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The Selfish Voter Paradox and the Thrown-Away Vote Argument *

PAUL E. MEEHL
University of Minnesota Medical School

During the last quarter century political scientists have become increasingly preoccupied with rational reconstructions of voter behavior, the leading ideas being taken from economics. Some theorists explicitly postulate voter selfishness[1]; others avoid this postulate in favor of whatever utilities (societal goods included) the voter wishes to increase,[2] although it is notable that the examples provided tend overwhelmingly to be egocentric, and usually monetary. Recently there has been growing an uncomfortable awareness that such "economic" theories have major trouble dealing with a big brute fact, to wit, that the empirical probability of an individual voter's behavior determining the outcome of a large scale (e.g., U.S. presidential) election is negligible. Riker and Ordeshook[3] estimate it as $p =$

10^{-8}, and my rough calculations indicate my chances of determining who becomes President are of about same order of magnitude as my chances of being killed driving to the polls—hardly a profitable venture. Precise estimates are neither possible nor necessary, since any fairly computed value surely lies below the $p < .0001$ whose complement $q = .9999$ Bernoulli[4] and Buffon[5], and all reasonable men, regularly treat as a "moral certainty."

I shall argue from these rather simple and noncontroversial truths that all economic theories of voter participation are radically incoherent, because such participation is irrational as an instrumental action toward an egocentric end. A voter's participation in large scale elections is inherently a case of the "Tragedy of the Commons,"[6] and no manipulation or complexification of the economist's cost-benefit formalism can make it otherwise. As a corollary, I shall try further to show that the *kinds* of justificatory premises required to render voter participation rational are distinctively moral and such that they will also justify voting for a "sure loser" candidate, thus rebutting the standard argument, made by supporters of the two major U.S. political parties, that voting for a third "minor" party is "throwing away your vote."

I think the argument can best be set forth in the form of a dialogue. One protagonist, "S.O.P." (= Standard Old Party), believes it to be irrational to vote for any presidential candidate who is neither a Republican or Democrat, since voting for anybody else is "merely wasting your ballot." The other protagonist, "F.E.V." (= Flat Earth Vegetarian), proposes to vote for the candidate of a fusion party composed of Flat Earthers and Vegetarians, recently united. Voter F.E.V. has become convinced that the troubles of the world are largely attributable to human beings engaging in the unnatural and wicked practice of consuming flesh foods, along

[1] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

[2] James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971). The present paper was drafted more than three years ago, and I am aware of the spate of articles meanwhile (1972-1976) devoted to aspects of the "voter calculus" problem. I have not discussed or even cited these recent contributions, because despite their merits and general relevance they do not bear appreciably on the distinctively *ethical* core of my argument. If I am right that no egocentric act-prospective rationale for voter participation will do, then elaborations or amendments of Buchanan and Tullock or Downs will not fix things up. Nor will further manipulations of the formalism. Thus to take one example, Ferejohn and Fiorina's paper on "maximin regret" (*American Political Science Review, 68* [September, 1974], 525-536) is an interesting and ingenious variation on the received model, but I think the reader will agree that it leaves my philosophical criticism quite untouched.

[3] William H. Riker and Peter C. Ordeshook, "A Theory

of the Calculus of Voting," *American Political Science Review*, 62 (March, 1968), 25-42 at p. 25.

[4] Ian Hacking, "Jacques Bernoulli's *Art of Conjecturing*," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, 22* (August, 1971), 209-229 at p. 219.

[5] D.A. Gillies, *An Objective Theory of Probability* (London: Methuen, 1973) at p. 165.

[6] Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science,* 162 (1968), 1243-1248.

with their adherence to the Magellanite heresy concerning the sphericity of the earth. The two disputants have agreed to disagree on the merits of these substantive views, and the dialogue is concerned solely with the question whether it is irrational of F.E.V. to cast his vote for the fusion party candidate, one Pastor Sedlitz, instead of taking the Democratic or Republican candidate as the best available according to his lights.

SOP: Of course I consider your views about the wickedness of eating meat and the earth's flatness as erroneous and, to put it bluntly, preposterous, but it seems clear from our discussions that you are set in your Flat Earth-Vegetarian ways, so I am not going to debate the merits further. However, our discussions have also shown that there are some features of your position that happen to be the same as those of the platform of the Republican party, and of individual statements by Senator Claghorn who is running as the Republican presidential candidate; and there are a few features of your views, although somewhat fewer, to be found in the position taken by the Democratic party and its presidential candidate, Governor Fisbee. I have not myself decided whether to cast my vote for the Republican or the Democrat, but I am certainly going to vote for one of the two; and I want to try to persuade you that it is pointless, even assuming the substantial correctness of your Flat Earth-Vegetarian views, for you to vote for the FEV candidate, Pastor Sedlitz. My argument is short and easy and does not require any big philosophical or political theory as underpinning. It consists simply in pointing out that if you vote for Pastor Sedlitz, even assuming that his FEV views are mainly correct, you will be throwing away your vote.

FEV: I don't understand what you mean by "throwing away my vote." I am voting for the candidate of my choice. Isn't that what I'm supposed to do in a democracy?

SOP: Well, yes, within reasonable limits I suppose one could say that. But the point is that you know right now that Pastor Sedlitz is going to lose. It's not absolutely *certain* that he'll lose, but it's quasi-certain—as certain as we ever can be about human affairs; as certain as we are normally required to be in our daily practical decision making. So it's like dropping your penny into the bottomless pit: you are going through a meaningless gesture of democracy, so to speak, because it is foreseeable with quasi certainty that your candidate will lose, whether you vote for him or not.

FEV: Yes, I concede it is foreseeable with quasi

certainty that Pastor Sedlitz and the Flat Earth-Vegetarian party will lose. That doesn't bother me a bit. But I am curious to hear why you propose to vote for Senator Claghorn, or Governor Fisbee, as the case may be.

SOP: Well, you see, I don't know which one of them is going to win, but one of them surely will. So my voting has some point to it; it's not a pointless effort or an empty gesture.

FEV: I don't see how that follows. If I understand you, your argument against my proposed vote for Flat Earth-Vegetarian candidate Pastor Sedlitz is that my voting for him cannot lead to his being elected. But your voting for Senator Claghorn cannot lead to his being elected either, can it?

SOP: It's not that my individual ballot determines Senator Claghorn's election, which of course we know it will not, with a probability of .99999 or better. The thing is, I am helping to bring about an event which, at least from our present condition of information, may possibly be brought about, if I and others like me get together. If I and others like me all vote for Claghorn, he will be elected, otherwise not.

FEV: I can't buy that last statement if I take it literally. You formulate it as a conditional that Senator Claghorn will win the presidency if "… you and others like you get together." But that's not literally correct. It is not necessary that *you and others like you* should vote for him. All that is necessary is that enough people, which group may or may not include you, vote for him. From which it surely doesn't follow that *you* must vote for him to bring about the intended result.

SOP: I mean that we have to vote for Senator Claghorn collectively, of course.

FEV: Why does it follow, from the statement that "we have to vote for him collectively" that "I, who desire his election, must vote for him individually"? I had thought that arguing from something that is true collectively to something true for the individuals in the collection was a fallacy, called the fallacy of division. They taught me that in Logic I when I was a freshman. Besides, you persist in saying "we," and you aren't entitled to say "we," if the word *we* is taken to include *you,* the particular individual with whom I am disputing. It is simply not correct to assert that anything hinges upon a specified subset of the electorate. That a subset which happens to include you as one member must vote for Claghorn in order for him to win, is literally just plain false. All that can be said to be literally correct is that a sufficiently large subset of the electorate (to be precise, a larger subset than those who vote for his opponent) must vote for him. It is surely obvious that this hypothetical subset does not need to include you, or me,

or any other specific individual. An assertion about a *specified* subset (e.g., one that includes you) is not even true if stated probabilistically—let alone as a solid-gold conditional.

SOP: Let me make an analogy to economics. Nobody's individual purchase, in classical economic theory, is considered to have an appreciable influence upon the price of hamburger. Nevertheless classical economics also says that these collective choices by all the purchasers who would prefer eating hamburger to keeping their 50c (or buying something else with their 50c) are what determine the supply and the demand and the price of hamburgers. As a rational economic man, I help determine what happens to the price of hamburgers, the supply of money, the number of hamburgers produced, and things of that sort by my individual action as a member of the collective; the same is true of the political process, is it not?

FEV: No, it is not. The rational man in economics buys a hamburger because he wants a hamburger more than he wants his 50c or something else that he could get with his 50c instead of a hamburger. He doesn't buy the hamburger *in order to* "influence" the macroeconomic process or state. He buys it because he wants something that he gets if he buys and lacks if he doesn't buy. The point is that if he as an individual didn't buy the hamburger, then he wouldn't have a hamburger; and he wants one. Whereas if you as an individual don't vote for Senator Claghorn, that does not determine whether you get Senator Claghorn or whether I get him. Almost all analogies between political and economic behavior are fallacious because, for politics in the large, where it can be said on empirical and mathematical grounds that a rational person knows with a "moral certainty" that his individual action does not substantially influence the probabilities of what befalls him (or, for that matter, anybody else, or the collective), he is *not at all* in the position of the vendor or purchaser postulated in economic theory. Incidentally, while the paradoxes of political participation as interest groups or individuals have become the focus of attention in recent years among political theorists,[7] you are surely aware that similar paradoxes were raised many years earlier (long before the advent of modern decision theory or the classic formal incoherence proofs of Arrow and Co.), notably in the well-known essay on the "tragedy of the commons" by William Forster Lloyd, a paper published almost a century and a half ago.[8] So the question also arises in economics; it's just that in economics it is not always critically present but depends on the circumstances; whereas in large scale political democracy, I claim that it is always present.

SOP: Consider what kind of consequences your mode of reasoning would result in if everybody followed it. How would *you* get anybody to the polls in a political democracy?

FEV: That's the point, precisely. *You can't get anybody to go "rationally" to the polls,* unless you introduce some sort of quasi-Kantian principle with a distinctly *ethical* content. Political participation theories that omit "ethical" premises are all radically defective for this reason.

SOP: I'm going to get plenty nervous if we have to go back to old Immanuel Kant to explain political rationality! I doubt very much that even you want to buy Kant, or do you?

FEV: No, I don't buy Kant. I don't even think Kant's own examples, when he gets to illustrating the Categorical Imperative, are either rationally compelling or intuitively punchy. At most, his example about paying debts has some plausibility, although I think I could even take care of that one. The business about suicide, or only looking out for my own interests as long as I don't harm others, or developing my talents versus loafing—all seem to me singularly feeble both in their argumentative structure and their intuitive appeal. (I think they testify mainly to the fact that Kant's background was pietist in its ethos, not that I wish to commit the genetic fallacy or argue *ad hominem*.) That's why I said "*quasi*-Kantian." What I mean is that you can't get me or yourself or anybody else to the polls in a national presidential election if you appeal to their selfish interests. And, worse still, you can't even get us there by an appeal to altruism if you have an act-prospective formal principle of conduct.

SOP: I'm not sure just what you mean by the term *act-prospective*. You better spell that out if you intend to rely upon it.

FEV: I am not prepared to give an absolutely rigorous definition of it. Roughly, I mean by an "act-prospective" formal principle of conduct one that, however stated, essentially makes the rationality of a proposed (dated, particular) action a_i dependent upon foreseeable differential consequences of individual i's taking that action. One must show that there is a substantial difference in the probability distribution over consequences if

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[7] See, e.g., Mancur Olson, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action* (New York: Schocken Books, rev. ed. 1971).

[8] Reprinted (in part) in *Population, Evolution, and Birth Control*, ed. Garrett Hardin (San Francisco: Freeman, 1964), p. 37.

I, the agent contemplating the action, take the action from what the probabilities would be if I failed to do so. I don't want to speak of an "act-utilitarian" criterion because it seems so obvious to me that one might follow a formally act-prospective rule of conduct without a wholly utilitarian content. Thus, for instance, I might vote in a small faculty meeting in a certain way, not with the aim of maximizing the utilities, but in order to "do justice" as defined in some other than a purely utilitarian way. Such a vote would be rationally act-prospective for me as a means to the "Justice" end because the number of people voting in a faculty meeting is small enough so that my single vote might possibly (even probably, if the faculty is small enough and seems divided closely) make a difference. In fact, for a faculty meeting, even a "lost" vote wouldn't necessarily make it pointless of me to have cast my single vote, inasmuch as how badly somebody loses in a group of a dozen persons may make a significant psychological or political difference now or in the long run.

SOP: All right, that's not a very precise explanation, but perhaps it's good enough for our present purposes. Now, how do you propose to use this notion?

FEV: What I argue is that in order for me to go to the polls, or for you to go to the polls—it doesn't matter whether we are Republicans or Democrats or Flat Earth-Vegetarians in our convictions politically —in a presidential election, assuming the premise (which you don't dispute) that there is a moral certainty that neither your vote nor mine determines the outcome, it is necessary to invoke some kind of ethical principle of political participation that is not act-prospective and not egocentric. A principle which is act-prospective won't get me there whether I'm egocentric or not, because there is a moral certainty that whether I vote or do not vote will make no difference in the outcome—even in the "appearance" of a landslide victory or a narrow squeak. Nobody is going to pay any attention to the last digit in a six place number for the state of Minnesota's popular vote for the President, especially as we all know that the voting machines and tabulations will contribute error larger than that. So there must be invoked a principle which is not purely act-prospective, a principle stating some kind of rule that bars direct appeal to probable differential prospects hinging upon my acting versus not acting. No direct appeal to utility can get me to the polls because of the quasi certainty, by any ordinary

reliance on probability reasoning in human life, that my vote is without effect, *either* in the sense of determining the outcome or of making the outcome "look stronger." Since you don't like the term "Kantian," even when modified by "quasi", let me characterize the kind of principle required as *axionomic*. I mean by "axionomic" a rule or principle—whatever else its formal properties or content—which has a form that does not confine its binding character to cases where act-prospective calculations make it reasonable to say that a certain outcome hinges, or its probability depends non-negligibly, upon what I do. And now I add a further point that even an axionomic principle will not suffice unless it is to some degree *altruistic*.

SOP: Oho, that will get you in bad trouble. If each voter is supposedly voting so as to benefit others at his own expense, we get into an awful mess, both philosophically and econometrically. Altruism will never work as a basis for voting. Surely you can't mean that Citizens A and B should, for example, each be voting high taxes for himself so as to provide transfer payments to the other? That's absurd, and it just won't work.

FEV: Ah, yes, you're quite right. I should not say altruistic, but something weaker, say *sociotropic*.

SOP: You seem to need quite a few fancy terms to defend your position. What does this neologism mean?

FEV: By *sociotropic* I mean taking some account— we needn't say exactly how much—of other persons' interests or, if you like, of the collective's interest. An axionomic egocentric principle would be a maxim of prudence, which tells me to behave rule-conformingly in a way that *tends* to pay off and bars direct appeal to act-prospective consequences for my own welfare. It bars such direct act-prospective calculations on the usual grounds of uncertainty in human affairs, bias in one's reasoning about complex matters, self-deception and wishful thinking, and the fact that there are some risks which I do not dare allow myself to take even though the probabilities associated with them may be relatively small. Thus we often temper a straight "maximize-expectations" decision rule by a rule which first excludes a class of too-large risks, either by disjunctive characterization (intensional) or, failing that, by actually listing them (extensional). This is not a maximin decision policy but a step-function rule superimposed upon an old-fashioned expectation-maximizing rule. It resembles what in assessment psychometrics we call a "mixed regression and successive hurdles" model. Now the point is that it cannot conceivably be a maxim of prudence for me to vote in any presidential election because the act-prospective probabilities are always

negligible; but we know with quasi certainty that I will *lose* certain utilities (such as having a pleasant evening watching the baseball game or making love or drinking beer or playing pinochle). Adding the fact that there is a small but not zero probability that I will get killed driving to and from the polling place —one that has almost the same order of magnitude as the probability that I determine the outcome of the election—clearly a maxim of prudence would lead me to stay at home. Therefore we need something more than an axionomic principle, we need an axionomic principle which is also sociotropic. We need a principle which speaks of my obligations to the rest of the collective, which pays attention to somebody's interest besides my own, and which formulates a *rule* about my conduct that has that sort of reference. If there's not a rule, I should not bother even on altruistic premises; if there is a rule but it's a prudential (egocentric) one, I should not bother either. What I need is both.

SOP: It disturbs me that you are speaking in such general terms rather than actually formulating the rule. If you have the rule up your sleeve, why don't you state it for me? It also concerns me that you keep formulating the matter so negatively, in terms of principles that *"won't* suffice to get me to the polls."

FEV: I assure you I am not engaging in any shenanigans in that respect. I am avoiding stating a rule because I'm not at all sure what particular rule you would accept or, for that matter, what rule I would accept. But I do want to maintain that a characterizable disjunctive class of rules is excludable as insufficient. So far as affirmative statements go, an adequate rule could be Kantian, or neo-Kantian, or Marxist, or production-maximizing, or "biological survival," or nationalistic, or Christian Natural Law, or fascist, or rule-utilitarian, or all sorts of other things. (Act-utilitarian it could not be, for the same reason that it cannot be, more generally, purely act-prospective.) I don't want to commit myself to any one of these specific possibilities. And even if I had made up my mind among them, I wouldn't want to have my argument with you hinge upon that choice. Because I claim we can make some strong meta-arguments concerning what *kind* of principle or reasoning is necessary to get an individual citizen to the polls, and that meta-reasoning suffices for the present purpose. It would be undesirable, in this sort of argument, to have the whole outcome hinge upon our mutual acceptance of a particular ethical principle, such as rule-utilitarianism, furthering the prole-

tarian class struggle, conducing to our nation's survival and power, evolving a better human species, or enabling each human personality to fulfill his potential. I want to say that my position is more general than any of those. As for my position being negative, that's for the same reason. I really don't know how to characterize the class of adequate rules except that each of them would need to be something stronger than a maxim of prudence or an appeal to probable differential consequences, altruistic or egocentric. What affirmative properties an adequate rule must have I do not know, although it seems to me that saying it must be axionomic rather than act-prospective, and saying further that it must have some social content rather than being purely selfish, says a good deal. I am inclined to think that any altruistic rule of that type will do the job, although it probably would not suffice to determine for which candidate I voted once I got there.

SOP: My understanding of what have been called "economic theories of democracy" is that they do not postulate voter altruism, and I don't see why you think that is necessary for them to work. If anything, these models typically assume voter selfishness.

FEV: When I said altruism, I misspoke. All I require is that the rule or principle should be sociotropic, and that doesn't mean altruistic. "Altruistic" is the *contrary* of "egocentric," not its contradictory. By "sociotropic" I mean that the content of the rule or principle (or its derivation chain) must involve at least some reference to the interests of others than the voter, or let us say more realistically, the voter and his immediate family taken as a political, economic, and social unit.

SOP: Well, the economic theories of democracy don't require even that weakened form of concern for others, in my reading.

FEV: No, I agree that they don't as usually formulated. My point is that they *must* do so in order to be adequate to get me into the polling booth as a rational agent. The crucial difference is that between my buying a hamburger because I want the hamburger (regardless of what my purchase might do to the price or supply of hamburgers) and my going to the polls. We simply can't postulate an egocentric means-end situation when it comes to voting.

SOP: But in economic theory your individual purchase of a hamburger doesn't do anything to the price either, does it?

FEV: No, but the point is that while collectively all these hamburger purchases do affect the supply and the price, I don't have that collective impact in mind, nor need I make any implicit reference whatever to it in defending a claim that the single hamburger purchase is

rational on my part.

SOP: I remind you that public appeals are often made by politicians and businessmen that people ought to pay attention to that "collective economic impact" such as in war time or to help control inflation, or in urging people to "buy something, anything" during a period of economic recession.

FEV: Yes, but my position is that such "collective economic" appeals also involve a sociotropic component that is *not* present when I behave rationally as an egocentric economic man and purchase my individual hamburger not because of such collective impact considerations, but because I *want that hamburger more than I want my 50c.* And, as is all too well known, such appeals do not tend to work—hence we have wartime price controls, black markets and the like.

SOP: All right, on this I guess we have no disagreement. But I still don't think there is anything necessarily sociotropic in your sense about the economic theories of democracy. It seems clear to me that they only require something weaker than either altruism or socio-tropism, namely, a kind of quasi-contractual principle which says that while I do not need to have somebody else's *interests* than my immediate family's at heart, I do have to carry out my part of an implicit social contract or bargain if I live in a democracy, one of the responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy being to cast his vote. I don't see why being sensible of this obligation has to involve even the faintest whiff of concern for your interests, any more than a businessman who accepts, in carrying on trade, the obligation of contracts must be presumed to have the interest of other businessmen with whom he deals at heart, even the least bit.

FEV: H'mmm—I hadn't thought of it that way. Yes, you have an important point there. All right, I will modify the sociotropic requirement. Since I think this kind of nonegocentric consideration might often play a significant role (because that's how people talk to me at times about their own voting behavior), I would suggest an amended version of the statement about content which would be to say that the content must be either sociotropic or social-contractual. Alternatively, I might revise my definition of *sociotropic* to mean "taking some account of the subjective desires, objective interests, or entitlements of others in my social group." It now occurs to me that I have a problem distinguishing between the form and the content of the kind of rule or principle that would be necessary to get me to the polls in a national election, and the additional elements of

the reasoning needed either *to get to the rule* or to *go from the rule* to the implication that one is obliged to vote.

SOP: I don't doubt that you have trouble with that, since you seem reluctant to state the rule, preferring only to talk about it or characterize it vaguely, if I may say so without offense. I mean it *does* make it difficult to argue with you, when you operate so much in the *meta*-meta-ethical clouds.

FEV: Well, you've objected to that generality or vagueness before, and I sympathize with your unhappiness, but the point about it is I would not want to state the actual rule, even if I could do so with precision, because I want to deal with a *class* or *family* of possible rules which are disjunctively necessary to make my voting a rational act, and I honestly don't want to defend one of these rules rather than another. I admit that this causes both of us trouble in the argument. You as critic are disadvantaged by not knowing exactly what rule you should be examining, and I am disadvantaged in providing grounds by not knowing exactly what rule or principle is to be inferred. But it can't be helped if my position is to be presented in the generality that I intend. I repeat that I do not want to be stuck defending rule utilitarianism or Marxist ethics or nationalist values or biological survivalism or Rawlsian lexical justice or any other particular set of political and moral principles. So I have to do the best I can with a general formulation. Of course this has the kind of weakness that any position does which talks about "what sort of things would be necessary in order to derive such and such a consequence." After all, we must remember that even in formal logic and mathematics, and *a fortiori* in any empirical domain or ordinary language discourse, statements about what kind of thing would be needed to get somewhere from somewhere else are necessarily only persuasive and cannot claim deductive rigor. But I take it we would agree that deductive rigor cannot be had in discussing political science anyhow, right?

SOP: Right, no quarrel on that score. I don't mean to fault you for this generality, even if I sound as though I'm doing that; I just think you ought to face up to the fact that by not stating the rule, you are bound to lose a certain amount of "punch" when it comes to persuading a reluctant old party supporter like myself. But back to the debate, what did you have in mind by your remark that it's difficult to separate the rule or principle involved from the antecedent reasoning and the reasoning from the rule to the consequence "I should vote"?

FEV: Something like this. Whether we make the rule "strongly" sociotropic by postulating an altruistic interest in somebody else's welfare besides my own, or

"weakly" sociotropic, covering altruism, benevolence, and a nonbenevolent social-contractual concept which merely requires that by sharing in the benefits of a democratic polity I am prima facie obliged to participate in it as a voter (some scholars would of course require more than that, but I think that's hard to show), in either case we need some additional reasoning first to show this and then to apply it. We have in the back of our minds some reference to what we want to happen (e.g., more prosperity and freedom and health and education and security and all of that) and, equally importantly, certain things that we want to avoid, such as the collapse of the political order, or a ruinous inflation or depression, or the rise of a tyranny or the stunting of human growth potentialities, not to mention a thermonuclear holocaust. Here again I don't know how to state it except in general terms but, speaking meta-talk about what (a) the rule itself, or (b) the reasoning to the rule, or (c) applying the rule, would have to include, I would take it as fairly obvious that it would require some kind of reference to an empirical means-end relation, and also some kind of conditional (allowably but not necessarily counterfactual) about what everybody has to do in order to make the thing work.

SOP: Aha—I thought you rejected the line of argument about what everybody has to do, as for instance the difference between the economic situation and the tug of war situation. In the tug of war situation, everyone on one side must help, otherwise that side is quasi-certain to lose. In the hamburger situation, and I thought you wanted to argue in the presidential election situation, it is literally false that everybody must do anything in order for such and such a result to accrue.

FEV: Correction sustained—I should have said, that in (a) reasoning to the rule and (b) applying the rule in order to get me to the polls and, I would also assume, (c) to determine my voting choices once I'm in the polling booth, we will have to say something about *collective action.* What we say will have to be a statement true collectively (i.e., "statistically", about the collective) and not, as I said before and as you now remind me, distributively. It is literally false to say that "everybody has to participate" in order to make democracy work. That's empirically absurd on the face of it. We have another one of those open concepts[9] where we have to talk about

some hard-to-specify minimum amount of participation in order for it to work. It is not necessary if democracy is going to work, for example, that 98 per cent of all eligible voters should participate, but democracy couldn't function on only 2 per cent—although I really don't know how one would go about proving that, do you?

SOP: Well, of course, if participation were that low, we would probably infer that something else of a fundamental character had already taken place so that in some sense democracy must already have ceased to function in a significant way, right?

FEV: That's right, so we needn't dispute about that one. Anyway, what we need is some kind of counterfactual or conditional statement concerning collective action. In order to get to the rule from some kind of sociotropic or social contractual notion, and in order to apply the rule to the question whether I should bother to vote (and, if so, *for whom*), we are going to need some kind of reference to what would happen if nobody voted or what would be desirable about nearly everybody voting. I submit further that in deciding for whom to vote (once I get there), I would also take the same kind of considerations into account, such as deciding how good or bad it would be if a majority voted for Hitler or Gus Hall or Gerald L. K. Smith or Senator Claghorn or Governor Fisbee or the Flat Earth-Vegetarian candidate.

SOP: I guess I understand why you think you need this, but can't you say more about the steps involved?

FEV: The meta-steps are by negation. First we ask, "What sort of overarching ethico-political reasoning would get me to the polls, assuming I am a rational man?". Then we attempt to characterize such a principle meta-ethically, by saying something general about its form and content. Next we show that whatever we proposed provisionally won't do, because acting on that kind of basis would be irrational. From which we infer that the contradictory meta-predicate must be involved instead, if the desired derivation is to go through.

SOP: Let's hear it in the concrete, or at least as concretely as you can do it operating *meta,* as I guess we are stuck with doing.

FEV: Having agreed that the principle or its derivation has to be axionomic and sociotropic, what else would you advance by way of making my individual participation a reasonable act?

SOP: I suppose I would say something to the effect that if people don't vote, then the system won't work; and, if persons who hold particular views, such as your Flat Earth Vegetarians, don't vote, their candidate won't win; he won't even make a showing that might possibly influence future voters, or the future positions of the

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[9] Arthur Pap, *Semantics and Necessary Truth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), chapter 11, "Reduction and Open Concepts," pp. 302-360.

two major parties, or his successful opponent's in-office behavior. As you say, it's going to be some kind of a conditional argument about the differential consequences of people voting or not voting.

FEV: I'll buy that, but only if you put the conditional carefully, since otherwise it's literally false. How do you put it?

SOP: How's this for a starter? "If people don't vote, democracy will collapse; and, in particular, if we Republicans don't vote, Republican candidate Claghorn will lose."

FEV: Well, maybe the Republican candidate is going to lose anyway.

SOP: He may, but we don't *know* that, before the election. Whereas we *know* before the election that the Flat Earth-Vegetarian candidate is going to lose. That seems to me a very important difference.

FEV: I confess it has a certain intuitive punch, even to me. But I must insist that from my position it is nevertheless irrational, when properly analyzed. Remember, we are talking about you, the individual Republican, and about me, the individual Flat Earth Vegetarian. We are trying to make clear how it could be rational for *you,* an individual, to vote for the Republican candidate, whereupon I am going to try to show that whatever reasoning will suffice to make it rational for you to vote for Senator Claghorn will suffice to make it rational for me to vote for the Flat Earth-Vegetarian candidate, Pastor Sedlitz.

SOP: Maybe there is a hang up here on what it means to be politically rational. Do you suppose that could be possible?

FEV: I would hate to be stuck with having to provide a generic definition of political rationality, but if you think that's a lurking problem in our discussion, I suppose I must make a stab at it. For purposes of the voting situation, remember that we are talking about an individual political agent, in particular, an individual who is a prospective voter or campaign fund contributor or automobile bumper sticker displayer. I would say that individual act a_i is politically rational for citizen i if it meets either of two conditions: (1) it is foreseeably probably efficacious, by which I mean that thinking about the empirical facts (e.g., the social order, the rules of the game, the Gallup Polls, the whole ball of wax) shows it reasonable to suppose that if I perform a_i the probability of an outcome O which I intend or desire more than the alternative empirical outcome possibilities is non-negligibly increased over the probability of O occurring if I refrain from performing contemplated action a_i. Secondly, if—

SOP: Now, wait a minute, that first one would automatically exclude almost any political action, according to your conceptions, so why do you bother mentioning it?

FEV: I mention it for completeness's sake, because there are a few situations, for instance, when the voting group is sufficiently small (as in a small college faculty meeting or maybe even in voting for alderman), in which the probability of my vote making a definitive difference, either in the outcome or in the appearance of strength, is non-negligible. Or suppose I had been a candidate for nomination and was defeated at the convention; then my decision publicly to support the nominee might make a significant difference. But you are of course correct that in speaking of an individual anonymous voter whose name carries no particular clout on the social scene, and whose contemplated action is not voting for dog catcher in his precinct but for the President of the United States, this first condition would never be satisfied. That's why we need a second (alternative) condition of political rationality if the ordinary voter is ever going to get into the polling booth rationally at the national level.

SOP: I cannot resist pointing out that in the matter of non-negligible probabilities of having differential effect, there is a slippery slope. It would be hard to draw an arbitrary line indicating when your condition one is unfulfilled.

FEV: It is hard to draw an arbitrary line, but that doesn't stop us from categorizing the vast majority of the instances. Don't forget what Edmund Burke said about twilight: its existence does not prevent our drawing a tolerably clear distinction between night and day. I surely don't want to get us into the "when is a man bald" argument, which fortunately we needn't settle in order to decide that a man with four hairs on his entire scalp *is* bald. Similarly, we don't have to decide precisely when the statistical probability p of my affecting the outcome of the election, or even the "showing of my candidate," is to be labeled "non-negligibly small." For instance, one might have a hassle about the issue like that of the statistician in medical research having to decide whether a significant result should be (for this curative purpose) set at $p < .01$ or $p < .05$. Statisticians tell us, "That's either arbitrary or, more often, decided on the basis of the relevant utilities (serious consequences of Type I versus Type II error, cost of enlarging the experiment)." I propose we accept the admittedly arbitrary cutting point of Buffon and agree that $p < .0001$ counts, for any practical purpose of human decision making and individual action, as a "substantially zero" or "negligible" probability. Thus, if

we get into a local election with a small number of voters, we might have a problem deciding about whether that cutting score was exceeded. I treat $p = .0001$ as a sort of lower bound, not claiming it's a greatest lower bound, on the set of what I call "non-negligible probabilities." But I am talking throughout about presidential elections, and there the facts show that a direct, act-prospective means-end condition for rationality is clearly not satisfied when considering the participation of the individual "non-famous name" voter. As soon as we get into cases where some highly visible person's support for a candidate can make a difference, then we are in a different ballpark.

SOP: All right, I agree it will get hopelessly messy unless we stick to the anonymous noninfluential single voter in a presidential election. What was your second alternative for individual action a to have political rationality?

FEV: It wouldn't be incompatible with the first one, but it might be substituted for it; and of course my position is that it *must* be considered an adequate substitute, if we're going to get me *or you* to the polls. The second possible principle of political rationality is that action a is in accordance with a rule or principle, axionomic in character, which has itself been given some kind of ethical justification. I suppose this amounts to saying that *the basis of political rationality can include ethical reasoning that need not be act-prospective.* I emphasize again, however, that it may *also* be act-prospective in some instances, as in voting for dog catcher at the township level, or publicizing my vote when I'm a "big name."

SOP: I don't see why you can't simply refer to its being ethical, since universalizability is one of the generally admitted requirements of an ethical rule or principle, shared by philosophers and political scientists of various ethical persuasions.

FEV: I would be willing to put it that way, except that I must be sure to exclude any justification that is act-prospective, and there are sophisticated forms of act-utilitarianism[10] that would be "ethical" philosophies by any ordinary usage. Besides, the term "ethics" is sometimes taken to include such axiological positions as egoistic hedonism.[11] The point is that

I don't want to get into that argument, and even a form of act-utilitarianism like that of Sartorius does not get me to the polls. It would be impossible to use Sartorius's to justify my voting, since the general principles needed to bar a direct appeal to utility, as applied to the national presidential participation by an individual citizen, could not be thus derived. For instance, one of the Sartorius considerations that can bar direct appeal to utility is the fallibility of human judgment about matters empirical—the fact that I cannot always carry out adequate computations about the act-prospective considerations when I contemplate a line of conduct. But in the case of my bothering to vote in a presidential election, it is obvious that I *can* carry out these computations, and that the differential probabilities are essentially zero. Furthermore, we mustn't identify act-prospective justifications with act-utilitarian justifications, because there can be act-prospective considerations that are not act-utilitarian (such as an individual magistrate's deciding something because he is convinced that if he decided the other way, individual injustice would be done, quite apart from his estimate of the total net utilities). It seems to me that the issue between a "pure utilitarian" and somebody who gives justice a separate weight, or postulates a Rawlsian lexical prepotency over utilities, is an issue we can't afford to get into here, when we don't really need to.

SOP: I guess I have no complaint against that, so go ahead with your reasoning.

FEV: I reason thus: In order for your action a_t in voting for Republican candidate Claghorn, or my action bj in voting for the Flat Earth-Vegetarian candidate, Pastor Sedlitz, to be a rational act, it must be an act which is in accord with a nonact-prospective ethical principle, since this is our second condition and we have agreed that the first condition cannot, at the presidential election level, be satisfied.

SOP: I still can't quite get over the feeling that you have somehow sold me a bill of goods, because my intuitions persist that there is some reasonable sense in which one can say that an action a is a rational means to a political end when it belongs to a class of actions A performed by a class of individuals C_A who share my desire for that political end, and who must, as a group, work together in bringing that end about.

FEV: I know how you feel about that intuition and I share it myself. But I must insist that it is irrational unless stated in a certain careful way, and my point is that people do not ordinarily state it that way. If one says that the individual action a is rational as a means to a political end *whenever it is an exemplar of a class of actions A that a group of persons C_A must collectively*

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[10] See, e.g., Rolf Sartorius, *Individual Conduct and Social Norms* (Encino, California: Dickinson Publishing Company, 1975).

[11] Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1907; Dover Paperback Reprinting, New York: Dover Publications, 1966).

perform in order for that end to be attained, that is an ambiguous formulation. It is not clearly false, but it is not clearly correct either. It just has to be unpacked.

SOP: It sounds pretty clear to me as you have just stated it. What's the matter with it as it stands?

FEV: I know it sounds clear, but it is not. There is nothing *wrong* with it as it stands, but it is objectionable as a formulation because it lends itself to an easy corruption, to wit, arguing distributively rather than collectively and then, via that error, arguing on a purportedly means-end, act-prospective, empirical-conditional basis, *without the ethical element* and *without the counterfactual element.*

SOP: And you want both the ethical and counterfactual elements for your nefarious purposes, is that it?

FEV: Exactly. We have a harmless sounding but, I think, ambiguous statement: "It is rational for a voter *i* to perform individual action a_i if *a* has the property *A* which actions as a class performed by a group to which he belongs (such as Republicans or Flat Earth Vegetarians) would, if performed by the members of the group, be politically efficacious." By "efficacious" here we mean that actions C_A would have a non-negligible probability of bringing about intended political outcome *O* rather than disfavored outcome $\bar{O}$. But this kind of talk can be rendered as "Everybody belonging to *C,* or a sufficiently large number of persons belonging to political interest group *C including me,* must perform action *a* in order to achieve *O.*" This, as I have insisted and I assume you now agree, is literally false to fact. On the other hand, the loose formulation can be rendered in a cleaned up form as, "It is rational for me to perform individual action *a* because it has the property *A* which a sufficiently large number of individuals in group *C* (who share my views) must perform, *whether that collective includes me or not.*" This latter formulation is not analytic or intuitively obvious without a pragmatic principle or justificatory rule, that is not act-prospective but is axiomic and sociotropically ethical. What I find objectionable in the ambiguous formulation is that it can be taken to mean that since the group statistically must do such and such, therefore I must do such and such, *as a means to an end,* i.e., as an act which is politically efficacious in the sense that my individual failure to do it would bring about the failure of the desired outcome, or will materially reduce the probability of the desired outcome. And while I am doubtless boring you by saying it yet once more, I

must repeat that this is literally false as an act-prospective, empirical, means-to-end, conditional assertion. The second translation is all right, but then it becomes a candidate for some kind of proof. Because we cannot infer directly, from the statement that collective "statistical" action A_c is necessary and sufficient to bring about the political outcome *O,* that therefore individual action a_i by individual agent FEV_i is necessary and sufficient for outcome *O.* And one can easily show by a simple empirical-mathematical argument that in the domain we are discussing, the latter assertion is not only not a valid consequence, but is in fact false.

SOP: So where does the rationality come from then? I suggest that you have proved too much. I am impelled to put a Konigsbergian query, "How is rational voter action a priori possible?" You have somehow to relate the means to the end, and it sounds to me as though you have effectively cut off the possibility of any such reasonable means-end transition, by the terms of your own argument, have you not?

FEV: As long as the rationale is formulated simply as an act-prospective empirically conditional means-end connection, that is what I think. So, if we are to get me into the polls, or, I repeat, if we are to get you into the polls to support your Republican candidate Claghorn, we have to have something stronger than this, something that goes beyond an empirical means-to-end argument of the form, "Since you individually desire *X,* you individually must do *Y,* because your doing of *Y* is the necessary and sufficient condition for *X*". Individual voting in a presidential election simply can't be justified that way.

SOP: I don't think you can afford to be stuck with *any* requirement, however you put it, that involves a reference to necessary and sufficient conditions, when we are operating in the realm of politics. You're going to be stuck with probabilities in any case, are you not?

FEV: Correction sustained. What I should say is that the question hinges upon whether my or your individually performing actions *a* (voting for Pastor Sedlitz) or *b* (voting for Senator Claghorn) is a condition for bringing about a significant increase in probability of an outcome intended by me or by you respectively. But one can include a funny kind of reference to its being necessary and sufficient, if the "outcome" is stated not as the result of the election, or even the good showing of a candidate, but as a necessary and sufficient condition for bringing about a non-negligible increment in the probabilities of those outcomes. I think I could do best by both of us if I throw the ball back to you, since after all the structure of my argument is that a principle adequate to get you into the polling booth to vote for

Republican candidate Claghorn will, if carefully stated, also be adequate to get me into the polling booth voting for FEV candidate Pastor Sedlitz. How would you defend voting for Senator Claghorn, since your vote will not determine the outcome, even in the weak sense of "improving his showing" in the event that he loses?

SOP: I suppose I would proceed along the lines that you are suggesting. I would invoke a conditional which says that, roughly, "If a sufficiently large number of persons vote for Claghorn, he will be elected. More generally, if a sufficiently large number of persons vote, democracy will continue, however clumsily, to function. Perhaps this last is more forcibly stated in the negative, that is, if enough people don't bother to vote—for whichever candidate—democracy will not function." Then I postulate, or derive (I'm not sure which, but maybe it doesn't matter for our purposes) some kind of ethical rule or principle which says that an individual member of a democratic polity has an obligation to make his political will known via the ballot box.

FEV: Why?

SOP: *Why?* It seems to me rather obvious why.

FEV: It's intuitively rather obvious to me too, but since I want to watch you like a hawk in this phase of the argument, I'd like you to say why. I don't require a derivation, and I don't know that I could give one myself, except perhaps in some general terms involving an implicit social contract or something of that sort. That is, if I receive the benefits of the society (including the very great benefits that come by virtue of its being a political democracy), I have some obligation to be a political participant in its decision-making processes. Will you buy that?

SOP: Yes, I think that's good enough for both our purposes, although I don't quite like this stated as an obligation, since there might sometimes be good reasons for abstaining from participation in the process.

FEV: Agreed. We could either say that it's one of W. D. Ross's prima facie obligations, or we could make it even weaker and say something to the effect that there is a kind of "obligatory tendency" involved. Like you, I wouldn't want to say that there was an absolute hard and fast moral-political rule that everybody has to vote in every election.

SOP: Of course one way you make your views known if you have a strong distaste for the available candidates is by abstaining. Modern political science has available some souped up statistical methods, based upon careful breakdowns of various geograph-

ical areas in terms of their make up and their previous voting pattern, of coming to empirical conclusions such as "part of the trouble with Governor Fisbee is that he lost the Polish Catholic vote this time around."

FEV: Yes, I would be quite willing to include periodic abstention from the ballot box as one form of meaningful political participation. Although I must emphasize that abstaining doesn't require any output of energy or opportunity cost or risk of getting killed on the way to the polls, so that the cases are not quite on all fours.

SOP: Anyway, we agree that an absolute requirement to cast one's vote is excessively strong, and is not needed for either of our purposes. So where are we now?

FEV: I was egging you on to spell out the principle in a little more detail. If you can derive it from some kind of ethical principle more general than that of political life, that's fine with me. But I repeat that I don't require this, as I'm not at all sure that I could do it myself on demand.

SOP: Well, let's not try it then. I gather we agree that if one did try it, it would involve some kind of reference to keeping the books straight between myself and the other members of my society, or some kind of reference to the benefits that I get requiring my participation in return, sort of analogous to the lawyers' notions of "unjust enrichment" or quasi-contract or some such way of thinking.

FEV: Okay, let's see how you put the principle for your purposes; never mind mine for the moment. And please explain the "obligatory tendency," if you need to rely on it. It was my expression, but it makes me uncomfortable, as it smacks of psychologism. We both know that voters *feel* obligated to participate, and the issue between us depends on why they *are* rationally obligated.

SOP: I want to avoid psychologism as much as you do. How about the term "obligation vector," to get the quantitative and directional flavor?

FEV: All right.

SOP: I would say that some sort of prima facie obligation or obligation vector exists for me as a voter to participate in the electoral process, relying on the general principle that unless people do, the system won't work; and when it comes to the *content* of my vote and the more specific application, I suppose further relying on the principle that if enough people who feel as I do vote as I contemplate voting (for Senator Claghorn), he will win or, even if he loses, he will make a respectable showing; and this will affect the subsequent course of events. It might, for example, affect the behavior of his opponent Governor Fisbee when he becomes President.

FEV: Sounds all right to me. I suppose then you would be willing to make explicit that there is here involved some kind of principle that says I have a quasi obligation or an obligation vector to do whatever it is I sincerely believe would be a "good thing" in terms of collective interests for some unspecifiably large number of persons to do, or something like that.

SOP: Yes, that is surely the underlying idea, and I presume that's why you made your earlier reference to the principle of justification being "quasi-Kantian."

FEV: Right. I certainly didn't mean to commit either of us to any orthodox form of the Categorical Imperative, except insofar as there is something rather like the Categorical Imperative involved in almost any nonegocentric axiological premise or meta-principle, to wit, the idea of universalizability. And I think we're both stuck with that much of Kant, are we not?

SOP: I think that's almost certainly true, and at any rate I am willing to include it among our shared political postulates for purposes of the present discussion.

FEV: Good. Go on then with your development—you were explaining why you intend to vote for Senator Claghorn.

SOP: I am going to vote for Senator Claghorn because I favor him and his views, or at least I favor more about him and his views than I do about the competition. I don't suppose we want to get into the knotty problem of deciding what to do when one likes some things about one candidate and dislikes others, or prefers one candidate but prefers the platform of the opposing party. It seems to me that distressing as those complexities are, and capable as they are of generating terrible problems of weighting and even sometimes out-and-out paradoxes or Arrow-type pragmatic contradictions, it would be a tangential issue for our purposes here.

FEV: Agree entirely. But please continue with your derivation.

SOP: So to simplify matters I will just say that I think that Senator Claghorn and his position are clearly the best candidate and position to solve the problems that currently confront the country. And I intend to vote for him because if everybody did—no, strike that, I'm falling into the same careless language you did earlier!—*if enough people did,* then he would be elected, and that would be a desirable social outcome.

FEV: Don't you want to mention "showing strength" here?

SOP: Yes, quite right, add "… and if he is elected I want him to be elected by a large enough majority so that he can appropriately talk of having 'received a mandate' and so forth."

FEV: But what if he isn't elected?

SOP: Even if he isn't elected, I would like him to make a "good showing" because I believe this will have some influence, at least on the average and however slight in some respects, upon the successful opposition candidate during his tenure of office.

FEV: So what's the principle involved?

SOP: I guess the principle is that I feel an obligation to vote for the person whose qualifications and views I believe would be a good thing, in some overall sense.

FEV: But why do that, since your vote doesn't determine the result?

SOP: I thought we went over that already. I feel an obligation to vote because I believe it would be a good thing if enough people (don't know how to say "enough," but it either means enough to get him elected or enough to make a good showing whether he gets elected or not) will do so.

FEV: But what if not enough people will do so?

SOP: The point is that I *don't know* in advance how many of them will. And that's one of the big differences between my voting for Claghorn and your voting for Pastor Sedlitz and the Flat Earth Vegetarians. You *know* right now that Pastor Sedlitz is going to lose, but I don't know that Senator Claghorn is going to lose.

FEV: I don't see what difference that makes to either of us.

SOP: It seems to me the difference is obvious and important. When one is contemplating an action and doesn't know what its effect is going to be, isn't his situation rather dramatically different from that in which he does know what its effect is going to be, to wit, nil?

FEV: I hate to keep dragging us back to previous points, but I thought I had successfully argued that *your effect* (in performing your individual action a_i) is going to be nil in either case. That is, Senator Claghorn is either going to win or he is going to lose, and if he loses he is either going to make a good showing or a poor showing and hence influence the subsequent behavior of Governor Fisbee as President; but whether he loses or wins, and whether if he loses he loses making a good or a poor showing, is not a function of whether you vote for him or stay home reading the funnies. Look at it this way: You do not determine that Senator Claghorn wins by voting for him, nor do you determine that he makes a good showing by voting for him. The difference

between his winning Minnesota by 274,631 votes and 274,630 votes is a socially, politically and psychologically null difference; ditto for his losing by one of these two amounts. Furthermore, you don't determine the base N to which that unit ballot is added or subtracted. That is, not only don't you determine the outcome by whether you vote, and not only do you not determine the showing by whether you vote, but you don't determine what the collective has done by whether you vote.

SOP: All right, all right—of course the whole business depends upon how many people think as I do about Claghorn and the platform he stands for. It seems to me we have to get that in somewhere.

FEV: I don't mind getting it in, because I would need it myself in justifying my intended ballot for Pastor Sedlitz and the Flat Earth-Vegetarian Party. But it seems to me the only way you can get it in is the same way you get in the reference to "enough people voting." That is, just as your vote doesn't determine who wins, and your vote doesn't determine how good a showing the winner or loser makes, so your vote doesn't determine how many people think and feel as you do (or I should maybe say how you think and feel in deciding how to vote doesn't determine how many people think and feel as you do).

SOP: Well then we have to move it back one step in our statement about universalizability, do we not?

FEV: That's all I would need.

SOP: I'm not sure just how we should be putting it at this point.

FEV: I don't know that I could put it precisely but wouldn't it be something like this: I am obliged (or, better, there is an obligation vector on me) to cast my vote so that it instantiates a universalizable statement to the effect that a voter ought to vote for the candidate that he believes to be the best one, all things considered. And this ethico-political principle is in turn derived from some more general statement about acting politically in a way that one can say, so far as he sizes up the situation, it would be sociotropically desirable for a sufficiently large number of persons to act, assuming of course that they cannot in good conscience act against their political or other strong convictions. So I guess this amounts to saying that you think it would be desirable if as many people as possible, or at least enough people to elect or make a good showing, shared your views about Senator Claghorn and his party's platform. Will that do it?

SOP: So far as I can see that would suffice to get

me to the polls. It mischievously occurs to me, however, that I might have an overarching principle that suffices to get me to the polls, that was sociotropic in content, and nevertheless once there, I might vote egocentrically. What would be the matter with that?

FEV: I'm not sure it's an out and out contradiction, although I suspect it is. Put it this way: To vote for X implies to vote. If the ethical principles involved in selecting X are not sociotropic, then it seems to me they would be axiologically incompatible with the ethical principles required to vote at all. That is, I can't vote for X without voting for somebody. And if the rationale in voting for X is a completely egocentric rationale, then I have cut the ground out from under my feet so far as justifying voting for anybody. Because we have seen that voting for anybody is egocentrically irrational, since maxims of selfish prudence would leave me at home.

SOP: Yes, yes, I know all that, although it's remarkable how hard it is to remember it.

FEV: That's right. That's why politicians in the two major parties, no offense to you, can easily get by with what is basically a fallacious argument when they keep telling disaffected independents that they would be throwing away their vote by voting for a minor party candidate.

SOP: But, you know, your argument went a bit fast a moment ago. You say that I can't vote for X without voting for somebody; so that if my rationale in voting for X is completely egocentric, I have cut the ground out from under my feet in justifying voting for anybody. That line of reasoning has some plausibility, but I don't find it persuasive. Why shouldn't I have a principle of political participation that justifies my voting, but still proceed, having decided to go to the polls on that principle, to cast my ballot, once there, on the basis of rational self interest? You really ought to spell that out a bit more.[12]

FEV: I'll try, although it seems to me pretty obvious. There might be, I suppose, some rational reconstruction of an act-sequence such that an earlier member of the sequence is justified by a different ethical principle from that used to justify a later one. Even there, if the meaning (purpose, "sense") of the first member of the response chain depends upon the later one, so that the first sub-action, being instrumental or preparatory, would be, so to speak, "meaningless" or "pointless" without the second (or at least the anticipation of it),

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[12] I am indebted to my colleague Rolf Sartorius for challenging this argument and forcing me to expand the dialogue hereat; as he is out of the country I do not know whether he will find the expanded form persuasive.

then I should think that while the principles might be *different,* they could hardly be *contradictory* without getting us into logical trouble.

But actually the voting case is far tighter than such an act-sequence would be. We don't deal here with two actions in a chain. (Of course you could make it seem that way by detailing the instrumental sequence involved in getting to the polls, such as putting on your topcoat, then getting the ignition keys for your car, opening the garage doors and the like. But these instrumental precursors of the molar "act of voting" are themselves justified by the *telos* of the final voting act, and I don't think we need have any quarrel about them.) The important thing about the act of voting is that the relation between "voting (at all)" and "voting for Fisbee" is *not* merely a contingent empirical connection, as between two acts one of which is a precursor or instrumentally preparatory for another. It is not even adequately represented by a stronger relationship than the causal arrow, such as the logician's "hook" (deducibility). No, the proper way to analyze it is that there is *one act,* namely voting (for somebody—you can't vote without voting for somebody, can you?).

So, if we do divide it up somehow for analytic purposes, we can't divide it into two actions, or even two components or aspects of an action. We have to look at it in terms of an action *a* of which some property or attribute *P* is predicated. That is, "voting" is the action, and we inquire about its various *properties,* such as whether you pull the lever with your right or left hand, whether you do it quickly or with much deliberation, and more importantly, *for whom* you vote. So that any notion of somehow splitting the behavior up in such a way that you can give an ethical ground E_1 for voting and then give a different *and incompatible* ground E_2 for your choice of candidate, is based upon an incorrect analysis. There is simply one act; the candidate-choice involved is one of its properties; and furthermore, that property of candidate choice is a determinant under a determinable whose presence is analytically part of the very concept of voting.

After all, nobody has ever proposed to define the act of voting as being physically at the polls on a certain night, without making a mark on a ballot or pulling the lever of the voting machine! So I argue that one cannot justify the act of voting (which, I repeat, always means the act of voting *for somebody*) by a principle that is act-prospective egocentric; rather he has to justify the act by a principle which is axionomic and sociotropic. And if that

principle is rationally active at the moment of his casting his ballot, it cannot become mysteriously irrelevant or be replaced by an act prospective, or a maxim of prudence-egocentric, kind of principle as the basis of rational choice between the candidates.

SOP: As I see the state of the discussion, we had arrived at a point where I was defending my vote for Claghorn on grounds of unpredictability, and you objected to that line of argument.

FEV: Yes, I do object most strenuously. In order to rely upon the argument from ignorance, namely, that I do not know what is going to happen and that I therefore ought to decide how to behave on the basis of that "informed ignorance"—knowing the alternatives and the risks and maybe something about the probabilities—one still needs some kind of strong ethical principle that involves universalization contrary to fact. Compare voting with buying life insurance. When I contemplate buying life insurance to protect my family on the grounds that I do not know the date of my death and that it is possible I may get hit by a truck tomorrow, the core of such reasoning lies in the if-then statements that I can make about consequences of the various unforeseeable contingencies. That is, I can say that if I fail to buy life insurance, and if having thus failed to protect my family, I die tomorrow of a myocardial infarction or an automobile accident, then my decision will accrue specifically, individually, and with near-certainty to their disadvantage. Given my state of ignorance, I am still able to attach differential consequences to various actions I may choose, considering each of the various unknown future states of nature.

But that is simply not the case in the voting situation because of the same old "large numbers" or "collective" argument. That is, you do not know whether Senator Claghorn will get a majority and become President of the United States; and you do not even know whether, if he should lose, he will at least make a good showing; but the point is that there aren't any statements you could make that have any appreciable probability attached to them which are of the form, "Assuming that he loses, then *if* I were to add one more tally to his vote count, *then* … [consequences]", because all such conditional statements are literally false. There isn't any way to get around it: *In a presidential election whether you vote for a given candidate or don't bother to vote at all has a negligible probability of having a non-negligible effect on either outcome or goodness of showing or policies of winner, regardless of what other people do so long as enough of them vote at all, which enough of them are quasi-certain to do for the purposes of this argument.* That is, you do not know in advance how

many people will vote for Claghorn or Fisbee, but you do know that enough people will vote in the presidential election so that the differential impact of your vote for Claghorn or Fisbee (or my vote for Pastor Sedlitz *has a quasi-certainty of exerting a negligible influence upon anything*. That's the basic empirical-statistical fact upon which the entire discussion must remain based, and the strong point I reiterate is that given that basic premise, which no sane man will dispute, there isn't any way to get either of us into the polls to vote for anybody unless we invoke some strong ethical argument about universalizability despite its counterfactual character and the collective nature of the outcome. I daresay you are getting as tired of hearing this reiterated as I am getting tired of saying it, but for some reason it seems unusually difficult for us to accept.

SOP: I suggest that the difficulty is that it gives anyone who takes it seriously a feeling of political impotence.

FEV: That may well be. All I would say is that the impotence I have as a Sedlitz supporter is actually no different in kind or amount from the impotence you have as a Claghorn supporter.

SOP: But you know, despite the apparent irrefutability of your main thesis, I still can't quite liquidate the view, or perhaps I should say (as a concession to rationality) the "sentiment," that in casting my vote for Senator Claghorn I am in some significant sense helping him to win or helping him to make a decent showing, whereas you admit that you know in advance that Pastor Sedlitz and the Flat Earth Vegetarians not only cannot win but cannot conceivably make a decent showing, and therefore you are not, as a tiny electoral atom so to speak, "helping" to do anything. I really don't want to say, when the chips are down, that this sentiment of mine is utterly foolish—even though I agree that in the sense of an appropriate means to an end, my individual vote doesn't have the usual means-to-end empirical properties with which we are familiar in our ordinary decision making in nonpolitical areas of life. There is something in me that insists on a hard core of reasonableness in that sentiment, and I find it difficult to think that you don't share it, reluctant though you may be because it's bad for your position.

FEV: We are being honest with each other, and I can see that I have some such feeling. That is, I do have a feeling of impotence when I cast my vote for Pastor Sedlitz; and I don't suppose that feeling would be as strong if I were casting it for Senator

Claghorn or his opponent Governor Fisbee, since we agree that empirically it is quasi-certain that one of those two major party candidates is foreseeably the winner. But when I try to explicate the nonemotional content of that sentiment, which I share with you, I don't seem to get very far, *unless I put in a distinctively moral element.* That is, if I unpack the cognitive as opposed to the emotive content of this attitude—which, I repeat, I do tend to share with you even though I don't like it for my position—the best I can get sounds pretty silly to me, and I think it will sound pretty silly to you upon leisurely contemplation. It goes sort of like this: "If the collective of a very large number of voter actions a_1, a_2, a_3 … a_N, where N runs into millions, achieves a political outcome O which I think it good to attain; then I think of myself as helping to attain it in some significant sense even if the counterfactual 'Were I to stay home from the polls, the end O would not be attained' is false. But if the end is foreseeably unattainable because there will be a very much smaller N_B of acts B, then my individual contribution to the collective of actions b_1, b_2, b_3 … b_N, is not in any significant sense helping." What that would mean is that you can only be said to help achieve an end if the end is achieved, even though whether it would have been achieved without your individual helping is irrelevant. I think such a definition of helping is irrational despite the intuitive appeal to the individual participant.

SOP: You can make it look pretty irrational, depending on how you choose to say it. You are emphasizing that something doesn't make a difference, whereas in my formulation I would emphasize that collectively we all do it.

FEV: Just how would you express it so it would sound more reasonable? And please don't use the word *help* if you can avoid it. Or at any rate I would like you to spell it out if you do.

SOP: I would put it roughly as follows. If a collective action A_c results in dichotomous outcome O, or if the outcome I desire failed but my candidate makes a good showing (even if he wins I can, as we have agreed, have an interest in how good a showing he makes) then my individual ballot, my individual action a in going to the polls and voting for him, can be said in some significant sense to have "helped" to bring about an outcome which was in fact successfully attempted by all of us in taking these actions. Whereas if my action a belonged to a class of actions performed by the collective C of persons who agree with my views, but their candidate fails at election and, further, so few of them agreed with me (or so few who agreed with me bothered to take this action) that our candidate also made a poor showing,

then I would say I have not helped to do anything that is significant. I remind you that a sufficiently poor showing may actually work *against* my views, because it begins to take on a kind of ludicrous and fanatic quality. And it doesn't seem to me that this formulation is as silly as you have suggested it is.

FEV: All right, I will confess that my intuitions go a little bit with you on that formulation. But I still want to unpack the rationale. We have agreed that nothing hinges upon words, and I am not going to quarrel with the word "help", although since you get a certain amount of motivational mileage out of being able to use that word in this rather special collective action sense, I have a sneaky desire to tack on a negative-sounding modifier such as "negligibly help" or "nonsignificantly help" or "ineffectively help." But that would just be a semantic device to counteract the semantic loading of the word "help," so let me do it this way: If the term "help" is taken to mean what I would prefer to have it mean as in the tug of war example, namely, that I make a significant difference that is foreseeably different, and by that I mean that I non-negligibly increase the probability of the dichotomous outcome O (my candidate wins whereas he would not have won had I not voted for him); or that there is a non-negligible probability, assuming that he wins without my vote, that my vote constitutes a significant increment in his mandate as a winner; or if he loses, that my vote has a non-negligible probability of his making a good showing and therefore, despite losing, influencing the course of political events in a variety of possible ways; then the argument runs easily from the basic premise that "He who wills the end must will the means," or some similar kind of act-prospective, means-end empirical contingency statement. What I want to maintain against your present offer to explain "help" in more broad terms (and so do justice to your intuitions) is that when the word "help" is used as broadly as you propose to use it, where it *does not* imply that there is a significant increase in the probability of an outcome or of a good showing by my action, that the overall generalization "You ought to help … [consequences]" can no longer be taken simply as stated. It can now be challenged because it is no longer axiomatic or intuitively obvious or analytic or whatever kind of meta-principle we are relying upon in the domain of pragmatic inference. When "help" no longer has a hypothetical means-to-end, act-prospective conditional significance, which it doesn't as you are now defining it, I will cheerfully accept your revised and

extended definition of "political helping." But now I will deny the overarching premise that one is *obliged to help* elect his candidate or to *help his candidate make a good showing,* because with this broadened meaning of "helping" *which no longer implies any differential consequence with non-negligible probability*, I would not accept, without further argument, a premise that says that one is obliged to help his candidate to win or to make a good showing.

SOP: I just don't understand what you're saying now. You are accepting my definition of "help," but you are saying you now deny one ought to help, is that it?

FEV: No, I am not denying one ought to help. I am saying that with this extended meaning of "help," the proposition that I am obligated to help support my candidate is no longer "obvious" or "self-evident" or "acceptable as a primitive ethical obligation of political life," which it might plausibly be said to be on a narrower use of the word "help." I guess what I should say at this juncture is that the four conditions for rational justification of my individual ballot have returned in full force.

SOP: How do you mean the four required assumptions return in full force? I didn't really intend to renege on what we had agreed on in discussing them. Are you suggesting that I am?

FEV: Maybe you didn't mean to, but my point is that the admittedly intuitive notion of "helping" as we have now spelled it out came up because you felt that somehow I was wasting my vote for the Flat Earth-Vegetarian candidate Pastor Sedlitz but you were not wasting yours by voting for Republican Claghorn or Democrat Fisbee. You felt that way because one of those two had a chance to win, and even the one that lost will have an impact derived from the strength of his showing. (Let's assume we don't know which one of them will lose, although modern public opinion polling makes it almost a sure thing to say which one will win—I'll return to that in a moment because it's very important in our dispute about foreseeability.) The intuition gets its force from the semantic overtones of the word "helping" or similar words like "participating in collective action" or "contributing, however slightly, to the total result." And I am arguing that when we spell out the meaning of "help" that is needed for your purposes at this point, it is not self-evident or an analytic truth of practical reason, so to say, that one must vote because that is the appropriate means to his own desired end.

The point is that straightforward application of an axiom about ends and means is unproblematic only if there is a single end and only if the means are known empirically to be efficacious or at least probably (or at

the very least conceivably) efficacious. Whereas in the individual voting situation there are other ends (such as the risks and the clearly foreseeable costs, however slight, of bothering to vote) as we have discussed above; and, more to the point, even if the means were completely devoid of disutility or risk, the means-to-end conditional relationship is not an empirical one. It is mediated first by making reference to the collective, and then by applying that statement about the collective to oneself as an individual, hoping to grind out an obligation vector from that application.

My point is that once we have spelled it out to that degree, then one goes back to the question, "Why should I bother to do something that is quasi-certainly inefficacious, in the precise sense that what happens does not *depend upon* my individual action a_i contemplated?" When you spell out "help" in the way we have just done, this important question recurs.

The reason I speak of it as "recurring" is that when we have stated that I do in some sense "help" to bring about an end which is successfully brought about by the collective action of numerous people helping as I am helping, the word "help" does make it seem, *unless we scrutinize the details carefully,* as though we had an instance of a straightforward application of the general axiom of practical reason which says that if you will the end you must will the means, *ceteris paribus*, assuming the means are licit. So it might appear that one has, by spelling out the intuition of helping, somehow bypassed the reasoning we went through earlier. And my point is that we can't bypass it because once we spell it out this way, it is simply no longer evident or obvious or a truism of practical reason that I ought to take the means to the end, since the means, considered here as my individual action a in going to the polls, is not literally a condition for the end. We only get to it by reference to the collective and, as before, adding some sort of counterfactual or neutrofactual remark about what *would* happen if a lot of people stayed home, or what *would* happen if *enough* people voted for Claghorn instead of Fisbee, and the like.

So my point is not to dispute about the word "help" as we have agreed to use it in your broad sense. My point is that when we have agreed to use it in that broad sense, it ceases to be an analytic truth of practical reason that "Anyone should help when he can … [consequence]" or however else one might choose to say it. In order to make it stick as a moral statement, since it cannot be a simple act-prospective

means-end conditional statement in the political situation, one has to have the four conditions we laid out previously. One has to rely upon some sort of overarching principle that is axiomic, sociotropic, collective, and neutrofactual. So I continue to insist that your intuitions about "helping," which I admit I share, do not avoid the thrust of my argument.

Furthermore, even if I were to buy what you say about "help" applying only when success is possible, which means almost all presidential elections, we would be on a slippery slope because of those elections in which the Gallup Poll made it highly probable that one of the major party candidates was going to lose. As you know, the first-class pollsters haven't missed one since 1948, and even there the best outfits, using the most scientific methods (e.g., the Michigan Survey Research Center) called it right for Truman over Dewey. I just don't see any way to get to the desired conclusion that individual voter John Q. Public should bother at the presidential election level without relying on a distinctively moral proposition that somehow says something about one having an obligation (or a prima facie obligation or an obligation vector) to act in accordance with a property of action A which one believes it would be desirable, *for whatever reasons* (I repeat I am not committing myself to utilitarianism or distributive justice or any other particular social content as to the ends) to be collectively achieved by some unspecifiably large number of persons doing it. How many will do what you intend to do is not something that you determine, and the same goes for me and for everybody else. If the principle requires that I determine the outcome, or the goodness of the showing, or that I determine by my vote how other people will vote and hence the collective result of which mine is a part, none of these forms of the principle will get me there because they're all empirically false with quasi-certainty. It has to be an ethical thing; and it has to be a positing, in a distributive sense, of something that is politically effective only in the collective sense; and it has not to depend on the actual outcome or the predictable outcome, but upon what *would be* the outcome if enough people did what I am contemplating doing. That is why I say that it must be both collective and neutrofactual ("possibly counterfactual"). And when I put all those requirements together, that it must be axiomic rather than act prospective; that it must be sociotropic rather than an egocentric maxim of prudence; that it must be collective rather than distributive; and that it must be possibly counterfactual rather than an indicative conditional—then, while you have all you need to justify a vote for Senator Claghorn, by those four principles I have all I need to

justify my "useless, thrown away" vote for Pastor Sedlitz. If any one of these four principles is removed or weakened in such a way as to render irrational my voting for Sedlitz, I am confident you will find that the rationale of your voting for Claghorn will have also been destroyed in the process.

SOP: It's a plenty tough argument to answer, and I am surprised how tough you have made it. At least for the time being, I don't believe I can rebut it. Just a couple of final questions, though. First off, don't you think you might get into some difficulty, not at this philosophical level but at an intermediate level of some of the derived consequences, within the framework of current empirical political science theory—namely, that countries which have a sizable list of different parties don't seem to function as well as those with a couple of big parties and maybe a third party at most constituting a swing party or a possible basis for a coalition government?

FEV: Yes, I think I may have a problem there, but that takes me into details and complexities beyond my competence in political science. I don't know that I would be willing to subscribe to any simple empirical generalization about the merits of a two big-party system, particularly since, as I read the record, the United States' two-party, both "moderate," political system, despite its impressive historical performance, is now creaking badly in the joints—if not coming apart at the seams. Personally, I have the impression that not one single major problem of our society is currently being solved by our political system, but that view probably reflects my substantive beliefs in the Flat Earth-Vegetarian picture of the world. So I guess I would rather just say that you have a point there that would be worth exploring on another occasion. What's your other question?

SOP: Let's stay on this one for a moment. On the social facts, I don't agree at all about our two-party system coming apart at the seams. Creaking at the joints, yes—of course I hold that is the human condition, it's the nature of *homo politicus*. But I agree we can't go into all that now. There's an aspect of the third party "sure-loser" business, however, that really needs clarification on your side. I think that persons politically identified with one of the two major parties sometimes use the locution "throw away your vote" not as a general designation of all circumstances where one votes for a low-probability candidate, but instead confine this "throwing-away" language to the special situation where one can be highly confident that the great majority of minor-party voters in a particular election will be drawn from (or, putting it affirmatively, would alternatively be drawn into) one of the two major parties rather than the other one.[13] If it can be further assumed that the race between the two major-party candidates is going to be very close, so close that a movement of potential third-party voters into one of the two major-party supporters would probably make the determining difference, then the notion of "wasting one's vote" on the third party candidate takes on a stronger meaning. Suppose, for example, that we are waging an unpopular war against Communist Eskimos in Greenland, and your Flat Earth-Vegetarian candidate Pastor Sedlitz proposes immediate unilateral withdrawal, which you as a pacifist voter would strongly prefer. But suppose that the Republican candidate is inclined to drop the Big Bomb on Greenland, whereas the Democrat wants us to get out, say under some carefully negotiated and secured conditions. The pollsters indicate that the vote between Republican Claghorn and Democrat Fisbee is very close, so close that a preponderance of pacifist votes for Fisbee would probably lead to his winning; whereas if all the pacifists were to defect to Sedlitz—who we *know* cannot win—then Claghorn would win and turn Greenland into a radioactive desert. Hence a pacifist "throws away his vote" if he votes for Sedlitz instead of Fisbee. One who employs this more restrictive meaning of "throwing away your vote" does not rely solely upon the negligible probability of the Flat Earth-Vegetarian candidate's winning. He goes on to point out that if most of those who, on the merits, would be inclined to support Sedlitz in the particular forthcoming election, were to do so instead of supporting the lesser of the two evils between Claghorn and Fisbee, then the worse of the two evils, to wit, Claghorn, would win.

FEV: Well, I confess that seems to generate a possible exception to my general line of reasoning, but I am not sure about it at present. Since the individual voter's contribution even in that instance is still infinitesimal, and my arguments supra still hold, as qualified by the assumed special circumstances of the close race, I believe that we still have to postulate the acceptance of some overall ethico-political premise which has the four required properties axiomic, sociotropic, collective, and neutrofactual. The complication introduced by specifying Auerbach's condition is, as I see it, mainly one of how we characterize the collective reference class *indicatively* (as contrasted with counterfactual-subjunctively) in formulating our axiomic premise.

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[13] I am indebted to Dean Carl A. Auerbach for calling this usage to my attention and pressing the argument for that case.

Suppose one says, "If everybody voted as I am contemplating voting, it would be a good thing (so far as the Greenland war is concerned)." Or, what amounts to the same thing but spells it out a bit more, one may say, "If everyone were to think as I do, and (relying upon an axionomic justification) were to vote accordingly, it would be a good thing (so far as the Greenland war is concerned)." It would seem that either of these two ways of stating the counterfactual legitimates my going ahead with the intention of voting for F.E.V. candidate Pastor Sedlitz, following the general line of ethical reasoning I defend. That is, my expectation that most people won't proceed to do what I am individually about to do need not deter me.

SOP: But in the light of the special political circumstance of a very close race between the atomic-incinerator candidate and the negotiated-slow-withdrawal candidate, I may prefer to formulate the neutrofactual (note, here we dare not say *counterfactual)* statement differently. Although it is known with near certainty that the strong pacifist candidate Sedlitz cannot win, it is not known with near certainty or even high probability which of the two major candidates will win. It is also known with near certainty that none of those who, like you, are currently contemplating voting for Pastor Sedlitz, would vote for Republican Claghorn if they went over to one of the two major parties; all such persons would, if they moved from the minor-party candidate to one of the two major candidates, vote for the Democrat Fisbee. On these empirical premises I therefore put to you the neutrofactual: "If, among those who feel as you do about the Greenland war, all (or most, or some sufficiently large number) were to vote for the Democrat Fisbee rather than for the Flat Earth-Vegetarian Sedlitz, Fisbee would win over Claghorn. And given the terrible importance of not incinerating the Eskimos, that is what persons who feel as you do should do under these special circumstances."

FEV: The difference between the formulations lies in the reference class taken as a basis. If we talk about what would happen *if* most people *were to* agree with my views, we get a different result ethically from what we get talking about what would happen if, *among all who already do agree with my views,* many (or most, or some sufficiently large number) were to vote as I am contemplating voting rather than voting as Auerbach would advocate voting under such circumstances.

SOP: I find his reasoning rather persuasive, don't

you?

FEV: Yes, but not hammer-blow coercive. A detailed analysis of the ground upon which one chooses the reference class for the condition contrary to fact in formulating an axionomic ethical principle (especially in the political domain) would take us into another long dialogue. I shall content myself with saying that an Auerbach Case *may* yield an exception to the general position I take.

SOP: Assuming we can predict a sufficiently close race between the two major contenders, plus a negligible probability for the third party candidate's winning, combined with a high probability statement about which of the two major party contenders would receive votes by defectors from the third party support, what ethico-political neutrofactual statement is appropriate? How does one slice up the sub-population of would-be third-party supporters? How does one decide with whom they can be appropriately conjoined for purposes of formulating an ethically applicable neutrofactual? How does one assign priorities to the forthcoming election's outcome versus longer term "teaching a lesson to the major parties"?

FEV: These seem to me extraordinarily difficult issues which, while they are probably more acute in the domain of political participation ethics, are not confined thereto.[14] Now what's your other question?

SOP: One of the nice things about economic theories of democracy like Downs's or Buchanan-Tullock's, which you have shown simply won't wash if we are to postulate egocentric rationality for the individual voter as economics postulates it for the economic man, is their liquidation of distinctively moral predicates from the conversation. Some scholars don't like this, but others believe that it has a conceptual advantage. Aren't you bothered by the regressive notion that political science cannot be handled without returning to what some would view as outmoded prescientific moral metaphysics?

FEV: I would answer that at two levels. First off, one does not himself need to subscribe to an axiological rule or principle in order to show how it must play a role in purported rational activity by those bipeds that are the subject of his investigation. Thus, for instance, I might as an anthropologist investigate the moral behavior of the Kwakiutl without holding their value system. I don't think that one can liquidate the subject of axiological principles or rules as part of political behavior and do empirical justice to the facts of the subject matter, any

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[14] See, e.g., David Lyons, *Forms and Limits of Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), especially chapter II, "Describing an action."

more than one can liquidate the concept of a grammatical rule in dealing with verbal behavior. Stones cannot think or value; human beings can. In other words, the super-behavioralist in political science seems to me to be in somewhat the same danger that Skinner is vis-à-vis the criticisms of linguists like Chomsky.

More importantly, however, I would say that this whole argument can be made hypothetical, and I would prefer to make it that way. I am not prepared to deliver the goods on a demand for a general philosophy of ethics, or even to provide a refutation of the positivist view that ethical statements are neither true nor false. In fact, I am very much open to the unpleasant possibility that among the various components of "classical Vienna Circle positivism"—most of which have been abandoned, refuted, or modified almost beyond recognition, largely by the logical positivists themselves—the only one that still seems to have merit is their destructive criticism of the cognitive content of ethical statements. It may be that ethics is nonsense, except as an expression of taste. I don't like to contemplate that very much, as

an ethical being. But it wouldn't bother me for the restricted purposes of the present discussion, since a showing that there is no such thing as a rational ethical obligation generally, while it would mean that my behavior in voting for Pastor Sedlitz and the Flat Earth-Vegetarian party was irrational, would also mean that your voting for Claghorn was irrational. So again we would both be in the same boat if ethics is garbage. The point is that the "thrown-away-vote" argument, as generally employed in American politics, presupposes that there is such a thing as *not* throwing away a vote, and I believe I have shown that you always "throw away your vote" unless you are behaving as an ethical animal. If ethics is baloney, and if there is no harm in failing to behave as an ethical animal, then it doesn't make sense to say that you "throw away your vote" on a minor third party candidate, since the only meaning to such an accusation of foolishness or irrationality would reside in a background presupposition that there is some way of voting in a presidential election that is *not* irrational, and the liquidation of ethics would liquidate such a possibility for all of us.

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