

Epistocracy and the Problem of Political Capture



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Abstract

Concerned about the harmful effects of pervasive political ignorance, epistocrats argue that we should amplify the political power of politically knowledgeable citizens. But their proposals have been widely criticized on the grounds that they are susceptible to manipulation and abuse. Instead of empowering the knowledgeable, incumbents who control epistocratic institutions are likely to selectively empower their supporters, thereby increasing their share of power. Call this the problem of political capture. In this paper I argue for two claims. First, I claim that the problem of political capture for epistocracy has been overstated. Incumbents who want to increase their share of power will encounter certain obstacles that complicate the task of capturing the system. Second, however, I claim that if the problem is nevertheless sufficiently serious, it militates against not just epistocracy, but also many other institutions. The problem of political capture is thus far wider than typically recognized.

About the Speaker

He is an assistant professor of philosophy at Lingnan University, where he also works with the Hong Kong Catastrophic Risk Centre. He received his PhD from the philosophy department at Rutgers University, New Brunswick in 2022. He works primarily in social and political philosophy, especially as they intersect with epistemology, political economy, and political science.