Many writers claim that democratic government rests on a principled commitment to the ideal of political equality. The ideal of political equality holds that political institutions ought to be arranged so that they distribute political standing equally to all citizens. I reject this common view. I argue that the ideal of political equality, as it is commonly understood, lacks independent justificatory force. By casting doubt on the ideal of political equality, I provide indirect support for the claim that democratic government is only instrumentally justified.

According to a common view, democratic government rests on a commitment to political equality. The ideal of political equality holds that political institutions ought to be arranged so that they distribute political standing equally to all citizens. The task for normative democratic theory, on the common view, is to articulate an attractive interpretation of the ideal of political equality and then to trace out its implications for the design and reform of political institutions. Not every democrat accepts the common view, however. Mill famously rejected the ideal of political equality. More recently, Richard Arneson has argued that political rights are justified to the extent that they protect more fundamental non-political rights. Mill and Arneson claim that democratic government is the best form of government, but both are prepared to recommend politically inegalitarian institutions if it can be shown that they would yield better political outcomes over time. I shall call this position democratic instrumentalism.

My aim in this paper is to provide indirect support for democratic instrumentalism by undermining a powerful and common argument for the ideal of political equality.

Both (P1) and (P4) of the above argument are open to challenge. However, I shall not contest either (P1) or (P4) here. The transition I shall be arguing about is the plausible one which arises from (P2) to (P3). As presented above, this plausible line of argument which can provide the needed supplementation, I shall not contest either (P1) or (P4) here. My concern is with the transition from (P2) to (P3).

I now present the (EAD) in general form. I shall not have anything to say against this possibility here. I shall proceed on the assumption that if the ideal of political equality is justified by democratic instrumentalism, it must be shown to be more than a mere by-product of a sound justification.

Before I outline the targeted argument, a few preliminary points are in order. First, it is important to note that even if politically egalitarian institutions would in fact produce optimal political outcomes over time, this fact would not vindicate the ideal of political equality. It would establish only that political equality is justified by democratic instrumentalism.

Secondly, it is possible that political equality is a beckoning-normative ideal. For the ideal of political equality to be vindicated, it must be shown to be more than a mere by-product of a sound justification.

Thirdly, as indicated above, I shall not discuss every argument for political equality. I shall want to focus on what I take to be the most promising political equality in terms of the relations between citizens that it establishes.

The different versions of the argument can be usefully sorted into two broad families: resource-centred and status-centred arguments. (Resource-centred arguments view political power in terms of a resource to which citizens have an equal claim, whereas status-centred arguments view political power in terms of the relations between citizens that it establishes.)

Finally, the critical discussion of both sets of arguments will not only undermine the (EAD), but also cast light on how democratic government can be justified without appeal to political equality.

II. EQUALITY OF RESOURCES

Resource-centred arguments construct political standing in terms of the distribution of political resources. These arguments seek to show that democratic institutions treat citizens equally in this way, since arguments that do not distribute political resources equally to all citizens.

P1. Every citizen’s life is equally morally important (or of equal moral worth).

P2. Consequently fully legitimate political institutions distribute equal political standing equally to all citizens.

P3. Only democratic governments distribute political standing equally to all citizens.

C. Therefore only democratic governments are fully legitimate.
Resource-centred arguments start from the premise: equal others and a resource for furthering one's own interests. These remarks are not immediately defeated by the fact that resource-centred arguments are not immediately defeated by the equal distribution of any kind of resource, political or otherwise. But in political situations, we are to treat citizens with equal regard. The vote is, at most, only a part of the bundle of resources that comprise this political power. Political equality demands that a resource be treated with equal regard. The resource is equal distribution of any kind of resource, political or otherwise. But in this section I grant this commonly accepted premise. The task for a resource-centred argument is to identify the best description of this political resource.

The second objection against the equal votes proposal holds that this rule is neither necessary nor sufficient for political equality. That equal votes are necessary for political equality has been widely noted. However, I am investigating the plausibility of pure resource-centred views, and on such views, equality of votes is not considered to be the necessary component of political equality. The reason for this is that if equality of votes is only part of the bundle of resources that must be equalized for political equality to obtain, then it ought to be possible to maintain political equality while violating equality of votes, so long as the unequal votes are compensated for by other resources relevant to political equality. Citizens could be compensated for by other resources, for example, by giving them extra votes. The idea that unequal votes could be compensated for so as to preserve political equality can make up for any amount of other resources. This is not the case with status-centred views, where the bundle of resources over political outcomes that must be equalized includes a claim to exercise power over other persons, in a way that is independent of the distribution of political power.

The idea that the vote is an exercise of power over other persons, in a way that is independent of the distribution of political power, is not the case with status-centred views, where the bundle of resources over political outcomes that must be equalized includes a claim to exercise power over other persons, in a way that is independent of the distribution of political power. The point of the view is that the vote is a resource that is independent of the distribution of political power. The vote is, at most, only a part of the bundle of resources that comprise this political power.

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equality is to obtain. Political power, we might say, is the ability to influence political outcomes. For present purposes, I do not need to provide a sharper account of this idea, for however the idea is developed. The main problem that sources of inequality in political power are objectionable. For example, some sources of inequality in political power are special and are therefore not to be disregarded.

This manoeuvre amounts to an abandonment of the simple equality of political power view. To avoid this implausible consequence, proponents of the equal political power view must distinguish between objectionable and non-objectionable sources of political power. A version of this argument holds that political equality requires not equality of power but equal opportunity to exercise political power. A version of this argument holds that only the former compromise the ideal of political equality.

This view, like the idea that the vote must be an inalienable resource, conflicts with the underlying premise of resource-centred political equality. The proponent of political equality can reply that the resources in question are special. If political institutions are to treat citizens with equal regard, then this bundle must be given priority over other resources. This situation violates the fair opportunity view; but it does not show that the two citizens are being treated with unequal regard.

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call this claim basic equality. If status hierarchies ‘reflecting’ judgements of intrinsic worth. This idea can be understood in different ways. A status hierarchy can be based on this judgement, if the reasons for establishing or maintaining it are based on this judgement. Alternatively, a status hierarchy can reflect a judgement if it is widely, and not irrationally, perceived to rest on the grounds of some persons outranking others (in the basic equality sense), or are widely and not irrationally perceived to be based on judgements of intrinsic worth. We then can apply this idea to the domain of politics. If political power does not reflect judgments of different intrinsic worth that conflict with basic equality, then equality of status does not obtain in that context.

III. EQUALITY OF STATUS

Before I consider these arguments, it is necessary to explore what ‘equality of status’ means. Despite the frequency of appeals to equality of status in recent political philosophy, little work has been done to clarify this key idea. Institutional arrangements which fail to show equal regard for all citizens. It must establish that political institutions which do not distribute political standing equally to all citizens fail for that reason to show equal regard for all citizens. This is because the proponent of the (EAD) must explain why the ideal of political equality, understood now and throughout this section as an ideal mandating equality of status in the domain of politics, the ideal of political equality, understood now and throughout this section as an ideal mandating equality of status in the domain of politics, would fail to show equal regard for all citizens. It must explain why the (EAD) has more force than (P2). For this reason, we then can ask whether the ideal of political equality has independent justificatory force because it is needed to explain why these arrangements are unacceptable to us. If the (EAD) has independent justificatory force because it is needed to explain why these arrangements are unacceptable to us, it will bridge the gap between (P2) and (P3) in the (EAD).

Political equality, so understood, condemns a range of politically inegalitarian arrangements. Yet for the ideal of political equality to play the role that it needs to play in the (EAD), it must do more than condemn institutional arrangements which fail to show equal regard for all citizens. It must establish that political institutions which do not distribute political standing equally to all citizens fail for that reason to show equal regard for all citizens. This is because the proponent of the (EAD) must explain why the ideal of political equality has independent justificatory force because it is needed to explain why these arrangements are unacceptable. If the (EAD) has independent justificatory force because it is needed to explain why these arrangements are unacceptable, it will bridge the gap between (P2) and (P3) in the (EAD). If the (EAD) has more force than (P2), it will bridge the gap between (P2) and (P3) in the (EAD). If the (EAD) has more force than (P2), it will bridge the gap between (P2) and (P3) in the (EAD). If the (EAD) has more force than (P2), it will bridge the gap between (P2) and (P3) in the (EAD).

resource-centred arguments fail to explain why political equality is required by deeper egalitarian concerns. Status-centered arguments may point to better in account for the special standing of political resources. The need to view them not as resources, but as constitutive elements of the requirements of the terms, we need to move beyond resource-centred arguments and consider political equality in terms of status. The central weakness of resource-centred arguments for political equality is that they fail to explain why political equality is required by deeper egalitarian concerns. Status-centered arguments may point to better in account for the special standing of political resources. The need to view them not as resources, but as constitutive elements of the requirements of the terms, we need to move beyond resource-centred arguments and consider political equality in terms of status. The central weakness of resource-centred arguments for political equality is that they fail to explain why political equality is required by deeper egalitarian concerns. Status-centered arguments may point to better in account for the special standing of political resources. The need to view them not as resources, but as constitutive elements of the requirements of the terms, we need to move beyond resource-centred arguments and consider political equality in terms of status. The central weakness of resource-centred arguments for political equality is that they fail to explain why political equality is required by deeper egalitarian concerns. Status-centered arguments may point to better in account for the special standing of political resources. The need to view them not as resources, but as constitutive elements of the requirements of the terms, we need to move beyond resource-centred arguments and consider political equality in terms of status. The central weakness of resource-centred arguments for political equality is that they fail to explain why political equality is required by deeper egalitarian concerns. Status-centered arguments may point to better in account for the special standing of political resources. The need to view them not as resources, but as constitutive elements of the requirements of the terms, we need to move beyond resource-centred arguments and consider political equality in terms of status. The central weakness of resource-centred arguments for political equality is that they fail to explain why political equality is required by deeper egalitarian concerns. Status-centered arguments may point to better in account for the special standing of political resources. The need to view them not as resources, but as constitutive elements of the requirements of the terms, we need to move beyond resource-centred arguments and consider political equality in terms of status.
These two ideals are respectively plausible. No one is committed to political equality, needed to ground these reasons. The first is the ideal of rational political authority. I hold that no one has a claim to exercise greater political competence or to distribute power more than others on the basis of properties except for exercising this competence or distributing power, on the basis of properties, for exercising that power. There are two interpretations of the equality of political institutions that are fully legitimate outcomes. I argue that all citizens with equal power, even when the process of producing the outcome is not itself a relevant consideration in determining whether the outcome treats citizens with equal regard. Given this interpretation, it means for an outcome to treat citizens with equal regard, the egalitarian outcome ideal directs us to design institutions that best produce outcomes that do so, given the circumstances in which the institutions must function.

The ideal of rational political authority explains why, in some circumstances, it would be right to distribute power more than another, if all citizens have equal power or distribute power more than another, if all citizens have equal power. I hold that no one has a claim to exercise greater political power than another. Since no citizen has a claim to exercise greater political power than another, if all citizens have equal power, no citizen has a claim to exercise greater political power than another, if all citizens have equal power.

Likewise, for those who understand political equality in terms of status, the egalitarian outcome ideal satisfies the ideal of rational political authority. If an institutional arrangement that satisfies the ideal of rational political authority, but violates the ideal of political equality, the proponent of political equality cannot explain why such an institutional arrangement is not relevant to political equality. This is why there is no objection to the person who stands at the top of the status hierarchy of his country's military because of his courage and intelligence. These are properties that are not irrelevant to performing the job well.

The reason follows from the egalitarian outcome ideal. Suppose, for example, that two arrangements are equally good with respect to the ideal of rational political authority, but that one of them contains political inequality that cannot be justified by the ideal of rational political authority. Then we have a reason to take the benefit away from A. But equally it would also provide a reason to give the benefit to B. This is why there is no objection to the person who stands at the top of the status hierarchy of his country's military because of his courage and intelligence. These are properties that are not irrelevant to performing the job well.
I shall now consider a couple of attempts to defend the equal respect claim. (These arguments are preliminary to the main line of argument in defense of the equal respect claim, which will be considered in the next section.)

(a) Argument from analogy

In some contexts, to show people equal respect we must treat their interests with equal consideration. The following remarks convey the gist of the idea.

Consider the ways in which equal respect is expressed within some affective associations, for example, a group of friends. We express equal respect in such contexts by consulting all with whom we wish to assert our preferences making decisions about where to go for dinner or which movie to see. Systematically, giving one friend's input more or less weight than the others, or giving them more or less opportunity to get their thoughts heard, would similarly count as expressing unequal respect.

(b) Self-Respect

These claims are indeed plausible. When formulating joint plans to go out for dinner or attend movies, friends should give equal weight to each other's preferences. By analogy, so should political institutions. The analogy makes sense. However, as noted above, on some matters on which citizens vote, they may be no correct judgements. Such independence of individuals for some matters on which citizens vote, however, does not rule out the need for political institutions to treat citizens with equal respect. For example, political institutions should be designed to give equal weight to the preferences of all citizens.

The analogy further suggests: (i) that concern for individual justice and political morality are independent of each other. (ii) that on some matters on which citizens vote, they may be no correct judgements. (iii) that political institutions should be concerned with the equal moral worth of all citizens. This, in turn, makes it easier for all to have a secure sense of self-respect. Two claims commonly advanced need to be distinguished. A weak claim holds that when political equality is realized, the basic political institutions of a democratic society publicly affirm the equal moral worth of all citizens. This claim is weak because it does not preclude the possibility that the institutions of a democratic society could publicly affirm the equal moral worth of all citizens in other ways. By contrast, a strong claim holds that the realization of self-respect is a necessary component of the realization of political equality, without which all citizens cannot have a secure sense of their own worth.

The weak claim is plausible, but it does not ground the ideal of political equality. It establishes only the modest point that the political institutions of a democratic society publicly affirm the equal moral worth of all citizens. The strong claim is more controversial. It claims that political equality is necessary for the realization of all citizens' self-respect. According to the strong claim, political equality is necessary for the realization of all citizens' self-respect. This is a controversial claim, but it is also a plausible one. For example, consider the case of a group of friends. We express equal respect in such contexts by consulting all who wish to assert their preferences in making decisions about where to go for dinner or which movie to see. Systematically, giving one friend's input more or less weight than the others, or giving them more or less opportunity to get their thoughts heard, would similarly count as expressing unequal respect.

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In the stockholding group discussed above, all the members agreed that the plural voting procedures put in place were a good idea. But the democratic society that was adopted for the modern democratic society, it can be argued that the plural voting scheme was adopted for a modern democratic society. It can be argued that while there is nothing inherently objectionable about the plural voting scheme, if the citizens were more tolerant, then there is a reason not to implement it. This line of thought moves from perception to reality, holding that the fact that an institution is in fact objectionable, and that citizens perceive it as objectionable, is a reason for concluding that the institution is objectionable. The perception must get right. The answer must be that the perception gets right what the institution expresses. The opponent of the plural voting scheme can argue that while there is nothing inherently objectionable about the plural voting scheme, if the citizens regard an institution as objectionable, then we may conclude that they are mistaken in their perception. We may say that the institution does not in fact express an insulting message. If this is right, then the interesting possibilities are the rationally optional and rationally required beliefs which stand behind the perception of offensive expressive meanings. To return to the argument I have been considering, many modern democratic societies have political cultures that are for a variety of historical and cultural reasons, they are founded on a political equality that is derived from a sense of their own worth. Since this can be achieved by arrangements that do not realize political equality, the weak claim fails to vindicate the ideal. The strong claim, if it were sound, would indeed vindicate the ideal. There is no reason to accept it. For, if it were sound, it would mean that all democratic societies contain political equality in its founding documents and in its basic constitutional structure. This guarantee plausibly could be understood to constitute the social basis of self-respect, and to that extent, it could constitute the social basis of self-respect, and to that extent, it could constitute the social basis of self-respect. By guaranteeing each citizen equal civil liberties and a fair share of wealth, the basic political institutions of the society would affirm the equal moral worth of all. This making it easier for all citizens to develop a secure sense of self-respect. Indeed, it could include the well designed plural voting scheme that I have been discussing. This shows that political equality is not a necessary element of the equal moral worth of the society. But the basic political institutions of the society need have no commitment to political equality. Indeed, it could include the well designed plural voting scheme that I have been discussing. This shows that political equality is not a necessary element of the social basis of self-respect. Still, while it is not strictly necessary, political equality, some may continue to think, is crucial to self-respect. They may reason as follows. We can imagine democratic societies which would both violate political equality, but these are not the societies with which we are concerned. For actual societies, any deviation from political equality will damage the social bases of self-respect. This means that in practice, if not in principle, political equality is an indispensable component of the social bases of self-respect. In the argument I have been considering, many modern democratic societies have political cultures that are for a variety of historical and cultural reasons, they are founded on a political equality that is derived from a sense of their own worth. 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Thus, on the one hand, there is a reason to conclude that the scheme is objectionable because it expresses a message. On the other hand, there is a reason to conclude that the scheme is objectionable because it expresses a message. On the other hand, there is a reason to conclude that the scheme is objectionable because it expresses a message.
no one is failing to realize that the scheme is objectionable. For this reason, the argument I am now evaluating would probably tell against even the best designed plural voting scheme for these societies. It would establish that there is an expressivity reason against implementing the scheme.

On this explanation, it is not important exactly why an institution has come to have an expressively offensive meaning. What matters is that the institution should not be implemented. I can make this point sharper by introducing a positive economic principle. A conventional explanation holds that the meanings of plural voting schemes are determined by the institutional rules by which citizens are elected to the governing bodies. The institutions which give the scheme its meaning are a function of the rationality of those members which have the scheme. The conventional explanation is true in general. It is true in this case, because the conventional explanation means that the institutions are the result of rational political calculation.

A critical objection to this explanation is that the scheme is objectionable because of its expressively offensive meaning. It is bad for political institutions to express this kind of insulting message. That is, one would need to show that the meanings is not expressively offensive meaning. In principle, the explanation could be either conventional or critical. But if the scheme is well designed, then the explanation plausibly is a conventional explanation. If the members of the group were to come to believe (and not irrationally) that the plural voting scheme expresses the judgement that some of them are more worthy than others, then we would have the result that the scheme would be expressively offensive. This transition needs to be made plain. The first thing to say about it is that it would come into play and round a reason to reject the scheme as a result of its expressively offensive meaning. A conventional explanation is a conventional explanation, if the members of the group have a critical explanation of the expressive meaning of the scheme.

The example of the stockholding group again illuminates this question. Every member of the group agreed that a plural voting scheme would be expressively offensive. But suppose now that the members of the group were to come to believe (and not irrationally) that the plural voting scheme expresses the judgement that some of them are more worthy than others. If this were to happen, then the members of the group would have to come to believe that the scheme is expressively offensive. This transition would come into play and round a reason to reject the scheme as a result of its expressively offensive meaning. A conventional explanation is a conventional explanation, if the members of the group have a critical explanation of the expressive meaning of the scheme.
The failure of the expressive argument to ground the ideal of political equality also undermines the expressive self-respect argument mentioned at the end of the previous section. So, I have still not identified an argument to bridge the gap between (P1) and (P3) in the (EAD).

V. GIVING DISAGREEMENT ITS DUE

It is true that with a little imagination the analysis here can be resisted. It is possible to construct a scenario in which a plural voting scheme would express an insulting message to some citizens, where the explanation for this fact would be critical, not conventional. Perhaps, given the details of the imagined scheme, those who receive fewer votes are rationally required to suffer some disadvantage. Nevertheless, the argument is not saved because if that is true, the scheme would be critical, not conventional.

We still need an account of the connection between treating persons with equal regard and treating their (currently held) views with equal regard. By respecting people's views we respect their nature as rational beings. This claim might provide the basis for an argument for universal suffrage. To deny adult capacity to form respectworthy political views. And this would, arguably, fail to satisfy their right to vote in democratic elections and, by so doing, it expresses the message that some are more worthy than others, and the expression of this insulting message would provide an additional reason to reject the institutions. The lesson to draw from this is that the connection between political equality and the expression of offensive meanings is deeply contingent. Concern for the latter need not carry with it any principled commitment to the former. For this reason, the expressive argument cannot ground the ideal of political equality.

of the issue. Political institutions should be designed not to treat the beliefs of citizens with equal respect, but rather, to the extent possible, to give effect to their sound beliefs. In some circumstances, this may be best done by establishing institutions that distribute political standing equally, or nearly equally, to all citizens. But in other circumstances, this is not the case. On an instrumentalist view of democracy, this is the case. Democratic institutions can be accounted for by a thoroughly instrumentalist view of democracy.

VI. DEMOCRACY WITHOUT EQUALITY

Unless I have overlooked something important, the EAD should be rejected. Its rejection, as I argued at the beginning of this article, is the first result of the fact that it requires no deeper support. Alternatively, I believe more plausibly, one can favour democracy while rejecting political equality. This is the position of the argument of this section. Properly understood, the need to give political disagreement its due does nothing to vindicate the ideal of political equality.

The argument here can be interpreted in different ways. On one version, the argument maintains that citizens have a claim to have their perceived interests treated equally, even if doing so would result in injustice. This is not plausible. If I hold unjust views, then the fact that implementing these views would further my perceived interests does not generate a claim on me to treat my views as if they are equally good for others. In general, the argument is more appealing than the previous version as it applies only to a subset of political views. The subset includes only views which have an equal claim to rational acceptance.

For this reason, the argument is more plausibly interpreted so as to apply only to a subset of political views. The subset includes only views which have an equal claim to rational acceptance. The argument now would hold that the interest of each of these citizens has equal political power with respect to the topic under discussion. The argument now would hold that the interest of each of these citizens has equal political power with respect to the topic under discussion. The argument now would hold that the interest of each of these citizens has equal political power with respect to the topic under discussion. The argument now would hold that the interest of each of these citizens has equal political power with respect to the topic under discussion. The argument now would hold that the interest of each of these citizens has equal political power with respect to the topic under discussion.
were best for that society, all things considered, despite the negative expressive meaning of the deviation. However, if expressive considerations are as weighty as many take them to be, then this possibility will be remote. Thus in many contexts, democratic instrumentalists will agree with proponents of political equality that the formal rules of the political process should not deviate from the equal votes rule.

A second set of considerations concern aggregation issues. These issues are those whose correct resolution depends on the distribution of preferences. Earlier I claimed that these issues provide support for democratic government. The reason for this is that to decide these issues correctly, a political decision procedure must first identify the distribution of preferences with respect to them. This is accomplished, ensuring that expressed preferences have an impact on the decisions made by the decision procedure.

Still, while the correct resolution of aggregation issues depends on the distribution of citizen preferences, these preferences are not enough to determine political outcomes. It is the distribution of preferences that determines what is decided. And this distribution can be determined by a variety of procedures, including majority rule, weighted voting, and various forms of proportional representation.

To conclude, expressive considerations, the need to resolve aggregation issues correctly, and the interests citizens have in political participation all provide some support for democratic government. Whether they are sufficient to justify a move away from the equal votes rule will depend on the particular situation.

A third and final set of considerations concern the value of the opportunity to participate in political life. Putting expressive and aggregative concerns aside, it may still be thought that it is important for each citizen to have an opportunity to make a difference in political affairs. This idea supports the view that political equality is important. This idea does not entail rejection of the equal votes rule, but it may still be argued that the opportunity for political equality should be extended to all.

Two instrumental reasons can be offered in support of this claim. The first reason appeals to the possible side-effects of increased participation in politics. It may be true, as Mill believed, that participation in politics cultivates moral and intellectual development. If it does, then there is a strong instrumental reason to encourage citizens to exercise the right to participate in politics. The second reason is that participatory democracy has the advantage of being self-enforcing. The more people participate, the more likely it is that people will continue to do so. This is another reason why it is important to extend the opportunity to participate in politics to all.

22 Democratic instrumentalists may want to press for procedural reforms that would have the same effect as a deviation from equal votes. For imaginative discussion along these lines, see P. van Parijs, ‘The Disfranchisement of the Elderly, and Other Attempts to Secure Intergenerational Justice’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 27 (1998), pp. 292-338.

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