

EPISTEMIC DEMOCRACY AND THE TRUTH CONNECTION

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ABSTRACT

If political decision-making aims at getting a particular result, like identifying just laws or policies that truly promote the common good, then political institutions can also be evaluated in terms of how often they achieve these results. Epistemic defenses of democracy argue that democracies have the upper hand when it comes to truth, identifying the laws and policies that are truly just or conducive to the common good. A number of epistemic democrats claim that democracies have this beneficial connection to truth because of the type of deliberative environment created by democratic political institutions. Democratic political cultures make it easier to exchange and give reasons, ultimately improving the justification that citizens have for their political beliefs. With this improved justification comes a better chance at truth, or so the story goes. In this paper, I show that attempts to forge a connection between justification and truth in epistemology have encountered numerous difficulties, making the case that this causes trouble for deliberative epistemic defenses of democracy as well. If there is no well-defined connection between truth and justification, then increasing the justification that citizens have for their beliefs may not also increase the likelihood that those beliefs are true, revealing a serious flaw in charting a connection between political justification and political truth.¹

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INTRODUCTION

Epistemic theories of democracy hold that democratic political institutions have a valuable connection to truth. On some accounts, democratic procedures are thought to always select the optimal political policy. Other perspectives argue that, while democracies do not ensure that the best policy will always be chosen, democratic decision-making increases the likelihood of selecting such policies. This is the first component of epistemic defenses of democracy, that democracies have a truth-tracking feature that makes them preferable to other political institutions:

Truth-Tracking – Democracies track the truth better than other political institutions

According to **Truth-Tracking**, democracies have a tighter connection with truth than other sorts of political institutions. This truth-tracking feature of democracies plays out in terms of the laws and policies selected by democratic institutions – these institutions are better, the thought goes, at selecting the best legislation. The shape of such legislation depends on the task at hand. In some contexts, the goal is to select just laws and policies. In others, the aim is to choose legislation that will be most effective in securing the common good. Of course, in many instances, it could be that making laws that promote justice and laws that secure the common good coincide.² **Truth-Tracking** can, in principle, be applied to all of these scenarios – it is possible to ask whether a law truly reflects the principles of justice or truly provides for the common good. The common thread running through **Truth-Tracking** arguments in favor of democracy is that democratic decision-making is preferable because of its ability to track the truth about these important matters.

It is not by chance that democracies are thought to satisfy **Truth-Tracking**. Instead, many advocates of truth-tracking theories, like David Estlund and Helene Landmore, hold that democracies are effective at tracking the truth because a democratic political culture improves the epistemic justification that citizens have for their political beliefs.³ For this reason, there is taken to be a tight connection between **Truth-Tracking** and **Justification**:

Justification – Democratic political cultures create deliberative environments that increase the justification that citizens have for their political beliefs

²One common criticism of truth-tracking arguments for democracy is that it is nonsensical to talk about a “true” political policy. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume that sense can be made of truth-tracking within the political sphere, though if it cannot, this poses another serious problem for truth-tracking cases for democracy. For a defense of this idea and the role that truth plays in political deliberation, see Estlund (2009), Ch. 2 and Landmore (2012), Ch. 8.

³Discussions of political institutions often debate whether or not such institutions are justified, but that is not the sort of justification I have in mind. By ‘epistemic justification,’ I refer to the notion of justification central to epistemology, the justification of belief.

The thought with **Justification** is that there are features of the political cultures of democracies that make citizens better justified in their political beliefs. These characteristics include cognitive diversity, egalitarian sharing of reasons, and equal access to debate. A number of truth-tracking accounts of democracy thus have two features – that democratic procedures are more likely to select correct political policies and that this is the case because voters are better justified in their political beliefs. The thought goes that, when citizens have better justified political beliefs, this results in better policy-choice so far as the truth is concerned. In Section 1, I examine Estlund’s and Landemore’s accounts of epistemic democracy, noting that they emphasize not only the truth of the policies selected by democratic institutions, but also that correct selection occurs due to the justification citizens have for their political beliefs. These accounts take it that, because democracies fulfill **Justification**, they will also satisfy **Truth-Tracking**.

In Section 2, I point out that a key assumption of this two-pronged strategy, that there is a well-defined connection between truth and justification, has serious difficulties. A necessary assumption for such epistemic defenses of democracy to go through is that epistemic justification has a connection to truth. A constituency with better justified beliefs can only more effectively identify the truth if having better justified beliefs in fact makes one better at locating the truth. This of course is a very natural thought, that justification marches lockstep with likelihood of truth, but it is a thought that has failed to be substantiated within contemporary epistemology, undermining democratic theories that appeal to the connection between justification and truth. There is thus a substantial difficulty for **Truth-Tracking** defenses of democracy that also depend on **Justification**, a challenge which I detail in Section 3.

I conclude the paper in Section 4 by showing that the combination of **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking** in many theories of epistemic democracy obscures an important choice point in epistemic defenses of democracy more generally: Would we rather have better justified laws or laws that hew closer to the truth? If the arguments of this paper are correct, these two questions come apart at a fundamental level, requiring that political theorists get clearer about what they are pursuing when they advocate an epistemic defense of democracy. Views that focus on the ways in which democracies improve the reasons citizens have for their belief, rather than substantiating **Truth-Tracking** instead suggest accounts on which democracies select, not policies that are more likely to be true, but policies that are better justified than alternatives.

One issue that is relevant before we begin is that there has already been a fair amount of work criticizing **Truth-Tracking**. The general thrust of these objections has been that, as a matter of fact, actual democracies do not do a good job of tracking the truth. The reasons this is thought to occur are myriad: The pressure for consensus drives groupthink rather than critical evaluation, voters have little incentive to be well-informed about political issues, and politicians have

more reason to cultivate rhetorical flair rather than political expertise. What these worries all have in common is that they attempt to deny **Truth-Tracking** by undermining **Justification**. It is thought that, because of groupthink, voter ignorance, or political incompetence, it is not plausible that citizens have better reasons for their political beliefs.⁴ My critique, however, goes further. I argue that, even if the issues that lead to problems with **Justification** can be resolved, this still will not mean that democratic institutions satisfy **Truth-Tracking**. My argument instead drives a wedge between **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**, pointing out that even if advocates of epistemic democracy can rebut the criticisms of **Justification**, this is not yet to argue that democracies satisfy **Truth-Tracking**, showing that resolving those issues is not the only challenge facing deliberative epistemic defenses of democracy.

1 TRUTH-TRACKING CONCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

1.1 PRELIMINARIES

There are a number of different positions on offer that fall under the banner of epistemic defenses of democracy – what they all have in common is a commitment to **Truth-Tracking**. Not all such views, however, will be the target of this paper. I will only be interested in views that endorse both **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**. There are thus a number of epistemic arguments for democracy that escape the criticisms of this paper.

One variety of epistemic defense of democracy that does not explicitly endorse **Justification** are accounts that rest on preference aggregation. According to this sort of epistemic argument for democracy, democratic procedures are valuable for selecting the best political policy because they are an ideal way to aggregate preferences. On this model, what matters is combining the individual preferences of all citizens, and counting votes makes such a tabulation possible, thus giving rise to the policy that best satisfies individual preferences. Though this type of view faces several difficulties, preference aggregation accounts are not the target of this paper. Even though these accounts may be committed to discovering the truth about the preferences of its citizens, preference aggregation defenses of democracy are not committed to **Justification**. In this model, it does not necessarily matter how citizens arrived at the preferences they have – what counts is whether democratic procedures are effective for aggregating those individual preferences that already exist. Because aggregation views of democracy do not take up **Justification**, the arguments of this paper are not directed towards such views.

Another sort of view that lies beyond the purview of this paper are the results touted by the Condorcet Jury theorem. Condorcet showed that, if independent voters are each more likely than not to get the right answer about a political

⁴For views along these lines, see Brennan, (2016), Caplan (2007), Solomon (2006), and Somin (2016).

question, then a large numbers of voters virtually ensures that the best political policy will be chosen.⁵ One assumption of Condorcet’s theorem, however, is that citizens form their views independently of other voters, practically the antithesis of the deliberative environment encouraged by **Justification**. According to **Justification**, it is precisely because voters do not form their political beliefs independently that they better track the truth. Thus, even though defenses of democracy that rely on Condorcet do advocate **Truth-Tracking**, they do not do so because of **Justification**. If all voters form their beliefs independently, then there is no collective deliberation about political decisions. For this reason, epistemic defenses of democracy that rely on the Condorcet result are also not the target of this paper.⁶

Instead of focusing on preference aggregation or Condorcet-motivated views of epistemic democracy, this paper instead hopes to make a criticism of epistemic defenses of democracy that advocate both **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**. On such views, it is because democracies create particular kinds of epistemic environments that they satisfy **Truth-Tracking**, not because democracy is effective for preference aggregation or independent belief formation. The target of this paper then are views that take the middle route to **Truth-Tracking** in Figure 1 that argue that democracy tracks the truth because of their unique deliberative environments. For the sake of clarity then, I will refer to such defenses of democracy as deliberative epistemic defenses of democracy.

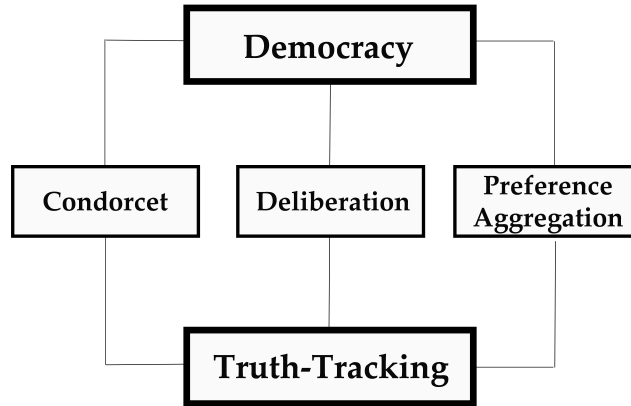


Figure 1: Deliberative Epistemic Democracy

⁵For a discussion of the original jury theorem and various ways to strengthen its results, see List and Goodin (2001).

⁶Through for work that modifies the independence assumption in order to account for real world deliberation, see Goodin and Spiekermann (), pp. 67-82

1.2 DELIBERATIVE EPISTEMIC DEMOCRACY

One recent account of deliberative epistemic democracy that traces a connection between **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking** is David Estlund's *Democratic Authority*. Estlund holds that democracies are preferable because of their effectiveness in identifying the true requirements of justice. This epistemic power is quite modest – on Estlund's view, democracies are (1) better than random in selecting the true principles of justice and (2) better than other political arrangements.⁷ In this way, Estlund's account has a truth-tracking component. Why think that democracy does better than other political arrangements at selecting the true principles of justice? Estlund holds that democracies are effective at approximating model epistemic deliberation in that they promote everyone having equal opportunity for sharing their reasons for their political beliefs.⁸ With access to more evidence for and against what they believe, citizens are able to take more into account when forming their political beliefs. Because citizens are able to appreciate more relevant reasons and have better justified beliefs than they would have otherwise, the likelihood that their judgments will lead to the best outcome increases. The reason then that **Truth-Tracking** occurs is because democracy supports the kind of epistemic environment that also satisfies **Justification**. Estlund's account of democracy thus ties together these two strands – both truth and justification play a role in his deliberative epistemic defense of democracy.

Another recent example that draws a link between **Truth-Tracking** and **Justification** is Helene Landemore's deliberative epistemic argument for democracy in *Democratic Reason*. According to Landemore, democracies are better than other political arrangements at selecting the best political policies.⁹ Like Estlund, Landemore argues that democratic procedures are both better than random at identifying the best political policies and more effective than other political arrangements, including dictatorships, oligarchies, and epistocracies. This, of course, is the **Truth-Tracking** plank of epistemic defenses of democracy – that democracies have an inside-track when it comes to making the right political decisions. What is it about democracies that give them this epistemic power? Landemore makes the case that cognitive diversity plays an important role in effective group decision-making, the kind of diversity that democracy is well-positioned to capture. Cognitive diversity has this beneficial effect on group deliberation because a diverse group of citizens bring more to the table, both in terms of potential solutions and reasons for and against adopting different

⁷See Estlund (2009), p. 98. Estlund also holds that the policy selection procedure must be acceptable to all qualified points of view, a criterion he uses to rule out forms of government that are not justifiable via public reason. The epistemic element of Estlund's view is thus only one component of his defense of democracy. For how the qualified acceptability requirement bears on the arguments of this paper, see Section 4.

⁸See Estlund (2009), Ch. 9.

⁹For those who are concerned that it might be ultimately incoherent to describe political policies as satisfying some external criterion of correctness, Landemore (2012) offers a defense of this supposition (Ch. 8).

solutions.¹⁰ This exposure to a diversity of reasons and solutions then improves the ability of the group to identify the best solution to the problem. Landemore thus argues that, to the extent that democracies are the most cognitively diverse political arrangement, they also satisfy **Truth-Tracking**. Here, then, we can see the connection again between **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**. It is in virtue of the deliberative process captured by democratic political cultures that citizens improve the reasons for their political beliefs, leading to better political decisions.

Even though Estlund and Landemore give different reasons for the epistemic powers of democracy, they both forward deliberative epistemic defenses of democracy. On the one hand, Estlund argues for the **Truth-Tracking** conclusion because democracy provides all citizens with equal opportunity for sharing their reasons and viewpoints, coming closest to instantiating model epistemic deliberation. Landemore, on the other hand, contends that cognitive diversity is what enables democracy to satisfy **Truth-Tracking**. What they have in common is that they both defend **Truth-Tracking** because of **Justification**, that it is the deliberative environment created by democracies that enable them to make the best political decisions. These, then, are the sorts of views that are issue in this paper, views which require a connection between justification and truth in order to make a case for **Truth-Tracking**.

2 THE TRUTH CONNECTION IN EPISTEMOLOGY

Theories of epistemic democracy accept **Truth-Tracking**, that there is a close connection between democratic procedures and truth. A number of these accounts, views like Estlund's and Landemore's, hold that the connection with truth is forged due to **Justification**. On these accounts, democratic procedures give way to better judgments because collective democratic decision-making makes citizens better justified in their political beliefs. There is thus a hope running throughout deliberative epistemic democracy that there is a connection between better justified political beliefs and better policies, that **Justification** leads to **Truth-Tracking**. Close attention to recent work in epistemology, however, undermines such optimism. As we will see, the thought that justified beliefs have a particular relationship to truth has not been able to be substantiated. In this section, I will survey possible routes to securing a connection between justification and truth, ultimately concluding that none of them will provide a firm foundation for those who offer an epistemic defense of democracy.

Before we examine these views on the connection between truth and justification, I should note that I do not take the objections listed in this section to be decisive. There are a number of possible avenues for response, many of which I make note, and I will not have the space here to consider all such possibilities. My intention, rather, is to illustrate the difficulties that have prevented

¹⁰See Landemore (2012), p. 102.

each of these proposals from enjoying wide endorsement within epistemology. Likewise, I do not take the options presented in this section to be logically exhaustive of the possible links between truth and justification – there are other possibilities, and variations on those possibilities, that will not be surveyed here. Summarizing the difficulties, however, of some of the most prominent proposals attempting to connect truth with justification makes clear why there is no consensus in epistemology that justification is coupled with truth. This fact alone is enough to make trouble for the deliberative epistemic democrat – until we have a better idea of how justification is connected to truth, we also will not know if **Justification** actually leads to **Truth-Tracking**.

2.1 ENTAILMENT

An early view of epistemic justification that attempted to make the connection between justification and truth explicit was Descartes’s view that having a justified belief that p entails that p is true. The Cartesian thought is that no belief should be taken on unless it is beyond doubt, and a belief is beyond doubt only when it follows deductively from one’s evidence. The *cogito* then gains purchase because, regardless of how deceived I am, it is entailed by the fact that I am thinking that I exist. The failure of the Cartesian project, however, came because this standard of justification is far too strong. There are many everyday propositions that we are justified in believing that are nevertheless not entailed by our experiences. It is conceptually possible that many of our beliefs are due to the machinations of a Cartesian demon, but we are nevertheless justified in our ordinary beliefs about the external world. The majority of philosophers have thus taken the lesson from DesCartes that the relationship between justification and truth is something less than entailment.¹¹

2.2 PROCESS RELIABILISM

Because the Cartesian project was ultimately untenable, epistemologists have explored views of epistemic justification on which the connection with truth is weaker than entailment. An influential view in this spirit is process reliabilism. Reliabilism attempts to characterize justification in terms of how well certain processes of belief formation result in true beliefs. For simplicity’s sake, let’s consider a process reliable if it produces more true than false beliefs.¹² Reliabilism is one strategy for attempting to make the relationship between justification and truth explicit without a Cartesian entailment requirement. On reliabilism,

¹¹It should be noted that Descartes does not explicitly discuss epistemic justification. Instead, he discusses when one ought to assent to beliefs. One promising interpretation of this view, of course, is that Descartes is taking a stand on when one is justified in holding a belief, see Bonjour (2009), pp. 39-40. Even if this is not the best way to characterize Descartes, however, there are nevertheless others who have defended a connection of entailment between justification and truth, see McGrew (1995 and 1998).

¹²This is a toy theory of reliability in comparison to Goldman’s original thoughts on reliability, but it should be adequate to point out the difficulties for process reliabilism (See Goldman (1979) p. 11).

what it is to have a justified belief is to have a belief that was produced by a truth-related process, in this case, a process that produces true beliefs better than half of the time.

Process reliabilism failed, however, because the link it proposed between truth and justification does not obtain. Believers can be justified regardless of the truth-efficacy of their belief forming processes. Consider the following counterexample to reliabilism:

New Evil Demon

Suppose that I have a counterpart in a possible world that is controlled by a Cartesian demon. Everything appears to my counterpart precisely as it appears to me and they have every reason to believe what I do in the actual world. Now, as it turns out, their belief-forming processes are completely unreliable due to the malevolence of the Cartesian demon.¹³

The counterpart is clearly justified in their beliefs, just as justified as I am in the actual world, but none of their belief-forming processes are reliable. The majority of their beliefs are false and always have been, but they are nevertheless justified. The way the process reliabilist conceives of the interface between truth and justification is thus misguided – justification does not require that a belief is produced by a reliable process.¹⁴

2.3 PROBABILITY-RAISING

In the wake of the failures of Descartes's necessitation account and Goldman's process reliabilism, there have been other proposals for how to connect justification with truth. One influential thought has been that, instead of the reasons for p necessitating that p , the reasons for p instead just raise p 's probability. A number of epistemologists have endorsed such a conception, with some even taking it to be a fundamental assumption about epistemic justification. Richard Fumerton, for example, says that "whatever else epistemic justification for believing some proposition is, it must make probable the truth of the proposition believed."¹⁵ Following closely on the heels of a probabilistic account of justification is a probabilistic account of evidence. Just like with justification, probabilistic accounts of evidence say that all evidence that p makes p more

¹³This example is due to Cohen (1984), p. 281.

¹⁴Though the New Evil Demon is widely taken to decisively show that reliable processes are not necessary for justification, dissenters include Bach (1985), Brewer (1997), Engel (1992), Goldman (1986), Littlejohn (2009), and Sutton (2005). Lasonen-Aarnio (Forthcoming) holds that the counterpart in the demon scenario, while perhaps not having justified beliefs, nevertheless has reasonable beliefs. While distinct from justified belief, reasonable belief is extensionally very close to justified belief and thus can account for the intuition that the counterpart is doing something right in the New Evil Demon scenario.

¹⁵See Fumerton (2005), p. 205. For another formulation of justification in terms of probability, see Steup (2005).

probable.¹⁶ The probabilistic conception of justification and evidence is thus deeply ingrained in contemporary epistemology as an attempt to connect truth and justification.

The difficult question for a probabilistic interpretation of justification, however, is how to construe an epistemic notion of probability. The counterpart in the demon world has very few true beliefs, so whatever notion of probability we give will have to rule that their beliefs are probable given their reasons. One potential thought is that they find themselves in quite an unusual world, and on the whole, possible worlds in which agent's have all of the counterpart's reasons for belief are like the actual world. This promising thought, however, is difficult, if not impossible, to make good on. To begin with, there are an infinite number of possible worlds, and so we will be appealing to equivalence classes of infinite possibilities. On this way of understanding the problem though, there is no way to capitalize on the thought that p is true in a greater proportion of the worlds in which the subject has good reason to believe p . Worlds where the subject has good reason to believe that p are either veridical or deceptive – in the former case p is true and in the latter the subject is deceived. Because there are an infinite number of veridical worlds, there is a way to sort the worlds such that, for each deceptive world, it is sorted into an equivalence class with only one deceptive world and an infinite number of veridical worlds. But because there are also an infinite number of deceptive worlds, there is also a way to sort the worlds where, for every single veridical world, there are an infinite number of deceptive worlds. The parody argument thus shows that the thought that a greater proportion of worlds where an agent possesses good evidence for p are veridical is unfounded. Finding an understanding of probability that tracks epistemic justification is thus a significant challenge.

Perhaps there is an interpretation of the sort of probability at play with justification that can respond to the above worries – my goal is not to argue that the objection I have offered is decisive. Rather, my objective is to note the difficulties that have prevented epistemologists from widely accepting any account of the connection between truth and justification. Just as necessitation and process reliabilist accounts of this link have serious issues, so do epistemic interpretations of probability. The difficulty runs so deep, in fact, that many

¹⁶Those who defend a positive relevance account of evidence include Carnap (1962), Hesse (1974), Kearns and Star (2009), Kronz (1992), Maher (1996), Roush (2004), and Swinburne (1973). For those who are evidentialists, taking the degree of justification to be solely a factor of evidential support, a probabilistic account of justification follows straightforwardly from a probabilistic conception of evidence. This will not be true for those who think that there are other factors involved in justification – Cohen's (1998) view is that to have a justified belief is to be able to rule out all salient error possibilities, with contextual effects altering what is salient (p. 292, fn. 11), while Fantl and McGrath (2002) take which beliefs are justified to be effected by whether one can act as if p given the stakes of one's practical situation. On these views, even though evidential support is not the only consideration when determining the strength of one's justification, the force of one's evidence nevertheless also plays a role in the justification of belief.

epistemologists have simply abandoned the thought that epistemic probabilities are connected to the truth, instead arguing that epistemic probabilities are just subjective degrees of confidence. There is thus far from a consensus that the probability-raising view of justification is correct, and if it is, whether these probabilities have anything to do with truth.

3 THE TRUTH CONNECTION AND DEMOCRACY

So what is the relationship between justification and truth? The failures of the preceding accounts – entailment, process reliabilism, and probability-raising – undermine the thought that there is a connection between justification and truth, and many epistemologists now do not think that there is a way to make sense of justification in terms of truth.¹⁷ Given that there is no accepted way to secure the connection between justification and truth in epistemology, it will also be difficult to make sense of the idea that **Justification** promotes **Truth-Tracking**. The deliberative epistemic arguments for democracy that we have seen, though, depend on the thought that, by improving the reasons that citizens have for their beliefs, democracies will be better able to track the truth. In this section, we will see that the ways to understand the proposals of deliberative epistemic democrats mirror the proposals that attempt to connect epistemic justification and truth, revealing that the difficulty in epistemology carries over to epistemic defenses of democracy.

Estlund and Landemore clearly do not think that democratic procedures guarantee **Truth-Tracking**, so the Cartesian view is off the table. The other views though, process reliabilism and probability-raising, can make sense of some of the comments by Estlund and Landemore. Suppose, for example, that we interpret Estlund’s and Landemore’s comments about democracy having a better than random chance of making the correct political decision as advocating that democratic procedures are justified because they select the right answer more than half the time. The best way to understand the epistemic defense of democracy, then, is as a form of democratic reliabilism, that democracies are the best political arrangements because they embody a reliable process, positioning epistemic democrats as depending on the reliabilist proposal as the correct account of the connection between justification and truth.

Just as with process reliabilism, however, democratic reliabilism is decisively refuted by the possibility of the demon world. The New Evil Demon world demonstrates that there is no connection between justification-conferring processes and truth. Likewise, a Democratic Demon scenario would be one in which, despite using democratic procedures, no democratic political decisions end up getting the right result because of the deception of a Cartesian demon. Due to open deliberation and cognitive diversity, the citizenry of a demon world democracy would be very well justified in their political beliefs, but that does

¹⁷See, for example, Berker (2013a and 2013b) and Cohen (1984).

not also mean that they will have a better than random chance at identifying the best policy. Because they suffer from demon-deception, their beliefs will be mostly false, preventing them from making sound political decisions. Thus, even if Estlund and Landemore are right that democracies satisfy **Justification**, this does not guarantee that they also satisfy **Truth-Tracking**.

Perhaps, instead of taking Estlund and Landemore to be reliabilists, we should take them instead as thinking that democratic procedures raise the probability that a political decision is correct. That is an alternative way of understanding democracy's "better than random" chance of getting the right result, that democratic deliberation makes the probability of getting the right answer great than fifty percent. Estlund at points appears to explicitly endorse such a conception, that policies chosen by democratic procedure are more likely than not to be true.¹⁸ Like with reliabilism, however, because the probability-raising conception of epistemic justification founders, a probability-raising conception of democratic deliberation is also doomed. As with epistemic justification, there is no sense in which, across infinite possible worlds, democracies are more likely to choose the best policies than not. For this reason, deliberative epistemic democrats should not want to be interpreted as endorsing a probability-raising connection between **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**.

The lesson from epistemological work on justification and truth should now be clear. It is dubious that there is a well-defined connection between truth and justification – likewise, there is a serious concern that there is no such connection between **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**. Deliberative epistemic democrats may be right about **Justification**, that open deliberation and cognitive diversity provide citizens with better reasons for their beliefs than they otherwise would have had, but this is not enough to also claim **Truth-Tracking** for democracy.

4 THE WAY FORWARD FOR EPISTEMIC DEMOCRATS

Given the difficulty connecting truth and justification, how should deliberative epistemic democrats proceed? A few avenues present themselves. Deliberative epistemic democrats could attempt to save the link between justification and truth, staking out a particular strategy for connecting truth and justification. Making this case would restore the close association between **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**, making it viable to argue for both in a defense of democracy. Failing this, however, deliberative epistemic democrats will have to make a choice – what is the more important, foundational political value, **Justification** or **Truth-Tracking**?

¹⁸See Estlund (2009), p. 114.

4.1 RESTORING THE LINK?

One way to restore the link between truth and justification would be to adopt Knowledge First Epistemology as advocated by Timothy Williamson. On Williamson's view, epistemology went wrong when it tried to analyze knowledge. The task, instead, is to understand epistemic notions like justification *in terms of* knowledge. In keeping with this approach, Williamson proposes that knowledge is what justifies belief: "In any possible situation in which one believes a proposition p , that belief is justified, if at all, by propositions q_1, \dots, q_n (usually other than p) which one knows."¹⁹ Here Williamson stumps for a factive view of justification. Only truths can be known, so if one's justification consists only of knowledge, then the justification that a person has for their beliefs is completely made up of truths.

At first glance, this seems advantageous for epistemic democrats. On Williamson's way of thinking, **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking** would not come apart – the more truths that citizens know, the more justification they have for their political beliefs. Using Knowledge First to restore the link between **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**, however, comes with a significant cost. Because justification is limited to knowledge, the citizens in the demon world hardly have any justification for their beliefs. Most of what they think they know is false, precluding them from having justification for the majority of their beliefs, including what they believe in the political realm. Williamson confirms that this is the case by characterizing victims of skeptical scenarios as excused yet nevertheless unjustified in their beliefs.²⁰ This position is even worse than what we saw in Section 3 – when **Justification** could diverge from **Truth-Tracking**, democracy in the demon world could at least increase the justification that citizens had for their beliefs even when it failed to increase the number of truths that they believed. Now, however, inhabitants in the demon world are deprived of both **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**, hardly an inspiring defense of the epistemic benefits of democracy.

Another possibility for restoring the link between truth and justification would be to ask why we should be concerned with demon worlds or infinite sets of possible worlds at all. What counts – what matters to Estlund and Landemore – is whether democracy is truth-tracking in the actual world. Why, then, do we need to consider the epistemic merits of other possible worlds? While promising, this line of response does have a significant drawback. The primary worry of proceeding along these lines is that it makes the deliberative epistemic case for democracy merely contingent – only in worlds like the actual world is democracy the best form of government. If deliberative epistemic democrats are willing to accept that, in the demon world, democracy is no longer the best

¹⁹See Williamson (2000), p. 185.

²⁰See Williamson (Forthcoming). Clayton Littlejohn, another recent advocate of the factivity of justification, stumps for the same view, that the deceived are excused but not justified, see his (2012 and Forthcoming).

form of government because it does not have a better than random chance at securing the right result, then emphasizing the actual world will avoid worries about the truth connection.

It is not clear, however, that deliberative epistemic democrats would be satisfied with a merely contingent defense of democracy. Take, for instance, worlds in which other political institutions come closest to tracking the truth. There have been political states that are founded on the premise that our best access to truth is via divine revelation, truths that cannot be established by human reason. According to these political arrangements, the best epistemic form of government is rule by those who have the best access to God's revelation. In the possible worlds where the best access to truth is in fact through divine revelation, would epistemic democrats be open to defending theocracy?

4.2 JUSTIFICATION OR TRUTH?

I seriously doubt that deliberative epistemic democrats would be satisfied with a solely contingent defense of democracy. In particular, David Estlund already has a ready response to the possibility of theocracy with his qualified acceptability requirement. On Estlund's view, it is not just the form of government that gets closest to **Truth-Tracking** that is preferable. Such epistemic merits are considered only once political institutions are "justifiable in terms acceptable to all qualified points of view (where 'qualified' will be filled in by 'reasonable' or some such thing)."²¹ On Estlund's view, the epistemic success of a form of government is only considered if it is acceptable to all qualified or reasonable points of view. Estlund uses this criterion in order to rule out forms of government that might do better at **Truth-Tracking** than democracy. It may well be that certain forms of epistocracy or theocracy will outperform democracy so far as the truth is concerned, but it is also possible for reasonable people to disagree about who the experts should be in such political arrangements, and so the proposals fail to even get off the ground. Estlund could press the same point against the theocracy proposal – presumably there will be qualified objections to who the religious experts are in a theocracy. Such a move allows Estlund to rule out theocracies before epistemic considerations come into play.

Deliberative epistemic democrats thus have a couple of options. They can restore the link by limiting their claims to the actual world, or they can keep their global claims while adopting something like Estlund's qualified acceptability requirement. The first route is unappealing in that it makes the epistemic defense of democracy merely contingent, putting pressure on the deliberative epistemic democrat to adopt something like qualified acceptance. The difficulty with going this route, however, is that it raises a serious question about whether the priority in choosing a form of government is **Truth-Tracking** or **Justification**. Do we want political institutions that track the truth or that people have

²¹See Estlund (2009), p. 41.

the most reason to endorse? Deliberative epistemic democrats want us to think we can have both, that **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking** march in lockstep, but we have seen that work in contemporary epistemology has not borne this assumption out.

Estlund’s qualified acceptability requirement avoids this worry by privileging **Justification** over **Truth-Tracking**, but this is tantamount to entirely switching tacks when defending democracy. What is most fundamental, on Estlund’s view, is that everyone has enough reason to endorse their political institutions, whether or not those institutions are truth-conducive is a secondary consideration. Arguing for a qualified acceptability requirement thus puts the emphasis on the reasons citizens have for their political beliefs, not on the truth of those beliefs, making the updated view quite distinct from strict **Truth-Tracking**. If, in response to difficulties connecting **Justification** to **Truth-Tracking**, epistemic democrats opt for something like qualified acceptability, then perhaps it is ultimately **Justification** that matters after all. Because it removes the fundamental emphasis on truth, a move to qualified acceptability represents a shift from a truth-centered focus to a justification-centered focus in defending democracy, admitting the two do not always coincide.

If deliberative epistemic democrats were to make such a move, prioritizing justification over truth, then they would be departing from what is typically thought of as an epistemic defense of democracy. As we saw in Section 1, what unites epistemic cases for democracy is their defense of **Truth-Tracking**. The varieties of epistemic democracy get to **Truth-Tracking** in different ways, whether by preference aggregation of Condorcet-type considerations, but what unites them as forms of epistemic democracy is a reliance on **Truth-Tracking**. For this reason, if deliberative epistemic democrats adopt **Justification** at the expense of **Truth-Tracking**, it is not so clear that their view remains within the camp of epistemic democrats.

CONCLUSION

Amongst epistemic defenses of democracy, deliberative epistemic democrats have a unique strategy. Though all epistemic democrats argue that democracies are effective at tracking the truth, deliberative epistemic democrats emphasize the type of discursive environment created by democratic political cultures, pointing out the epistemic virtues of these settings. Helene Landemore argues that these environments capture the widest range of cognitive diversity, while David Estlund contends that democratic political cultures best instantiate ideal epistemic deliberation. What these views have in common is that they argue that democratic citizens are better justified in their political beliefs and that this explains why democracy is better at tracking the truth than other political arrangements. Deliberative epistemic democrats have overlooked, however, that there is no consensus in epistemology that there even is a connection between

justification and truth, so even if Estlund and Landmore demonstrate **Justification**, this is not yet to show that **Truth-Tracking** also obtains. If it is not possible to have both **Justification** and **Truth-Tracking**, how deliberative epistemic democrats respond to this difficulty reveals what really matters in political institutions. If we cannot have both, should we prefer political institutions that we have the most reason to accept, or those that best track the truth?

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