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Social Norms for Citizenship

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL NORMS IN CONTEXT

A social norm is a principle or rule of behavior, which is maintained among members of a group of people both by trying to follow it and by trying to enforce it upon each other. Both of these effects are contingent on the existence of the norm and on the effort of others to maintain it (Bicchieri 2006). In part because of this contingency, social norms differ from abstract moral principles. And the existence of the contingency gives social norms a kind of stickiness. It is difficult to get them started, because a group must accept them, and, once started, they tend to maintain themselves. Social norms also differ from laws, which are usually enforced by an institution dedicated to enforcement. The enforcement of social norms is dispersed. (But Ostrom 1990 has discussed many intermediate cases in which punitive enforcement of rules is also dispersed.)

Social norms are one means for mutual control and influence within groups of people. From a simple economic point of view, control is needed because of externalities, the effects of each person's choices on others. Social norms encourage positive externalities and discourage negative ones. Other means of influence involve coordination, endorsement of moral principles, or coercion by law.

In coordination, someone states a standard or principle, and it immediately becomes to everyone's individual advantage to comply. An example is "Drive on the right side of the road." It is of course illegal to drive on the wrong side, but this is for those rare cases where people are too much out of control to do what is in their clear

self-interest, so they should not be driving at all. Another example is “We speak English here,” although this does not always work (since the costs of learning a new language are high).

Endorsement of moral principles differs from social-norm endorsement in not being understood as contingent on their general acceptance, although moral norms may in fact be generally accepted, so that the categories of moral and social norms overlap considerably. When overlap occurs, the only way to determine the difference between social and moral norms is to determine what would happen in the absence of general support. Turiel (1983) tested such a distinction by asking two questions: “Is it wrong to do X?” and “Would it still be wrong if everyone thought it was okay?” Even most five-year-old children said that it would still be wrong to push someone out of a swing because you wanted to use it, but it would not be wrong for boys to wear dresses to school if everyone thought it was okay. Turiel called rule about dresses a convention, but the same test could apply to social norms.

Moral principles themselves do not come with means of enforcement. But they can be endorsed publicly as a way of creating or strengthening social norms or creating laws. Examples of such historical change have concerned slavery, racial discrimination, and women’s rights. Eventually these historical changes have led to laws, but the social norms are still needed where the laws are not easily applied, and the idea that women are morally equal to men has yet to take hold around the world.

Coercion is usually done by a central authority. In principle, and often in fact, coercion can solve problems of externalities by threatening to punish harms and withhold rewards from failure to provide positive externalities. It is efficient to have such a central authority, both because of the benefits of specialization and because, when individuals take punishment into their own hands, they invite retaliation by those who see the punishment as excessive (which it often is), and long-term feuds can escalate over time. Thus, the centralization of the power to punish, as well as the resulting effort to suppress

“second-party punishment” by banning such vigilantism, was one of the advantages of government, and a state, when these came into existence in human history. The advantages were so great that states persisted for centuries, even when the central power was abused, with the “king” or warlord using it in large part to enrich himself.

An intermediate case, between law and social norms, is the idea of a code of ethics or etiquette, often an informal one. In some cases, such codes take on the force of law, but only insofar as they can be enforced. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) maintains several written codes of ethics, but the strongest penalty it can apply is expulsion. (For clinical psychologists, this may be supported by the state, through its licensing procedures.) In other cases, although attempts are made to write down the rules (in books about etiquette, or statements of principles for scientific research practice), they are maintained as social norms, entirely through mutual support by a group.

Sometimes these rules are somewhat arbitrary, as in the case of the norm of using “participants” rather than “subjects” to describe the targets of psychology research (Roediger 2004). But arbitrary rules, like other social norms, are sticky. Young researchers continue to use “participants” even though the APA itself has now decided that “subjects” is an acceptable term after all. And the widespread use of “participants” in psychology (although not so much in other disciplines that study human behavior) leads to the perception that the norm is widely supported. This effect may be an example of “pluralistic ignorance” (Prentice and Miller 1993), in which people try to follow a norm because they believe that a strong majority supports it, even though, deep down, most people do not.

Another sort of “bug” in the system concerns moralistic values, which take the form of moral principles but are actually personal values for what other people do, independent of any belief that doing these things will help others achieve their goals. Examples are the attempts of various religions to impose their religious rules on others who do not accept the religion or the rules in question.

DEMOCRACY

The idea of democracy is quite old, surely older than the ancient Greeks who gave us the term. But it acquired philosophical and political “legs” in the Enlightenment, leading eventually to what is now roughly a worldwide belief that it is the least bad form of government and should be promoted everywhere. Democracy works because the state requires the “consent of the governed.” It thus has a harder time abusing those who are governed for the benefit of those in charge, and an easier time doing what is good for its citizens, because they will support such helpful actions.

Yet, the idea contains a hidden problem. Citizens must indicate their concerns and protect their interests through such actions as voting. And each voter has very little power over ultimate outcomes, so little that it is tempting to simply abstain and let others decide. Downs (1957) pointed out that, from the perspective of narrow self-interest, even the simple act of showing up to vote is irrational. The cost to each voter is greater than the expected influence she has over the outcome, in terms of her self-interest. In particular, your vote is “wasted” unless it is “pivotal” in determining the election outcome, and the probability of being pivotal is extremely low. The expected value of voting, the probability of being pivotal multiplied by the maximum benefit to the voter of winning, is less than the cost.

Even if the effort of showing up at the polls were worthwhile, a useful vote requires more than that. It requires finding enough information to decide how to vote to achieve the goals you have for voting (Hardin 2009). Yet the cost of such information search may be substantially reduced, or even become a benefit, for those who regard the news as a form of entertainment equivalent to a never-ending soap opera.

Democracy is hobbled because most of those in charge, citizens (excluding, perhaps, some of the news junkies), do not have much self-interested incentive to do the job they need to do. The result is that, all too often, elections are dominated by a minority of citizens who actually show up, and, among those, many who are too poorly

informed to be helpful, and others who vote out of some moralistic value, which, if put into effect by the state, makes outcomes worse rather than better.

SOCIAL NORMS FOR CITIZENS

It is widely recognized that democracy works only when it is supported by the right kind of culture. We have seen many examples of authoritarian countries that are suddenly “given” democracy by outside powers that destroyed the former rules, and are then collectively unable to use the tool that has just been put in their hands.

What I propose is that the “right kind of culture” is one that supports particular social norms of citizenship itself. I describe three of these. Although I’m sure there are others, I think these three are particularly important in today’s world.

Cosmopolitanism

I use this term even though it represents one extreme on a dimension, and any movement in this direction is, I argue, better than none. The term refers to the broadest possible concern with other people (and some would like to include other animals). Singer (1982), in a book aptly titled *The Expanding Circle*, argues that, throughout history, our concept of morally relevant beings has expanded as a result of reflection. We have gradually realized that people outside our family, village, or tribe are morally relevant, and that race and sex are morally arbitrary categories that by themselves have no relevance to moral principles. When we reflect, we realize that, one by one, all the arguments for the relevance of these categories are either wrong or can be subsumed under other principles. For an example of another principle, most people now think that children are at least as morally relevant as adults, yet we deny children many rights that adults have. This denial is not about the moral relevance of children as a category; it is based in part on protection of people from their own misjudgments, which applies as well to adults who suffer from severe mental disability.

From a moral point of view, then, we can argue that it is wrong to ignore the concerns of those outside a narrow group. If we apply this principle to voting, it implies that we should consider the effects of our vote on the entire world, now and in the future, insofar as possible. Of course, many issues placed before voters have essentially no predictable effect on those outside a particular region. In other cases, voters have a heightened obligation to vote about local issues because they are the ones most familiar with the issues (thus subsuming what appears to be in-group bias under another principle that could apply to an out-group as well).

Another argument, aside from the purely moral one, concerns voting in particular. I noted that, from the perspective of pure self-interest, taking the trouble to vote (putting aside even the trouble of collecting information bearing on the options) is not worthwhile. Even with the greatest possible benefit from your favored side winning, the probability of being a pivotal voter is so low that the expected value is close to zero. If your chance of being a pivotal voter in a national election is one in 100 million, and you stand to gain a million dollars if your favored candidate wins, the expected value of voting is one cent.

Now consider the opposite extreme. Suppose that you are not voting out of self-interest alone. You care about other people. In fact, you care about all other people, now and in the future, who might be affected by the issues in an election. You count each person's utility as part of your own personal utility, surely not as much as you count your own, but to some reasonable extent. Climate change, and, more generally, issues that affect the long-term capacity of the earth to sustain human populations, are candidates for issues that affect humanity. Still, the large number of affected people changes the calculation. If your chance of being a pivotal voter in a national election is one in 100 million, and the average outcome per person out of that 10 billion is worth \$100 to that person, and you give each other person a weight of one-thousandth of the weight you give yourself, the expected value of your vote in dollars is $(100 \cdot 10,000,000,000) / (100,000,000 \cdot 1,000)$ or

\$100, which might exceed your cost of informed voting. Of course, these numbers are not particularly realistic, but the general point is that informed voting becomes rational if you care enough about other people and enough other people are affected by the issues in the vote. (Edlin, Gelman, and Kaplan 2007 have made the same argument, with different numbers.)

Note that caring only about yourself, on the one hand, and caring about all humanity, on the other, are the ends of a continuum. In between are various limitations on which other people are relevant and how much you care about them. Thus, many people vote for what they see as best for their nation, in a national election, or for their city, in a municipal election. Often, the issues before the voters do not affect outsiders enough to worry about, so these limitations would not change anything for people who cared about all humanity. But, as I shall note, in other cases the issues do have broader effects.

The general point is that voting and gathering relevant information become more rational the larger the circle of concern (other things being equal). Pure self-interest voting is rarely rational, and parochial voting (a smaller circle than all those affected) is less likely to be rationally justified than truly cosmopolitan voting. Moreover, when the choice before us presents a conflict between small-circle and large-circle concerns, and when we do care about the larger circle, the larger number affected in the large circle raises the relative attractiveness of the latter option.

In sum, if we do care about other people in general, parochial voting is likely to be better (more rationally justified) than self-interest voting, and cosmopolitan voting is likely to be best. A social norm favoring cosmopolitan voting would help people achieve their personal goals when these goals include a broad concern for others. And such a norm could also help them to develop goals for such broad concern, and perhaps also goals to follow the news. Personal goals are themselves malleable.

Anti-moralism

In June 2006, then-senator Barak Obama said something like the following (from *USA Today*, July 10): “To say that men and women should not inject their ‘personal morality’ into public policy debates is a practical absurdity; our law is by definition a codification of morality. ... [But] democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. If I am opposed to abortion for religious reasons but seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.”

The idea that church and state should be separate was part of the US Bill of Rights, and it has been incorporated into the constitutions of many other countries, which are then said to have secular governments. Of course, constitutional prescriptions and reality do not always agree. England, for example, has an official religion, but surely honors this separation more than many countries that are secular largely on paper.

But Obama’s statement goes beyond the sort of separation that is required by law. It is a statement of what should be a social norm, and an explanation of the reason for such a norm. It is instructive to compare the serious arguments about abortion in the literature on moral philosophy with the way this issue is debated in public discourse. Most of those who support one side or the other simply try to get those on the same side to vote, without trying to convince anyone of anything. Those who do make arguments rely on emotion-arousing anecdotes or images, or they use weak arguments, easily rejected by their opponents (Baron 1995). “Abortion is the murder of an unborn child” surely begs the question, as does “Women have the right to control their bodies.”

Many abortion opponents derive their opposition from their understanding of religious doctrine, often based on some interpre-

tation of religious texts. They do not explain to those of “all faiths” why such doctrine should have any relevance to public policy. They thus try to impose their views on others who do not accept them and who have as yet no reason to accept them. In the matter of abortion in the United States, this strategy has largely failed because its strongest opponents are not in a strong majority. However, Islamists have come to power in some countries, thus moving toward making the religious law of Islam into the law of the land. In these cases, a majority imposes its will on a minority, again without any argument except that one particular religion specifies a set of laws. Some have argued that the Bharatiya Janata Party in India is moving in a similar direction, imposing Hindu precepts on some laws, even though India is constitutionally secular.

Such ways of enforcing, or trying to enforce, religious doctrine seem unlikely to realize the potential benefits of democracy over authoritarian government, where the sovereign can also impose his will on the population without regard for their true interests. Even when such an imposition has majority support, a reasoned debate could lead people to understand the position of the minority and make provisions for its members.

Actively Open-Minded Thinking (AOT)

Good thinking about policy should follow the same standards as good thinking about anything else. It should be reflective in a particular way. The explicit concept of reflective thought as something to be encouraged is fairly recent in the development of human cultures. Surely it emerged more than once, but in Western culture it seems to have originated with the Greeks, a few hundred years before Christ. In the writings of philosophers, it has been discussed more or less continuously since them. One high point was the influential *Port Royal Logic* of 1662 (Arnauld 1964).

John Stuart Mill was perhaps the clearest nineteenth-century advocate of reflective thought. In *On Liberty* (1859, chap. 2), he writes (as part of a longer argument):

The whole strength and value, then, of human judgment, depending on the one property, that it can be set right when it is wrong, reliance can be placed on it only when the means of setting it right are kept constantly at hand. In the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him; to profit by as much of it as was just, and expound to himself, and upon occasion to others, the fallacy of what was fallacious.

Other philosophers have also made much of this theme, especially John Dewey ([1901] 2012), and John Rawls (1971), who discussed “reflective equilibrium” as a method of inquiry in philosophy itself.

Several researchers have developed this idea into a concept of actively open-minded thinking, which can be understood as the disposition to be fair towards different conclusions even if they go against one’s initially favored or pet conclusion. Baron (1993, 1995, [1988] 2008) proposed a general framework for discussing thinking in terms of search for “possibilities, evidence and goals” and making inferences from these, and also outlined a general theory of where thinking often goes wrong, specifically in failing to search for possibilities and goals other than those “on screen” at the moment, failing to look hard enough for evidence against favored possibilities, and under-weighting evidence against favored possibilities when it is available. Baron called this set of deficiencies “myside bias.” The general set of dispositions that would reduce these biases was called “actively open-minded thinking” (AOT). AOT is not merely being open to why a favored possibility might be wrong but also actively looking for reasons, in the spirit of Mill’s ideal. Of course, this whole approach drew heavily on earlier work, particularly that of Irving Janis and collaborators (e.g., Herek, Janis, and Huth 1987), who developed a similar framework for analysis of decision making in particular.

AOT has three functions in politics. First, it helps individuals reach conclusions that are more consistent with the available evidence and relevant goals. In the same vein, it reduces overconfidence when evidence is absent or conflicting. Second, it helps people be open to counterarguments, to listen better to each other, and to engage in true argument, rather than screaming past each other.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, AOT helps us evaluate claims of special knowledge. Individual citizens do not have the time or background to delve deeply into policies concerning trade, immigration, crime, or almost anything (Baron 1993). Partly this is a function of the low expected-value of spending time informing ourselves, but even if we are passionately involved, we cannot get to the bottom of all the issues we face. We must rely on the conclusions of others. Note that Mill's statement quoted above was not about how we should think but rather, most directly, about how we should evaluate others.

For example, science and many other forms of scholarly inquiry are based on actively open-minded thinking (AOT), refining themselves by challenging tentative beliefs. Astronomy differs from astrology because the latter has no standard procedures for thinking critically about its assertions. The same applies to a great deal of religious doctrine. Science, by contrast, engages in AOT at least as a group, if not within the heads of individual scientists. Scientists are rewarded (with publications, grants, promotions, jobs) for finding problems with the conclusions of other scientists. Individual scientists try (perhaps not always hard enough) to anticipate possible criticisms before they try to publish something. This is what makes science effective in approaching truth and understanding ever more closely.

Unfortunately, this process of criticism, carried out in public, may give the impression that "scientists don't agree." The problem is exacerbated because scientists use the same word— theory—for a proposal that remains to be tested as well as one that has survived a large number of tests and is now assumed as the basis of further advances. But many of the criticisms that get so much attention will in fact turn out to be wrong or misconceived, or they will lead to

minor modifications. And many past conclusions of science are no longer questioned.

Karl Popper (1962) called the process “conjectures and refutations.” Describing the difference between African traditional thought and Western experimental science, Popper’s follower Robin Horton (1967) put it as follows: “The essence of the experiment is that the holder of a pet theory does not just wait for events to come along and show whether or not [the theory] has a good predictive performance. He bombards it with artificially produced events in such a way that its merits or defects will show up as immediately and as clearly as possible.” (The same point would apply to observations, as well as experiments.) Scientists seek them out because they could potentially challenge some hypothesis. Horton pointed out (172–73) that African traditional thought was just as complex as science, but the former had no method for setting itself straight when it was wrong.

We have no better way. Alternatives such as “faith” or acceptance of the word of authority have no built-in mechanism for self-correction. If they are wrong, we have no way to know, and, therefore, we also have no way to know if they are right.

The argument for AOT is thus simple. Errors of judgment and poor decisions are common. Especially when judgments of different people conflict, as in beliefs about religion or public policy, at least one of the parties must be incorrect. How can we protect ourselves against such errors? The answer, the essence of AOT, was provided by Mill in the quote above.

THESE NORMS EXIST, BUT NOT ENOUGH

The needed norms exist, but some counternorms oppose them. I have conducted various informal searches of the web for “Why I voted for” and related sets of terms. It would be pointless to try to categorize and count such an unsystematic sample.¹ But it is apparent that many responses are fully consistent with what a rational voter might do. Many of these mention a specific issue that is highly important to them, such as protection of gun ownership, homosexual rights, or the

natural environment. Such responses are rational in the sense that they would be reasonable if candidates were close enough on other issues so that this issue became dominant, or if the issue in question was a signal of broader attitudes. Of course, they could also arise from self-interested or parochial voting, e.g., by gun owners or homosexuals, but we cannot tell.

In other cases, people vote on the basis of character of candidates. This could be reasonable if people believe that general character exists and that it predicts good decision making of an office holder. It is a reasonable strategy for those who (rationally) do not take the time to develop opinions about particular issues.

In other cases, parochial voting is more apparent, especially when people say that some candidate is good for “us” (implying Americans, when in fact the policy in question is obviously harmful to outsiders, viewing them as competitors rather than potential cooperators, as in matters of trade), or when the United States is specifically mentioned. Others are more narrowly parochial, as for those who view women, or Christians, as a group whose interests are paramount.

Moralistic voting is more difficult to detect, although it may lie behind the reasoning of those who vote on the single issue of opposition to abortion. (Yet serious arguments can be made that abortion is a harm to a being that morally should not be harmed.)

In sum, we have some reason to think that violation of the three social norms I have mentioned is widespread, but not at all so widespread as to warrant pessimism about whether these violations can be corrected on a large scale.

The same conclusion can be supported by psychology experiments on the three violations in question: parochialism, moralistic values, and myside bias. In each case, we find many studies that clearly support the existence of the violation in the form of a bias. Yet when the data are examined closely, it is apparent that individual differences are quite large, with some people showing no apparent bias at all. Unfortunately, many researchers demonstrate some bias by showing that the average response of a group of subjects on a

measure of the bias is greater than zero, and they conclude that “people have this bias,” when in fact all we actually know is that, in the population from which their subjects were drawn, more people have the bias of interest than the opposite bias. Or, if the opposite bias cannot exist, then we know just that some people have the bias in question.

Parochialism and Self-Interest as Norms

Recent papers (Baron 2012a, 2012b; Baron, Ritov, and Greene 2013) found parochialism in hypothetical voting decisions, i.e., willingness to vote for policies that helped in-group members but hurt outsiders so much that the overall effect was negative (even in the eyes of the subjects). Moreover, many subjects believed that this was their moral duty. We showed this, among other ways, in a study of Jewish and Palestinian students in Israel. A second result grew out of an incidental observation. Many subjects thought that their moral duty was to vote for their individual self-interest, even when this conflicted with the interests of their nation, or the world.

In particular, I have found large differences in whether people think that the duty of each citizen is to promote the good of all; the good of some group, such as a nation or ethnic group; or the good of the citizen him- or herself, regardless of the effects on others. I gave people scenarios like the following:

June, an American citizen and resident, is in the oil business. Her company builds drilling rigs for major oil companies around the world. The US government has proposed a tax increase on the use of all oil in order to reduce carbon emissions into the atmosphere. June believes strongly that this tax would help to reduce the amount of global warming, so that everyone around the world would benefit, especially those in low-lying areas that are likely to be harmed by rising oceans. But the tax would seriously hurt her business.

The government decides to have a referendum on this proposal, and the vote is expected to be close. How should June vote? (Choose one.)

- A. She should vote for the proposal.
- B. She should vote against the proposal.
- C. She should not vote.

Why? (Click all that apply.)

- A. People should vote for what they believe is in their self-interest. The best proposals would be chosen then.
- B. People should vote for what they believe is best for everyone on the whole, even if they think it will be worse for them as individuals.
- C. People should vote for what they believe is in the interests of themselves and other people like them. They should be loyal to the people in their group.

Some scenarios pitted self against group and world. That is, what was better for the self was worse for one's group and the world. Others pitted group against self and world, as a test of parochialism, a willingness to sacrifice for one's group even when the total effect on everyone is bad. I found all three types of responses (with proportions depending on the particular story). Many thought that they should vote for their self-interest; others, for their group; and others for the world.

Both parochialism and self-interest voting may be supported by a naïve theory of democracy, which is that it is a means of self-defense, either through defense of an in-group or of oneself. This is a misunderstanding, because individual democratic participation is an inefficient way to achieve this goal. Those who follow this naïve theory can subvert their own goals for advancing the general good, and, by supporting policies that do not advance the general good, they can subvert the goals of others.

Some evidence suggests that parochialism is a social norm even when it is not a moral opinion (Baron 2012a). In this study, subjects were given 20 issues involving actions that would help outsiders at the expense of insiders. I hoped that the benefits would be seen as greater than the harms, putting aside who was affected. Examples are:

- Companies hire foreigners, helping them immigrate, while some citizens who are almost as qualified do not have jobs.
- Private universities in the United States accept foreign students while rejecting some US students who are almost as well qualified.
- Nongovernmental disaster relief organizations send more help in response to a foreign disaster than to a domestic one, even though the domestic need is almost as great.
- The national government gives research grants to foreign scientists, while rejecting applications from domestic scientists who are almost as worthy.

After each item, subjects were asked several questions. The first asked whether the action was immoral, and whether it should be allowed anyway or banned. Many subjects chose answers indicating that the action was immoral and should be banned regardless of the benefits to outsiders. This indicates parochialism. Another question asked whether, if 80 percent planned to vote to ban the action, that would make the subject more or less likely to vote to ban it, or have no effect. Although most said “no effect,” more subjects said that this would make them more likely to vote to ban the action (35 percent overall) than to vote against a ban (13 percent). This suggests that subjects were sensitive to the opinions of others, indicating a social norm. Of course, as I noted, moral opinions can also function like social norms, so this result is an underestimate of the total role of social support.

Table 1: Categorization of Goals According to Baron (2003)

		Goals for your behavior	for others' behavior
<i>That are</i>	<i>dependent on others' goals</i>	Altruistic	Moral
	<i>independent of others' goals</i>	Self-Interested	Moralistic

Moralistic Values

Baron (2003, 2008) classified values or goals that enter into political behavior such as voting into four categories: self-interested, altruistic, moralistic, and moral (see table 1). Moralistic goals are (in this version) goals for others' behavior or goals. Moralistic goals, unlike moral goals, are not dependent on the goals of others. Although moralistic goals may sometimes coincide with others' goals, at other times they may conflict, as in the case of a goal that other people do not have same-sex desires, which conflicts with the goals of those who have such desires and want them to be legally protected.

Empirically, moral and moralistic goals may also be hard to distinguish. Many people holding moralistic goals probably think that these goals are in fact moral, and that their conflict with others' goals arises only because others are mistaken about some of their goals, or don't yet know them, or are mistaken about reaching the goals that they have. Opponents of homosexuality may well think that gays would be happier if they were "ex-gay." Yet Baron (2003) reports that some people acknowledge moralistic goals for others' behavior—even though they may be hard to distinguish—in the sense of admitting that they would still want others to follow particular moralistic goals even if the consequences were worse and even if the others lacked these goals.

Myside Bias

In an early demonstration, Perkins, Bushey, and Faraday (1986) asked students to write down their thoughts on issues that were "genuinely vexed and timely" and that could be discussed on the basis of knowledge that most people have, e.g., "Would providing more money

for public schools significantly improve the quality of teaching and learning?” Most students gave more arguments on their favored side, “myside” thoughts, than on the other side. When the students were asked to try harder to think of arguments on each side, they thought of very few additional myside arguments but many additional other-side arguments. Left to their own devices, then, the students looked primarily for reasons to support their initial opinion, but out of biased search rather than lack of ability or knowledge.

Baron (1991, 1995) argued that beliefs affect what people do, and supported this with correlations between subjects’ beliefs about the nature of good thinking and the subjects’ own thinking. Stanovich and West (1997, 1998) found additional supporting evidence. They constructed a questionnaire that emphasized similar beliefs. The questionnaire was designed for college students, and it contained many items that were irrelevant to nonstudents.

Several papers (reviewed by Toplak, West, and Stanovich 2014; and Stanovich 2016, table 1) found correlations between this belief scale and other tests, some of which measured biases described in the literature on judgment and decision making, including (but not limited to): baserate neglect, conjunction fallacy, framing effects, anchoring effect, sample size awareness, regression to the mean, temporal discounting, gambler’s fallacy, probability matching, overconfidence effect, outcome bias, ratio bias, ignoring $p(d/h)$, sunk cost effect, risk/benefit confounding, omission bias, expected value maximization, hindsight bias, certainty effect, willingness to pay/willingness to accept, and proportion dominance effect.

I selected items from the Stanovich/West (1997, 1998) scale and added others to make a short form appropriate for the general population, designed to assess beliefs in particular. Example items are: “People should take into consideration evidence that goes against their beliefs” and “Changing your mind is a sign of weakness.” This short form has had considerable success in predicting the results of other tasks such as perceptual judgments and reduced overconfidence in them (Haran, Ritov, and Mellers 2013), accuracy in geopolitical fore-

casting (Mellers et al. 2015), utilitarian moral judgment, and problem solving (Baron et al. 2015, using a slightly extended version).²

The fact that this short belief measure (and others like it) correlates with task performance suggests that efforts to explain to people the value of AOT, thus changing their beliefs to make them more favorable toward AOT, could result in improved performance on many tasks that involve thinking.

For the purpose of looking at how people think, this scale is not ideal because it does not measure thinking itself. However, it is surely more useful as measures of social-norm endorsement, since people would presumably endorse the kind of thinking that they think is good. And as noted, AOT beliefs provide a basis for evaluation of the credibility of various experts.

The low scores on this scale are somewhat surprising, since the items almost seem to be measuring social desirability. Who could be against open-mindedness? One possible answer, suggested in Baron (2008) and supported in Baron et al. (2015), is that some people grow up in cultures that oppose questioning, lest children come to question doctrines dictated by authority. Baron et al. (2015) find large negative correlations between AOT and a measure of belief in “divine command theory” (Piazza and Landy 2013), the idea that people do not have the capacity to engage in moral reasoning or to understand it, so that we must accept the word of God without question. It would appear that some cultural institutions, in order to prevent questioning of their authority, tend to inculcate the belief that thinking, curiosity, and questioning are more generally undesirable. To the extent to which this is true, the promotion of AOT becomes part of a “culture war” rather than a technical problem.

It is important to point out that, in all these studies, and others (e.g., Baron 2009), individual differences are large. Some people do engage in AOT, and believe that it is the way people ought to think, and some do not. Myside bias is not a “hardwired” part of human nature, in the way that most visual illusions probably are.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR DOING SOMETHING

The three social norms I have discussed—and surely others I have not discussed—should be encouraged around the world in order to realize the promise of democratic government. This sometimes happens, especially with AOT. AOT is the essence of good scholarship, so it is encouraged in universities, and to some extent in schools (Baron 1993). Journalists sometimes criticize politicians for ignoring arguments on the other side, often implicitly by interviewing people “on both sides” (albeit with some danger of “false balance”). Yet, as I noted, AOT is opposed by conflicting norms as part of the “culture war.” This war must be fought. AOT is better, and we must explain why.

Antimoralism and cosmopolitanism are not encouraged much. In school courses on government, or classes for new citizens, there seems to be very little discussion of the proper attitude toward the duties of citizenship. News media sometimes criticize politicians for “appealing to their base” rather than “reaching out to others,” but the nature of the problem is rarely made clear. Appeals to the base are often grounded in moral assumptions that are not widely accepted, and are presented with no arguments about why they should be accepted.

Although Perkins, Bushey, and Faraday (1986) found no effect of participation in formal debates on AOT, such debates might help reduce excessive moralism, because the goal of debates is to convince those judging the debates, and, ideally, the debaters do not know the views of the judges and must appeal to all.

Comopolitanism is widespread, especially among young people who move between countries, but, since the days of John Lennon’s “Imagine,” has not been widely encouraged or endorsed as a norm. Indeed, college students generally do not get criticized for using “we” in a paper, unthinkingly, to refer to Americans, and politicians are rarely criticized on moral grounds for advocating policies that are harmful to foreigners. In public political discourse, foreigners are often treated as if they did not exist, much the way blacks were treated when the only blacks in view were slaves. Populist political movements actively encourage norms of parochialism and self-interest.

These norms seem to change over time and place. Self-interest voting, for example, seems to have increased in the United States over the last 40 years, possibly because politicians themselves have encouraged it. Miller (1999) makes this point, citing relevant statistics. President Kennedy, in 1960, asked voters to ask themselves what they could do for others, but Ronald Reagan, in 1980, said: “Ask yourself, are you better off today than you were four years ago?”

If citizens are going to use their political power for the good of their fellow citizens, and for the good of people of the future and those living elsewhere, it might help to tell them that they are at least free to do this, and not compelled by any moral rules to vote for their narrow self-interest or the parochial interest of their group.

A few devices can reduce parochialism. First, parochialism is supported by the “illusion of morality as self-interest” (Baron 2001, 2012a). People think that cooperation (in which individuals contribute to help their group) is actually in their self-interest. They reason, “What I contribute helps my group. I am a member of my group. Therefore, my contribution helps me.” This argument neglects the fact that the part that “comes back” is less than the contribution. This illusion is larger when the group is easily identified as the subject’s in-group. When subjects are forced to calculate the self-interest benefit of their contribution, along with its benefit for others, both the self-interest illusion and parochialism itself are reduced. Thus, parochialism seems to result in part from a misunderstanding of the nature of cooperation.

Second, parochialism is greater when outsiders are thought of as a group rather than as individuals (Baron 2012a). We have all heard stories about people who oppose illegal immigration while, at the same time, going out of their way to help particular illegal immigrants. Groups like Americans, Fascists, or communists are constructed abstractions. Parochialism might be ameliorated by focusing on the humanity of individual out-group members.

Third, parochialism is supported by beliefs about the moral duty of citizens (Baron 2012a,b; Baron, Ritov, and Greene 2013). Yet

other results indicate that some individuals do not show parochialism but are truly cosmopolitan in their judgments (Buchan et al. 2009, 2011). These results suggest that parochialism arises in part from malleable cultural norms about what our duties are. Cultures that promote parochialism might remain more cohesive over time. But, as argued by Singer (1982), cultural norms that support parochialism are fragile when faced with demands for justification.

It is unclear whether the “natural” state of human beings is parochialism or cosmopolitanism. The application of reason to support the latter may be required largely in opposition to cultural forces that drive the former. Although evolutionary accounts of parochialism are possible, it is also possible that parochialism did not evolve biologically at all but is the result of cognitive abstractions. Its existence could be determined by other factors, such as cultural evolution or cognitive processes operating within individuals.

NOTES

1. It is worthy of mention that, before doing this, I searched Google Scholar using probes such as “stated reasons for vote” and found essentially nothing. My impression is that the disciplines of political science and political psychology are primarily concerned with the prediction of voting behavior rather than how people think about voting.
2. The current version is at <http://sjdm.org/dmidi/Actively-Open-Minded-Thinking-Beliefs.html>.

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