Testimony, Deference and Value

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Abstract

The problem of deference in political epistemology is that of working out the extent

to which some people should defer to others when making up their minds about

what decisions should be made regarding institutional arrangements within a social

domain such as the modern nation state. This chapter defends a qualified

endorsement of epistemic deference in politics on the basis of an epistemic division

of labor. It is argued that epistemic deference in politics is consistent with the values

of authenticity; virtue; knowledge; understanding; responsibility; mutual

justifiability; equal opportunity for influence, and a rational attitude towards risk and

trust.

THE PROBLEM

As I understand it in what follows, the *general* problem of deference in *politics* is that

of working out the extent to which some people should defer to others when

decisions are made about institutional arrangements within a social domain, such as

the modern nation state. The *specific* problem of deference in *political epistemology* is that of working out whether, and if so how, some people should defer to others when *making up their mind* about what decisions should be made regarding institutional arrangements within such domains. These forms of deference are logically distinct. On the one hand, a member of a political organization can defer politically to its executive committee as a matter of collective responsibility even if they believe that executive's decision is wrongheaded. (This can happen when some members of said executive are out-voted by others.) On the other hand, a member of a political organization can defer epistemically to a panel of experts even if the final decision on what to do is up to that member alone. (This can happen when the leader of a political party makes an executive decision based on expert advice.) If politics is about the justified exercise of power, political epistemology is about the justification of the beliefs with which that power is exercised and distributed. Yet even though the specific problem of deference in political epistemology is not the same as the general problem of deference in politics, it is an important part of that problem insofar as it matters that political power is exercised and distributed with epistemic justification.

All else being equal, it makes sense to defer to someone else's judgment if the following conditions are met. First, their judgment is better than ours in terms of accuracy, reliability or understanding of the subject at hand. In other words, when deferring to the judgment of others we may hope to defer to someone whose judgment is epistemically better than our own. Let's call this the *insight condition* on reasonable deference. Second, what someone communicates to us when we defer

to their judgment is an accurate or fair representation of the content of that judgment. In other words, when deferring to the judgment of others we hope they will not mislead us about or incorrectly report what their judgment is. Let's call this the *transfer condition* on reasonable deference. From the perspective of a neutral observer it might seem that only the first of these conditions is an *epistemic* condition on reasonable deference, the second being partly an *ethical* condition on good communication. Yet even if it is possible to consider the epistemic and ethical aspects of deference independently this way, the epistemic relevance of the transfer condition is evident once we consider the first person perspective of someone deferring. From their perspective, both the insight condition and the transfer condition are relevant to the question of whether it is epistemically reasonable to defer. In order for this to be the case, there needs to be evidence not only that the persons deferred to possess the relevant insights, but also that they will pass over those insights in an honest or transparent way. Thus, it is a common trope in contemporary politics that politicians, pundits and other people in positions of authority cannot be trusted (O'Neill 2002). What is at stake for those who make this complaint is just as often that the persons in question are lying or otherwise dishonest as that they don't know what they are talking about. To this extent, the problem of deference in political epistemology has both a narrowly epistemic and a wider ethical dimension. And although it is primarily the narrowly epistemic dimension that is at issue in what follows, it is incumbent on any plausible political epistemology to bear in mind the ubiquitous relevance of broader ethical issues in the philosophy of communication.

The epistemic dimension on deference in politics has two interacting and overlapping targets. The first of these consists of broadly 'descriptive' claims about what the social world is like and how it can be made to work. This is the aspect of epistemic deference that is commonly associated with the idea of professional expertise that political representatives solicit and receive, and that media outlets often put on display. It is also the aspect of epistemic deference that is least controversial. Although there is plenty of expert disagreement on descriptive as well as normative issues, the idea that there is *nothing whatsoever* to the idea of an expert in such areas as climate science, historical demography, applied economics or epidemiology does not withstand serious scrutiny. (The fact that experts are fallible; exaggerate; and represent the vested interests of their paymasters is a different matter.) Having said that, claims to expert authority in these fields are sometimes presented as though they are purely descriptive when they are not. This is not only because normative judgments are sometimes made implicitly by way of using what looks like purely descriptive language (e.g. 'The equity markets will never comply with that'). It is also because the theories employed by experts to make sense of politics embody idealizing assumptions that 'model' the social world without accurately describing it (e.g. by assuming that political actors are consistent, rational, or acting in light of more information than they have). To this extent, the case for epistemic deference to experts along the descriptive dimension must be qualified to the extent that the expertise in question either relies on, or implies, commitments that go beyond strict descriptive accuracy.

The second target of the epistemic aspect of deference in politics consists of normative claims about how the social world should (or should not) be. To that extent, this component is both aspirational and to some extent possible to grasp independently of how things actually are. It is with respect to this component that the case for epistemic deference to experts and other sources of epistemic authority is most controversial, not only in politics but also in the normative domain more generally (see e.g. Williams 1985; Jones 1999; Hopkins 2007; Hills 2009; 2013; McShane 2018; McGrath 2019). Reflecting on the sources of this controversy, a simple argument against epistemic deference in politics can be formulated as follows. Our political aspirations are a function of how we think the world should be. Questions of how the world should be can be formulated by means of basic evaluative and normative concepts (e.g. just/unjust; good/bad; right/wrong) that any competent citizen is able to grasp, in some cases as 'self-evident'. For example, an average competent citizen is capable of grasping that a world without extreme poverty, ecological destruction and coercive behavior towards vulnerable others is better than a world that displays these features, and is therefore better than the actual world. No experts are required to inform the average citizen of this, and similarly basic, normative facts. Therefore, there is no case for epistemic deference in politics with respect to its basic normative aspects. At best, epistemic deference in politics is reasonable with respect to its descriptive aspect, where experts may offer specialized factual insights on how what we independently know to be a better world can actually be brought about, or disaster effectively prevented.

This argument is too quick. Assume that the average competent citizen is in a position to grasp a set of basic truths about which worlds would be better or worse with respect to a wide range of basic values, such as life, wellbeing or justice. It does not follow that this grasp would make epistemic deference in politics redundant. First, although what it makes sense to aspire to in politics is not narrowly constrained by how the world actually works, it is constrained by how it could actually be made to work. To the extent that expertise with respect to the descriptive target of epistemic deference is relevant in order to answer the latter question, it is therefore also relevant to the formation of reasonable political aspirations. Second, even if it is possible to formulate some political aspirations in abstraction from expertise about how the social world should *ideally* work (e.g. by way of some negative critique of a 'whatever, so long as it is not *this*' variety (see e.g. Finlayson 2015)), factual assumptions about how the world actually works will inevitably form a part of any interesting judgment that registers the *sources* of those aspirations (such as the negative effects of current economic arrangements.) It follows that there is room for epistemic deference with respect to judgments about what options *not* to favor (e.g. in the form of political programs). Finally, it is not clear that the assumption that the average competent citizen is capable of grasping a set of basic truths about which worlds would be better or worse with respect to a range of basic values will get us very far. As historically embodied at any given time and place the values of life, wellbeing and justice have been variously interpreted and instantiated, and have been realized in ways that give rise to deep and enduring conflicts that would challenge the comprehension of even the most knowledgeable expert. Consider: is the European Union a progressive alliance working towards

peace, prosperity and global justice; an aggressive 'neo-liberal' trading block; or both; or neither? The claim that the average competent citizen is in a position to see through the conceptual and empirical thickets of questions like this unaided is no more plausible than the claim that there are people to whom they can reasonably defer (c.f. Enoch 2014).

AN ARGUMENT FOR EPISTEMIC DEFERENCE

Perhaps the most straightforward argument *in favor* of epistemic deference in politics takes a broadly teleological form and appeals to the idea of an *epistemic division of labor* (c.f. Christiano 2012). This is a relatively modest argument, in that it requires us to make few controversial assumptions either about the persons advised to defer, or about those whom they are advised to defer to. Thus, it is not assumed that either part in the relationship enjoys a privileged status or authority that legitimates their epistemic privilege. Nor is it assumed that the persons deferring are in principle less able to form a sound judgment on the issues in question than the persons to whom they defer (although the argument is consistent with both possibilities). Instead, the argument is based on the effectiveness of epistemic deference in producing good political outcomes. According to this argument, better political outcomes are sometimes produced by people 'outsourcing' their political judgment to others because of the epistemically advantageous position of those others in a given deliberative context. The central claim of the argument is that if better political outcomes can be produced by such distribution of deliberative 'load', then epistemic deference is justified, or even required (c.f. Ahlstrom-Vij 2015).

The idea of distributing deliberative 'load' in this way is not especially esoteric. Nor is it specific to politics. A representative democratic system where elected politicians are free to vote on matters of state according to their own best judgment is a *de facto* mechanism for dividing the labor of political judgment along these lines. Second, and insofar as members of political parties 'adhere' to political programs, their adherence to those programs will sometimes involve an element of epistemic deference with respect to the soundness of certain aspects of the policies proposed (e.g. aspects they have not considered at length themselves). Third, the epistemic division of labor extends across institutional practice beyond the realm of politics. For example, norms of confidentiality regarding personal information (such as employee health records) frequently put certain colleagues in positions of epistemic privilege in ways that don't permit all stakeholders to fully access the grounds of their decisions. This fact on its own does not make it unreasonable for said stakeholders to defer to said colleagues, even if they consider themselves perfectly able to judge the matter if presented with the information in question.

This argument for epistemic deference raises two important questions about the nature of politics. The first question is what political thought fundamentally *is*, or *is for* (c.f. Geuss 2008). Thus, it might be objected that the argument relies on a conception of political thought as purely *instrumental,* whereby the role of individual deliberation is essentially conceived as an input to a collective mechanism designed to produce desirable outputs. On this conception of politics, it is hardly a big surprise if the efficiency in question will sometimes benefit from divisions of labor, some of

which could be epistemic. Yet to conceive of politics this way is not politically neutral, insofar as it implies the basic legitimacy of a set of deliberative mechanisms conceived of as *means* to social *ends*, where both the means and ends in question are frequently very controversial. If one of the basic questions of politics is (in words attributed to Lenin): '*Who can do what to whom?*' (a question that alerts us to the possibility that a political arrangements can be deemed unacceptable whatever it is said to 'deliver'), then one of the things one might want deliberative mechanisms to reflect is the refusal, rejection or resistance of those to whom political power is applied. To take just one example: in the context of social arrangements in which some demographic groups are consistently excluded (whether intentionally or as a side effect) from the social position of being 'in the know', the question of *how knowledge is distributed* might well be perceived as being just as important as the question of *what knowledge is said to 'deliver'*. In these circumstances, the epistemic privilege enjoyed by those in power might be regarded by those excluded from power as part of the problem, not the solution.

A second question about the division of labor-based argument in favor of epistemic deference in politics arises not from the question what *politics* is (or is for), but from the question what *episteme* (or deliberation) is for *in politics*. Thus, it might be objected that the argument above implicitly relies on a conception of political epistemology that is primarily instrumental*,* and according to which the role of epistemic efforts in politics is to produce desirable epistemic outputs (such as political knowledge, or expertise). On such an instrumentalist conception of political epistemology it is hardly a big surprise if the efficiency in question is found to benefit

from epistemic divisions of labor. Yet to conceive of epistemology this way is not politically neutral either, insofar as it can be said to presuppose a division of epistemic values in politics into the *intrinsic* and the merely *instrumental* that is itself politically controversial. To take one example: in the context of public education there is a potential tension between the value of being able to 'deliver' true answers to historical questions and the value of being able to give a narrative account that manifests a broader understanding of the historical events in question, where the ability to score maximally on one of these measures does not inevitably bring with it the ability to score maximally on the other (c.f. Elgin 2017). If one of the things one values epistemically is the ability to 'give an account', then one of the things one might want epistemic subjects to achieve in politics is a kind of deliberative ability that epistemic deference may stand in the way of acquiring. Thus, it might be argued that just as individual citizens have a duty to make themselves informed enough to participate in the political process in an epistemically competent way, the state (or whichever political agency one might prefer to substitute for it) has a duty to enable or facilitate citizens in their efforts to exercise those duties. Indeed, it might be argued that placing others in a situation of dependency in which they systematically have to rely on epistemic deference is to impose a regime of 'epistemic injustice' in politics (c.f. Fricker 2007).

In light of these considerations, it might be tempting to conclude that the above case for epistemic deference in politics turns on the plausibility of *Consequentialism*, in the sense that the rightness of actions, policies or practices is a function of the value of their outcomes, or effects (c.f. Ahlstrom-Vij & Dunn 2014). Yet this is also too

quick. The ability of consequentialists to (re-) model pre-theoretical thought is almost indefinitely flexible, and consists in re-interpreting what non-consequentialist objectors construe as *constraints* on the promotion of the good as *a proper part of the good* itself. This strategy is applicable to the present case by means of a case-by-case 'transfer' of whatever value the Consequentialist is alleged to have missed (such as 'the ability to give an account') from the purely 'instrumental' to the 'intrinsic' values of political thought. (The remaining question is then to weigh, rank or otherwise compare the intrinsic values in question.) In any case, the idea that the problems just raised for epistemic deference in politics turn primarily on the formal structure of Consequentialism is arguably too esoteric to do justice to the substantial issues at stake in these debates.

AGAINST DEFERENCE: TESTIMONY AND VALUE

Attitudes to epistemic deference in politics are partly a function of attitudes to the relation between politics and morality. One way of mapping problems about epistemic deference in politics is therefore to locate them with respect to a pair of potentially overlapping spheres, where one sphere represents problems that are paradigmatically moral in content and the other problems that are paradigmatically political. What to say about a given problem involving epistemic deference is then partly determined by whether or not what is at stake in that problem can be located at a point where the two spheres overlap. For example, those who argue that questions of politics are generally best thought of as independent of questions of personal morality might argue that even if there are problems about epistemic

deference on narrowly moral issues, these are not necessarily relevant in the sphere of politics (c.f. Quinton 1993). On the other hand, both those who think of political conviction as a deeply personal matter (c.f. Sartre 1946/2007) and those who think of morality and politics as contextually specific applications of the same set of basic normative principles (see e.g. Dworkin 2011) are likely to consider the problem of epistemic deference on moral and political issues as complimentary aspects of a single sphere. (On the complex interplay of moral and political considerations in the context of a feminist critique of contemporary epistemology, see e.g. Fricker 2007).

The downstream effects of this question about the relationship between politics and morality can be illustrated by considering a number of values that have recently been said to conflict with reliance on *moral testimony* (where for present purposes we can understand reliance on moral testimony as *deferring to someone else's moral judgment by accepting that judgment on the basis of their 'say-so'*). It has recently been suggested, for example, that the practice of relying on moral testimony is incompatible with the requirements of *virtue*; a fully virtuous person not only being a person who acts in the right way but also someone who acts in the right way for the right reasons (and who knows the 'why'; the 'why of the why', and so on (see e.g. Hills 2009)). Assume for the sake of argument that a fully virtuous person would never rely on *moral* testimony (but see Lillehammer 2014). It does not follow that reliance on *political* testimony is incompatible with the better exercise of one's civic responsibilities as a political subject. First, in modern liberal democracies, at least, the state does not demand of its citizens that they are morally virtuous across all aspects of their lives, including the moment when they anonymously exercise their

voting rights at the ballot box, potentially voting on favor of what they take to be their personal, or their social group's, best interest. Indeed, it is one of the cornerstones of the more palatable versions of modern liberalism that they do not, and that a state that demanded moral perfection of its citizens would be a form of tyranny (c.f. Rawls 1993). (This is not to deny that political authorities have a legitimate interest in the moral virtues of their citizens, e.g. in terms of encouraging their development by means of education, or by excluding certain criminals from the census, etc.) Second, the manifestation of virtue in *politics* requires the disposition to behave in ways that display some understanding of how *political*, as opposed to familial, filial, or other personal relationships work. If political relationships are such as to invite or require certain forms of epistemic deference, it is no good objecting that such forms of epistemic difference conflict with the virtuous cultivation of different social relationships.

A closely related claim has been made about an alleged conflict between reliance on moral testimony and the achievement of moral *knowledge* and/or *understanding* (see e.g. Hills 2009, whose argument is focused on understanding). Assume that genuine moral knowledge and/or understanding of a moral issue requires not having deferentially formed one's judgment on the basis of someone else's say-so (but see Lillehammer 2014). This is obviously a more palatable hypothesis on the assumption that for a significant number of normal human adults the knowledge and/or understanding of the relevant moral issues are in principle within reach. Yet when extended to the case of politics the tension alleged to exist in the moral case is much less plausible and fails to present a good argument against reliance on political

testimony. The alleged tension is less plausible in the political case because one way to display knowledge and/or understanding of political reality is to appreciate that there are some issues (including *both* complex decisions requiring technical expertise *and* substantially normative matters requiring personal sensitivity or insight) on which *one* responsible way to exercise knowledge and/or understanding *of politics* is to epistemically defer (e.g. in the case of the leader of a political organization who makes an executive decision based on expert and/or confidential advice). If legitimate political practice depends on political subjects exercising their general knowledge and/or understanding of politics in the absence of topic-specific knowledge and/or understanding of some political questions, there is no case for the claim that reliance on political testimony is incompatible with epistemic excellence in politics.

The fact that general knowledge and/or understanding of politics can be displayed by a political subject deciding to epistemically defer helps to address another potential obstacle to reliance on political testimony, namely one that has historically been formulated in the language of *autonomy* and/or *responsibility* (see e.g. Dworkin 1988; Driver 2006). In the moral case, the claim is that since it is in our nature as responsible moral subjects to be autonomous legislators of our own lives, no moral subject could rationally 'outsource' that legislation to an external source, such as another person's will. Assume that there is a serious moral objection to abdicating responsibility for one's own life to the will of another agent. It is far from obvious what, if anything, follows from this about one's particular responsibilities as a political subject. First, and building on a point made in the previous paragraph, to

show epistemic deference in light of knowledge and/or understanding that on the issue in question there are other people better placed to judge could in principle be one way of responsibly exercising one's capacity for autonomous choice. Second, for a politically active person their reliance on political testimony could be a matter of deferring to the judgment of others on a set of institutionally mediated questions that arise with respect to *some* aspects of their life, but *not all*. Third, although an act of epistemic deference *could* be premised on a belief that the persons or institutions to which one defers have some normatively privileged status from which one is in principle excluded, this need not be so. As we have already seen, some acts of epistemic deference are premised on no more than the contingent social position of the people involved with respect to the information in question.

Similar observations can be made about the application to politics of the suggestion that reliance on moral testimony is incompatible with the value of *authenticity* (see e.g. Mogensen 2015). Assume that being authentic (in the sense of being 'true to oneself') is an important moral value (but see Adorno 1973). In response to this suggestion, we should first note that it is not obvious that being true to oneself has any necessary connection to what most people would recognize as politics. (For better or worse, quite a few people claim to have 'no interest in politics'.) Second, we should note that given the potentially different 'selves' to which different authentic subjects could be 'true', there is more than one way for the value of authenticity to be manifested even within politics. True, Aristotle famously thought that the human being (whoever exactly he intended to include in that category) is an essentially political animal (Aristotle 1981). Yet what, exactly, does that imply with

respect to the question of epistemic deference? As we know, political arrangements come in many varieties (including the politics of Aristotle's Athens, which went through more and less democratic phases, and which was generally favorable towards a division of adult humans into citizens, barbarians and slaves). Exactly which, if any, of these different kinds of politics, is it my identification with which would qualify me as truly 'authentic'? Far from a refusal to epistemically defer in politics being a *condition* of authenticity, therefore, it is more charitably interpreted as one potential way, among others, for a selective group of people to think about their own personal relationship to politics in highly specific circumstances.

A further concern is that epistemic deference in the form of *political* testimony conflicts with the democratic values of *mutual justifiability* and *equal opportunity for political influence* (van Wietmarschen 2018). Yet the values that motivate this concern are arguably consistent with the practice of epistemic deference in democratic politics, whether by way of relying on political testimony or otherwise. First, epistemic deference in the form of political testimony is in principle consistent with mutual justifiability, albeit in ways that are often institutionally mediated and therefore indirect (e.g. by way of publicity constraints such as data protection; freedom of information; judicial review, or other democratically enforced mechanisms). Second, epistemic deference in the form of political testimony is consistent with equal opportunity for political influence insofar as political 'positions' of epistemic privilege are not reserved for some non-democratically specified subset of the population, and are open to change over time (e.g. by way of individual citizens being effectively empowered to defer or not; to stand for office in regular

elections; or be elected by lot). The extent to which any actual political arrangements approximate to these conditions of justifiability and opportunity is a good, but different, question.

QUALIFYING DEFERENCE: RISK AND TRUST

There are other sources of skepticism towards epistemic deference in politics that make less problematic assumptions about the relationship between morality and politics. Two such sources are the problems of *risk* and *trust*. The problem of *risk* arises for the obvious reasons that not only are the facts of politics highly complex and subject to deep disagreement, there is good evidence that much political disagreement is a result of systematic ignorance, entrenched bias, and deliberate manipulation (including 'spin' or suppressed evidence; hostile depictions of out-groups; 'fake news'; fraudulent 'fact-checking' services; or 'personalized' and self-reinforcing internet search algorithms). Short of being able to purchase a reliable 'bullshit detector' to separate sound from unsound opinion, it might be thought that the best epistemic strategy is to think things through for oneself on the merits of the individual case.

The problem of *trust* arises for closely related reasons. Politics is a web of vested interests in which conflicting parties have a stake in keeping the voting citizen confident enough to stay on their side; getting them 'hooked' on ideas that bring them into the fold if they are undecided; or undermining their confidence in case they belong to 'the other side'. Hence the way that emotive political issues are

differentially depicted by different media outlets (e.g. to trigger anxiety or hostility by means of repetition; tendentious labeling or alarmist news items). Once more, short of being able to purchase a reliable 'bullshit detector' to separate sound from unsound opinion, it might be thought that the best epistemic strategy is to think things through for oneself on the merits of the individual case.

No plausible political epistemology would advocate the universal lowering of our epistemic guard in these respects. There are excellent reasons for this, quite apart from any naive optimism about the democratic distribution of sound political judgment. After all, whichever way we actually arrive at our political judgments, those judgments often involve decisions that - short of cultural or self-induced amnesia - have to be *lived with by us*. Given that events often turn out rather differently that we hope (e.g. in the case of controversial policies proposed in response to a national emergency or global pandemic), it might be a source of spiritual comfort that at least we came to our judgment (whatever it was) by ourselves, and by exercising such socio-political knowledge and/or understanding as we had. Yet we have already seen that the responsible exercise of political judgment is consistent with epistemic deference in some cases, and further reflection on the problems of risk and trust only serve to reinforce this claim, for the following three reasons.

First, no person ever exercised political judgment in a *psychological vacuum*. For example, there seems to be an unfortunate tendency for people to underestimate the extent to which we ourselves are the 'victims' of the kinds of self-deception and

self-reinforcing biases that during the course of political discussion we are often quick to attribute to our adversaries. Hence, someone on the political 'left' might be stubbornly convinced that people on the 'right' are selfishly reluctant to contribute to the collective purse, while someone of the political 'right' might be equally stubbornly convinced that people on the 'left' are selfishly feeding on it. The difficulty of 'thinking oneself' out of this predicament on one's own is not one that should be underestimated.

Second, no person ever exercised political judgment in a *social vacuum*. For example, there seems to be an unfortunate tendency for members of different social groups to collectively engage in self-reinforcing interpretations of social facts to the extent of becoming the social vehicles for precisely the kinds of 'demonizing' narratives and confirmation biases we are often quick to attribute to our adversaries. Hence, people on either side of a political 'spectrum' being ever so quick to find examples of their political opponents behaving 'hypocritically', as opposed to having had to moderate their lofty political ideals in the face of complex socio-political realities. Once more, the difficulty of 'thinking oneself' out of this predicament on one's own is not one that should be underestimated.

Third, some degree of perspectival 'bias' is inescapable in all political thought, insofar as none of us have autonomously chosen or created the concepts by means of which we are constrained to interpret the social world in the first place. The very idea of 'making up one's own mind' or 'relying on one's own best judgment' is necessarily infused with the influence of others, if not by explicit deference then by

implicit or pre-reflective 'osmosis'. No individual is ever in possession of purely context-independent first-personal epistemic privilege about how, and to what extent, this is the case. A certain degree of modesty is therefore in order when contemplating the idea of transcending epistemic deference in politics in favor of our own individual judgment.

CONCLUSIONS

Epistemic deference in politics is in principle consistent with authenticity; virtue; knowledge; understanding; responsibility; mutual justifiability; equal opportunity for influence, and a rational attitude towards risk and trust. It is also arguably inevitable. This does not mean that people should never think 'for themselves'. If I trust someone else's judgment, I am not thereby abandoning my own judgment altogether, insofar as I could be making a judgment about who to trust. Furthermore, we all know that unless we are either very privileged or extremely lucky, it is not always the best strategy to trust oneself. We also know that it is not always an option merely to 'suspend judgment', if only because the reluctance to judge which 'side' is right is often *de facto* equivalent to choosing the wrong side. The result is that we often have no realistic option but to place our trust in people or institutions the political judgments of which transcend our epistemic reach. And although there is much the average citizen of the contemporary information society can do in order to place that trust responsibly (such as 'calibrating' the incoming bombardment of information by consulting a broad range of different sources), there is no prospect of infallibility in this respect. Yet to think the solution is

therefore only to rely on one's own 'individual' judgment is at best simplistic and at worst a fantasy.

RELATED TOPICS

Chapter 5, "Mill, Liberalism, and Epistemic Diversity;" Chapter 6, "Politics, Post-truth, and Postmodernism;" Chapter 11, "Epistemic Networks and Polarization" Chapter 13, "Are Political Disagreements Real Disagreements?" Chapter 18, "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, Online Communities;" Chapter 21, "Is Political Ignorance Rational?" Chapter 24, "Asymmetrical Irrationality: Are Only Other People Stupid?" Chapter 28, "Virtues and Vices in Public and Political Debate;" Chapter 29, "Closed-Mindedness and Epistemically Hostile Environments;" Chapter 32, "In Defense of Epistocracy;" Chapter 33, "The Pragmatist's Epistemic Argument for Democracy;" Chapter 34, "Democratic Authority and Its Limits;" Chapter 35, "The Epistemic Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy;" Chapter 40, "Online Trust and Doubt;" Chapter 41, "Epistemic Trust in a Digital World."

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