



VICTORIA COLLOQUIUM

in Political, Social and Legal Theory

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On the Expressive Theory of Voting

Gerry Mackie is a member of the Department of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego. His *Democracy Defended* (2003) challenges, conceptually and empirically, Arrovian and Rikerian accounts skeptical of democracy. It has been described as “brilliant” and “counterrevolutionary” for “attacking the widely accepted claim of social choice theory which claims to show democracy to be impossible, arbitrary, and meaningless.”

This paper takes on the conventional view in political science that it is instrumentally irrational to vote. The next inference is that since most citizens do vote, they must do so from some act-contingent motivation: bribery by whiskey or reputation, duty, or, most popularly, the value of merely expressing one’s preference. Mackie summarizes a larger argument that it is quite rational to vote for instrumental purposes. He argues that the expressive theory’s contrast between voting action and consumer action is wrongly drawn, that the value of expressing a preference in the voting context is trivial and that the expressive theory is conceptually and empirically mistaken.

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