

# It's Okay to Not Vote

Alexander S. Peak

4 November 2008

In every election, there are always a hand-full of people who, for one reason or another, do not vote.

Some are lazy, and don't wish to bother going through the hassle of registering, finding their polling locations, and submitting their ballots.

Some are busy, and would rather not take the day off work, especially considering that their votes aren't—let's face it—going to change the outcome of the election. Putting food on the table is simply more important.

Some are ignorant, having not educated themselves on either the issues or the candidates, and do not wish to pollute the election with an uninformed vote.

Some are ethical, and believe it is unethical to vote, to foist some ruler onto other people without their consent.

All in all, there are as many potential reasons out there to not vote as there are *to* vote. Unfortunately, not everybody out there is willing to defend, if you choose not to vote, your personal choice.

It is absolutely disgraceful how the cult of civic duty attempts to make non-voters feel guilty.

I have heard over and over that, allegedly, it is your “responsibility” to vote. But what is never explained is how such an innate positive obligation supposedly arises.

In place of an explanation, all that are usually provided are appeals to emotionalism. It's pointed out by the anti-non-voter that not everyone in the world has the ability to vote, as though that somehow places an imposition on you to use *your* ability. Of course, this is illogical; although I have the *ability* to see, an ability not shared by all humans, I nevertheless have no innate *obligation* to ever open my eyes.

An action is not a responsibility unless it is naturally permissible to punish a person for not committing it. For example, if we contract to trade with one another, it becomes my responsibility to uphold my end of the deal. If I fail to do so, I may be punished by being required to pay some sort of restitution to the other party.

But if this is what we mean by responsibility, then clearly humans have no innate positive obligations. The only innate obligation we have is to refrain from infringing upon the equal rights of others, and this is not a positive obligation, but rather a negative one.\*

The cult of civic duty, of course, ignores this. Its objective is to make you feel sub-human for not voting. They *want* you to feel guilty, as though you had committed some sort of crime. But how can it be a crime if you did not thereby victimise someone? In truth, these victimless "crimes" are not true crimes, and ought not be treated as such.

It is your natural right to not vote. Unfortunately, not all governments respect the existence of this natural right. I recall a friend in Australia telling me how the Australian state aggresses against non-voters *via* imposition of fines. This sort of oppression ought never be tolerated.

In conclusion, whether you choose to vote or not, it seems only just that we stand up for the rights of non-voters by rejecting the cult of civic duty.

---

\* A positive obligation is an obligation to *do* something, *e.g.* to pay Smith \$100. A negative obligation is an obligation to *not* do something, *e.g.* to not murder Smith.