

*Rational Choice and Empirical Data Show Widespread Political Ignorance (and Irrationality)*

- Voters are **ignorant**: Most voters do not know basic, easily-verifiable facts about government. Fewer could accurately explain the fundamental and uncontroversial findings of economics, political science or law that are relevant for political decision-making.
- Voters are **irrational**: They are not only ignorant, but choose to go on and form opinions – and badly. Most people form their beliefs on policy matters using unreliable, biased, and motivated reasoning. And when met with opposing evidence, most react by becoming further entrenched in their views. Again, these are established results in political science.

*Brennan's Argument for Epistocracy*

1. **Against Proceduralism**: There are no good “in-principle” grounds for favoring democracy.
2. **Competence Principle**: Political decisions are presumed legitimate and authoritative only when produced by competent political bodies in a competent way and in good faith.
3. **Corollary of the Competence Principle**: Presumptively, we ought to replace an incompetent political decision-making method with a more competent one.
4. **Comparative Institutional Claims**: Universal suffrage tends to produce incompetent decisions, while some forms of epistocracy are likely to produce more competent decisions.
5. **Conclusion**: We should replace democracy with certain forms of epistocracy.

*The Nature of Moral Expertise*

- Consider the following political preferences of higher-information voters:
  - More pro-choice; Favor less punitive and harsh measures on crime; More in favor of affirmative action; Less supportive of prayer in public schools; Less moralistic in law
- Probably there are also correlations re: gun rights, euthanasia, gay marriage, drug laws, etc.
- **Hypothesis 1**: Higher information voters simply have more reliable moral judgments because they have more information.
  - **The Convergence Thesis**: Any two ideally (epistemically) rational agents with the same complete, relevant empirical information will converge in their moral judgment.
  - Arguably this thesis is false, for a couple of reasons:

- i. Moral reasoning takes place via the method of *reflective equilibrium*: Starting with intuitions about some cases and ethical principles, one modifies one's principles to fit as many cases as possible. Arguably, there can be two rational agents starting off with different intuitions about cases or principles, and these agents need not converge by the method of reflective equilibrium.
  - ii. Many of the issues listed above are the subject of intransigent and seemingly endless debate among equally epistemically-qualified philosophers, who are all knowledgeable about the empirical facts.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Greater political knowledge correlates with the holding of certain ideologies, which are adopted for non-rational reasons. Perhaps for largely contingent reasons the moral preferences of high-information voters happen to line up with what is fashionable among the current academic and cultural elite.
- Perhaps high-information voters are not more competent to address some political debates.

#### *Epistocracy and Buchanan's Constitutional Political Economy*

- Interestingly, Buchanan was well aware of the incentives that voters face to remain ignorant; however, in several places, he also seems to say that universal suffrage is required.
- It is initially unclear why: After all, why couldn't agents behind the veil of uncertainty (a la *Calculus*) decide they would do best under a restricted suffrage epistocratic constitution?
- **Buchanan's Normative Individualism:** 1: Individuals are the only sources of value. 2. So, legitimate political institutions are those that individuals would unanimously consent to in order to realize their preferences. But 3: "Those who are not allowed to participate ... their preferences must go unrepresented." So, restricted suffrage regimes are illegitimate.
- But why endorse this last claim, (3)?
- **Buchanan's Strict Subjectivism:** "My position is sometimes classified to be one of strict subjectivism ... From a subjectivist perspective, a 'utility function', as such, does not exist which, even conceptually, could be observed and recognized independently of an individual's choice behavior. All there is are individual choices, and it is about these choices, not about some alleged relationship to a utility function, that we develop theories."
- Thus: "The values of those persons who remain disenfranchised cannot be reflected in the results *from the very fact of nonparticipation.*"