

“Who Do You Trust?: Expertise and the Pitfalls of Democratic Decision-Making”

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I. Introduction

One merely needs to look out on major policy debates today to see that figuring out who precisely the experts are, let alone which ones to trust, is a major hurdle in developing the necessary groundwork for well-reasoned policy deliberation. Scientists, economists, and politicians espouse radically different answers to a wide variety of questions. From the perspective of an individual accustomed to cable television, determining which candidates’ or even so-called experts’ views line up with the truth concerning any given issues is a highly difficult task. What is needed is a set of criteria through which individuals can determine which experts are in fact trustworthy in their respective policy domains. However, such justificatory criteria are not easily forthcoming and themselves the subject of substantial controversy. Are there good, epistemically sound reasons to trust experts?

In this paper, I argue that attempts to formulate criteria for laypersons to justifiably trust experts within the context of democratic policy making reveal the undermining of one of democracy’s central ideals: namely, the *democratic epistemological ideal of expertise*. This ideal, which assumes that democratic citizens can justifiably place their trust in experts in order to make decisions about policy, cannot be reasonably realized due to a lack of a substantial criterion through which laypersons could reasonably assess the trustworthiness of experts. In this paper, I offer up several possibilities for criteria that either fail to establish justified trust in

expertise or require unreasonable amounts of knowledge gathering for the layperson. From these considerations, I contend that trust in expertise is rarely based on epistemically valid considerations, but on ideological preferences where trust is based on the adherence to certain beliefs that have no direct or rational relation with expertise.

II. The Democratic Epistemological Ideal of Expertise

Democratic citizens are given two major duties in their roles *qua* citizens: (1) a political duty to participate in policy deliberations and (2) an epistemic duty to have a working knowledge of various policy concerns when deliberating. It is this epistemic duty that proves problematic for the democratic state. Given that no one individual is capable of gaining all the knowledge necessary to answer all policy questions, the ideal of expertise, especially expertise in policy domains, cannot be demanded of all democratic citizens as a normative standard.¹ Generally speaking, an expert is someone who has a large set (i.e. greater than most people) of true beliefs and relatively few false beliefs about some domain of expertise as well as the ability to use those true beliefs to form new true beliefs in response to questions within the relevant domain of expertise.² At the center of this arrangement is an assumption: even if the average democratic layperson does not understand all the particular nuances or justifications of a given policy, she

¹ In many respects, each individual person can be considered an expert of the specific aspects of their individual life. However, very rarely does a large amount of this information matter when considering questions of policy; this is not to devalue the experience of any given individual, as obviously an auto mechanic's knowledge becomes paramount when fixing a car. However, that particular field carries considerably less importance when writing health care policy. Similarly, even though a person may be an expert in their own life situation, this sort of expertise is not necessarily what we are looking for when constructing policy. We are looking for experts who possess expertise in a relevant policy domain who will pool their information together to craft excellent policy.

² Alvin Goldman, "Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63 (2001): 85-110

can still gain the necessary groundwork of true beliefs in a justified manner from experts. This is the *democratic epistemological ideal of expertise*.

Ideally, we would easily be able to identify experts. However, we find ourselves seeking experts in situations where numerous individuals, experts or not, are competing for societal prestige and trust. If we are wrong, misplaced epistemic trust can place us at severe prudential and moral risk.³ In the case of democratic policy, where the decisions made have the potential to affect an entire country, it is crucial that we are in some way justified in that trust to prevent harm as much as reasonably possible. The strongest sort of practices for identifying experts would presumably be those practices which are somehow based on evaluating the expert's knowledge of her domain of expertise; after all, the reason we are trusting the expert in the first place is because of her knowledge in the domain of expertise. I will call these *direct justificatory criteria*, as opposed to *indirect justificatory criteria*, which are evaluations of the expert based on factors not related to her domain of expertise. For instance, political pundits tend to talk of president candidates "winning" debates based on how they performed rather than the substantive content of their policy positions.⁴ If debates are supposed to be assessments of the candidates' expertise, pundits prioritize the assessment of the candidates' dialogical superiority as an indicator of expertise rather than the content of their positions. A direct justificatory criterion would be based on an assessment of the expert's expertise in regards to her domain of expertise rather than another correlated factor such as dialogical superiority.

³ Allen Buchanan, "Political Trust and Social Epistemology," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 32 (2004): 96

⁴ "The main image of the night will be of Romney, eyes alight, gesticulating from the podium with a rarely seen passion, while Obama, playing into his image as professorial, delivered most of his answers with his head down." - Ewen MacAskill, "Mitt Romney comes out on top as Obama stumbles in first debate," *The Guardian*, October 4, 2012, accessed November 21, 2014
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/04/romney-obama-first-presidential-debate>.

This distinction does not necessarily evaluate which criteria are better or worse at discovering and assessing expertise; rather, the distinction maps the particular epistemological relationship between the criteria and the domain of expertise. It is entirely possible for a criterion such as dialogical superiority to be a reliable criterion for the assessment of expertise even though it does not involve the assessment of the domain of expertise itself. However, the reason that we accept dialogical superiority as a potential criterion for expertise is because of various social connotations of expertise with dialogical superiority. It is entirely possible for the criterion to no longer track expertise, as a society where those who debate well are no more likely to be experts than those who debate poorly is entirely conceivable. In this case, dialogical superiority would prove a poor criterion for assessing expertise. A direct criterion is incapable of becoming decoupled from expertise in this manner and this is where the distinction lies.

In the sections that follow, I argue that justified epistemic trust based on direct justificatory criteria cannot be justified as an epistemic norm because it places an impossible burden on laypersons. I have two interrelated arguments that point towards this conclusion. First, the democratic layperson cannot directly assess the first-person propositions of experts: this is the *problem of esotericism*. Second, the democratic layperson is unable to assess second-order independent checks on expertise, either because the solutions themselves are not verifiable by non-experts or the solutions requires assessment of certain values when considering whether or not a particular check is fulfilled: this is the *problem of second-order value*. After concluding these arguments, I consider the extent to which certain indirect criteria could be used to justify epistemic trust.

III. Expertise and Esotericism

Consider two experts engaged in a debate on national television concerning some proposition in both of their relevant expert domains. Expert 1 makes proposition P, while Expert 2 asserts the opposite, $\sim P$. Assuming that P lies within the domain of expertise for both scientists, a layperson will be unable to assess which expert is correct. Most statements within a given expert's domain of expertise will be *esoteric*, which is to say that a non-expert is unable to determine their truth-value.⁵ This is different from the statements being incomprehensible or *abstruse* to the layperson. Consider the following four propositions by and about notoriously abstruse philosopher G.W.F. Hegel:

1. "Absolute freedom as pure self-identity of the universal will thus has within it negation..."⁶
2. "Hegel...did not desire to step out of his own time and his own thought-situation..."⁷
3. "Hegel says 'Absolute freedom as pure self-identity of the universal will thus has within it negation...' on page 361 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*"

Now let us consider my relation, as a Hegel layperson, to the above propositions.

Proposition 1 is abstruse because, besides not being able to assess its truth value, I am incapable of understanding what precisely Hegel is proposing, even though the sentence is (purportedly) in English. Proposition 2 is comprehensible to me as a statement about Hegel's goals when writing his *Phenomenology*; however, having not read the *Phenomenology* in full, I am not able to directly and reasonably assess the statement's truth value and hence the statement is *esoteric*. Finally, Proposition 3 is not esoteric, as anyone regardless of their expertise could crack open the relevant page of the *Phenomenology* and discover the truth value of the proposition. When

⁵ Goldman, "Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?", 94.

⁶ G.F.W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1977), 361.

⁷ J.N. Findlay, Forward to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1977), vii.

considering the case of experts making propositions about democratic policy, it is generally expected that most statements will be esoteric but not abstruse. If a statement is too abstruse, people tend to discount or ignore it in favor of more comprehensible propositions. Based on this consideration, I will proceed as if the statements of experts in their domain are esoteric rather than completely abstruse to the democratic layperson.

Even granting this consideration, it does not change the fact that laypersons cannot assess the truth-value of statements made by experts in their domain of expertise. It is this problem that creates the need for epistemic trust in the first place. However, it also places a major roadblock in the way of directly assessing expertise. In the case of Experts 1 and 2, if P is esoteric to the layperson, then whether or not either Expert is correct in assessing P cannot be used as assessment of which expert can be trusted. While it is straight-forward to conclude that using the truth-value of P to determine which expert to trust on P would beg the question, it also applies to any statement within the domain of expertise; that is to say, no assessment of the truth-value of any esoteric statement can be used to justify trust in an expert because such an assessment is not open to the layperson.

Not all statements need remain esoteric; due to various circumstances, esoteric statements can become *exoteric*, or outside of the domain of expertise and hence open to the layperson.⁸ If esoteric statement P became exoteric and if it became obvious that P was true, Expert 1 would, *ceteris paribus*, be the expert to trust in the future even if future propositions never became exoteric. Experts could then be identified as those individuals who accurately and reliably predict the truth-value of exoteric propositions while they are esoteric. For example, suppose I was

⁸ Goldman, "Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?", 94,107

looking for a meteorologist that I could trust to accurately predict the weather far enough in advance to determine my travel plans. The statement “The snowstorm in my desired area of travel will be bad enough in seven days to prevent travel” is esoteric to me; while I might be adept at predicting the weather based on previous experience, predicting seven days in advance is beyond my cognitive grasp. I check on about ten different meteorologists and see their forecasts seven days before they occur and then watch the weather conditions when they occur seven days later, i.e. when they become clearly exoteric. By compiling this information, I should be able to form a justified opinion about which meteorologist to trust when considering weather conditions seven days out.

However, such an analysis of the movement from esotericism to exotericism is not always convenient or even possible. I cannot always experiment and weigh results in the way described above. It is not reasonable for me to check up on different plumbers, for instance, and figure out if they are capable of rendering my plumbing related problems into solutions through their consistent expertise. At some point, I will have to make some sort of leap of faith and pick a plumber, regardless of whether or not the plumber’s expertise has been justified in the way described above.

The central problem for this method of determining expertise is that it is useless for statements that never become exoteric, which happens to be the case for most statements involved in the crafting of democratic policy. Consider the following set of propositions:

- (1) Human-caused global warming is occurring.
- (2) Supply-side economics provide the best solution to our economic ills.
- (3) Obamacare has been successful at lowering healthcare costs.

Each of these statements are esoteric; even more importantly, none of them will become exoteric as it is not clear or uncontroversial how we would determine when such a statement had become exoteric. When, precisely, would it become obvious that supply-side economics had solved the majority of economic problems? Under what conditions could a layperson determine whether or not global warming is occurring, and, even more difficult, whether or not it was being caused by humans?⁹ The next section considers these so-called *problems of second-order value*.

IV. Expertise and Problems of Second-Order Value

If we assume that P will remain esoteric indefinitely, how would we assess which expert to trust on the truth-value of P? One way would be to engage a *second-order* or *independent check* on P. A second-order check means assessing the truth-value of other statements we would expect to be true if P is true and that would be exoteric rather than esoteric. These checks are conditionals of value, statements that take the form of “If X, then P” for some esoteric proposition. X is not necessarily logical proof of P, but is rationally connected to P in such a way that, if X is true, then we have justified reasons for assessing P is true (or vice-versa). Because X is exoteric rather than esoteric, a layperson could have reasonable access to its truth value and hence assess the likely veracity of P as well as the trustworthiness of experts espousing P.

Consider the case of supply-side economics.¹⁰ If some supply-side policy, such as lowering the corporate tax rate, lowering or abolishing the minimum wage, or decreasing regulation on corporations, led to some positive economic indicator, e.g. a decrease in the unemployment rate, it would seem to be reasonable to trust that economist on future economic

⁹ For a presentation of laypersons failing to understand even rudimentary climate science, I point towards those individuals who claim that particularly cold winters somehow “disprove” global warming.

¹⁰ I have my professor, Michael Fuerstein, to thank for this particular example.

issues. To use the value conditional form, P is “Supply-side economics provide the best solution to our economic ills” and X is “Adopting some supply-side policy leads to positive economic outcomes”; if X, which is exoteric, turns out to be true (or false), then we have good reason to believe that P is also true (or false) and hence that our economist is trustworthy.

However, this formulation runs into some major problems. If X is to be useful as an indicator of P’s truth-value, it itself must be exoteric. However, the justification for stating the conditional in the first place is not always exoteric. In order for X to be usable as a check on P’s veracity, this relational justificatory premise must be itself be exoteric and not based on esoteric, expert-domain considerations. Otherwise, the layperson is either trusting an expert to demonstrate that X and P are rationally related which would once again beg the question for the expert or would be making the relation without justification.¹¹ In the case of supply-side economics, X is “positive economic outcomes occur.” Economic data is notoriously difficult to parse and due to various considerations nearly impossible for a layperson to fully understand. A list of positive economic outcomes include GDP growth, increased employment, job growth, decreased inflation, and an increased Dow Jones index. GDP growth, for instance, could be attributed to any number of other economic causes or related variables that have nothing to do with the policy enacted. Experts¹² themselves disagree about whether a fluctuation in some economic indicator, such as GDP, can be causally linked to the adoption of certain policies. It is

¹¹ This argument is loosely adapted from Decker and Groll’s paper “On the (In)Significance of Moral Disagreement for Moral Knowledge,” in which they demonstrate how Sarah McGrath’s appeal to the lack of an uncontroversial “independent check” in moral knowledge in defeating the possibility of moral knowledge in “Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise” is misguided due to the non-existence of independent checks in numerous “non-controversial” and “scientific” domains of inquiry.

¹² Or at least a group of people that we would want to *prima facie* attribute expert-dom to.

problematic for the validity of a supposedly exoteric premise when the experts disagree about its evaluation.

To justify this relational premise without unjustifiably trusting an expert can only be accomplished by assuming some kind of *second-order value*, which is a statement about what counts as *good* in terms of assessing evidence and best practices within a given domain. I assert that such statements of value are esoteric to laypersons because they constitute the principles and methodologies the given domain considers to be foundational, even if there is no given truth to the matter. Assessing economic data means making assumptions about which data is important and what the important data means given the broader economic context in which the data is located, all of which requires making arguments about foundational questions in the domain. Even if these claims to second-order value are controversial between experts, this does not make a claim or argument for that value unjustified. However, those arguments will be arguments in the expert domain, and hence esoteric to non-experts.¹³

V. The Potential of Indirect Criteria

If direct justificatory criteria are impossible for laypersons to use in policy contexts, then indirect criteria offer the only possibility for justified epistemic trust. This next section considers the extent which such indirect justification is possible. Allen Buchanan argues that experts can be assessed through *merit*, which he defines as “the possession of objective qualifications

¹³ One thing that this argument does not state is that laypersons are not qualified to make statements of *ethical value* about a given field. Democratic society assumes ethical egalitarianism and as such as citizens are capable of making and assessing propositions concerning moral good and truth. For example, arguments about what the economic benefits and drawbacks of the minimum wage might be esoteric, but arguments about whether or not the minimum wage is ethical do not require some sort of expertise to be evaluated, though it is entirely possible for ethical arguments to hinge on the truth-value of certain esoteric propositions. In this case, laypersons would not necessarily be justified to their moral propositions.

rationally related to the functions of particular social roles and positions.”¹⁴ Using the term ‘merit’ invokes the concept of meritocracy, which should be familiar to students of democracy given that one of democracy’s centrally cited benefits has been the awarding of positions of power to those who deserve or “merit” them based on their qualifications. Meritocracy is contrasted with cronyism, nepotism, and what Buchanan calls *status*, awards “accorded to persons or groups simply on the basis of their being identified as having a certain status or of their being a member of a certain group.”¹⁵

It would seem that the distinction between merit and status would line up with direct and indirect justificatory criteria, but such a comparison misses two salient differences between the two frameworks. Merit when described as rationally related criteria can operate as a direct or an indirect criterion, depending on the context. Though dialogical superiority in a debate has nothing to do with the subject matter of an expert’s expertise, it could be used as an assessment of an expert’s familiarity with the subject matter which would be a rational relation between expertise and the criterion. Dialogical superiority also entails evaluating which speaker is better able to construct compelling responses to the points made against her. In this case, the expert worth trusting would be the one who is best at engaging in a dialogue with her opponent. Such a justification could be constructed and create a form of indirect meritorious criteria.¹⁶

Status, on the other hand, is just one *form* of indirect justificatory criteria rather than a full constitution of the concept. It is entirely possible for indirect criteria to serve as justified assessments of expertise; as such, Buchanan tends to imply that status is trust that is not

¹⁴ Buchanan, “Political Liberalism and Social Epistemology,” 99

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 111-112.

¹⁶ This criterion would still be indirect, however, because it must go through another set of criteria (i.e. what does it mean to be a good speaker and what it means for that to relate to expertise) before it can be utilized.

rationally related to the expert's expertise. For example, Buchanan often treats status as having primarily negative connotations, discussing the dangers of "party loyalty or ideological purity" interfering with decision making.¹⁷ This point alludes the dangers of trusting a presumed expert only because she possess a particular political ideology or holds a certain religious affiliation because these do not rationally relate to any domains of expertise, except for perhaps the doctrine and interests of the relevant position.¹⁸ As such, trust is not warranted for these experts in other relevant domains.

Status is not always necessarily a matter of ideological bias and as such cannot operate as the antithesis of merit. Trusting an expert because they are a member of a particular institution which you do have reason to trust is a type of indirect criteria that can be justified in certain contexts. A medical doctor, for instance, is trustworthy with reference to his credentials because of what those credentials represent: namely, that the doctor was trained by other certified doctors, completed medical school, and has some experience practicing medicine. The medical practice in this way works as a meritorious or trustworthy institution that produces experts in the medical domain. In this instance, the expert becomes deserving of merit-based trust by association of his status in a meritorious institution. What this particular example demonstrates is the ambiguity between merit- and status-based trust: we trust doctors because of their status in a particular community which simultaneously acts a form of merit.

However, the problem of how a given institution could be deemed as trustworthy or meritorious still remains. The worry here is the ever-present danger of trust in an institution's experts becoming decoupled from the credentials that maintain them in a form of false

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 114.

¹⁸ While Stephen Colbert's assertion that "reality has a well-known liberal bias" is a particularly witty quip, it does not constitute a valid form of epistemic justification for trusting liberals.

consciousness, so that trust in the institution becomes purely ideological rather than justified. This is a problem for all indirect criteria, regardless of their merit- or status-based nature. Detractors of climate change often claim that climate scientists are either perpetuating or operating under a political ideology that leads to the substantially biased results used to justify the assertion that human-caused climate change is occurring. Here, both the experts and the institutions that produce them are accused of using their status as epistemically trustworthy to push a political agenda; hence, appeal to academic credentials will be insufficient to prove the validity of this indirect claim to expertise. What is needed is a set of criteria that can directly assess the trustworthiness of institutions to which we can appeal when deciding whether or not to trust a given expert. Presumably, this would apply to any other indirect criteria as well, including Buchanan's conception of merit; we would need a process through which the rational connection of the given indirect criterion to a direct assessment of expertise could be justified.

A process like this is what Elizabeth Anderson fails to provide when considering the extent to which citizens are capable of making second-order assessments of experts. On her view, a given expert's academic credentials, easily accessible via the Internet, is a fully justifiable assessment of expertise.¹⁹ However, producing these credentials will not assuage those who worry that academia is under the sway of an ideological false consciousness. For them, someone who is a "leader in the field"²⁰ might be operating under guiding principles that are false, either knowingly or unwittingly. Furthermore, the colleges, universities, and research programs might themselves be under the sway of ideologically biased doxastic systems that exclude certain views or preempt certain conclusions. While credentials point out which

¹⁹ Elizabeth Anderson, "Democracy, Public Policy, and Lay Assessments of Scientific Testimony," *Episteme* 8, (2011): 145

²⁰ *Ibid.* 147.

individuals have studied the most in a given domain, they do not help evaluate which individuals or institutions should be trusted based on their expertise. They merely point out which individuals are members of certain institutions and leaves open the question of whether or not that institution creates experts who are worthy of trust and are not under the sway of false consciousness.

Assessing the extent to which institutions can be assessed for expertise falls into the same skeptical problems as those criteria for assessing individuals. Criteria for assessing the expertise of institutions revert back into assessing the individuals who comprise the institutions, which laypersons are unable to assess the ability of institutions to produce experts as that would require being able to assess which individuals are experts in the first place. Laypersons are capable of assessing the ability of institutions to produce individuals who espouse similar sets of propositions, but making use of this ability runs into the problem of second-order value, unless those principles can be directly linked to the ability of the produced experts in question. Trusting an institution because of their professed commitment to American liberal or conservative values would be a purely ideological assertion of principles rather than an epistemically justified criterion for trust. As such, assessing membership in institutions fails to provide a compelling criterion for assessing expertise.

One potential way to bypass the problem of second-order value justifies trustworthiness based on adherence to general principles of *epistemic virtue* rather than the specific values of the domain of expertise. These virtues are the normative practices and attitudes which underlie the process of good inquiry and tend to lead to true beliefs and expertise, regardless of subject-matter. A given layperson then has justified reasons to trust experts if they adhere to

epistemically virtuous practices shared in common between all domains of inquiry and expertise. Elizabeth Anderson's concept of *epistemic responsibility*, or "responsive accountability to the community of inquirers," provides a compelling example of these sorts of practices.²¹ Epistemic responsibility means avoiding dogmatism in regards to one's propositions by accepting and responding to criticism. The practice of peer review, where an expert submits a given paper to critical scrutiny by other experts, is clearly models this form of responsibility. If a peer-reviewed paper is published, it is assumed that the author has responded to the criticisms of her reviewers and engaged in critical analysis on the veracity and consistency of the content of the paper. Adherence to peer review processes provides a clear example of how epistemic responsibility operates in a way that is open to the public. Between two experts or expert-institutions, one of which is peer-reviewed, *ceteris paribus* we are epistemically justified in trusting the peer-reviewed one.

Michael Fuerstein explicitly argues for what Anderson takes for granted: any institution such as peer review must be arrayed in a broader societal network that "adjudicates among complex knowledge claims, identifies epistemic authority figures, and takes in available evidence."²² Peer review is one particular form of such a network and different contexts call for different kinds of networks. The foremost principle uniting these networks is the Liberal Principle of Justification, which states that citizens and experts alike must "present...reasons for political action...for all to assess," "respond to...objections," and "modify... political actions in a way that sensitive to the results of...public deliberations."²³ If an expert is engaged in the LPJ, laypersons will be able to access not only their specific knowledge claims but the processes and

²¹ *Ibid.* 146.

²² Fuerstein, "Epistemic Trust and Liberal Justification," 14.

²³ *Ibid.* 5.

reasoning behind those claims. Even if the reasoning is esoteric to the layperson, the fact that it is accessible gives the layperson more reason to trust a given expert. Conversely, a supposed expert not engaged in the LPJ is likely to be less worthy of trust. The LPJ thus forms the basis of trust in experts.

These considerations, unfortunately, cannot form the full basis of a criterion upon which trustworthiness is assessed. First, the principles of epistemic virtue are themselves controversial and esoteric²⁴ and thus require an expert on epistemic virtue to be clarified and used. To do otherwise falls into the problem of second-order value, where the layperson makes claims to the truth-value of different epistemic virtues without the proper justification. Setting aside this problem and assuming that the principles of epistemic virtue are obvious to the layperson, their employment is limited due to the imprecise nature of the criterion itself. Even if epistemic virtues are in fact noncontroversial, the *relation proposition* linking an epistemic virtue to its application is itself esoteric. This problem becomes especially prevalent in the creation of policy, precisely because claims about epistemic virtue take center stage in these debates. Such claims are neither non-controversial nor exoteric.

Imagine a televised debate between a rabid climate change denier and an establishment scientist. Both sides accuse the other of violating epistemic virtues. The scientist claims that the denier is an industry shill who has taken money from various groups with vested interests in discrediting climate change, thus violating the principles of epistemic virtue. The denier in turn claims that the scientist is manufacturing data to justify the increasing of the size of government and fulfill a liberal ideological agenda, thus violating epistemic principles also. A layperson finds

²⁴ One need only consult the vast literature on epistemology to evaluate the deep controversies that exist between different concepts, practices, and disciplines.

himself in a dilemma where two presumed experts accuse each other of violating epistemic norms with no clear recourse to resolve the debate. If not violating epistemic norms is the criterion for trust, then the connection between the evidence for violation and the violation itself should be relatively straight-forward. In most instances of creating policy, from economics to foreign policy to climate change, this is simply not the case. Epistemic virtue, in this case, proves to be a relatively unhelpful criterion for assessing expertise.

VII. Conclusion

This paper set out to show how the democratic epistemological ideal of expertise is ultimately unfounded and unreasonable by showing how potential candidate criteria for expertise fail to be easily accessible or possible for laypersons to assess. In many ways, this paper outlines what many will feel they already know: that trusting experts involves not knowing and rather trusting whether a given expert knows what she is talking about. Lacking clear and justifiable criteria, most laypersons will use their personal and ideological preferences to determine which experts to trust rather than assessing the merits of each individual expert. After assessing the arguments above, we are left only with questions about how democracy should proceed: what does it mean for democracy if one of its principal ideals is untenable on a conceptual level? Are democracies capable of demonstrating any sort of competence that is not accidental? How do we square away our own experience of democracies working with the assertion that most decisions are not based on expertise but on ideological bias? These questions cannot be answered in this paper, but I hope in the conclusion here to outline how I imagine a framework for answering these questions might develop.

On the one hand, it might be asserted that my argument merely demonstrates another avenue through which democracy fails as an ideal of governance. Just as it is impossible for all citizens to directly vote on all matters of state, it is impossible for all citizens to even have the information necessary to make well-informed voting decisions. Any state that claims to be democratic uses these principles to cover up the fact that the input of voters has little impact on actual policy, i.e. we are not truly living in a democracy but a state that claims to be one for other instrumental reasons. However, I find this line of reasoning fails to fully explain why states with elements of participation even include the apparati purporting to fulfill democratic principles. It also ignores the way that the public, both through their voice and through the ballot have created changes in policies in numerous instances, from prohibition (and its subsequent repeal) to civil rights. Clearly, citizens are not completely disregarded at the level of state decision making even though it can frequently feel that way.

On the other hand, there lies the potential for a model of democratic decision making that attempts to decouple the ideals of expertise and participation within a democracy. Though I can only outline it briefly here, this decoupling would involve understanding the election process are not determining experts or affirming expert decisions but voting for particular ideals of political parties. To do so, we must assert bureaucracy as a political force that acts within democracy along with the populace and their representation. Citizens vote on ideological representation while a system of experts attempts to make those ideological ideals reality. When observing American politics, this system lines up much closer to reality than an ideal of fully educated citizens making fully justified decisions of trustworthiness. It also avoids the cynical and overly simplistic pitfalls of the first explanation. This explanation merely asserts that making ideals real

often involves greater amounts of ambiguity and complexity than immediately assumed. Those who claim that American democracy has failed clearly do not understand what it means for democracy to fail in the first place; it certainly does not mean that a greater amount of complexity than originally assumed has been introduced, which is the case here.