ethical obligation to promote the truth, many if not most of the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence will not spill into the legislature. To

20 Patrick Grim et al. have provided an extensive empirical analysis of epistemic democracy that shows that the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence can survive in representative democracies (“Representation in Models of Epistemic Democracy”). Whatever the plausibility of their analysis might be, it simply does not consider whether profession-specific obligations do or should significantly compromise the ethical and epistemic competence of politicians.

compromise the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence is bad, but to allow the bad apples to do significant harm to many innocent people is worse. So the active possibility of the bad apples winning and wielding political power as they wish is enough to ethically oblige conscientious politicians to compromise the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence in order to gain the alliances and votes necessary to resist the bad apples. As a consequence, epistemic democrats risk an unrealistic model of politicians since the active possibility of bad apples in the legislature should motivate conscientious politicians to spoil the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence for the rest of us.

2.2. *Won't Somebody Please Think of the Common Good?*

The avoidance of the worst is not the only consideration in political decision making. The promotion of the common good is also a central consideration in political decision making. Brennan has argued that the political power of democratic citizens voting in elections should become conditional on political competence and that political competence depends on the ability to promote the common good.²¹ In other words, the right to vote should depend on the ability to promote the common good. Similarly, perhaps the political power of party politicians in office should also become conditional on the ability to promote the common good. So, if a politician compromises on promoting the common good in order to resist the bad apples, she may become too politically incompetent to hold political office. In the opposite direction, I will argue that if a politician compromises on the obligation to resist the bad apples in order to promote the common good instead, she might become too politically incompetent to hold political office. As explored next, the ethical obligations of the average voter and of the average politician should differ in light of the different stakes involved in their political decisions.²² The terms and conditions for political competence should become sensitive to the different obligations of the different participants within the democratic process.

The average voter is typically only one out of millions in the electorate. For example, if fifty or so voters out of the fifty million or so voters in an electorate voted for controversial public spending or tax cuts that they judge necessary to

21 Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 144–47.

22 It is generally recognized that the stakes of political decisions affect political behavior. Lomasky and Brennan, “Is There a Duty to Vote?”; Pincione and Tesón, *Rational Choice and Democratic Deliberation*; Hamlin and Jennings, “Expressive Political Behaviour”; Somin, *Democracy and Political Ignorance*; and Brennan, *Against Democracy*. In a similar spirit, the different stakes should affect the ethical obligations of the different participants in the political process.

promote the common good, whatever the unintended political consequences might be, they would not make much if any difference to who wins, how they win, or how they govern. They are only 0.00001 percent of the electorate. Even if five hundred, five thousand, or fifty thousand voters voted for the divisive policies necessary to promote the common good, they would still remain only 0.00001 percent, 0.0001 percent, or 0.001 percent of the electorate. So perhaps it is not unreasonable to expect competent voters to prioritize the controversial policies necessary to promote the common good, despite the active possibility of bad apples in the legislature, because the average voter has very limited political power in the political process. As a consequence, the ability to know how to promote the common good may remain central to the political competence of the average voter.

Conversely, the average politician is typically one out of only hundreds in a legislature. For example, if fifty or so politicians out of the five hundred or so politicians in a legislature advocated for the divisive public spending or tax cuts they judge are necessary to promote the common good, whatever the unintended political consequences might be, they risk failing to gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the bad apples. They are approximately 10 percent of the legislature. Even if only five politicians uncompromisingly advocated for the common good, they still remain a potentially critical 1 percent of the legislature. So the particular type of political power the average politician has in the political process makes it unreasonable to expect party politicians to prioritize the common good. The average politician is much more able to resist the bad apples than the average voter. With that profession-specific power comes the profession-specific responsibility to resist the bad apples. Consequently, epistemic democrats in particular and political philosophers more generally should become much more sensitive to the fact that politicians bear a profession-specific obligation to resist the bad apples even if they must compromise on the correct but controversial policy decisions necessary to promote the common good in the process.

Independently of how well democracy can promote the common good compared to antidemocratic alternatives, political theorizing should also focus on how well democracy can resist the bad apples compared to antidemocratic alternatives. The moral compromises fundamental to the fragile alliances and support of conscientious politicians can empower them to limit significantly how much harm the bad apples inside or outside their political parties can do. If conscientious politicians gain critical alliances and votes through moral compromise, they can take significant alliances and votes away from the bad apples. So a potential democratic tradeoff is that moral compromises may limit the advocacy of conscientious politicians for the divisive decisions

necessary to promote the common good, but those compromises can also empower them to limit significantly the advocacy of the bad apples for the worst policies available.

2.3. *Democratic Integrity*

The external consequences of an action are not the only considerations in political decision making. Following political philosopher Bernard Williams, consequentialist calculus neglects the moral value of personal integrity.²³ The internal commitments of the agent are also central considerations in political decision making. A minimum-integrity politics is unattractive. If a party politician does whatever she expects to promote better consequences regardless of her principled commitments, she puts the public at risk of very unprincipled behavior in order to gain slightly greater goods, which she is not certain of gaining in return. However, a maximum-integrity politics is also unattractive. If a politician protects her personal integrity regardless of the external consequences, she puts the public at risk of great wrongs in order to avoid the significantly lesser wrong of compromising her personal integrity. Williams therefore defended a medium-integrity politics: integrity must not be valued too little nor be valued too much. When a conscientious politician judges that circumstances compel her to compromise on her principled commitments, she should express a sincere sense of guilt afterward in order to reassure the public that she recognizes the wrong she has done and that she did not and will not compromise her principled commitments unless she is confident it will avoid a significantly greater wrong in return.

As explored next, a conscientious politician should compromise her principled commitments to avoid the significantly greater wrong of allowing the bad apples to win and wield political power as they wish. Political ethicist Edward Hall has argued that party politicians typically acquire competing ethical obligations as moral agents and as political advocates for the interests and values of those they represent.²⁴ When these competing ethical obligations conflict, politicians are forced to get dirty hands. When the circumstances of politics force a conscientious politician to choose between two wrongs, she should do the significantly lesser wrong to avoid the significantly greater wrong. Nevertheless, the politician does get dirty hands: she is still morally guilty of doing wrong even if it is the better choice all things considered. However, the politician would not have remained morally innocent if she had not done the significantly lesser wrong. She still would have gotten dirty hands but for a different

23 Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism."

24 Hall, "Political Compromise and Dirty Hands," 228.

reason. In that case, the politician would have been guilty of failing to avoid the significantly greater wrong. Inaction is not always morally on par with action, but inaction is not always morally innocent, especially if an action would have avoided a significantly greater wrong.

Following Hall, it is useful to recall sociologist Max Weber's distinction between an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility.²⁵ A conviction politician does not accept a high level of responsibility for the unintended but foreseeably bad consequences of acting on her good convictions. A conviction politician, as a moral agent, prioritizes her personal integrity and promotes her moral convictions. She may therefore be willing to act on her good convictions even when she risks unintended but foreseeably bad consequences. Similarly, a "values advocate" typically prioritizes the moral values that she judges or that those she represents judge are correct, even if she must neglect her ethical obligation to advocate for the material interests of those she represents as a consequence.

In a different direction, a responsible politician accepts a high level of responsibility for the unintended but foreseeably bad consequences of acting on her good convictions. A responsible politician, as an elected representative, prioritizes a different type of integrity—her democratic integrity—and takes responsibility for protecting the material interests of those she represents. Independently of whatever unacquired ethical obligations people as moral agents might have, politicians as elected representatives acquire a professional obligation to protect those they represent.²⁶ So a responsible politician is willing to act against her good convictions to avoid unintended but foreseeably bad consequences. Similarly, an "interests advocate" typically prioritizes her professional obligation to advocate for the material interests of those she represents even if she must compromise the moral values she or those she represents judge are correct in the process.

Unfortunately, moral compromises often do compromise personal integrity.²⁷ However, to see only that moral compromises compromise personal integrity is to overlook whether moral compromises may cultivate a different type of integrity. In particular, an interests advocate cultivates her *democratic integrity* as an elected representative. An interests advocate protects those she represents from the bad apples, even if she must compromise her personal integrity as a moral agent in the process of gaining critical political alliances and electoral

25 Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics."

26 A similar type of view is expressed in Mark Philp's 2014 Report for the Committee on Standards in Public Life ("Public Ethics and Political Judgment").

27 Leopra, "On Compromise and Being Compromised"; and Leopra and Goodin, *On Complicity and Compromise*.

support. The moral good of cultivating democratic integrity potentially compensates for the moral bad of compromising personal integrity. Conversely, a values advocate compromises her democratic integrity to conserve her personal integrity. A values advocate promotes those values she judges or those she represents judge are correct, even if she must compromise her democratic integrity as an elected representative and fails to protect those she represents from the bad apples as a consequence.²⁸ The moral bad of compromising democratic integrity potentially taints the moral good of conserving personal integrity.

Hall has argued that a conscientious politician primarily aims to promote her principled commitments as effectively as her circumstances permit.²⁹ I will argue that the active possibility of the bad apples winning and wielding political power as they wish unfortunately means that circumstances rarely permit a conscientious politician to promote her principled commitments very effectively. To not resist the bad apples is grossly negligent. If the bad apples win and wield political power as they wish, the risk is that the material interests of the innocent people conscientious politicians represent will be harmed by some of the worst policies available. So a conscientious politician should compromise the moral values that she judges or that those she represents judge are correct and deploy whatever rhetoric, lies, and bullshit will gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the bad apples. Rather than become Goodin and Spiekermann's competent delegate or some type of uncompromising values advocate, the conscientious politician should become a compromising interests advocate. As an interests advocate, a conscientious politician is guilty of compromising the moral values that she judges or that those she represents judge are correct. However, she would not have remained morally innocent as a values advocate. If she does not compromise those moral values to resist the bad apples, she is guilty of failing to advocate for the material interests of those she represents.

Epistemic democrats might argue that the decision to do the significantly lesser wrong is the correct decision.³⁰ To compromise the otherwise correct decision in order to resist the bad apples is itself the correct decision in those circumstances. However, in a dirty-hands choice between two wrongs, there is no right. As dirty-hands theorists argue, there is something morally good about avoiding the significantly greater wrong, but there remains something morally bad about doing the lesser wrong.³¹ In a dirty-hands choice, decisions

28 Dovi, *The Good Representative*, 164; Philp, "What Is to Be Done?" 479; and Hall, "Political Compromise and Dirty Hands," 221.

29 Hall, "Integrity in Democratic Politics."

30 Estlund, *Democratic Authority*, 163. This type of view is also extensively defended in Nielson, "There Is No Dilemma of Dirty Hands."

31 Hall, "Political Compromise and Dirty Hands," 217.

that could count as correct are not feasible. The only feasible decisions are two wrong decisions. To see doing the lesser wrong as the correct decision is to overlook the deep residual moral bad still fully present in the lesser wrong.

Epistemic democrats should expect that more than enough party politicians potentially spoil the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence. Because of the circumstances of politics, competent voters are prone to vote for electorally competent but ethically and epistemically incompetent politicians. First, competent voters may vote for bad apples. They mistake electoral competence for ethical and epistemic competence. Bad apples may appear principled and knowledgeable during campaigns; the circumstances of politics thus reward the electoral competence of bad apples.

Second, competent voters might vote for a conscientious politician. The conscientious politician is principled and knowledgeable. However, a conscientious politician should prioritize her electoral competence even if she must compromise her ethical and epistemic competence in the process. She should compromise the moral values that she judges or that those she represents judge are correct in order to gain the alliances and votes necessary to protect the material interests of those she represents from the bad apples. In order to resist the bad apples, the conscientious politician may become guilty of failing to respect particular truths, failing to do particular goods, and failing to avoid particular harms. The circumstances of politics force her to do the significantly lesser wrong of compromising her ethical and epistemic competence in order to avoid the significantly greater wrong of allowing the bad apples to win and to wield political power as they wish.

Third, competent voters could vote for a conscientious politician who is unwilling to prioritize electoral competence—in other words, a politician who is uncompromisingly principled. However, the uncompromising politician simply risks losing the next election. The circumstances of politics thus punish the electoral incompetence of a conscientious politician. So she would therefore be guilty of the significantly greater wrong of failing to gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the bad apples.

It is plausible to presume that there are some uncompromising politicians in the legislature. However, the legislature potentially contains a critical mass of compromising politicians willing to resist the bad apples. So there are potentially too many compromising politicians in the legislature for the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence to spill into the legislature. Whatever the composition of large legislatures might be, the bad apples problem shows that current epistemic democratic aspirations are potentially defective. As elected representatives, party politicians should not primarily aspire to reap the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence. As elected

representatives, politicians should primarily aspire to resist the bad apples, whatever the consequences for the correct decisions might be.

3. DELIBERATED COMPROMISES

As explored above, the principled reasons for compromise extend beyond the typical reasons of reciprocity, inclusion, and mutual respect.³² As elected representatives, party politicians have a profession-specific obligation to protect the material interests of those they represent. So a politician can and should compromise the moral values that she judges or that those she represents judge are correct in order to resist the bad apples. However, politicians need a mechanism that would inform them of which moral compromises will help them gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the bad apples. In a different direction from epistemic democracy, the next core contribution of this paper is to show that a potential epistemic value of public deliberation in representative democracies is that politicians may use deliberation to inform themselves about which moral compromises to advocate for. Rather than participate in Goodin and Spiekermann's competence-inducing deliberation or Landemore's wisdom-inducing feedback loop, conscientious politicians can and should participate in a compromise-discovering type of deliberation. The epistemic value of public deliberation in representative democracies with incompetent politicians may look very different from that of direct democracies with competent voters.

In between the political ideal of public consensus and the political reality of state coercion is moral compromise.³³ A consensus typically discovers *common* ground that two parties share. It contains principles both parties already accept whatever else they accept. Following political philosopher John Rawls, an overlapping consensus contains moral principles all reasonable people accept for moral reasons.³⁴ In contrast, a compromise typically discovers a *middle* ground that is close enough to the two parties and not too distant from either political party. It contains principles neither party already accepts but that both parties will accept. A *modus vivendi* conception of compromise contains moral principles that a critical mass of people (reasonable or otherwise) will accept for

32 Gutmann and Thompson, *The Spirit of Compromise*; Weinstock, "On the Possibility of Principled Moral Compromise"; and Wendt, *Compromise, Peace and Public Justification*.

33 Bellamy, Kornprobst, and Reh, "Introduction"; and Spang, "Compromise in Political Theory."

34 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 147–48.

pragmatic reasons.³⁵ A Rawlsian overlapping consensus and a *modus vivendi* compromise are second-best agreements but for different reasons.³⁶ Nobody accepts them as the correct conception of justice. A Rawlsian overlapping consensus is a second-best agreement because it contains only those moral principles all reasonable people accept for moral reasons. So a consensus second best can look quite similar to the correct first best. Conversely, a *modus vivendi* compromise is a second-best agreement because it primarily contains those moral principles a critical mass of people will accept for pragmatic reasons. So a compromise second best can look very different from the correct first best.

Nobody accepts moral compromises because they judge that they provide the correct decision. Everybody accepts moral compromises because they recognize that people disagree over which decisions are correct. Nobody accepts moral compromises because they are coerced. Everybody accepts moral compromises as second-best or third-rate agreements that forgo the correct decision to avoid an even worse outcome. In private life, people typically commit to conflicting values that must compete against and compromise with each other: internal moral compromise is a common characteristic of private life. Similarly, in public life, radically diverse people typically commit to conflicting values that must compete against and compromise with each other.³⁷ In other words, interpersonal moral compromise is a familiar feature of public life. *Modus vivendi* compromises do not righteously aim to promote the correct religious, moral, or political values since all of those values are deeply controversial. *Modus vivendi* compromises realistically aim to promote those few common interests most if not all members of a radically diverse political community share. They aim to avoid violent conflict, preserve a peaceful coexistence, and cultivate productive cooperation in a political community with radically divergent religious, moral, and political values.

Political philosophers typically see deliberation as aiming at consensus and see compromise as the product of negotiation.³⁸ In a different direction, the next core contribution of this paper is to show that deliberation is potentially a *compromise-discovery process*.³⁹

35 Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*; Horton, "Realism, Liberal Moralism and a Political Theory of Modus Vivendi"; and McCabe, *Modus Vivendi Liberalism*.

36 Vallier, "On Distinguishing Publicly Justified Polities from *Modus Vivendi* Regimes," 219–21.

37 Hall, *Value, Conflict, and Order*, 71–89.

38 Van Parijs, "What Makes a Good Compromise?"; and May, "Compromise in Negotiation."

39 Jones and O'Flynn, "Can a Compromise Be Fair?"; Warren and Mansbridge, "Deliberative Negotiation"; Weinstock, "Compromise, Pluralism, and Deliberation"; and Spang, "Why a Fair Compromise Requires Deliberation."

It is helpful to distinguish between what political theorist Richard Bellamy has called “bargained compromises” and what I call “deliberated compromises.”⁴⁰ A *bargained* compromise is primarily self-interested: two parties promote a middle ground to advance their narrow individual and group interests as effectively as possible given their opposing interests. Conversely, a *deliberated* compromise is primarily public-spirited: two parties promote a middle ground to promote their political, moral, or religious values as effectively as possible given their opposing values.⁴¹ A deliberated compromise foregrounds opposing *values* rather than opposing *interests*.⁴²

Rather than participate in Landemore’s wisdom-inducing feedback loop, conscientious politicians can and should exploit the feedback loop between the public’s policy preferences and the politicians’ policy decisions to discover which deliberated compromises will empower them to resist the bad apples. Deliberation allows a politician to revise and refine which values she is willing to compromise on in light of what the voters are willing to compromise on. In return, deliberation allows the voters to revise and refine which values they are willing to compromise on in light of what politicians are willing to compromise on. A politician must follow public opinion when judging which deliberated compromises are electorally feasible. However, a politician can also lead public opinion on which deliberated compromises she judges are necessary to resist the bad apples. This shows that the dynamic between public opinion and the policy decisions of politicians is much more interactive and complex than that of vote-hungry politicians blindly following an ignorant public. Party politicians blunt not only the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence but also the epistemic significance of widespread public ignorance. If a politician is less sensitive to public opinion and more sensitive to her profession-specific obligations, public ignorance becomes less of a problem. As explored above, politicians are ethically obligated to protect those they represent. Even if the voters are too ignorant to know how to promote the common good by themselves, they may remain competent enough to help politicians protect their material interests from the bad apples.⁴³

40 Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism*. Bellamy has also explored “trimmed” and “segregated” types of compromise, which exceed the scope of this paper.

41 Bellamy prefers what he has called a “negotiated compromise”: they aim to acquire the reciprocal accommodation of opposing interests and values. Presumably, reciprocal accommodation aims to promote the negotiators’ values rather than advance their interests. So negotiated compromises are a special type of deliberated compromise.

42 Benditt, “Compromising Interests and Principles.”

43 Political scientist Gerry Mackie has argued that voters are competent enough to contribute to the mandates of party politicians. Mackie, “Rational Ignorance and Beyond.”

As explored next, informative public deliberation allows party politicians to know which moral compromises to advocate for in order to win critical votes during elections and to gain critical alliances when in office.⁴⁴ First, elections incentivize politicians to become willing to seek the vote of the median voter in order to maximize their share of the vote.⁴⁵ The median voter provides imperfect protection against polarized political sentiments. The median voter prefers mildly good policies that most do not judge are the best but most do not judge are the worst. However, a politician still needs a mechanism that would inform her of the policy preferences of the median voter. I will show that politicians are able to know the policy preferences of the median voter with informative public deliberation. Deliberation reveals the political judgements of the voters. It makes political judgements publicly known and encourages voters to justify their political judgements to each other in light of opposing judgements.⁴⁶ So deliberation can empower politicians to persistently discover the diverse and dynamic political judgements among the voters and to infer the policy preferences of the median voter; without it, politicians are left mostly in the dark about the complex and constantly changing political judgements of the voters. Deliberation can empower politicians to persistently infer which mildly good policies most do not judge are the best nor the worst in order to gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the bad apples.

For example, deliberation can empower party politicians to persistently infer a level of income redistribution that neither progressive liberals nor market liberals judge is the best nor the worst. Economist Dan Usher has argued that the median voter supports some level of income redistribution: “self-interest can be relied upon in voting about the redistribution of income, narrowing the gap between rich and poor, without removing the gap completely, altering people’s ordering on the scale of rich and poor or destroying incentives to work and save.”⁴⁷ However, politicians still need a mechanism to *know* the level of income redistribution the median voter supports. As explored next, politicians are able to know the level of income redistribution the median voter supports with informative public deliberation.

44 Politicians can also use deliberation for a variety of other purposes. In particular, it remains possible that bad apples will use deliberation more effectively than conscientious politicians and that deliberation will reveal moral compromises that empower bad apples rather than help conscientious politicians resist them. This possibility exceeds the scope of this paper.

45 Black, “On the Rationale of Group Decision Making”; and Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*.

46 Elster, “Arguing and Bargaining in Two Constituent Assemblies.”

47 Usher, *The Economics of Voting*, i.

Deliberation makes the acceptable levels of income redistribution among progressive liberals and market liberals known. Progressive liberals typically hold that income redistribution is imperfect: it does not eliminate social inequality. It does not permanently liberate the working class from working under exploitative terms; it only temporarily reduces the exploitation of the working class as the logic of capital accumulation forces the capitalist class to increase the exploitation of the working class over time. Nevertheless, progressive liberals can reveal through deliberation the lowest level of income redistribution they reflectively judge necessary to significantly reduce the economic power of the capitalist class over the working class and consequently reduce the capacity of capital to exploit labor.

Conversely, market liberals typically hold that income redistribution is less than perfect for a different reason: it reduces economic freedom. It is not the case that the working class has nothing to lose from income redistribution: they risk losing the social benefits of economic freedom. In particular, redistribution diminishes the profit incentive that encourages entrepreneurs to invest in productive, technological, and scientific innovations. Redistribution forces the working class to forgo the better and cheaper consumer goods and services that entrepreneurial innovations produce over time. Nevertheless, market liberals can reveal through deliberation the highest level of income redistribution they reflectively judge possible to still significantly preserve the profit incentive and consequently preserve the capacity of entrepreneurial innovation to produce better consumer goods for the working class over time.

Deliberation is a dynamic discovery process that persistently allows party politicians to know the complex and changing levels of income redistribution acceptable among progressive liberals and market liberals. Deliberation can empower politicians to persistently infer an acceptable level of income redistribution that progressive liberals reflectively judge will prevent the worst consequences of social inequality and market liberals reflectively judge will preserve the best consequences of economic freedom. More generally, deliberation allows politicians to discover which mildly good compromises to advocate for in order to gain the political alliances and electoral support necessary to resist the bad apples.

Second, vote trading can empower party politicians to avoid policies that a majority of voters mildly support but a minority of voters intensely oppose.⁴⁸ Vote trading provides imperfect protection against the tyranny of the majority. Electoral minorities can vote for minority parties or minority members

48 Coleman, "The Possibility of a Social Welfare Function"; and Tullock, "Problems of Majority Voting," 51–53.

within majority parties to advocate for them within or outside of government. Politicians representing electoral minorities can agree to vote for policies that those electoral minorities mildly oppose (or against policies that they mildly support) in return for getting more votes against a policy that those electoral minorities strongly oppose (or for a policy that they strongly support).⁴⁹ So vote trading provides imperfect protection against policies that electoral minorities judge are the worst. However, a politician still needs a mechanism that would inform her of the intensity of political sentiments among electoral minorities. As explored above, deliberation is a compromise-discovery process. Deliberation can empower politicians to persistently discover the diverse and dynamic intensities of political sentiments among electoral minorities and to infer which votes to trade; without it, politicians are left mostly in the dark about the complex and constantly changing intensities of political sentiments among electoral minorities. Deliberation can empower politicians to persistently infer which popular policies to oppose in light of mild majority support and intense minority opposition. By persistently discovering what the majority mildly supports and what electoral minorities intensely oppose, deliberation can empower politicians to persistently discover which moral compromises to advocate for to win critical votes during elections and to gain critical alliances when in office in order to resist the bad apples.

4. CONCLUSION

Epistemic democrats typically provide an idealized model of deliberation for direct democracies. However, they provide a potentially unrealistic model of deliberation for representative democracies. Widespread public competence can still yield bad policy outcomes because the choice of good policies is mediated through a choice of bad politicians. Politician incompetence blunts the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence. Epistemic democracy should therefore become much more sensitive to the ordinary incentives of party politicians competing for votes in representative democracies and how they shape the ethical obligations of politicians. A politician has many more ethical obligations than an ethical obligation to promote the truth. In particular, she has a profession-specific obligation to resist the bad apples even if she must compromise on promoting the truth to gain the necessary alliances and votes to do it. A politician should become an interests advocate rather than a values advocate. She should cultivate her democratic integrity as an elected

49 Political philosopher Stuart Hampshire observed that compromise frequently involves both sides of a divide dropping their more minor commitments (*Innocence and Experience*, 154).

representative with a moral responsibility to protect those she represents even if she must compromise her personal integrity as a moral agent with moral convictions in the process. As a consequence, politicians potentially spoil the epistemic benefits of widespread public competence for the rest of us because of the circumstances of politics.

In a different direction, public deliberation may bring other epistemic benefits to representative democracies. Public deliberation provides party politicians with an effective mechanism to know which moral compromises will gain the alliances and votes necessary to resist the bad apples. In light of the constantly changing range and intensity of political sentiments among voters, public deliberation can empower politicians to persistently discover which mildly good compromises a majority mildly supports and most electoral minorities do not intensely oppose. Once party politicians and their obligations are put at the center of political theorizing, epistemic democrats in particular and political philosophers more generally might gain a powerful reason to start modelling public deliberation in representative democracies as a compromise-discovery process that can help conscientious politicians resist the bad apples.⁵⁰

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50 I am very grateful to Dr. Edward Hall, Dr. Matt Sleat, Professor Robert Goodin, Professor Alasdair Cochrane, and two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Any errors remain mine.

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