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The Need of Virtues in Politics: Political virtues as a possible solution and foundation to practicing politics

Visser, Jelmer

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The Need of Virtues in Politics

Political virtues as a possible solution and foundation to practicing politics

Introduction

The most popular political structure in the current century is some form of a representative liberal democracy. Within this democracy, the standard is that every citizen, above a certain age, can vote in elections for which politicians in parliament represent them. In some countries, there are referenda where the outcome is not merely advice for the government but contributes to actual legitimate political decisions. However, this current form of democracy is not without criticism. For example, the quality of democratic decision-making seems to fail. Some authors blame this on the lack of competence of the individual voter and propose an epistocracy where the citizen is required to be ‘competent’ or ‘knowledgeable’ before they may vote.

However, the epistocratic theory does not fulfil the requirements that individuals should have. Therefore, I believe that there is a gap between competence in epistocracy and the real requirements or real competence necessary for a citizen to make better decisions.

This thesis addresses these problems regarding collective decision-making in democracy, analyses the solution epistocracy provides, and argues that the solution proposed by epistocracy is not enough to create competent political individuals. Furthermore, I provide one possible solution for overcoming these problems with a political system based on multiple essential political virtues – a *virtuecracy*. This project consists of research on how and which political virtues can create and support a conception of a political citizen and voter that is competent enough to fill in the ‘virtue’ gap that Jason Brennan’s epistocracy creates.

Analysing the current political structure and real alternatives to the current dominant structure is an important task of political philosophy because this also analyses the underlying structures, reasoning, maintainability, and positions of citizens in the system.

First, the process of reflecting and analysing can lead to suggestions that increase the political living standards for all citizens. Second, this process can build on the ongoing tradition of political philosophy by redefining conceptions and re-igniting certain discussions about how society should be shaped.

Chapter 1 of this thesis is an extensive literature evaluation of the academic debate about epistocracy and democracy. I provide an overview of the leading positions in the debate.

In Chapter 2, I analyse the structure of Brennan's argument for epistocracy and his competence principle. Reflecting on this analysis, I pose my own argument against epistocracy and argue in favour of a political structure based on several political virtues.

Chapter 3 addresses three main accounts of political virtues in the history of philosophy. Furthermore, this chapter addresses several crucial political virtues based on Plato, Rawls, and Amy Gutmann.

In Chapter 4, I reflect on the political virtues and explain how these can solve the practical problems laid out in Chapters 1 and 2.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, consists of suggestions concerning possible forms of virtueocracy and how thresholds and requirements play a role in defining its possible forms.

In the conclusion, I recap my argument on the need of political virtues as an essential part of the solution to a better political system, be that democracy, epistocracy, or virtueocracy. I want to show that even though someone may not agree with a system such as virtueocracy, the reasoning behind this political process is sound, and it should be part of the solution.

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Chapter 1: The debate on democracy and epistocracy

1.1 Introduction

One common proverb is 'we stand on the shoulders of giants'. When writing a thesis, this is most certainly true. In this chapter, I address the current academic debate used to construct my argument. I will hopefully spark a contemporary discussion on the importance of several political virtues and how they can contribute to the solution of the current problems some of our liberal democracies have.

In the first chapter, I briefly point out the general conception I have of politics to present a clear understanding of this key concept. Afterward, I show how the academic debate about democracy and epistocracy is structured and highlight the theories and arguments necessary for this thesis. Addressing the main authors and arguments in this debate results in understanding the academic playfield and where to position myself in the debate. I aim to present the most important arguments in defence of democracy and against any form of an epistocracy. In this thesis, I argue that even epistocracy does not overcome the problems it claims to. Furthermore, even if virtuecracy is not the best, it is still better than epistocracy on proceduralist grounds. This goes hand-in-hand with a reflection about what political virtues do have to offer and which ones are important in a political society. Finally, I describe the main debate and the authors which have contributed to the conception of political virtues used in this thesis.

1.2 Defining politics

First, when discussing or arguing for any form of government, there is a need to have a clear concept of politics so that there is a common ground for all parties to base their debate on. Certainly, with the debate about who is to rule, it is crucial to understand what 'to rule' is. Politics is the act and structure of creating policies and laws in society in addition to an experience of being part of a social community. This also holds decisions that form the future of the concerning social community.

Democracies embodying this by letting individuals 18 years old and above vote on candidates who make the laws and policies that form the future of their society. Epistocracy changes this age requirement gap by establishing that a voter has a minimum of knowledge to be able to elect officials who will make policies and laws. On first look, the goal looks the

same, but upon closer examination, that is not entirely true. Democratic theory aims to establish reasonable policies. Furthermore, it inherently aims for democratic participation. In contrast, epistocracy explicitly focuses on how the best possible policies and laws can be made through elections. Epistocrats want to establish a threshold of certain knowledge for voters to have. Instead of focusing on political participation, epistocracy looks for the best way to achieve better politics in a system of majority voting.

Democratic theorists argue that politics is not only about collective decision-making but also about how to incorporate citizens into the political process and embody values the concerned community deems important.¹ Therefore, the arguments for political systems come in two groups: *proceduralist arguments* and *instrumentalist*. Proceduralist arguments focus on how beneficial and efficient the outcomes of the political structure are. In contrast, instrumentalist arguments focus on the effectiveness of decision-making. Democracy does not have a real contender because it seems difficult to fight democracy on how well it treats its participants; it aims to combine freedom, equality, and reasonable levels of decisions. The distinction between proceduralist and instrumentalist understandings of democracy is crucial to understand the upcoming theories and arguments.

1.3 The rule of the people versus the rule of experts

Out of all systems, democracy is often perceived as the fairest one. Currently, there seem to be no real contenders which can give the same amount of autonomy, self-governance, and safety to citizens as a representative democracy does.

Although there is a debate about the rule of experts – epistocracy versus the rule of the people – democracy started within ancient philosophy. I want to start with a debate between John Dewey and Walter Lippman. Lippman, although not an academic philosopher, wrote a very impactful book on how, according to him, citizens act within a democracy.² In response to Lippman's book, the philosopher John Dewey wrote *The Public and Its Problems*, in which he defends the public or citizens against the opinion of Lippman. Dewey states that the 'public is merely in eclipse'³ and a democracy with contributions of citizens is feasible.

¹ Tom Christiano, Bajaj Sameer, "Democracy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021).

² Walter Lippman, *The Phantom Public* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1993).

³ John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (Chicago Gateway Books, 1946).

I find the arguments which these two authors have made relevant because they were made at the beginning of the twentieth century, a time when mass democracy started to be analysed. Because they deal with mass democracy as we currently know it, I think it is a good starting point for the debate. Walter Lippman wrote his first book on democracy, *Public Opinion*, to criticize how individuals were being used by politics and the media. Additionally, to stabilize the political process, experts were needed to structure and control the flow of information to the voters on concerning which official to vote for.

Lippman's second book, *The Phantom Public*, goes even further. It states that the public, being the individual citizens as social and political group that actual influences the political structure is not a valid conception but merely an illusion – a phantom. There is no such thing as a relevant public in democracy according to Lippman. To be a citizen who can really understand and influence the political process, one must be immensely competent – read all newspapers and check all laws and policies. Lippman writes the following: *'The ideal of the omniscient, sovereign citizen is, in my opinion, such a false ideal. It is unattainable. The pursuit of it is misleading'*.⁴ This is a very strong opinion, but the essence of the statement is hard to disagree with. In current mass democracies, there are a lot of information and skills needed to understand the basic structure of the political systems, how the processes work, and which official and party do what or what their relation is. Additionally, he does not deem 'normal' citizens as being too dumb but rather simply too far away from the political process. The reason is that it is too hard to keep track of the processes because it requires a lot of time, information, and skills. Is it legitimate to deny citizens access to voting when they have no knowledge on the process?

To be a well-informed citizen is a hard task, more so with the complex division of labour in modern democracies. Christiano describes the idea of a complex structure of the division of labour in modern democracies. There are a lot of specific jobs and requirements for positions. This division flows into his argument – that many citizens lack the information to formulate well-thought out and structured answers to political questions and problems. The democratic system needs this complex division of labour, but it results in a weakened democracy through the increasingly challenging process of making sure 'normal' citizens get

⁴ Walter Lippman, *The Phantom Public* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 29.

the correct information.⁵ Regarding the criticism of Lippman, John Dewey responded with a strong defence of the public. He stated that the 'public is in an eclipse', and it is indeed possible for the public to be informed and influential in the political process with informed and reasonable contributions to the political community they live in.⁶ He argues that citizens must be awakened to the feeling that they can contribute to the political structure.

Further critical view on democracy comes from Joseph Schumpeter, who was convinced that democracy was just a 'mechanism for choosing and authorizing governments'⁷. He also stated that most citizens are irrational, ignorant, and lack good judgment. Good judgment can be understood as 'having the ability to think critically and weigh certain matters to make a reasonable judgement'. For Schumpeter, democracy has no intrinsic value, while establishing values is one of the main aims of democracy – delivering freedom and equality through self-governance, which results from majority-voting.

Some very fundamental arguments in favour of democracy have been stated by John Stuart Mill in 1861. Mill argued that democratic decision-making is better than non-democratic decision-making in three ways: strategically, epistemically, and via the improvement of the characters of democratic citizens. Strategically because it uses the interests of the citizens – it must use the people's interests to make decisions about society. Due to the (minor) political power everyone has, politicians cannot override whole groups of people. The next reason is epistemically grounded. It holds that because of the high number of people contributing to politics in political discourse, there is far more knowledge and critical assessment than in an aristocratic society, where far fewer people contribute to the debate and final decision-making. The last reason stated by Mill is the improvement of the characters of the individuals living in a democratic society. The responsibility and inclusive aspect of a society would develop in practical and moral manners. This leads to 'better' individuals in democratic society than in a society without a system of collective decision-making.⁸ However, the current state of representative democracy does not fulfil any of these arguments. Due to massive populations, the influence of a single vote is diminished, and politicians can make decisions that override a lot of people's common beliefs or opinions.

⁵ Thomas Christiano. "Democracy Defended and Challenged," in *Rethinking Open Society*, ed. Ignatieff Michael and Roch Stefan (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2018), 76-77.

⁶ Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*.

⁷ Gerry Mackie, "Schumpeter's Leadership Democracy," *Political Theory* 37, no. 1 (2009).

⁸ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (The Floating Press, 2009).

1.4 Leading positions in the debate on epistocracy and democracy

In the literature, there seems to be three prominent positions concerning the debate on epistocracy and its relationship to democracy. The most recent and famous advocate of epistocracy and opponent of democracy in philosophy is Jason Brennan. In his book *Against Democracy*, Brennan attacks the legitimacy of policy made by democracy. He makes that argument based on the idea that every individual has the right to be under competent policy, and democracy disqualifies itself for multiple reasons.⁹ According to Brennan, democracy, through the decision-making mechanism of majority-voting, does not sufficiently set competent policy standards. In a democracy, there is equality in the sense that everyone can vote. However, many citizens do not have sufficient knowledge or critical thinking power to understand law and policy-making. Because of this fact, incompetent people have power over others, but they do not have a right to this power. Therefore, democracy results in a system that is not able to make good policies and causes harm to citizens.¹⁰

The main challenges of epistocracy are in regard to whether selecting individuals based on their knowledge contributes to better policies and deciding on the requirements of individuals. The most argued response is that there should be restricted suffrage instead of universal suffrage. With a system of restricted suffrage, an option could be to implement a 'voter exam', where the potential voter must show that they have the required scientific and political knowledge to identify which party or politician holds their best interest. This idea of restricted suffrage attracts a lot of attention from defenders of democracy and, therefore, universal suffrage. A prominent defender of democracy and strict opponent of epistocracy, although being the person that coined the term, is David Estlund. In his published articles and books, Estlund strongly argues against any form of a 'rule of the knowing'.¹¹ Estlund has published a lot about democratic theories. He argues that epistocracy is not desirable for multiple reasons. His main objection to epistocracy is the demographic objection. '*The Demographic objection: The educated portion of the populace may disproportionately have epistemically damaging features that countervail the admitted epistemic benefits of education*'.¹² This objection focuses on the selective nature of epistocracy. It means that the highly educated individuals who can cast a vote might have negative traits that neglect the

⁹ Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy* (Princeton University, 2016), Ch. 2-4.

¹⁰ Brennan, *Against Democracy*, Ch. 3-4.

¹¹ David Estlund, "Why Not Epistocracy," in *Desire, Identity and Existence: Essays in honor of T.M. Penner*, ed. Naomi Reshotko (Academic Printing and Publishing, 2003).

¹² Estlund, "Why Not Epistocracy," 62.

positive aspects of being highly educated. He uses this example: Many educated individuals could understand more complex ideas and be racists, self-centred, or even worse, negatively biased.¹³ I think there is certainly an argument to be made that selecting people based only on their education could bring in people with wrong motives and wrong values as a side effect. It means that selecting people without being aware of this fact can result in having a group of voters who lack different perspectives. Because of the overarching factor of knowledge, there is no attention to harmful side effects, such as biases.

The other objection that Estlund has proposed is rooted in the idea that epistocracy cannot justify a system. The reasoning is that all political justification must rely on claims and doctrines acceptable to all reasonable citizens (or citizens when reasonable). Estlund writes:

'The general acceptance criterion I want to rely on, still schematically, says, then, that political authority ought to be justifiable to the ruled in terms that are beyond qualified rejection. It must be generally acceptable, though not just any ground of rejection is qualified. Beyond that I do not offer any general account hereof which are qualified and which are not'.¹⁴

This means that a political system needs justification from the ruled to be an active, working, and legitimate system. Estlund denies that epistocracy can be built on a justification supported by the people who are ruled because they (as reasonable people) would disagree with a system that only lets a select group of the community cast their vote.¹⁵ Is it reasonable to expect these select voters to vote in the interest of all members of society, or would they focus on their own interests? This doubt raises a challenge to epistocracy to have a foundation of political authority that can be reasonably agreed to by the citizens of the concerned community.

There are also other authors arguing against Brennan. One of them is Piero Moraro. Moraro states that Brennan's competence principle overlooks the seriousness of the harm done by policy. He further argues that selecting citizens based on whether they have political knowledge leads to a significant chance that socially disadvantaged citizens will not be able

¹³ Estlund, "Why Not Epistocracy," 59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

to take advantage of an opportunity. Combining this reason with the potential seriousness of the harm done by policy, Brennan's idea would result in additional disadvantages for social groups with fewer opportunities in the community.¹⁶

In the literature, there is also a position which focuses on the problems democracy has and theorizes about possible solutions without choosing a whole different system. Some of these theories and ideas are similar to the core ideas and principles of epistocracy. Thomas Christiano has published several articles on the subject while keeping a neutral position on the debate. In his article 'Voting and Democracy',¹⁷ he focuses on the conception of voting. He makes a distinction between voting as preference and voting as statements. Christiano argues that both conceptions have severe shortcomings, and he presents his conception of voting. According to Christiano, voting should be viewed as a resource that can help one's interests or a tool with restricted applications whose purpose is to benefit a well-functioning democracy.¹⁸

In another essay, Christiano has described the approach of Alvin Goldman's study of social epistemology regarding what voters and citizens need to know for a democracy to function well. Christiano adds his requirements to Goldman's study.¹⁹ Goldman argues that citizens should at least be able to identify how politicians benefit the citizens' interests. Christiano focuses on knowledge that advances the citizens' interests in addition to the idea that equality is publicly embodied in democratic institutions. Individuals need knowledge about not only their own interests but also the interests of other people.

When arguing for any form of epistocracy, it is essential to have the best conception possible of voting by individuals. In other words, when arguing for restricted suffrage with a voter's exam, the aim is the highest possible threshold for voters and can be justified. When implementing restricted suffrage, one wants the best result because, institution-wise, it is a significant change to not have everyone in a society vote. The importance of this step should be emphasized – by having the best version of voters who are the best to represent the citizens who do not vote. I would suggest that the best version of a voter includes, for example, a citizen having precise knowledge about others' interests in addition to knowledge about their own interests. If that is possible, the position of a rational and

¹⁶ Piero Moraro, "Against Epistocracy," *Social Theory and Practice* 44, no. 2 (2018): 202.

¹⁷ Thomas Christiano, "Voting and Democracy," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 3, (1995).

¹⁸ Christiano, "Voting and Democracy," 410-412.

¹⁹ Thomas Christiano, "Democracy and Social Epistemology," *Philosophical Topics* 29, no. 1/2 (2001).

educated voter that can identify different interests of different people can be strong versus people who only vote for their own interest without reflecting on those of others. Within the debate of epistocracy and democracy, certain attributes, such as knowledge, have an important place. Of relevance is the focus of political philosophy focused on civic education. As Mill pointed out, the people who are part of a democracy can be taught to be better citizens through simply be part of the voting group. According to Mill being able to vote will educate citizens.²⁰ One of the contemporary leaders in the debate is Amy Gutmann. She wrote a lot about democratic and civic education: what specific skills or civic virtues are to be incorporated into education to make a well-rounded political individual.²¹ I focus on civic education in Chapter 4 to show how political virtues can be learned and how that makes a virtueocracy an even better alternative because it makes civic education even more relevant.

Recap

In this first chapter, I explored the problems of democracy. I addressed the theory of the authors that have leading positions in the current debate about democracy and epistocracy. In the next chapter, I build further on this theory and show that there is a virtue gap in the current position on epistocracy.

²⁰ Jack Crittenden and Peter Levine, "Civic Education," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018).

²¹ Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, (Princeton University Press, 1987).

Chapter 2: Focusing on competence

2.1 Introduction

Democracy is built on the idea that every individual matters. It also means collective decision-making is part of the political process. Although it is a very honourable aim, it seems that democracy is underperforming with the quality of political participation of the citizens. Often, voters have no real knowledge about what is going on in the political structure. As Walter Lippman describes it, 'there is no possibility to know what is going on as an outsider'.²²

Epistocracy argues that the quality of decision-making is just as important as letting all individuals be part of the political process. Epistocratic authors contend that the rule of the wise would be better because every citizen would get better policies. As stated before, the specific epistocratic argument I will focus on in this thesis is the argument Jason Brennan makes in his book *Against Democracy*.

2.2 The structure of the argument

The argument of Brennan is the following:

- 1) *Against proceduralism*: There are no strong proceduralist grounds for preferring democracy to epistocracy,
- 2) *The competence principle*: It is presumed to be unjust and in violation of a citizen's rights to forcibly deprive them of life, liberty, or property, or significantly harm their life prospects as a result of decisions made by an incompetent deliberative body or as a result of decisions made in an incompetent way or in bad faith. 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 certain forms of epistocracies are likely to produce more competent decisions.

²² Lippman, *The Phantom Public*, 54.

- 5) *Conclusion*: We should probably replace democracy with certain forms of epistocracy.²³

According to Brennan, in the current society, the only systems that turn out positive in terms of the decision-making procedure are democracy and epistocracy. Based on this reasoning, epistocracy can be a viable alternative for democracy. He proposes multiple versions of epistocracy in his book²⁴, but they are united by one sole focus. The crux of Brennan's argument is the sole focus on knowledge as the essential ingredient for making citizens better political individuals who are equipped to make political decisions, such as better votes during election time. It is important to add the following: It's crucial to remember that the competence principle applies to *individual* political decisions.²⁵

Democracy promotes outcomes based on the fact that the decisions are a joined effort in a certain sense. Brennan's epistocracy promotes itself because only citizens with a certain amount of knowledge can cast a vote. However, then it seems that he does not escape the problems he addresses in democratic theory – the lack of useful influence by citizens.

2.3 The lack of competence

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the problem of democracy is the lack of real participation of citizens in the political process. Keeping score on laws, policies, and economic and social problems is very difficult, especially when populations and government tasks keep getting more complex. Still, citizens can vote about how these topics are handled by selecting which officials are going to make new policies and laws. Brennan poses this question: Why can citizens who clearly lack the knowledge and skills to make sense of the political structure have a vote about these topics?

This question is a reasonable and legitimate question about decision-making in societies, not only because it is good to evaluate and reflect on the current state of politics but also to envision better possible forms of government, with epistocracy or virtuecracy being new options. Brennan structures this thought in what he calls the competence

²³ Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 141-142.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch. 6.

principle: *'It is unjust to deprive citizens of life, liberty or property, or to alter their life prospects significantly, by force and threats of force as a result of decisions made by an incompetent or morally unreasonable deliberative body, or as a result of decisions made in an incompetent and morally unreasonable way'*.²⁶ It means that citizens have the right not to have policies or laws which impact their lives be made by incompetent deliberation or politics. As an individual, a person has the right to have the people who decide the shape of their day-to-day life, the prices in the supermarket, the power of corporations, the infrastructure in their city be technically 'qualified' to make such decisions.

If a baker who decides to have a political career and succeeds in doing so becomes responsible for the financial policy of a community with 20 million people, then it sounds unreasonable. Again, I find Brennan's ideas very compelling. My own example of the baker is exaggerated, but a lot of people that have no knowledge about how politics works, what power in a parliament means, or have no knowledge about topics such as economics or culture do vote and influence the decision who is to govern and who is to impact the lives of individuals. But what does it mean to be competent and be capable of the tasks described above?

2.4 Defining a successful political community & the problem of citizens in democracy and epistocracy

I argue that competence alone as a political requirement is not good enough to construct a solid political system with majority-voting. I put the competence to the test and show that instead of a vague knowledge-based concept, one needs several outlined political virtues to heighten the minimum level of policy-making.

First, to do this, I want to establish what makes a political community successful, according to me. Second, I highlight current problems in democracy and how these problems relate to competence and certain lack-of-character skills which could be solved with a certain political virtue.

Importantly, a political system starts with individuals who create a community, and by creating a community start a political system. To achieve a well-constructed system, it is crucial to 'maximize performance' of the first step; therefore, I focus on the individual

²⁶ Jason Brennan, "THE RIGHT TO A COMPETENT ELECTORATE," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 61, no. 245 (2011): 704.

qualities that make a political community work and ones that do not. From that point of view, a system can be developed which contributes to these qualities instead of the other way around. In this way, a skills based political structure is the most suitable system for political decision-making. These qualities I aim for are to be seen as excellent displays of a quality or virtue, so to speak. Therefore, I define them as 'political virtues' because they are excellent qualities entirely focused on creating a solid foundation for a political structure.

I focus briefly on what defines a successful political system because this can be a highly subjective matter. What does a successful political community look like? In my view, a successful political community means the following:

- 1) A working and reliable voting system or decision-making mechanism structured to make the best policies possible.
- 2) The citizens who can vote are individuals who have particular skills or virtues needed to make good political decisions.
- 3) There must be opportunities and room for everyone to develop into politically virtuous citizens and develop other virtues they personally aim for.
- 4) There must be skilled politicians that act according to the whole community.
- 5) There must be a focus on which shared values are relevant in the community and important to all citizens to create policy and laws that resemble these values.
- 6) The community and its policies must focus on balancing equality and personal welfare among citizens. This balance is essential to keep everyone part of the political community.

2.5 Structural problems of democracy

In this section I introduce the need for political virtues and show which problems democracy has, additional and how they are still relevant in an epistocracy. Additionally, I aim to identify the characteristics of citizens that lead to flawed collective decision-making. After addressing these problems, the underlying character traits and what the aim is for a successful political community is discussed. Then, in the next chapter, I will focus extensively on which political virtues are crucial to achieve this kind of politics.

First, I start with identifying the problems democracy has from a lack of human traits. Important to note is that with Brennan's epistocracy, as formulated in the previous chapter,

this lack of human traits is still problematic; only having citizens with knowledge would not make a viable political structure.

Tunnel vision

One of the recurring issues is that some minorities are not heard; they are under-represented in democratic societies. Technically speaking, democracy should focus on the representation of every individual who votes except for the fact that some citizens do not have voting rights or are too young to vote. The system aims to give worth to every vote and a voice to every individual.

In a modern representative democracy, the goal is that everyone votes for a politician who supports their goals and values. The mass number of votes should balance the system and stress the priorities and values that are important for the largest group of citizens. The system is structured around individualism.

As stated before, in a successful political structure which is focused either on quality government policies or a flourishing political community, the politician should serve the citizens. In other words, the politician should strike a healthy balance between acting on their political expertise and fulfilling the interests and values of the citizens. However, the politician should always be seen as a public figure that serves the community. It is important not to forget that the significance of the politician's position means an extra need for an even stronger selection process for the public officers and politicians.

Majority voting does not support a system to make quality policies. The problem is that every individual has learned that they should vote for the politician that embodies their interests and values as closely as possible. This learning process is certainly a way for a political system to influence the citizen. Because of the voting mechanism, every individual learns that their interests and values are the most important and that they should focus on themselves. I would say that it is a combination of selfishness and not being able to notice the interests of others, especially the interests of minorities because they seem less relevant or clear in the public debate.²⁷ The problem is that an individual voter only votes in their interest; if people are not part of any minority and lead a 'good life', they would probably

²⁷ Because of the minorities being a minority, the representation in media, social life, and politics is less. Because of this, it is harder to know what their interests are; connecting with individuals outside your personal social framework can be hard.

never vote for change policies that benefit others because it does not make sense in this individualistic voting system, and it is hard to structurally focus on others' interests when doing politics.

Eventually, a democracy will run into a lack of equality in laws and policies. With a representative democracy, these inequalities will slowly be changed or influenced by a majority. Perhaps the process will be too slow to stop social injustices from happening. Most important for my argument is that a lack in qualities will hinder the ability to make good policy which minimizes the harmful effects to the citizens who are not benefitted by the aimed change. As stated earlier, I believe that such a format of policies should be the goal of a political system if the system is to be understood instrumental to achieve good policies.

Information and ignorance in a democracy

There are a lot of authors who highlight the lack of information and ignorance of 'normal' citizens. Lippman, Schumpeter, and Brennan are among them. For most theorists, ignorance is not a matter of will but a matter of possibility. The distinction between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' is helpful to understand why it is so hard to have legitimate information of the political processes.²⁸ The structure is enormous, and there are many new laws, policies, politicians, and changes which are hard to keep up with when you are a working-class person who reads the paper every day. As Christiano has said, 'Democracy has one of the most complex divisions of labour known in human history because all the tasks of the system'.²⁹ The relevant political knowledge necessary to be able to participate in democracy increases every year.³⁰

Individual voters in modern democracies decide who will make financial plans for the country and who is going to (re)structure health care and influence the overall political structure in terms of appointing officials. However, the average voter barely knows anything about basic economy, politics, or health care.

Although I mainly focus on policy quality being necessary for a successful political community, I believe it is important to include citizens in the political structure. There is a delicate balance between 'serving' citizens and 'deciding for' citizens. In the end, a unified

²⁸ Lippman, *The Phantom Public*, 54.

²⁹ Christiano, "Democracy Defended and Challenged".

³⁰ *Ibid.*

society is needed which supports the red line of policies to have stable socio-economic conditions for everyone. This support can be hindered because the lack of information and the ignorance in a democracy are problematic for voters to make good political decisions. To make political decisions that make the impact a voter wants, it is crucial to understand who is saying what in the political arena. Then a voter can fully understand where their vote goes and how it affects financial policy or other policies.

On the one hand, social scientific knowledge is necessary for understanding policies and which is the best possible decision based on the known facts. On the other hand, one needs the information to understand which representative says what about different subjects. That way voters can understand the representatives' political plans so that their vote goes to the politician that supports their interests and, maybe more importantly, values.

In the last decade(s), with the uprising of new populist parties and fake news, the importance of correct information about topics and political representatives holds even more weight. Information is necessary to make fundamental decisions; this information can be divided into two categories: 1) social scientific knowledge about politics and the economy and 2) specific practical knowledge about how society works and how politicians can influence the internal and external processes and structures. Therefore, the massive presence of misinformation that voters have about topics is concerning.

According to Christiano, this ignorance is mainly enabled by a highly complex division of democratic labour. Because there are so many topics relevant to politics, it is not possible for people who work full-time to have all information and understanding about these topics and political issues.³¹ If the system's goal is to make everyone have an informed vote but the system itself creates such a split between politicians and citizens concerning information, an informed vote is not possible. This split is a systematic flaw of democracy and divides the citizens into social groups. Together with having more time to focus on politics, it is also a matter of having the proper education; on average, rich people have a higher education than poor people. This division results in the upper class having a better understanding of which party or politician supports their values and interests, which gradually leads to a society that mostly benefits themselves. This is an important point and a significant flaw in a democracy.

³¹ Christiano, "Democracy Defended and Challenged," 73-74.

A politically abled individual should be able to cast a vote, and they should have the basic knowledge to identify what each party or politician supports concerning political values and policies.

The voters' lack of rationality

Understanding political and economic concepts is essential, but a lack of information is not the only quality lacking that causes a problem in democracies. The lack of rational judgment is another problem I want to discuss. Making a rational judgment is not an inherent side-effect of gaining social scientific knowledge. Being rational means that a person can make objective decisions and can see the value of arguments. Brennan attributes irrationality mainly to the 'hooligans'. These hooligans only focus on their party and politician, which often solely promotes their values. Everything else besides this party and politician is not taken into consideration and is deemed 'wrong'.³² To achieve a democratic system like the advocates of democracy or even deliberative democracy argue in favour of a voter needs to be able to communicate on equal grounds and see the value of others' arguments. The voters with tunnel vision exclude whole groups and arguments in a collective decision-making process. Rationality is the ability of a person to see things clearly without too much interference from their own ideas and arguments. The ability to see all sides of a political issue and understand, and maybe even respect, an opponent's argument leads to the possibility of deliberation.

In the current democratic system, there is the problem of having certain political individuals who are well-suited for a high-functioning political society and who can make good and informed decisions, but a large section of the citizens do not display the required virtues. This is also a result of representative democracy, which, as a system, promotes self-centrism and does not ask individuals to display certain civic or political virtues. Rather, it is made to serve the voter with regarding the quality of the policies it produces.

Corrupting the citizens

The last problem to address is the bad influence a political system has on individuals. According to John Stuart Mill, the idea of collective decision-making is a good choice because

³² Brennan, *Against Democracy*, Ch. 1.

citizens become better individuals when they are part of such a system through sharing the responsibility of the policies that are created.³³ The idea of Mill is captured in the following argument:

- 1) The civic and political activity requires citizens to have a broad view of other people's interests and search for ways to promote the common good. This activity requires long-term thinking and engagement with moral, philosophical, and social science issues.
- 2) If so, then the civic and political activity will tend to improve citizens' virtues and make them better informed.
- 3) Therefore, civic and political activity will tend to improve citizens' virtues and make them better informed.³⁴

I would say that the argument of Mill, as formulated above by Brennan, depends on the will of individuals to invest in their political lives. Just because civic and political activity requires citizens to take a broad view or search for ways to promote the common good it does not necessarily mean that citizens will do so. Political activity does not mean they will do what is necessary. If Mill's argument would succeed, it means that citizens already have the required abilities, like long-term thinking, and thus are not created by civic and political activity. A response could be that Mill sees this as necessary and not as a sufficient condition. Still, this means that the claim that political participation would help educating citizens is not strong enough of a claim and therefore doesn't negate the corruption of a democratic system.

Brennan's reply to this argument is that democracy does not make citizens better persons. Furthermore, democracy, even in comparison to a society where political participation is minimal, corrupts citizens. After reflecting on broad political science research, he states that even deliberation causes people to become more stubborn in their political judgments. He has written, *'The most charitable way to read the education argument is that it makes a controversial yet possibly correct empirical claim. It asserts that participation causes people to learn more and become more rational'*.³⁵ Brennan says it is

³³ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (The Floating Press, 2009).

³⁴ Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

more of a social science claim than a philosophical argument because we cannot analyse the concepts.³⁶ While philosophically analysing the concept of democracy and its problems, I would assert that human participation is a considerable part of weighing whether democracy succeeds. We can analyse the implications and requirements of the concept; the empiric results of such an argument or claim are indeed beyond the possibilities of conceptual analysis.

Brennan argues that participation does not automatically result in improved knowledge. Everyone has multiple biases that someone must surpass.³⁷ Empirical data shows that citizens do not like deliberating and do not become more interested or wiser from it in any way.³⁸ By deliberating, people often take knowledge into their biased framework, which leads not to more knowledge but rather even poorer political understanding than before the deliberation or participation.³⁹

Corruption by political systems was also a problem, according to Plato. In the *Republic*, he argued that direct and unchecked democracy can corrupt. Two reasons are as follows: 1) Freedom is an inherent value of democracy, but it can lead to a danger of excessive freedom and 2) More importantly for this thesis, democracy brings politics to individuals that aim for power and are motivated by personal gain rather than using political power for the community.⁴⁰

2.6 Discovering the virtue gap

A requirement for competence is a great way to get the debate started about which requirements there should be. There are several problems with the current system of mass democracy that have bad influences on the system of majority voting. Although it is hard to point out whether some decisions in democracies would have turned out differently, the reasoning that citizens who are up to date with the political process, have knowledge about certain topics, and who try to be able and well-informed political individuals, make better decisions is plausible.

Brennan's epistocracy goes a long way but is not good enough to promise collective decision-making that minimizes harm. To make sure all voters can vote in a well-informed

³⁶ Ibid., 56.

³⁷ Ibid., Ch. 3.

³⁸ Ibid., Ch. 3.

³⁹ Ibid., Ch. 3.

⁴⁰ Eric Brown, "Plato's Ethics and Politics in *The Republic*," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017).

manner, reasonably, and thoughtfully toward other citizens needs more than just the 'skill' of having political knowledge to be competent. There is a skills gap between the point of competence and the point of being truly competent when making political decisions. These skills take the form of political virtues when debating political systems. Therefore, there is a virtue gap to bridge the aim for a successful political community. This virtue gap means that Brennan's proposed system fails in creating a thriving political community due to its lack of focus on multiple political virtues. The problems he points out in democracy are still online in his suggested epistocracy. In this thesis, I argue for 'the rule of the virtuous' – a virtuecracy.

I think Brennan's competence principle is a good way to open the conversation about politics, but I disagree that his conceptions of epistocracy fulfil his own competence principle. In establishing a society that selects voters on the amount of knowledge they have, Brennan creates a virtue gap. Even if virtuecracy is not the best political structure, it is still better than epistocracy when it comes to answering to the competence principle.

Many citizens are unaware, self-centred, focused on their own values, and unable to deliberate. If these things are needed to make sound political decisions, epistocracy will fail. These political skills or virtues mentioned above are not enabled by just having political knowledge. To achieve better politics, certain political virtues are required of the individual.

Being competent to 'rule' is necessary not only to be able to have the knowledge to make decisions but also to have certain political virtues that allow someone to identify another's interests, have moral knowledge, have scientific knowledge, and be able to justify their beliefs and act with a sense of the common good. Without considering multiple important political virtues, there would be a virtue gap in epistocracy, and the system would not be able to answer the competence principle.

2.7 The plan to overcome the virtue gap

Now that I have pointed out where the virtue gap is, it is time to offer a solution that can succeed in bridging that gap. The argument is as follows:

1. When focusing on the competence principle, democracy fails to fulfil the requirements.

2. According to Brennan, epistocracy can fill these requirements through the requirement of political knowledge by individuals; this deems them competent voters.
3. Having political knowledge does not seem to enable traits such as rationality and reasonability. These qualities are needed to be able to promise better policies that addresses the requirements of the competence principle, which claims that everyone deserves to be under competent policy.
4. To truly bridge and even come close to filling this gap, several political virtues must be held by the citizens. This results in closing the virtue gap.
5. To structurally be able to deliver better political individuals, a political system which requires that these individuals have these political virtues is necessary.
6. To structurally be able to deliver good political individuals who can fulfil the competence principle, a version of a virtuecracy is necessary.

The argument I make is, at its core, very simple: Epistocracy suggests a solution to the practical problems of democracy, creating a more knowledgeable and competent public. To achieve this aim, Brennan uses knowledge as a requirement for being a competent voter. I have shown the practical problems, such as tunnel vision, need more than just knowledge to be solved. Because knowledge does not solve the problems of a political community, there is need for more political virtues within the political individual to be a better voter. A virtue gap is created by claiming that a knowledgeable voter is a competent voter and a truly better voter by having political virtues. I will address these political virtues and how acquiring these virtues does a better job to solve the problems of political communities in mass democracy. I want to create an philosophical account that can be used when debating the need of political virtues in a political system and the crucial impact of virtues in making solid policies for a community.

Recap

I want to leave Brennan and his form of epistocracy for now and am instead focus on the political virtues that are needed and the theory supporting these virtues. Covering the upcoming political virtues will hopefully show how important these 'traits of excellence' are for a citizen in a political community and for re-enforcing the idea that competence is too

minimal of a requirement to really contribute to a successful political community. In this community, the political policies minimize harm to others and maximize the benefits through virtues citizens.

To see clearly which moral and practical qualities make an individual competent and politically excellent to participate in political policy and decision-making, it is necessary to look at the current problems of the current system of representative democracy and dive in the philosophical literature on political virtues. By identifying the problems and the underlying qualities that support or create these problems, it should become clear which political virtues are required to create a threshold. From this threshold, one could describe citizens as politically competent and able to make decisions that minimize possible harm and maximize possible benefits for the political community. Additionally, the identified problems will hopefully show which virtues are fundamental to a healthy political structure, democracy, epistocracy, or virtuecracy. In the upcoming chapter, I explore the political virtues that are essential to a successful political community. In Chapter 4, I address how the political virtues and systemic decision-making comes together and creates an alternative to epistocracy.

Chapter 3: Political virtues

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I identified a virtue gap in the proposal for epistocracy to create a competent public which will translate to better and more competent policies. However, focusing only on competence is not enough to create such a competent public because of the complex nature of politics and society in current democracies. I argue that to cross this virtue gap and truly establish a politically competent public, certain political virtues from the citizens are needed.

A great deal about political virtues has been written. Often the term ‘civic virtues’ is used, and it plays a significant role in the literature about political philosophy, political systems, civic education, and democratic education. I first address three major accounts of political virtues and then focus on several virtues that support these accounts.

The virtues I want to address concerning political competencies are the best qualities an individual can act on – excellence, so to speak. Virtues are the excellent performances of a certain quality.⁴¹ In virtue ethics, it is stated that specific actions are morally good or bad based on the intention behind the act. No act can be considered virtuous when the individual behaves well because they think they should act that way because it is the norm. Being virtuous and acting virtuously is a matter of acting consistently virtuous – or living well as Aristotle calls it.⁴² Being a virtuous political citizen means acting on virtues and having a fundamental belief that these political virtues, among other virtues for the non-political areas of life, are how individuals should shape their lives.

3.2 Main accounts of political virtues

There are several accounts on political virtues in the history of philosophy. The three I chose to address further are all relevant when debating mass societies with a strong focus on individualism.

I chose Plato because of the foundation he built for political philosophy, especially on how individuals should act inside a political community and how the community radiates these values, virtues, and skills.

⁴¹ Rosalind Hursthouse, and Glen Pettigrove, “Virtue Ethics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018).

⁴² Randall Curren, “Aristotelian Necessities,” *The Good Society* 22, no. 2 (2013): 247.

Rawls is one of the main authors on reasonable disagreement with his tools of public reason, sense of justice, and sense of common good. All these virtues are relevant to debating a political system that is based on individualism but has collective decision-making.

The last account I want to use is more focused on civic education and the virtues needed for a successful political community. Deliberative Democratic theorist Amy Gutmann has written a lot on civic and democratic education. A large part of civic education includes certain skills and virtues the citizens need for the political community to succeed.

3.2.1 Plato: courage, wisdom, temper, and justice

In Plato's *Republic*, Plato explains four virtues through Socrates attempting to figure out who could be the best possible people to govern a political community. These four virtues are the following: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Of them, wisdom, courage, and temperance are considered cardinal virtues, and justice is considered a tertiary virtue.⁴³ Moreover, the different virtues resemble the different factions of the society with each his own different virtue. The factions consist of artisans, auxiliaries, and the guardians. Each faction has a different set of distinct natures and capacities. The philosopher king is the one who rules the community.⁴⁴

Courage can be understood as strength and is primarily found within the warrior class. Temperance can be best understood as moderation and is mainly connected to the producing class. Wisdom was primarily associated with the ruling class. The virtue justice is the factor that connects these three cardinal virtues.

Although having a more modern society with a less strict class system, these virtues can still be relevant to contemporary political discussions about citizenship, civic education, and required virtues. Because of Plato's system in which a good city resembles the good political individual, there needs to be a connection between actions of the citizen and the actions and image of a political society. This is shown in the following:

"The question we have to ask ourselves is this. What is our aim in appointing the guardians? Is it to provide the greatest possible happiness for them? Or does our aim concern the whole city? Aren't we seeing if we can provide the greatest degree of

⁴³ Brown, "Plato's Ethics".

⁴⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Tom Griffith. Ed. G.R.F. Ferrari. (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

happiness for that? Isn't that what we should be compelling these auxiliaries and guardians to do? Shouldn't we be persuading them – an everyone else likewise – to be the best possible practitioners of their own particular task? And when as a result the city prospers and is well established, can't we then leave it to each group's own nature to give it a share of happiness?"⁴⁵

The ideal and purpose of the virtues is to create a successful and stable political community ruled by competent and just citizens that each fulfil their task. Following such structure the citizens will be able to experience their share of happiness.

3.2.2 Rawls: moral virtues as political virtues

A lot of the content in the philosophy of Plato appears later in the work of John Rawls. Rawls uses certain political virtues in his philosophy surrounding political liberalism and how citizens can create and support a society together while leading lives according to their own values and goals. A large focus of the work of John Rawls was to make reasonable disagreement a necessary part of politics:

‘Diversity of reasonable comprehensive (religious, philosophical, moral) doctrines found in modern democratic societies is not a mere historical condition.. it is a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy’.⁴⁶

Rawls's philosophy aims to give an answer to this permanent feature of ‘diversity of reasonable comprehensive doctrines’ using some philosophical tools. The most famous one is the ‘veil of ignorance’: Everyone should construct society with the idea that they could get placed or born on every step on the socio-economic ladder. I want to focus on his use of public reason, sense of justice, and sense of the common good. Public reason is a skill of virtue that enables individuals to connect and communicate with other individuals while having different ideals and priorities in life. The sense of justice can be translated into giving every individual fundamental moral worth.⁴⁷ The sense of the common good is the capacity

⁴⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, 421 B-C.

⁴⁶ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 36.

⁴⁷ John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 299.

to understand, apply, and act from the public conception of justice, which characterizes the fair terms of social cooperation.⁴⁸

Rawls is also concerned with the political individual being rational and reasonable. Both ideas, as Rawls calls rationality and reasonability have moral power that can be used within a political community.⁴⁹ All these concepts are to be used to make social cooperation possible within the basic structure of a society. The basic structure is the main political, social, and economic institutions and how they fit together into one unified system of social cooperation from one generation to the next.⁵⁰

3.2.3 Amy Gutmann and civic education

The last account I want to address is that of Amy Gutmann, an author on civic and democratic education. She focuses on the position and capabilities of the political individual in a society. She is an advocate for deliberative democracy. One of her books is called *Democratic Education*, in which she says, '*Democratic Education* argues that a necessary condition of an adequate civic education is to cultivate the skills and virtues of deliberative citizenship'.⁵¹ Although not sharing the goal of deliberative democracy, I share the goal of a successful political community, wherein the citizens also have the virtues which enable deliberation and respect of each other in the community.

Consistent with her ideal of deliberative democracy, she focuses on virtues as toleration of difference and being able to compromise based on principled prudence and mutual respect.⁵² Her end goal with these virtues and what can be conceived of as a political virtue in and of itself is deliberation. Next to toleration of difference, being able to compromise and show mutual respect are necessary. These virtues support the necessary critical thinking skills to be able to manoeuvre in modern democracy and develop into a person that is capable of deliberation.

Although less of a traditional account of political virtues, I find her approach interesting. Plus, the prioritized virtues correspond with some of the virtues I have chosen and will address in the upcoming section. Having mutual respect and toleration is crucial when creating a successful political community having several different ways of life.

⁴⁸ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵¹ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 13.

⁵² Amy Gutman, and Dennis Thompson, "The Mindsets of Political Compromise," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 4 (2010).

3.3 The necessary political virtues

Public reason

Public reason is a frequently visited topic by philosophers. It is important to the discussion of liberal politics. Reasonable disagreement and different priorities of citizens are relevant when debating a system which aims to create a political platform on the foundation of individualism. Some of the endorsers of public reason are Gerald Gaus, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Larmore, and John Rawls.⁵³ The philosopher Rawls defines public reason as follows:

‘Public reason, then, is public in three ways: as the reason of citizens as such, it is the reason of the public; its subject is the good of the public and matters of fundamental justice; and its nature and content is public, being given by the ideals and principles expressed by society’s conception of political justice and conducted open to view on that basis’.⁵⁴

Public reason is the conception that moral and political rules which influence the basic structure of society must be able to be justified or accepted by all persons who are influenced by these rules. As described in Chapter 2, some of the current problems with democracy, tunnel vision, and individualism lead to a state where policies are worse because of the sole focus on the self and the inability to connect one’s own opinions to the general discourse. To create a successful community, a person must be able to communicate through the same discourse to at least be aware of developments in society outside of their socio-economic bubble.

I think that public reason can be used to structure a person’s own ideas and ideals concerning a society and relate them to another’s positions. When making a political decision, a helpful skill would be an ability to place the decision in the context of the community and consider how it would have to be explained to other citizens. In addition to being a good check-in if an individual can accept it themselves, it is a skill that enables better policy-making due to the fact that policies must be justified to all people; it implies more restrictions on what ‘good’ policies are. Within a modern democracy, this should be a

⁵³ Thomas Mulligan, “On the Compatibility of Epistocracy and Public Reason,” *Social Theory and Practice* 41, no. 3 (2015): 460.

⁵⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 213.

required political virtue because the nature of politics makes laws and policies that regulate all citizens' lives.

Sense of the common good or equally beneficial goals

In political philosophy, a great deal is written about the common good of a community. Most notable is the Rousseau's formulation residing in the idea of 'a general will'. This idea means there is a common goal that is best suited to be followed for all citizens and should be the focus of the community.⁵⁵ The response of the philosopher Isaiah Berlin is that 'the belief of a common good is responsible for the most slaughtered individuals'.⁵⁶ I do agree that the idea of a very simple common good of a group can be dangerous. Still, I think that in another sense, a common goal is necessary to have as a citizen when being a political individual.

A more nuanced conception of the common good can be found in Plato's and Rawls's ideas of the common good. Plato understood that to be a just political citizen one should aim for what is good for the society and not for themselves as an individual. It seems a bit vague. He means that being a virtuous person in a political community shows through a person's actions and contributes to the prosperity of the society.⁵⁷ This can be interpreted in many ways as the good of a society is not specificized. Rawls describes it as 'certain conditions that are equally to everyone's advantage'.⁵⁸

I would define a sense of the common good as the following: *The ability of an individual to see and think from the perspective of a citizens' own political community. Identify which possible perspectives and values are best suited for the concerning society from that perspective. Additionally taking this perspective with them in the process of making decisions that have an impact on the entire society.*

Although having some resemblance to public reason, the goal here is not to justify or accept certain laws but rather start from the 'aggregate' thinking point of all the citizens. What is the best social or economic policy for the community as a whole? When evaluating politicians or policies, it would be helpful to use Rawls's formulation for a sense of what can be to everyone's benefit equally. For Plato, it is important for citizens that to be virtuous someone needs to contribute to society.⁵⁹ Rawls focuses on an ability to analyse and reflect

⁵⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012).

⁵⁶ Isaiah Berlin. "Two Concepts of Liberty," In *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

⁵⁷ Plato, *The Republic*.

⁵⁸ Rawls, *Theory of Justice*.

⁵⁹ Plato, *The Republic*.

on common benefits, and Plato focuses on actions that contribute to these common benefits.

Having the ability without practising is not worth that much. An individual who is able to analyse, reflect, and act on these evaluations will be able to contribute to society with a sense of the common benefits and goals shared by all citizens.

Sense of equal and moral worth

Certain knowledge can be helpful to certain problems in democracy. However, most problems which are discussed are more fundamental. Minorities in political communities can be harmed intentionally or unintentionally by a majority group who just focuses on their own interests. A quality that can fix this lacking is the ability to sense others' interests and the context of their decisions. This means having the political virtue to see and hold the equal and moral worth of all citizens while being politically active.

Christiano argued for and stated this idea very clearly. He stated that beliefs about society and politics must be grounded in a conception of equal worth.⁶⁰ This means that one's own and others' interests have similar weight in understanding social and political policies. I agree with him; to achieve this virtue of respecting every individual in the society as equally worthy, it is vital to transcend one's own perspective. This political virtue enables one to transcend perspectives, understand that beliefs about society and politics should be grounded in this conception of equal worth, and be aware of the interests of possible minorities.

Such a virtue can be strengthened by a virtue promoted by Gutmann; she promotes the virtue of mutual respect, considering it a necessary skill to be incorporated in the education of competent citizens. The idea of equal and moral worth is to base and evaluate the political decisions within a society on how these decisions impacts the lives of all citizens. More importantly, how does it succeed or fail in its aim? Together with a conception of mutual respect, a sense of equal worth should be a core ability of anyone who is practising politics when other citizens are involved. This ability lets one analyse certain patterns in policies, whether they are destructive or beneficial to citizens.

⁶⁰ Thomas Christiano, "Democracy and Social Epistemology," *Philosophical Topics* 29, no. 1/2 (2001): 85-86.

Wisdom and scientific knowledge

The political and economic systems we live in are getting more complicated and intertwined every day.⁶¹ To understand policies about the economy and political measures, one must have a certain understanding of topics such as the following: history, social science, math, geography, economics, and politics. Society exists in a framework of knowledge; to understand the framework of one's own society and the problems in it, one must at least have a grasp of this framework. Otherwise, one will not be able to gather or understand new information. Without such knowledge, one cannot understand new information and new developments on various subjects. This could prevent individuals from making informed decisions on how the issues should be handled.

This virtue of knowledge is how this thesis began. Epistocracy focuses on this single virtue to promise better political individuals. Although I do not agree with this singular focus, it is indeed an essential part of a political community. For Plato, 'wisdom' is the primary virtue that characterizes the rules of society. This virtue is the ability to understand what the best decision is in a certain situation and for which concerning group. Also, wisdom is the ability to have knowledge and use knowledge for the good of the whole community. In Plato's time, society consisted of mainly three classes. According to Plato, knowledge was an essential virtue for the ruling class. In the *Republic*, he states the following through Socrates:

'And the title "wise" because of that small part which acted as an internal ruler and have those instructions, having within it a corresponding knowledge of what was good both for each part and for the whole community of the three of them together'.⁶²

Related to wisdom, but being a more specific and modern form of knowledge, is scientific knowledge. To understand the increasingly more difficult problems, policies, institutions, economy, (geo)politics, health care, and global warming, one needs a solid foundation of information. I define scientific knowledge as *understanding structural processes and essential information that are the foundation of human society, like politics, health care, environmental processes, and the economy*. This is a lot of knowledge to grasp for an

⁶¹ Christiano, "Democracy Defended and Challenged".

⁶² Plato, *The Republic*, 442 C.

individual; therefore, a better way is needed to deal with this problem. Additionally, hopefully the complex division of labour in current democracies can be used to our benefit instead of it being an obstacle to well-informed voting.

Probably the most constructive way of dealing with scientific knowledge and formulating a virtue is instead of understanding everything, a voter should have to understand the basic foundations of these topics. This will enable the voter to analyse which official or politician does have the more profound knowledge of the topic, and whether that person is competent enough to make decisions about these topics for the society.

A basic understanding allows one to identify who does have actual knowledge about these kinds of topics. Moreover, it lets one understand some of the possible consequences of a decision on a topic like health care can have. Understanding basic concepts allows someone to practise critical thinking and reasoning. This means identifying which policy would have which outcome and identifying which public actor has a real and even better understanding of these scientific concepts. This ability will lead to a situation in which an individual can identify which policies are incorrect and understand the more complex reasoning behind the plans presented by politicians. Having the wisdom or critical thinking skills to analyse the options and from there decide on the most effective plan to achieve the goal can be crucial when casting a vote for a policy or a politician influences millions of lives.

Reasonable and rational

In a lot of literature on politics and economics, the modern human is portrayed as reasonable and rational. Being reasonable is necessary to assume certain things that structure society and being rational is necessary to focus on one's own economic interest. How rational humans are is frequently a topic in the academic debate about economics or politics.

Thus, rationality is a very broad concept in philosophy and its history. One possible definition is from Rawls. He states the following when addressing rational individuals: *'We assume such persons share a common human reason, similar powers of thought and judgment, a capacity to draw inferences and to weigh evidence and to balance competing*

considerations, and the like'.⁶³ For Rawls, rationality is the ability to connect to other individuals through basic human reasoning and connection of different thoughts.

Other useful interpretations of this virtue – rationality – could include ‘the ability to be fair and objective in one’s judgments and reasoning when they do not have the best argument’. This version of rationality includes being interested in the ‘truth’ which is the reality shared by all people. It is also to understand that there is a shared truth in most societal areas, and voters and politicians must follow this truth.

Reasonability is a concept closely related to rationality; it is also a very important quality of individuals. Being reasonable in a political community means using common sense, being open to different perspectives on social issues, and basing opinions or decisions on grounds that can be accepted through good reasoning.

The opposite is sometimes true: *‘By contrast, people are unreasonable in the same basic aspect when they plan to engage in cooperative schemes but are unwilling to honor, or even to propose, except as a necessary public pretense, any general principles or standards for specifying fair terms of cooperation. They are ready to violate such terms as suits their interests when circumstances allow*’.⁶⁴ In the literature and specifically in Rawls’s writings, being reasonable plays a significant role in enabling reasonable disagreement and multiculturalism in the sense of combining multiple ways of life into one society. I agree that when creating a successful political community with an array of different ideals and priorities, an individual should be reasonable to enable an effective political structure. When someone is being a virtuous voter, it means that they are able to construct reasoning that all citizens can understand. Plus, it means they can contribute to better decision-making through ‘common sense’ and aim for social cooperation when making decisions.

Biases & transcending perspectives

We also need to address the relevance of bias and, preferably, non-bias in society. One of the most significant objections to epistocracy and, in a sense virtueocracy, is that it maintains that the mechanism of restricted suffrage is the demographic objection formulated by David Estlund. As mentioned in the first chapter, it implies that if only highly educated people are

⁶³ John Rawls, “The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus,” *New York University Law Review* 64 (1989): 236.

⁶⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 50.

allowed to vote, this demographic group would bring certain biases and prejudices that fully counter any positive effects that voter selection would have.⁶⁵

The objection, fully explained in Chapter 1, raises questions about an important concept in society – biases. Everyone has biases towards certain people or aspects of life. An extremely dangerous bias is the example of racism – ruling out entire groups of people based on their skin colour. History and even contemporary societies show the possible impact of this bias. A few biases significantly influence daily and political life: (dis)confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, intergroup bias, and availability bias.⁶⁶ The argument Estlund has presented focuses on the problem of these biases. It is realistic to think that if the voters come from a particular group, they will also have certain biases in common, whether positive or negative. For a successful form of epistocracy and any form of politics, it is vital that people are unbiased to the maximum extent possible, or at least very conscious of their own biases. Being objective in one's reasoning and not letting biases prevent deliberation or thinking is essential. The virtue of not acting out of biases is, therefore, a necessary component of an excellent political citizen. I can imagine a list of the most prevalent biases being formed into an extensive and detailed test by a diverse committee. This way, people who do this test can grow self-aware of these biases and try to actively alter or suppress them. There is an inherent lack of other perspectives; therefore, being unbiased is a virtue that must be trained and does not come naturally.

Biases are inherent in individuals, and being unbiased means acting without letting one's biases influence their decisions. The political virtue of being unbiased is perhaps the easiest to justify. If someone is part of the select few who have the political power to influence society and choose public figures who will keep influencing society, that person must be unbiased. In this way, they will choose the right policy for the right reasons. Biases are often sentiments that have been learned over time but often have no real foundation. In the search for the best political decisions, an unreasonable bias can block the most effective decision.

⁶⁵ Estlund, "Why Not Epistocracy," 61.

⁶⁶ Brennan, *Against Democracy*, Ch. 3.

Toleration

Mostly used in theory of deliberative democracy, toleration is a political virtue that can be crucial when the goal is to create a successful and lasting political community. If someone wants to establish a useful discourse in a community, they need the citizens to tolerate each other. According to Gutmann, toleration is essential to educate a citizen because it enables cooperation with other citizens, and it leads to a more democratic character of this citizen.⁶⁷ Without toleration, there will be no room for communication or the true goal of deliberative democracy – compromise.

In public reason, we explored how one should be able to justify ideals or policies to others. In biases and transcending perspectives, I claimed that to make good political decisions one has the ability to be conscious of their own biases and look past their individual perspective. In this way they can be a political individual, familiar with other situations of people who have varying welfare, education, and opportunities.

Toleration can also be translated as ‘the ability to accept certain negative occurrences in the political structure that do not benefit oneself’. It is not only accepting other ways of life; it is also how these other ways of life through laws influence one’s own life in a negative manner.

Recap

In this chapter, I have introduced three accounts and explained the requirements of several political virtues supported by these accounts. I have chosen these virtues on the basis of the addressed problems in Chapter 2. These virtues are wisdom, scientific knowledge, toleration, mutual respect, a sense of equality, moral worth and being unbiased, rationality, and reasonability.

I have defined a lot of these virtues very strictly, including their importance to the political goal. Although it would be great if a political individual would meet all these strict standards, it is impossible and not necessarily needed. This thesis aims to create a better solution than epistocracy for the problems of decision-making. For this purpose, the argument does not need the perfect political individual. Instead, there is the need of a requirement to such an extent that it is better than what epistocracy aims for with the

⁶⁷ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*.

singular requirement of political knowledge. To a certain extent, a political individual with all these political virtues will be better able to make good political decisions that have a more 'competent' impact than Brennan's competent voter. Even when not in agreement about how a political system should be created, it should be considered fair and acceptable that all these virtues which can possibly be found in an individual will result in better policy-making. To ensure this goal, I address the practical problems in Chapter 4 with the political virtues conceptualized in this chapter.

Chapter 4: How virtuecracy solves problems

4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, all the different political values have been addressed and it was explained why they are needed to create a successful political community. This chapter defines virtuecracy more, describes how it stands up against the flaws that Brennan's epistocracy contains, and promotes it to as a better system than democracy. Brennan focuses on only one political virtue, namely, knowledge. The problems with democracy and the specific problematic things Brennan points out in democracy would still exist in his version of epistocracy.

4.2 Ideal versus non-ideal politics

Two significant trends are essential to consider in political philosophy when creating a political theory or debating ideas in political communities. These are ideal and non-ideal philosophies. As the names suggest, ideal political philosophy focuses on an ideal scenario or worldview where everything is as desired.⁶⁸ This ideal scenario could mean that every citizen is virtuous, and one could build on that and give everyone voting rights. Non-ideal philosophy is connected to the real world, where not everything is as desired or perfect.⁶⁹ Not everyone will be able to be virtuous. Therefore, not everyone may vote. A good example of ideal theory is Rawls's theory, where every individual is deemed rational to make responsible choices – a group of rational individuals. He aims for the perfect situation in which skills to be a good citizen can be attributed to everyone.

In this thesis, I focus on problems of collective decision-making in democracy and epistocracy: Most individuals are not competent enough to make political decisions, so a system must be devised that deals with this imperfection and still produces solid outcomes. Although Brennan tries to have a realistic approach, the singular focus on knowledge which epistocracy brings is still a more ideal theory than a non-ideal theory. It is unrealistic to expect that a system with restricted suffrage that only selects knowledgeable individuals will instantly produce a better instrumental political community with better policies.

⁶⁸ Ingrid Robeyns, "Ideal Theory in Theory and Practice," *Social Theory and Practice* 34, no. 3 (2008): 342.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 343.

4.3 Solving practical problems

In chapter two, I have addressed some of main problems democracy struggles with. I based the choice for certain political virtues on these problems; now, I address how the virtues embedded in a political structure can solve these problems, where the epistocracy of Brennan fails. I try to focus on practical problems of collective decision-making to show the strength in the reason for accepting that political virtues must be required while doing politics.

Improving the epistemic aspects of democracy, epistocracy, and virtuecracy

If someone wants the best political outcomes possible, they need to instil certain virtues within the individuals who vote and influence these outcomes. One of the most important virtues is having foundational (scientific) knowledge, and even more relevant in modern society is identifying expertise.

The opinions or decisions of experts on certain topics are important in political matters. The relation between citizens and experts is relevant when debating expertise knowledge and how it should play a role in a political community. What defines this relation is the amount of knowledge both parties have. This difference can alternate between the situations and the actors in them.⁷⁰ Requiring the virtue of (scientific) knowledge and wisdom lets people identify who is the best possible candidate for an office. This identifying or accepting knowledge, as seen in the current COVID-19 crisis, can be hard for citizens. Not accepting expertise knowledge can harm a political community a great deal, for example, by not getting a vaccination because an individual believes the pandemic is part of a greater secret plan. It is important to always criticize and analyse what is said or stated, but accepting beliefs is also an important virtue when creating a successful political community. Achieving better epistemic results in political decisions relies not only on being knowledgeable but also on being rational and reasonable to enable discussion and accept knowledge of experts.

Alvin Goldman wonders, 'what kinds of education, for example, could substantially improve the ability of novices to appraise expertise'.⁷¹ He has written about the relationship

⁷⁰ Alvin I. Goldman, "Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63, no. 1 (2001).

⁷¹ Goldman, "Experts," 109.

between the novice and the expert. Goldman focuses on ideas as track-records, the use of numbers, and the blind faith novices should sometimes have in society.⁷² I would state that next to these interesting ideas, it is also important to systemically improve the level of citizens' knowledge, rationality, and reasonability.

To get the best political outcomes, epistemic wise, citizens are needed who possess not only knowledge but also multiple virtues. Virtuecracy uses a restrictive voting selection so only the citizens who have acquired and have shown that they possess the virtues can vote. By focusing on the civic education of political virtues and setting a reward – that is voting – virtuecracy does a better job than democracy in enabling and challenging citizens who want to develop themselves into politically virtuous individuals.

The problem of individualism and tunnel vision

Instead of being incentivized to be politically virtuous, democracy tends to develop towards the voter instead of the voter to the system. Political parties often change their position or policy ideas to attract voters. Although it is a reciprocal relationship and voters get attracted to certain parties, the result of development towards the voters is that voters are not asked or pushed to develop their political perspectives or abilities.

Everyone zooms in on their own interest and how politicians or policies can benefit this interest. In current systems, this is sort of the default mode – citizens vote for the official who is going to represent them in the parliament. This results in preferring policy and politicians which do not benefit the political structure. Instead, it slowly erodes the effectiveness of the political structure. I do think it is important for someone to be able to analyse and reflect on this process in their own political community. Acting on it will be the next step, but one should at least be consciousness about the process to stop eroding the effectiveness of political decisions.

Deliberation in a political community: use of public reason

Even reasonable individuals can disagree or have different judgments. Rawls states in *The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus* that even when people are rational and reasonable, they will not automatically agree about how society should be structured.⁷³

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Rawls, "The Domain".

Following this argument, how does virtuecracy give an answer to the lack of deliberation in modern political citizens?

Having toleration towards other, being rational, and being able to look at other perspectives means that one can understand the argument or opinions posed by others. Democracy and, to a lesser extent, epistocracy do not focus on individual development that much. This lack of focus makes both systems unable to establish a structural system of deliberation. Therefore, these systems lack the individual skill needed to have a fruitful political debate that aims for compromises or new ideas for the concerning political communities. I would like to state that for proper deliberation, one must be able to respect, accept, and understand each other. This is originally not asked of political participants in democracy or epistocracy, and citizens often lack these virtues to enable fruitful deliberation. I think a political system which requires political virtues can escape this failure of deliberation. If citizens pass the 'political examination' and are 'politically virtuous', they have the required abilities to have discussions and arguments that could help compromise.

I have discussed the concept of public reason; it means that policies or changes should be reasonably acceptable for all citizens involved.⁷⁴ This specific concept could help stop the corruption of democracy and the lack of deliberation due to corruption. Requiring this ability from citizens can hold individuals' ideals to a certain standard, creating more room for acceptance and fighting corruption. The corruption, as Brennan states, is that people will have even more belief in their own ideals than to be open to deliberation.⁷⁵ The space created by public reason means that people accept that their ideals must already be reasonable to agree to begin with. So, people will not perform deliberation from out their own ideals but ideals that are more suited to a liberal society.

4.4 Civic virtue education

Implementing a new political system based on passing requirements of political virtues should be done carefully. Therefore, I want to promote civic education as an important part in virtuecracy. To achieve the goal of virtuous citizens – get as many citizens as possible politically active and able to overcome new problems in the community – one needs a solid foundation of civic education. This foundation shows what virtues are necessary for living

⁷⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.

⁷⁵ Brennan, *Against Democracy*, Ch. 5.

together well and shows that the system can be beneficial to an individual and the community. It should create the perspective that everyone who wants to put forth time and energy is able to become a politically active citizen.

Amy Gutmann has dedicated a lot of time to writing about civic education – about the content and the need for it. In her book *Democratic Education*, Gutman has argued that a strong packet of virtues must be incorporated in a political structure to ensure long-term ‘democratic values’ and prevent the possible hollowing out of a political structure.⁷⁶ I agree with the importance of a civic education and certainly with a restricted suffrage which aims to improve policies, laws, and officials. It is important to teach individuals how to practise politics. Democracy does not bring any needed education with it. Representative democracy often develops in the direction of the voter, changing language or ideals which are best suited to win elections. The source of democracies’ problems lies partly in the citizens, but there is no attempt to improve the citizens or improve the system so that there can be a healthy balance between both parties. If someone does not invest in education and politics for the long-term, the system will be hollowed out due the gap between citizens and politics.

4.5 Closing the virtue gap

I identified the virtue gap in chapter two. The aim is to create better quality policies. However, the problem is that individual citizens, according to epistocracy, lack the knowledge to make well-informed decisions.⁷⁷ But there are more problems with democracy and more of a lack in virtues within citizens who block better policies and well-informed decisions. Reaching this, there is a gap between knowledge as competence and actual knowledge and skills needed for improved politics, it is a virtue gap.

For now, I have reasonability and rationality to make citizens better able to place themselves in the public debate and follow reasoning. There is a sense of the common good and transcending perspectives to be able to analyse and reflect on which decisions could be good for the society and which policies or politicians are constructive to the community. Also, there is the virtue of knowledge so that enfranchised citizens have a basic understanding of scientific knowledge and can identify who has the expert knowledge on socio-economic issues. With these political virtues required to be able to vote, there is a

⁷⁶ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*.

⁷⁷ Brennan, *Against Democracy*.

threshold on which others can trust these individuals with political power and trust that they should be able to support and create better policies. Even when not agreeing with a system with restricted suffrage, it is reasonable to accept that requiring these virtues can help improve citizens and close the virtue gap that is present in epistocracy.

Recap

In this chapter, I wanted to address how virtuecracy tries to solve non-ideal problems in democracy through the presence of several virtues within citizens. Implementing a system such as virtuecracy needs a strong structure of civic education to enable virtues and the perspective that every individual can join the political 'workforce'.

My key claim of this thesis is that Brennan's argument lacks substance and that his argument does not work because he only focuses on that similar and singular quality, which is knowledge. Epistocracy in that form will never be viable because it lacks the same aspects that democracy lacks, meaning that it does not offer a way to include the several qualities that make individuals politically virtuous to make political decisions. Therefore, the academic debate needs a new and a more specific form of epistocracy that identifies the qualities and has real room and use for individuals with these virtues. This means there is a need for a political structural process of selecting citizens with the qualities and giving them a license. The license shows that they are suitable to make decisions that have a big impact on other people's lives. There is a need for a virtuecracy that does select individuals to vote or represent based on multiple qualities because then you come closer to individual's actual practicing better politics. Even without a system such as virtuecracy, my argument should show that political virtues are necessary when improving the current political structure, while epistocracy fails to do so.

Chapter 5: Suggestions for a virtuecracy

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I show how different versions of virtuecracy can be constructed and will specifically outline one of these versions and possible objections to this conceptualized version. I argue that even if the objection to virtuecracy is strong, the argument for it has many advantages.

5.2 Three aspects of virtuecracy

When debating virtuecracy, there are three aspects to focus on: the threshold for the requirements, the learning model, and the selective model. The threshold is about how high or low the requirements should be when discussing who should be considered skilled enough to vote. The first model of choosing citizens is a learning model where everyone gets the chance to be a voter through learning and developing their virtues. The alternative is the selective model which, instead of developing citizens into voting candidates from the start, just focuses on selecting citizens who can show they have the required virtues. Of course, a person can learn the virtues themselves and even be promoted, but the system itself will only select and aim for political citizens, not develop them. This begs the question about whether a person should oblige civic education in the general political structure or not.

As mentioned earlier, another aspect that is relevant when debating a system like virtuecracy is the threshold of the system. When are citizens deemed virtuous enough to be eligible to vote? The most effective split when debating is a low threshold and a high threshold. A low threshold could be that citizens show some aspects of each political virtue and are therefore eligible to vote. This system would emphasize the aim to include every citizen in the political process in the long run. A voter's license could be a great way to implement this. Everyone can try to learn the virtues to a certain extent and take an exam to prove their skills. In a selective model, a low threshold would mean that select people that, for example, finished a secondary education program, such as a master's program. The high threshold would aim for virtuous 'angels', so to speak. They are citizens that have mastered the chosen political virtues. An example in the learning model would be that someone is only eligible after finishing a bachelor's degree. This implementation would reduce the number of potential voters that could do the voter exam drastically. The selective model

combined with the high threshold even amplifies that trend. Such a system would be similar to Plato's system of philosopher kings. A small amount of wise, politically virtuous citizens will lead the political community.⁷⁸ They are selected because they have proven to be the best in the area of politics.

The model I want to discuss – one that is the most interesting and realistic of these four, in my view – is the low threshold plus the learning model. The voter's license is attractive because it is not an ideal scenario. It could be achievable to make everyone do an exam they have to pass, with related lessons that could start from high school. The learning aspect also makes it so that, hopefully, everyone can be a voter someday; this means that everyone can be included in the political level of their society.

Matrix of possible forms of virtuecracy	Learning model	Selective model
Low threshold	Voter's license	Submit your degree
High threshold	Yearly political examination	Plato's philosopher kings

5.3 Voter's license as the political structure

Democratic theorists object to epistocracy, saying that it is not inclusive.⁷⁹ However, in a democracy, many groups are banned from elections, such as teenagers, those whose future is at stake, those who are mentally impaired, or those whose interests in society's health care and safety nets are very high.⁸⁰ With a system where the voter license must be earned, one can, in theory, let everyone do the exam and see who passes it instead of banning whole groups; it creates an opportunity for individuals to become voters while they would generally be put in a group that is unable to vote. This is a problem for democracy because it lacks justification for not letting younger citizen's vote.⁸¹ In a virtuecracy, everyone who takes the lessons and passes the exam is shown to possess the virtues needed to participate

⁷⁸ Mary P. Nichols, "The Republic's Two Alternatives: Philosopher-Kings and Socrates," *Political Theory* 12 no. 2 (1984).

⁷⁹ Estlund is afraid that versions of epistocracy will endanger inclusivity.

⁸⁰ Claudio López-Guerra, "Enfranchising Minors and the Mentally Impaired," *Social Theory and Practice* 38, no. 1 (2012).

⁸¹ Michael S. Merry, and Anders Schinkel. "Voting Rights For Older Children And Civic Education," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2016).

and is to be trusted with the responsibilities that political decision-making comes with. People with a mental disadvantage can take the exam to test whether they understand and have the virtues to participate. The strongest objections to discuss when proposing a voter's license model are Estlund's demographic objection and the moral objection. The objections are that every political community must be inclusive so every selection mechanism, whether it is through learning or definitive selection, cannot be legitimate in society. A voter's license will not be ideal but with a low threshold will improve the quality of politics, combined with a strong civic virtue education.

Answering the demographic objection

In Chapter one, I introduced the demographic objection posed by Estlund as an attack on Brennan's epistocracy. This objection holds that focusing on a singular aspect of individuals such as intelligence or knowledge results in a particular demographic group being far more represented than other groups.⁸² An example is that if one focuses on highly educated individuals, there will be more forty- or fifty-year-old white, highly educated people than minorities in the voting booth. According to Estlund, such a demographic selection will bring adverse effects that wipe out the positive effects of focusing on something like knowledge. With a large part of the voting, individuals being white, older educated males, there could be systematic unconscious racism in their judgments because of the lack of representation of other ideas and values out of society. These unconscious biases will reduce all the positive effects that come with a highly educated group of voters.

For Estlund, focusing on a singular virtue would be harmful because of the consequences of selecting people based on their knowledge. This results in a lack of different perspectives and negative side effects of the chosen voting group. My response is also similar. I think that Estlund makes a strong argument and that some human qualities are more present in specific demographic groups. The reason for this is how society is constructed currently, and how society historically has developed; this results in a lack of different perspectives. However, a form of virtuecracy could fix this possible problem. Installing a political system where everyone needs a voter's license and must show multiple political virtues to a certain extent when taking the exam, should diminish the presence of

⁸² Estlund, "Why Not Epistocracy," 61.

negative biases as a by-product of voting requirements. Democracy seems to include everyone and hopes to balance out negative biases through sheer numbers of voters. Epistocracy focuses on competence and knowledge to assure better policies but does not provide an answer for these unconscious, negative biases Estlund addresses. A virtuecracy focuses on eliminating these negative biases and lack of perspectives.

Meeting the qualified acceptability requirement

According to Estlund, the only legitimate political system is a democracy because of the QAR: *'A state or kind of state is legitimate only if its coercive enforcement of law can be justified on a basis that is acceptable to all possible qualified points of view'*.⁸³ Democracy is legitimate because there are no reasonable citizens against this type of system. This is based on the idea of Rawls.⁸⁴ David Copp argues that Estlund fails in his aim only to legitimize democracy and delegitimize epistocracy. With the foundation of the argument that no reasonable person would reject, this becomes an ideal. An ideal can be plausible grounds for the argument, but it is not a solid ground because it is hard to imagine that a political system will ever be acceptable to all possible qualified points of view. In my perspective, this is an ideal theory and, therefore, there is no strong ground to reject political systems other than democracy.

Adding to the reasonability argument, it is the question whether when choosing between majority voting that influences the lives of millions in several ways without any restrictions on political competence, versus a restriction that will minimize the cause of harm through a virtue threshold looks reasonable to choose the second option. Additional to this question, it is the goal to incorporate several skills in the exam and license that specifically aim to be aware of different perspectives and act out of such a position when practicing politics. It means everyone's interests and values are included. When feeling represented while not voting, the non-voters can safely support virtuecracy.

The justification of selecting voters and the right to self-governance

⁸³ David Copp, "Reasonable Acceptability and Democratic Legitimacy: Estlund's Qualified Acceptability Requirement," *Ethics* 121, no. 2 (2011): 241.

⁸⁴ Rawls argues that every citizen should be able to reasonable agree to a certain standard.

Another big part of a political system that needs justification is the selection of a few to make decisions for many. One of the most significant differences with democracy and, in a lesser sense, epistocracy, is restricted suffrage, as mentioned in the previous section. Not everyone is instantly able to vote. A question that can be asked while debating about virtueocracy and democracy is this: Is there not a fundamental moral right of self-governing?⁸⁵

This justification comes down to a specific form of the harm principle, which was initially formulated by John Stuart Mill.⁸⁶ Mill used it to justify the containment of someone's liberty by stating that the individual's liberty stops when this individual is about to harm another individual. Selecting individuals who vote and implementing a political structure in which many individuals cannot vote is also limiting their political liberty. In Chapter 1, I explained the argument of Jason Brennan, who uses a form of this harm principle. His narrative is that voting can harm many individuals just by making uninformed or biased votes.⁸⁷ Because of the risk of harm, it can be justified to temporarily take away the right of political self-governing until they prove they can take this responsibility.

I want to add to this argument. If someone installs a system like a voter's license, one can provide guarantees that everybody will be technically able to vote. Furthermore, through the requirement of political virtues, citizens will be aware of others' interests and a common good. The requirements for such a license will be researched and defined carefully. Aiming for a learning model is important to create a perspective for all current and future citizens.

5.4 A positive account of virtueocracy

In this last paragraph of this chapter, I give a summarized, feasible, realistic, and positive account of virtueocracy. The best form of a virtueocracy satisfactory to these standards is a system of a voter's license, a virtue exam, and a structure of civic education that focuses on political virtues from an early age. Moreover, it includes how a political system works and how it can be beneficial for a citizen.

⁸⁵ Christiano, Sameer, "Democracy".

⁸⁶ David Brink, "Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018).

⁸⁷ Brennan, *Against Democracy*, Ch. 1-2.

A learning model is beneficial because it means it can be constructed for the long term and is focused on educating all citizens to be part of this political structure. There is no single requirement for selection that will split the society in two. It aims to let everyone be politically active who has been shown to be responsible and skilful enough to influence others' lives. Thus, there will be minimization of harm and maximization of the benefits of policies and laws made. Identifying different values, interests, expertise, solid reasoning, and having other political virtues will result in identifying which public officials and politicians are suitable to make policies. It also increases the ability to analyse and reflect on how these officials and politicians do their job, hopefully making voting a stronger mechanism than it is currently.

Not everyone will agree on a political structure based on political virtues, but selecting individuals above a certain threshold could solve the quality of decision-making through their enhanced political skills or virtues. It will be not an ideal system, but it aims to better the non-ideal political structure that is currently a representative democracy. A singular system as epistocracy will not be able to deal with the problems in a non-ideal scenario although Brennan states that he focuses on real scenarios. Competence or knowledge will not be enough to better policies, and certainly not in the long-term. Virtueocracy can improve the quality of politics through improving citizens and hopefully can hold this quality through the importance of civic education ending in an exam which can legitimize an individual to be politically active in their community.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have looked for an answer to the problems of democracy and the failing answer of epistocracy. After understanding the current academic debate and analysing the argument of Brennan's epistocracy and his supporting competence principle, I stated that focusing on competence as the only requirement for political individuals is not a solution to the problems of decision-making because it does not better the quality of voters, policies, or both.

To truly improve the quality of decisions made by political individuals, they need to have several political virtues that are crucial in a political community. These are *sense of justice, sense of equal worth, public reason, sense of common good, rationality, and reasonability*. This research which accounts for political virtues has shown that citizens need at least several of these virtues listed above to practice better politics. The next step is reflecting on exactly how these virtues can make individuals better and how they are solutions to the practical problems of good decision-making, such as lack of knowledge, lack of rationality, and inability to identify politicians or officials that can really contribute to the society.

The current debate was based on this question: Is it better for the political structure if the majority is allowed to vote or if voting by lesser people who have proven their competence would be better? I hope I have shown which political virtues are essential and desirable in a specific political community. Furthermore, I have contributed to the debate by showing that just disenfranchising people or making simple requirements will not solve any of the problems. Restructuring the conception of political individuals in liberal democracies and the virtues they need can help to improve the political structure for all citizens and politicians involved in the political process of decision-making. Moreover, it can impact lives in their political community.

Although it will be hard to set up a system such as virtuecracy, I think it is very important to look to alternative ways of dealing with political power. It is important to ask the questions who can contribute to the society, and what is needed to provide that contribution? By arguing for certain virtues, I have shown that more than only knowledge is needed to understand decision-making. Additionally, the debate needs to focus on personal

development if we want to have a sustainable political structure that provides good policy-making based on virtuous political citizens.

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