# In Search of Ithaka

On the Epistocratic Challenge to Universal Suffrage

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Göteborg Studies in Politics 195

2026

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i statsvetenskap som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet framlägges till offentlig granskning fredagen den 16 januari, kl. 13.15 i Torgny Segerstedtssalen, Universitetets huvudbyggnad, Vasaparken 1, Göteborg.

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**Abstract**

Sensitivity: Internal

This dissertation examines a specific challenge to universal suffrage, namely, the epistocratic challenge. The challenge lies here: epistocrats claim that voting ought to be restricted to those competent enough. Contemporary epistocrats, like Jason Brennan, claim that voters are, generally, too incompetent to make good decisions, and voters ought to be more competent since this would enhance the quality of political outcomes. In this thesis, I define "competence" as the combination of motivation, ability and task ability. I also examine whether we consent to universal suffrage by voting ourselves and conclude that we do not. Had we consented, the case for epistocracy would have been rendered weaker. After this, I investigate, with the help of reflective equilibrium, firstly, the argument that individually incompetent voters impose (undue) risk. Secondly, I examine virtue ethical arguments in relation to voter behavior. I evaluate the strength of these arguments and find that neither of these sets of arguments justify a scheme of restricted voting. Individual voters do not pose undue risk of harm, neither would a restriction of voting rights make voters more virtuous. The problem of incompetent voters still remains, however, and the dissertation ends with an examination of whether there are ways to enhance voter competence within a framework of universal suffrage. I conclude that epistocrats ought to embrace institutionalization of authoritative, legislative, party-competitive deliberative mini-publics.

**Key Words**: restricted suffrage, epistocracy, competence, harm, virtue, deliberative mini-publics

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