

# What's So Funny about Voting Rights for Children?\*

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## ABSTRACT

*The case against extending the vote to children is usually grounded in consequentialist rather than in categorical grounds. That is, it is thought that it would be harmful to allow children to vote. But the denial of the voting rights of children should satisfy a principle of realism; that is, it should not invoke consequentialist criteria which would also rule out certain categories of adults. Nor should it infer from the present level of relevant aptitudes of children that they could under no circumstances increase their possession of relevant aptitudes, since these levels are at least in part a function of the arrangements societies have made to promote their development in children. Arguments to the effect that children should be given only fractional votes or that they should be granted the vote only under certain conditions do not satisfy these requirements. Moreover, they are premised on a mistaken view about the nature of the changes that introducing children into the pool of voters would give rise to, and on an exaggerated view of the extent of the changes to electoral outcomes that they would generate. Accommodations that we would need to put in place to facilitate access to the vote would, moreover, largely be of a piece with the kinds of accommodations that we make, or that we ought to make, for all voters.*

## INTRODUCTION

The British political philosopher David Runciman recently caused a furor when he suggested on his podcast *Talking Politics* that a possible remedy to some of the ills presently afflicting the institutions of representative democracy in advanced liberal democracies is that children as young as six be allowed to vote.<sup>1</sup> His argument is, in brief, that changing demography in advanced post-industrial societies makes young citizens the perpetual losers in the democratic game. The disaffection that this gives rise to is a (further) source of great risk for democracies, one that would be partially allayed by giving the (very) young the vote.

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<sup>1</sup> *Democracy for Young People*, TALKING POINTS (Dec. 5, 2018),

<https://play.acast.com/s/talkingpolitics/democracyforyoungpeople?autoplay> [<https://perma.cc/Z95C-SBM4>].

Runciman's argument has generated considerable backlash. How, ask those who have attacked Runciman, could one possibly entrust decision-making about state affairs to persons lacking the most basic cognitive capabilities for contemplating questions voters usually think about? Surely, this is some kind of joke!<sup>2</sup>

There is little chance that Runciman's proposal will ever make it on the political agenda of any democracy (though more moderate proposals, that would, for example, lower the voting age to sixteen or seventeen, already exist in a number of places). The present paper therefore has an ideal-theoretical bent that distinguishes it from most of my previous work. In realist spirit, we should not be asking "how might we integrate children into the electorate?" Rather, we should be asking, "given that children will never make it into the electorate, how can we best protect their interests?" However, I believe it is worth considering some institutional design issues that might arise if enfranchising children ever made it onto the political agenda. This is for at least two reasons. First, you never know. It may have seemed inconceivable at some points in the history of democracy that women or non-propertied classes would get the right to vote. Though the enfranchisement of children may not happen in my lifetime, it could still happen at some point in the distant future, and so it is worth contemplating the modalities through which this might occur. Second, considering both the potential harms of allowing six-year-olds to vote, and the ways to offset those harms, might lead us to think about (1) the harms of letting people *presently* enfranchised make significant decisions and (2) the ways to offset those existing harms.

I will proceed in this paper as follows. In section I, I will distinguish two ways in which arguments can be developed to exclude children (or any other category of persons) from the vote. I term them "categorical" and "consequentialist" and suggest that the case against child and young adolescent voters are largely consequentialist in nature. In section II, I will suggest a "principle of minimal realism," under which a consequentialist criterion to determine children's competency to vote should not be overly idealized, or worse, held hostage to a conception of democracy too removed from reality to be relevant for determining enfranchisement eligibility. In section III, I will discuss and reject two proposals as to how to go about enfranchising children, one by Andrew Rehfeld and another by Philip Cook. In section IV, I will discuss what it might mean for the rest of the electorate to be harmed by enfranchising children and young adolescents. Finally, in section V, I will consider the question of whether some of the potential accommodations for young voters actually count as evidence that these putative voters do not actually possess some traits required of competent voters.

## I

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of the controversy, see Matthew Weaver, *Cambridge Academic Defends Idea of Giving Six-Year-Olds the Vote*, GUARDIAN (Dec. 13, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/13/cambridge-academic-defends-idea-of-giving-children-the-vote> [https://perma.cc/7ZFT-G9BP].

There are two categories of reasons that might lead us to deny the right to vote to classes of persons.<sup>3</sup> Let's call the first one "categorical." Categorical reasons to exclude relate to the categories that some persons fall in. Arguments grounded in categorical reasons are to the effect that some persons should, by virtue of the kinds of persons they are, be excluded from the franchise. Such arguments are insensitive to consequentialist considerations. That is, even if we were to find that including such persons would improve the quality of the vote, on whatever metric we choose, these arguments hold that such persons should be excluded nonetheless.

Categorical arguments, or proto-arguments, are legion in the enfranchisement literature. Most obviously, non-citizens of a polity are most often<sup>4</sup> seen as appropriately disqualified from voting, even if they find themselves in said polity for a long period. Basic principles of self-determination are seen by some as requiring that even non-citizens who are affected by the results of a vote be excluded from the democratic process. In some jurisdictions, prisoners, and even those who have served a prison sentence for certain crimes, are categorically excluded from the vote. Some have argued (and some polities enforce the principle) that non-resident citizens should be excluded from the vote, at least after a certain amount of time spent outside the country, and a debate exists about whether those with multiple citizenships should be restricted to only voting in the country in which they reside, or at the very least only be allowed as a matter of democratic equality to vote in one of the countries of which they are citizens.<sup>5</sup>

Let's call the second kind of exclusion "consequentialist." The question asked here by those who purport to exclude certain categories of persons from the vote is the following: are there people who, though they are not categorically excluded from voting, should nonetheless be excluded because of the harms that would ensue were they allowed to vote? There are many categories of persons who, it is feared, would be undesirable voters because of various cognitive deficits. Voters need on such views to possess, variously, minimal information about the electoral system, the system of representation, and the main policy issues that democracies need to address; the ability to engage in basic means-ends reasoning; range of experiences (holding a job, paying bills, etc.) that make their choices as voters epistemically vivid, etc. People with various cognitive impairments are seen under this argument as lacking in these regards. Though they are in other respects considered to be full citizens who merit full protection of their interests by the state, people with such impairments are seen as properly excluded from the vote because, it is claimed, it would be harmful to allow them to vote, given the cognitive requirements attached to voting.

As far as I have been able to determine, the argument against extending the vote to children is consequentialist in nature, rather than categorical. Children who are otherwise qualified for citizenship in a polity are seen as not yet having the cognitive equipment required to exercise the vote well (enough), even though they are in other respects considered to be categorically included within the set of citizens. Thus, for example, even defenders of the political

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<sup>3</sup> For the most systematic account of the rationales for democratic exclusion, see CLAUDIO LOPEZ-GUERRA, *DEMOCRACY AND ENFRANCHISEMENT: THE MORALITY OF ELECTORAL EXCLUSIONS* (2014).

<sup>4</sup> "Most often," rather than "always," because both the theory and the practice of some actually existing democracies would grant the vote to non-citizen residents, in particular for local elections.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Robert Goodin & Ana Tanasoca, *Double Voting*, 92 AUSTRALASIAN J. PHIL. 743 (2014). For my argument against this categorical exclusion, see Daniel Weinstock, *On Voting Ethics for Dual Nationals*, in *AFTER THE NATION?* 177 (K. Breen et. al. eds., 2010)

rights of children such as Andrew Rehfeld and David Archard argue that those rights should only be gradually implemented (for example, through the implementation of a “fractional” vote) in recognition of the partial political maturity of children.<sup>6</sup>

I don’t want, for the purposes of this paper, to deny that young children lack the cognitive capacity required in order to exercise the right to vote very well. The question I want to ask is what we should make of this fact. Indeed, general voter incompetence is something that has been widely established<sup>7</sup>, and so the requirement that citizens only qualify as voters if they pass a certain cognitive threshold would have far more radical implications than many of those who have argued for the exclusion, or for only partial and gradual inclusion, of children, have been willing to concede. Indeed, at the very least, parity in reasoning would require that we consider disenfranchising older citizens in cognitive decline.<sup>8</sup>

Another question we might ask ourselves, in the light of this fact (and in case we are reluctant to disenfranchise vast swaths of the adult population!), is the following: what policies can we adopt to offset the deficits and vulnerabilities that characterize some portions of the population with respect to their capacity to exercise their democratic rights? Consider an analogy: the law has become such a complex set of texts, practices, and principles that it is unrealistic to expect people to become legally competent in order to be seen as rights-holders. And thus, for better or for worse, we have invented the profession of *lawyer*. The legal profession is a piece of social technology through which we reconcile, on the one hand, the fact that people have various rights, with, second, the fact that even well-educated and cognitively high functioning people lack the relevant knowledge required in order to uphold their rights in an increasingly complex legal system. It would seem manifestly unjust to say that because a person does not possess the requisite knowledge to represent herself in legal proceedings, she should therefore be seen as lacking the relevant right. Why should there be any difference with respect to *political* rights? Why are we tempted by the thought that, rather than finding appropriate technologies through which to offset the cognitive deficits, that afflict certain categories of persons in the exercise of their political rights, we should simply deny that they possess these rights at all? At the very least, we should explore the other alternative.

More specifically, we should consider two distinct questions reflecting this set of concerns, which we should avoid conflating. First, we should ask ourselves what we can do in order to *lessen* the incompetence of voters. Indeed, we should entertain the possibility that some proportion of the deficits in voting competence among advanced liberal democracies is a dependent, rather than an independent variable. How much people know and understand, in other

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<sup>6</sup> DAVID ARCHARD, CHILDREN: RIGHTS AND CHILDHOOD 70 (1993); Andrew Rehfeld, *The Child as Democratic Citizen*, in ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 633 (2011). To my knowledge, the closest anyone has come in the recent literature to denying the right to vote to children on categorical grounds is Carl Cohen, who argues that by virtue of their unrealized cognitive capacities there is a logical error in granting them the right to vote, since the right to vote is premised on voters having precisely the capacities that children lack. On Cohen’s view, children would therefore be the wrong kind of people for the democratic franchise. Digging deeper, it seems clear, however, that the grounds of this apparent logical flaw are consequentialist as well. Indeed, what disqualifies them on Cohen’s view is presumably that to allow them to vote given their lack of relevant capacities would have deleterious consequences. Carl Cohen, *On the Child’s Status in the Democratic State*, 3 POL. THEORY 458 (1975).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., ILYA SOMIN, DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL IGNORANCE (2d. ed 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Joanne Lau, *Two Arguments for Child Enfranchisement*, 60 POL. STUD. 860 (2012).

words, is a function of how much and how well the relevant educational and political institutions instruct them on the matters about which they should have knowledge and understanding to be able to vote competently. Presumably, we can improve those institutions in order to allay at least part of the problem posed by voter incompetence. Let me call this the "problem of induced ignorance."

Second, we should ask ourselves what we can do in order to minimize the harms caused by the lack of knowledge and understanding among voters that are unavoidable and perhaps to some degree, even desirable. Some degree of voter ignorance is simply due to the reality that the policy debates of modern democracies are complex. A deep understanding of these issues requires specialized knowledge that ordinary citizens simply don't have. Indeed, it is arguable that even experts in one policy field do not have the expertise required to competently apprehend the issues that arise in other policy fields. Why, for example, should we expect an expert in climate policy to have a deep understanding of the complexities in criminal justice? Some degree of voter ignorance is moreover due to the rational deployment of cognitive resources on the part of citizens. Indeed, given how little impact each individual vote has on the outcome of an election, it has been argued by many that it actually doesn't make much sense, absent some special set of reasons, for the ordinary citizen to expend much effort in order to acquire the amount of knowledge and understanding of the relevant issues that she would need in order to arrive at anything resembling expertise about any of the issues that are presently in the agendas of modern liberal democracies.<sup>9</sup> Let me refer to the issues that are imposed upon those of us concerned with the institutional design of modern liberal democracies as the "problem of irreducible ignorance."

I will address some of the issues posed by these two problems in the final three sections of this paper. Before that, however, I want to raise another principle which, in my view, should guide us in examining the issue of whether or not children should have the right to vote, which I will refer to as the "principle of minimal realism."

## II

Thus far, I have defended the view that if there are reasons to exclude children who otherwise, by virtue of the circumstances of their birth or lineage, satisfy the conditions for citizenship in a polity, those reasons are consequentialist rather than categorical. That is, we should exclude children only if there are harms attendant upon their enfranchisement that we can only avoid by not enfranchising them at all.

As I will show below, there are many things that we both can do, and some that we already do, in order to offset the competency deficits that afflict present adult voters. But below a certain age, it is possible that these deficits simply can't be offset, or that they can't be offset in an acceptable manner, one that would not involve unfairness relative to other voters, or excessive costs. Even Runciman argues that the right to vote should not be extended to children below the age of six, on the grounds that it would (unfairly) provide parents with extra votes, since the only

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., BRYAN CAPLAN, *THE MYTH OF THE RATIONAL VOTER*, (rev. ed. 2008); GEOFFREY BRENNAN & LOREN LOMASKY, *DEMOCRACY AND DECISION: THE PURE THEORY OF ELECTORAL PREFERENCE* (1993).

way in which children below that age could vote would be through some kind of a proxy mechanism.

My intention in this paper is not to engage the debate about exactly where the age threshold should be set. But I do want to argue that, in setting it, we should not advert to standards which would exclude many people who are presently included within the franchise. Our democracies function, not because we exclude people from the franchise who do not meet exacting standards of competence, but in spite of the fact that we do not set too high a threshold. Whatever threshold we establish, it should not unjustly discriminate against children by holding them to standards to which we do not hold adults. We should, in other words, cleave to a principle of minimal realism, which states that we should not exclude categories of persons from the franchise on the basis of epistemic standards that would be appropriate only for an idealized democracy that lies at a significant removed from reality of the practice of actually existing democracies.

The exclusion of children should not, for example, be based on the fact that they do not generally possess the kind of capabilities that would allow them to engage in democratic deliberation. Now, it is an open question whether it would be a good thing for there to be more deliberation in existing democracies, of the kind described by a range of deliberative democrats. For what it's worth, some deliberative democratic theory seems to me to be unhelpfully idealized because it is premised on the idea that democratic deliberation can without coercion give rise to consensuses. Democratic deliberation thus construed is in my view at odds with one of the premises of pluralist democracy, namely, that such a system of government is about making decisions despite persistent disagreement, rather than being about the elimination of such disagreement.<sup>10</sup> Be that as it may, the relevant point for present purposes is that contemporary mass democracies are far from instantiating the ideals of deliberative democracy (whether they are desirable or not), and it is wrong to justify the continued exclusion of a whole class of citizens—in the present case, children—because they do not instantiate epistemic traits that are relevant to a conception of democracy that is only present in a fairly remote possible world.

Nor should we exclude them because in exercising their right to vote they might not make use of the kind of public reason that according to Rawls ought to characterize the thinking of citizens when they engage in practical deliberation about who to vote for.<sup>11</sup> We should not exclude them from the vote because they might be inclined to vote in one way or another on the basis of extraneous considerations such as the “likeability” of candidates, because presently enfranchised voters vote in this way as well, and political parties trade on such considerations in candidate selection.

One might object to this principle by claiming that it is unattractively complacent. That is, it assumes that democracy is pretty much going to continue to be the grubby affair that it is in our non-ideal world. Worse, by including categories of persons that might only qualify for democratic participation given the parlous state of modern democracy, it pretty much locks democracy into place in its present, non-ideal state. It is, on this view, one thing to have a

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Weinstock, *Saving Democracy from Deliberation*, in *CANADIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY*, (R. Beiner & W. Norman eds., 2000). See generally, JEREMY WALDRON, *LAW AND DISAGREEMENT* (1999).

<sup>11</sup> John Rawls, *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, 64 *U. CHI. L. REV.* 765 (1997).

democracy many members of which do not have the capabilities to take part in a more attractive form of democracy; it is quite another to lock non-ideal democracy into place by including people who do not even potentially have these capabilities.

There are several ways of responding to this critique. One response would be to say that a thousand flowers should bloom in political philosophy. Political philosophy can be utopian, when it renders variable what less utopian endeavours in the field would treat as parametric. There is nothing wrong either with the utopian enterprise or with an enterprise that attempts to aim for improvements in an admittedly normatively sub-optimal environment.<sup>12</sup>

I am tempted by a stronger argument, which I will only gesture toward here. We should beware of utopian visions that, unwittingly or not, function in ways that disadvantage actual flesh-and-blood persons, here and now. It is a privilege to be able to point to a far-off utopia as grounds to disenfranchise (or choose not to enfranchise) already disadvantaged groups of persons, who most likely will not be around to benefit from the onset of the utopian dawn. Years ago, Critical Race Theorists like Richard Delgado argued against the utopian stylings of such Critical Legal Studies theorists as Roberto Unger for ignoring short term gains that disproportionately benefit already subjugated persons.<sup>13</sup> I am tempted, and will hopefully one day develop, an argument to the effect that an ideal theory that would deny a right to already marginalized persons on the basis of an ideal unlikely to be ever realized is similarly regressive, no matter how attractive the utopian vision is, taken in and of itself.<sup>14</sup>

### III

In this section, I want briefly to evoke two alternative paths that have been taken in order to integrate a concern with the voting rights of children. Both of them strike me as problematic because they strike at what I view as core commitments of democratic societies that any plan for the enfranchisement of children should satisfy. My conclusion will be that if we are to provide children with the right to vote, then *all* children that are not barred by some valid categorial reason should be granted the right and that right should be the same that is exercised by all other voters.

The first proposal is due to Andrew Rehfeld.<sup>15</sup> His contribution to the debate aims to accommodate both the view that children lack the requisite political maturity for full political rights and the apparently opposed view that it is only through the actual exercise of political rights that they will develop some of the requisite capacities. One of the central ideas is to

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<sup>12</sup> For an important statement of the importance of continuing to engage in ideal theory, see DAVID ESTLUND, *UTOPOPHOBIA. ON THE LIMITS (IF ANY) OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY* (2019). For an argument to the effect that there is no such thing as ideal theory, see Jacob T. Levy, “*There Is no Such Thing as Ideal Theory*”, 33 *SOC. PHIL. & POL’Y* 312 (2016).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Delgado, *The Ethereal Scholar: Does Critical Legal Studies Have What Minorities Want?*, 22 *HARV. CIV. RTS. – CIV. LIB. L. REV.* 301 (1987).

<sup>14</sup> For an argument that occupies similar conceptual territory, see GERALD F. GAUS, *THE TYRANNY OF THE IDEAL*, (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Rehfeld, *The Child as Democratic Citizen*, 633 *ANNALS OF THE AM. ACAD. OF POL. & SOC. SCI.* 141 (2011).

ascribe fractional votes to children as of a certain minimal age and to increase the fraction up to the point at which they have a full vote at age eighteen. Thus, young adolescents would on Rehfeld's scheme receive 1/7th of a vote at age twelve and would see 1/7th added to their vote every year until age eighteen.

Rehfeld's argument is based on two assumptions. The first is that the development of the cognitive capacities relevant to voting is gradual and that democratic institutions, which are usually governed by a bivalent yes/no logic, should find a way of reflecting the gradual nature of that development. The second is that the cognitive deficits that mark children before they reach the age of majority matter to the rest of us because they give rise to "errors" that are systematic (that is, errors that do not by virtue of being random cancel each other out) and difficult to correct.<sup>16</sup>

I will return in the next section to the second of these assumptions, namely, that granting the right to vote to children leads to systematic errors from which, presumably, the rest of us have the right to be protected, even if such protection involves denying the right to vote, either partially or *in toto*, to those who belong to a group more likely than others to commit such errors. Let me first address the question of gradualness and the idea that the gradualness of the onset of relevant political competencies should be reflected in the gradualness of access to full political rights. I want to make four points about this argument. The first is simply to point to the principle of minimal realism and ask whether the view that children at the age of twelve typically only have 1/7th of the skills required to exercise their voting rights is in violation of that principle. Now, it is possible that they only possess 1/7th of the skills that the ideal participant in democratic life possesses or that they only possess 1/7th of the skills that would be required in order to take part in a highly idealized form of democratic life, one that differs radically from our own. But on the principle of minimal realism, these are not the appropriate standards on the basis of which to determine whether children should have the right to vote, or to determine what proportion of a full vote they should have. Rather, what should be asked is whether they only have 1/7th of the competencies required to take part in democratic life as we actually find it, or whether they only have 1/7th of the skills of the median adult voter, or some such. I have no data with which to make this point. I simply want to make what strikes me as the moderate claim that it is far from clear that the latter claim, which on my view would have to be the one made by Rehfeld in order to make good his argument, is true.

To the extent that there is data suggesting that something like Rehfeld's claim is, in fact, true, I would argue, second, that it has to be dealt with very carefully. Chan and Clayton have for example scoured recent studies that suggest that children and young adolescents actually do lack the relevant knowledge about basic aspects of the political system and about the positions of the main political parties.<sup>17</sup> The problem with drawing conclusions about the capacity of children to participate in political life is that doing so ignores path dependency. The level of preparedness that children and young adolescents currently exhibit is a function not only of their native cognitive endowments, but also of the fact that they live in societies in which they do not

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<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 144.

<sup>17</sup> T.W. Chan & M. Clayton, *Should the voting age be lowered to sixteen? Normative and empirical considerations*, 54 POL. STUD. 533 (2006). For a diverging reading of the relevant data, see Tommy Peto, *Why the Voting Age Should be Lowered to Sixteen*, 17 POL., PHIL. & ECON. 277 (2018).



exercise the franchise until the age of eighteen and in which there are no institutions that see it as necessary to prepare them for an earlier exercise of the right to vote. If children had the right to vote, many other things would change. Schools would see it as part of their mandate to prepare them to exercise the vote, political parties would extend the kinds of activities that they engage in to mobilize the young, media would be more incentivized than they presently are to present information relevant to decisionmaking among the young, and so on. In other words, the evaluation of the cognitive capacity of young persons should be based on an evaluation of potential, rather than realized, capacity. Undoubtedly, the mechanisms that would exist in order to cognitively empower the young would be far from perfect (and the risk of manipulation, which I will talk about below, would need to be closely monitored), but they would be greater than they are now, simply because the relevant institutions under a regime of youth disenfranchisement do not see it as any part of their mandate to educate children to exercise the right to vote. There are countless things that schools, political parties, media, families, and the like could do in order better to prepare children for the exercise of the vote, and thus to address what I have above called the problem of induced ignorance.

Consider the potential contributions of political parties. There has in recent years been a small but significant renaissance of interest on the part of political theorists in the importance of political parties in liberal democratic theory.<sup>18</sup> One of the important functions that theorists of political parties rightly ascribe to parties is that of making the policy landscape tractable for the ordinary voter (thus addressing an important aspect of what I have here called the problem of irreducible ignorance). They do this by producing platforms and manifestos through which voters can see how parties intend on addressing the full range of policy challenges that face their society in a way that is answerable to a small set of overarching values and normative commitments and which makes clear necessary trade-offs among policy commitments.<sup>19</sup> The point I want to make about platforms and manifestos in the present context is that they are adapted to the epistemic capacity of voters. Now, parties address themselves differently to different kinds of voters. They may go into more detail about policy options for voters with greater political knowledge and limit themselves to general orientations for others. There is no reason, in principle, for parties not to adapt their messages to the epistemic capacity of children (bearing in mind that that capacity is likely unrealized or not fully realized in contexts such as ours in which they are not expected to exercise their political rights until they are 18). Thus, in a manner continuous with the way in which they already address the irreducible political ignorance of voters, parties might contribute to what may on the face of it seem irredeemable political deficits of children.

The third point I want to make is that, all things equal, the matching between gradualness of onset of relevant faculties and gradualness of access to the right to vote should be symmetrical. That is, if it is true that persons only acquire the relevant skills gradually and that their access to political rights should be correspondingly gradual, then it should also be the case

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<sup>18</sup> NANCY ROSENBLUM, *ON THE SIDE OF ANGELS. AN APPRECIATION OF PARTIES AND PARTISANSHIP* (2008); RUSSELL MUIRHEAD, *THE PROMISE OF PARTY IN A POLARIZED AGE* (2014); JONATHAN WHITE & LEA YPI, *THE MEANING OF PARTISANSHIP* (2016); MATTEO BONOTTI, *PARTISANSHIP AND POLITICAL LIBERALISM IN DIVERSE SOCIETIES* (2017); FRANCES MCCALL ROSENBLUTH & IAN SHAPIRO, *RESPONSIBLE PARTIES: SAVING DEMOCRACY FROM ITSELF* (2018).

<sup>19</sup> I have said more about the role of party platforms in Daniel Weinstock, *Integrating Intermediate Goods to Theories of Distributive Justice: The Importance of Platforms*, 21 RES PUBLICA 171 (2015).

that persons gradually *lose* fractions of the vote as their cognitive capacities wane in later life.<sup>20</sup> Now, this might be a bullet that those who defend disenfranchisement or only partial enfranchisement of children are willing to bite. But to the extent that we view it as problematic, it is because some of us may feel that the justification of voting rights is not only instrumental. That is, we do not only grant the vote on the basis of the mode of allocation that leads to the best policies. Rather, we also see it as a marker of equality. Now, Jason Brennan may be correct in arguing that there is no conceptual necessity to the linking of equal citizenship with equal voting rights.<sup>21</sup> But to the extent that something like Brennan's argument is used to justify partially or completely disenfranchising the youth and the cognitively impaired, I would argue that it falls foul of the principle of minimal realism. Though there may be a world in which voting rights and the sense of equality are detached, that world is very far from our own, and thus should not be used as a relevant benchmark.

Finally, there is the question of incentives. Rehfeld, following Brighouse<sup>22</sup>, believes that in order for children to develop the requisite political skills, they need to be made to take part in democratic practices. Democracy is a matter of "know how," as much as it is one of "know that." Practical knowledge can only come through practice.

Now, in order for an institutional device to prepare people for the practice, it has to embody the most important aspects of the practice. I would argue that a crucial thing missing from Rehfeld's proposal is the presence of the right kind of incentive. Now, to be sure, it could very well be that at the end of the day it is irrational to vote in order to make a difference to what happens. In a mass society, each vote is a proverbial drop in the bucket. Consider. Census figures from 2019 suggest that there were approximately 400,000 twelve-year-olds in Canada that year. To the extent that one of the considerations that offsets the irrationality of the individual vote is the idea of the power of the voting bloc, providing Canadian twelve-year-olds with 1/7<sup>th</sup> of a vote reduces their voting bloc to somewhere on the order of 50–60,000 votes. That's not much voting power, even under conditions in which twelve-year-olds vote as a cohesive group. Arguably, therefore, a practice that begins by providing young voters with only 1/7<sup>th</sup> of a vote risks lacking one of the crucial elements that has to be in place in order for an institutional device to prepare for a practice. Political parties would presumably not expend too much energy appealing to voters whose voting power has been reduced to (in the first years of the proposed scheme at least) a fraction of what it would be for other voters, and young voters themselves would be receiving the message (again especially in the first years) that their votes do not matter as much as those of their elders. Schools might not find it as important to prepare children for the exercise of the vote in as serious a manner as they would were young votes to have the same "weight" as those of other citizens. In general, the incentive structure that would be put in place by a 1/7 or 2/7 scheme would be quite different from that which exists in elections otherwise. To the extent that being exposed to that incentive structure is essential to training children in the appropriate way, it follows that the only way in which to acquire the requisite skills for voting is by taking part in the vote, not on a fractional basis, but as an equal. Only then would the relevant

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<sup>20</sup> This is simply an adaptation of the argument in Lau, *supra* note 8.

<sup>21</sup> JASON BRENNAN, *AGAINST DEMOCRACY* (2016).

<sup>22</sup> Harry Brighouse, *What Rights (If Any) Do Children Have?*, in D. ARCHARD & C. MACLEOD, *THE MORAL AND POLITICAL STATUS OF CHILDREN* (2002).

incentives be in place for youth to take an interest in voting and for the relevant institutions to take seriously the task of preparing them for the vote.

There is a principled reason to oppose fractional voting as well, moreover. If we accept that children, by virtue of their cognitive inferiority, ought to receive a fraction of the vote that their older fellow citizens do, the door is opened for us to adopt Mill's scheme according to which more educated citizens ought to have weightier votes. While this might seem like a good idea to some contemporary epistocrats, it seems quite clear when we attend to the case of Mill's proposed scheme that differentially weighted votes are incompatible with the norm of democratic equality. That this only comes clearly into view when we consider the implications of differentially weighted votes for adults reflects the kind of unjustifiably discriminatory attitudes toward children that are part of what drives the needs for arguments such as those in this paper.

But are we opening ourselves to harm by accepting this argument? What if Rehfeld is right in saying that the youth would make mistakes through their exercise of the vote not randomly, but systematically? I will turn to this concern in the next section.

Before I do so, however, I want to consider and to reject another interesting proposal, this one due to Philip Cook.<sup>23</sup> Cook's argument is not that we should oppose minimal voting ages because we should also reject the idea that minimal competencies should be criterial for the right to vote. Rather, his argument is that denying the right to vote on the basis of age would involve the invocation of controversial epistemic standards grounding invidious comparisons and also insufficiently respectful of young citizens. He imagines a procedural test that would do away with the age requirement. "Independence" and basic literacy would be the minimal requirements under this test. Literacy is fairly straightforward, and independence (that is, the requirement that young voters not be subject to undue pressure in the way they vote) can be verified through the proxy requirement of "personal voluntary attendance at a voter registration office with private registration sessions [which] ensures independent ability to comprehend and consent to the rules of the ballot."<sup>24</sup>

Literacy seems a minimal requirement indeed, but as we know, it is one that countless adults even in advanced liberal democracies fail to meet. The Canadian province that I am from, according to some studies, presents illiteracy levels as high as 19%. Now, Cook is aware of this fact, and thus, he sees the literacy requirement as imposing duties on the state more than it does on individuals. And, thus, he writes that "a literacy test is only permissible given a just distribution of resources and opportunities for literacy."<sup>25</sup> Cook's proposal as to how, and even as to whether, to measure literacy as a condition for the vote is thus caught in a dilemma. Either the condition expressed in the foregoing quote is taken seriously, in which case, noting that in no present-day liberal democracy is the condition satisfied, we end up doing away with the requirement, or it is idealized away, in which case it runs foul of the principle of minimal realism.

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<sup>23</sup> Philip Cook, *Against a Minimum Voting Age*, 16 CRIT. REV. SOC. & POL. PHIL 439 (2013).

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 451.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

Independent registration as a proxy for independence raises some other issues that merit being flagged in the present context. Let us pass over the question of whether the one is, in fact, a reliable proxy of the other. The question that should be raised is that of feasibility. Ease of registration depends not just on the capacities of the putative voter but also on the manner in which the society in question institutionalizes registration. In some societies, registration is more or less automatic, and in others, it is heavily biased (whether unwittingly or by design) against certain categories of persons: persons who do not own motor vehicles, persons with inflexible work schedules, persons with no fixed addresses, etc. How much accommodation by the state is required in order for the willingness and ability of an individual to register to be an at least plausible proxy for independence (as opposed to other, extraneous features)? Conversely, at what point does the need for accommodation reflect the fact that the persons for whom accommodation is needed do not, in fact, satisfy the minimal requirements for voting? I don't want to answer these questions here, but merely to raise the general question: what voting technologies must be put in place in order to ensure that people who possess the requisite traits are actually able to vote? Conversely, are there accommodations of which it can be said that the need to put them in place actually bears witness to a relevant shortfall on the part of those for whom they are required?

The main argument I want to make here is that, before we accept the kinds of criteria proposed by Cook in order to determine eligibility to vote, we had better make sure that they do not ultimately exclude potential voters whose shortfalls relative to those criteria are due to the polity to which they belong not having taken reasonable steps to ensure that they meet them (for example, through educational reforms aimed at increasing literacy rates) or whose shortfalls cannot be reasonably accommodated.

#### IV

At this point, I want to dig deeper into the assumption made by Rehfeld that the cognitive shortfalls that children and young adolescents display should appropriately disqualify them from at least full voting rights. Remember that Rehfeld's claim is that these shortfalls matter because in his view the errors that the young are susceptible to are not random.

Were the distribution of errors made by youth to be completely random, then they would not matter to the rest of us, as they would not affect the outcome of a voting exercise. They would merely cancel each other out. If these errors are systematic, however, then they risk making a difference. In Rehfeld's view, they risk pulling us away from epistemically justified outcomes of electoral processes, toward epistemically unjustified or less justified ones.

A couple of preparatory remarks are in order. First, it is important to get a grip on the extent of the transformation of the democratic arena that would be giving rise to were, say, six- to eighteen-year-olds to be admitted to the franchise. In 2019, the inclusion of this group would have brought in Canada roughly five million new voters. There were roughly twenty-seven million eligible voters in the last election. Presently excluded youth would represent somewhere on the order of 15% of eligible voters. To give oneself some comparative numbers: those above seventy represented about 4.4 million. Disabled Canadians over fifteen number approximately

6.2 million. Adding children six and over to the list of eligible voters would represent a significant addition, but it is in rough proportion to the number of elderly and disabled voters (of course, these categories are not entirely disjoint).<sup>26</sup>

The second preparatory remark is that, for the most part, citizens of modern liberal democracies exercise their right to vote by voting in elections, rather than directly for particular policy options. In the podcast that I cited at the beginning of this article, David Runciman argued that the growing disaffection of vast swaths of the electorate for the apparatus of representation is making it the case that pressure to vote directly on important issues will make itself felt to ever-increasing degrees. The Brexit vote is in his view a harbinger of things to come.

Though Runciman may be right in making this projection, it remains the case that modern voters will for the foreseeable future be voting for parties, and for candidates who are vehicles of party platforms, rather than voting directly on complex matters of economic or foreign policy.

Given these preparatory remarks, we can sharpen the question: on the assumption that the difference made by the enfranchisement of children and young adolescents is systematic rather than random, and given the fact that the way in which they will act politically will be through voting for representatives who belong to political parties (rather than through referendum questions bearing directly on policy options), where does the risk for error lie, and what is its magnitude?

The first thing to note is just how difficult it is to get a grip on what it might mean to say that children and young adolescents will be making flat-out mistakes in voting for one or another party in an already established liberal democracy. Now, let's assume, as is plausible, that children and adolescents will not present exactly the same voting distribution among the available choices as would other segments of the population. They may skew to a greater degree to issues that are in the long-term interests of children; they may skew to parties that cater to their shorter-term interests. Which of these two skews would be mistaken? And bringing in the principle of minimal realism at this point, what distribution of long and short-termism would point to the young being more in error than their elders, who also distribute between long and short-term perspectives in deciding how to vote? Any group will tend to privilege its interests, or perhaps more charitably, a conception of the common good strongly inflected by a particular class, gender, race, age, or perspective. Remove them from the electoral mix, and you will undoubtedly note a non-random change in the distribution of the vote. The same is true if you add them back in. Does the systematic, slightly centrifugal impact that every group brings to the electoral table necessarily spell error?

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<sup>26</sup> All estimates are drawn from Statistics Canada population surveys. STATISTICS CANADA, POPULATION ESTIMATES ON JULY 1<sup>ST</sup> BY AGE AND SEX (last visited Oct. 2020), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000501> [https://perma.cc/CHA6-9HD3]; STATISTICS CANADA, CANADIAN SURVEY ON DISABILITY (last visited Oct. 2020), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181128/dq181128a-eng.htm> [https://perma.cc/7D9P-GRJR].

Looking at the issue more deeply, it could be that the introduction of a new voting bloc might introduce error not directly through the choices made by new voters among already existing parties and their already existing platforms. Rather, it could be that their arrival would give rise to the creation of new parties devoted to their (mistaken) priorities. Or it could be that it would incline already established parties to modify their platforms, in a mistaken manner, so as to cater to this new segment of the electorate.

The arrival of a voting block representing 15% of the electorate will undoubtedly change the behaviour of established parties, and in certain kinds of electoral systems, in which representation within the legislature is possible even with, say, 10% of the vote, it may also give rise to entirely new political parties. But it is easy to exaggerate the revolutionary disruption that the arrival of this block would give rise to. Imagine, for the sake of argument, that children and young adolescents presented more homogeneity than the presently most homogeneous groups of voters in a liberal democracy. Imagine, to fix ideas, that 70% of them voted the same way. This would either mean that some party would (again using Canadian numbers) get an at least temporary 10% bump from the arrival of young voters. This is, to be sure, not insignificant. But it would not in and of itself be either without parallel. Think of regional voting blocks. In Canada, for example, the Western provinces routinely deliver all or almost all of their seats to the Conservative Party of Canada. Their presence within the voting system gives rise to a systematic skew. Were they to secede, the Liberal Party of Canada would receive an enormous boost. The arrival of young voters, or the fact that they are today *de jure* excluded as would the Western provinces were they to secede, would not be disproportionate relative to kind of voting block effect that we consider to be normal in present-day electoral politics.

Now, it is true that the arrival of these new voters might incline parties to modify their policies in order to attract as many of these new voters as possible. But there are limits, given the numbers, on the extent to which it would make sense for parties to abandon their erstwhile constituents in order to pander to the youth. After all, the proportion of the vote that young voters would represent would not be sufficient to carry elections, and traditional parties in first-past-the-post systems would probably incline toward the median voter just as much as they do under present dispensation. In such electoral systems, the creation of youth parties would, again given numbers artificially inflated to exaggerate the risk that the introduction of young voters would represent, make very little electoral sense, as narrow-focus parties such as Green parties in countries like the US, Canada, and the UK are well positioned to appreciate.

It might be more likely that the arrival of a new voting block might shift the political landscape to a greater degree in proportional representation systems. After all, coalition leading parties in PR systems often establish their position as leaders with little more than 25% of the vote. But even on the (unlikely) assumption that 2/3 of the new youth electorate were to vote for a Youth Party, that would at best make such a Party a junior partner. Negotiations leading to the hammering out of a governing coalition would require that such Parties make great concessions and compromises with Parties representing a more traditional set of political positions.

I hope to have made two points at least plausible in this section. The first is to point out that given, first, the fact that voters in liberal democracies vote for parties, rather than directly for policies, and second, given that the enfranchisement of children and young adolescents would

not end up adding catastrophically large numbers of voters to the voting rolls, the electoral impact of the enfranchisement of youth, even of youth as young as envisaged in Runciman's argument, is easy to exaggerate. But more importantly, I have wanted to point out just how difficult it is to go from the observation that the introduction of a new voting block would make a systematic difference to electoral outcomes, to the much stronger conclusion that their introduction would make a systematically *mistaken* difference to such outcomes. The introduction of any new block of voters would make a difference to electoral outcomes by virtue of the fact that their exclusion entails the exclusion of a set of distinct interests and perspectives. The right question to ask is not whether those of us who presently have the right to vote would see the satisfaction of our interests less easily satisfied through the electoral process than it would have been before the inclusion of a new block, but rather whether we have any legitimate grounds to exclude the members of this block from the franchise. The fact that the exclusion of children can only be justified on consequentialist grounds, combined with the principle of minimal realism and the observation that we already put in place democratic devices such as political parties to alleviate and accommodate both induced and irreducible political ignorance, make it quite difficult to identify such legitimate grounds.

One way in which to salvage something of the idea that the introduction of children to the electoral rolls might give rise to results sufficiently problematic to justify their exclusion is provided in a recent book by Gideon Yaffe.<sup>27</sup> Yaffe's overall argument is that it is appropriate that children be considered by law as having less criminal responsibility than adults do because they are not able to influence the laws to which they are subject through the vote.<sup>28</sup> But he also argues that we should not give children more responsibility by giving them the vote, because to do so would be unfair, as it would breach the principle of equality that is central to our political ethics. This is because parents appropriately have a say over their kids' values. "Parents enjoy legal entitlements *the function of which* is to entitle them to exert influence over who their children are and will become, in the deepest sense".<sup>29</sup>

If Yaffe is right, then it would be wrong to give children the vote because to do so would be to give too much of a say to parents over the vote, since they appropriately have a say over their children's values and identities.

Is Yaffe right on this score? I would think not. Granting parents the kind of "say" over their children's upbringing that Yaffe thinks appropriate and linking that prerogative to the moral entitlement to shape their children's identities and values runs afoul of another important liberal democratic value: individual autonomy. The only way in which to justify the kind of authority that parents have over their children in the context of a liberal democracy committed to the future autonomy of children is to premise that authority on the presumption that parents will be acting in their children's best interest, where that interest includes an interest in a tolerably "open future," one over which parents will not have had excessive power and influence.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> I thank Alex Guerrero for having alerted me to the relevance of this book to my purposes.

<sup>28</sup> GIDEON YAFFE, *THE AGE OF RESPONSIBILITY. CHILDREN AND THE NATURE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY* 2018.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 174 (emphasis added).

<sup>30</sup> Despite their differences, this claim unites some of the leading figures in the ethics of childhood and the family, including Matthew Clayton, Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift. *See*, MATTHEW CLAYTON, *JUSTICE AND LEGITIMACY*

Now, as Yaffe acknowledges, the fact that parents have legitimate “say” over what their children do, what they believe, and who they are does not mean that that “say” will empirically translate into actual influence. Conversely, denying the legitimacy of the kind and degree of entitlement that Yaffe argues parents appropriately have does not ensure that parents will *not* have influence over their children. It is entirely possible that a parent who cleaves to the principle that she ought not to *attempt* to influence her child’s political values will in fact have a great deal of influence over those very values.<sup>31</sup>

Whatever the case, it seems excessive to exclude from the vote those who might be influenced by others as to how they vote. This concern has after all historically been used to “justify” the exclusion of women and of the unpropertied. What’s more, it falls foul of the principle of minimal realism, since we are likely all influenced in some way or other by others in our political choices. Had it been morally acceptable for parents to be granted the prerogative to deliberately shape their children’s values in the way suggested by Yaffe’s argument, then a less consequentialist egalitarian concern might very well have been raised. But the prerogative is not morally acceptable (nor is it clear that the manifestations of that prerogative in law are best seen as having the function, as Yaffe suggests, of allowing parents to shape their children’s values and identities). Thus, Yaffe’s argument cannot salvage a position such as Rehfeld’s, which was, to recall, that there is something systematically wrong with providing children with full voting rights.

## V

In this final section, I will sketch a framework for thinking about the following problem, one that I briefly alluded to in my response to Cook’s argument. Any electoral system that enfranchised children would also have to introduce new electoral technologies aimed at making it easier for children to actually exercise their right to vote. On the surface, there is nothing strange about that. After all, electoral offices should be accessible in order for voters with limited mobility to be able to exercise their right to vote. Indeed, there would be something wrong about electoral systems that did not put such technologies in place. That’s because mobility deficits are irrelevant to the determination of whether a person has the relevant capacities to vote. By making voting and registration offices accessible, we are neutralizing the effect of aspects of voters that are irrelevant from the perspective of their capacity to vote, rather than compensating for the absence of competencies that we should expect voters to have.

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IN UPBRINGING (2006); HARRY BRIGHOUSE & ADAM SWIFT, FAMILY VALUES. THE ETHICS OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (2016); Daniel Weinstock, *How the Interests of Children Limit the Religious Freedom of Parents*, in RELIGION IN LIBERAL POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (C. Laborde & A. Bardon eds., 2017).

<sup>31</sup> For what it’s worth, the empirical evidence concerning parental influence over the political choices of children is mixed. See, e.g., Elias Dinas, *Why Does the Apple Fall Far from the Tree? How Early Political Socialization Prompts Parent-Child Dissimilarity*, 44 BRIT. J. POL. SCI. 827 (2014).



Some technologies that we would have to put in place in order for young voters to be able to exercise their right to vote would be of the same order as those we put in place to accommodate people with mobility deficits. Trivially, we would want to make voting stations accessible by public transportation or walking. It would be as unfair to place voting stations in places only accessible by automobiles as it would be not to equip voting stations with ramps (I would argue that there is more reason to keep children and young adolescents away from the wheel of a car than there is to keep them away from voting booths!).

But there may be some vulnerabilities that are characteristic of children that, at least at first glance, would seem to speak to their lesser competence to vote. Accommodating these vulnerabilities might therefore be less justifiable than would be the accommodation of a characteristic that is irrelevant to the act of voting.

One concern that we might have with the extension of the right to vote to children has to do with their susceptibility to manipulation and intimidation.<sup>32</sup> The fears in this area are diverse: children may be more susceptible to manipulative political advertising than adults are. They may be more susceptible to having family members coerce them into voting in a certain way.

I will pass in the context of the present argument on the empirical plausibility of the foregoing suppositions. Let us again, for the sake of argument, stipulate whatever set of facts would seem to be most favorable to the opponent of the extension of voting rights to children.

There are technologies that we can quite readily imagine to offset these vulnerabilities considerably. Advertising aimed at children is already more tightly regulated in most liberal democracies than are advertisements aimed at adults. There is no reason not to engage in such heightened regulation in the case of political advertisement aimed at children. The veracity of the claims made by advertisers could be monitored, as could blatant emotional manipulation. What's more, polling stations could be set up in places in which children and young adolescents are least likely to be under the direct influence of their parents, namely, their schools.

Is there an argument against such arrangements, on the grounds that their aim, unlike that of ramps at voting stations, is not to offset an irrelevant trait, but rather to artificially compensate for a relevant one? I do not believe so. This is so for a variety of reasons. First, if we are concerned with the vulnerability of voters to manipulation, then we should be concerned with this vulnerability in the case of adult voters, as well. Remember that the exclusion of women from the vote was often premised on the argument that giving them the vote would in effect mean giving their husbands two votes. Manipulation, and the susceptibility to manipulation, is probably quite generally distributed, as has been made clear in recent years by the susceptibility of voters generally to manipulation on social media.<sup>33</sup> Focusing on the manipulability of children risks violating the principle of minimal realism, which enjoins us not to apply criteria for the enfranchisement of children that we do not apply to other groups. Technologies through which manipulation is lessened across the board have something to be said for them, not just in the case of children but more broadly.

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<sup>32</sup> Thanks to Rivka Weill for pressing me on this point.

<sup>33</sup> SAMANTHA BRADSHAW & PHILIP N. HOWARD, *THE GLOBAL DISINFORMATION ORDER: 2019 GLOBAL INVENTORY OF ORGANISED SOCIAL MEDIA MANIPULATION* (2019).

What's more, accommodations aimed at reducing the susceptibility to manipulation are probably justifiable on other grounds, as well. Placing polling stations for children in their schools not only minimizes the risk of manipulation but also facilitates voting by bringing polling stations closer to where voters spend the bulk of their days.

There may be other ways in which voting rights for children would require technologies that accommodate for features of children that speak against their possessing traits that should be possessed by all voters. The case of manipulability suggests that this is not the case. But a more systematic study would need to be carried out in order to make the case in a more definitive manner.

## CONCLUSION

The time has come to tie the strands of this argument together. I have argued that, to the extent that there are reasons to exclude children from the vote, they are consequentialist in nature. I have further argued that in assessing the consequentialist arguments against allowing children to vote, we ought to cleave to the principle of minimal realism. That is, we should not exclude them on the basis of standards that implicitly or explicitly refer to conceptions of democracy that are far afield from the manner in which our actually existing democracies are set up. I have further argued that in our existing democracies, there are many things that we both currently do—and could further do—in order to offset the deleterious impact for democracy of both induced and of irreducible voter ignorance. There seems no reason not to extend these kinds of democratic devices to children. The changes in electoral outcomes that would emanate from the inclusion of children are moreover difficult to characterize as errors, as opposed to legitimate outcome differences that inevitably arise whenever a previously unjustly disenfranchised group is allowed the franchise.

I began by considering David Runciman's suggestion that children be enfranchised and the furore to which it has given rise. Once the basis of the considerations is canvassed in this paper, it is easy to understand, but harder to justify that furore.

One last consideration that perhaps deserves mentioning. While I think it is clear that it would not be unhealthy *for democracy* if children and adolescents were given the vote, it would perhaps be unhealthy *for children*. According to the view I am considering, children deserve to be shielded for a time from the kinds of responsibilities that come with the vote. They deserve to be immunized from having to think about the difficult, sometimes tragic choices, that political life sets before the electorate. They are entitled to not have to consider the tawdry realities that participation in political life inevitably places one in contact with.<sup>34</sup>

There are both normative and empirical questions raised by this set of concerns, which can only be touched on here. Normatively, the question arises of whether it is an attractive conception of childhood that shields individuals from participation in the public sphere, warts

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<sup>34</sup> An argument along these lines can be found in LUDVIG BECKMAN, *THE FRONTIERS OF DEMOCRACY: THE RIGHT TO VOTE AND ITS LIMITS*, 114–19 (2009).

and all, for more than 20% of their lifespan. Empirically, the concern raises the question of whether it is not more harmful to children that they be aware of the problems facing the world (as inevitably they will be given the ubiquity of information and misinformation to which they are subjected unless they live in remote, cut-off Mennonite or Amish communities) without feeling that they can do anything about them.

These questions will have to await another occasion. For now, I conclude that we may be duty-bound to consider what may have seemed at the outset as an outrageous suggestion—namely, that children be given the same voting rights as their elders.