

JUSTICE

Lecture 8 – The Utility of Democracy

1. So far:
 - a. We have considered the Principle of Utility as the ultimate principle of justice
 - b. We have explored some of its implications for the content of laws and social practices
 - c. But the Principle of Utility also has implications for the *form* of government
2. Utilitarianism as a theory of democracy
 - a. Everyone should have rights of political participation, including the right to vote
 - b. Not because there is an “inalienable” right to participate in collective decision-making
 - c. But because popular government has “the greatest amount of beneficial consequences”
3. Why does representative government have better results than non-representative government?
 - a. Influence on the content of laws: participation provides better protection against oppression
 - b. Influence on the character of the governed: participation has important educative effects
4. Mill on the beneficial educative effects of participation
 - a. Having the vote gives people the sense that the laws to which they are subject are changeable by them, not merely “visitations of Nature” or unchangeable obstacles
 - b. Political discussion expands people’s thoughts beyond their daily tasks and wants; they are led to form opinions on larger matters of common concern
 - c. Participation in the exercise of public functions (voting, serving on a jury, holding a public office) develops the ability and desire to act impartially and to pursue the common good
5. Government should be organized so as to enhance these beneficial educative effects, through *e.g.*:
 - a. Opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate in the exercise of public functions
 - b. Norms of open, public discussion by government officials and elected representatives
 - c. The Single Transferable Vote

6. But mass participation can also have bad consequences, since at present the majority has
 - a. Low “technical competence”
 - b. Low “moral competence”
7. These “dangers of incompetence” must somehow be addressed if popular government is to be justified by appealing to its results
8. Mill’s proposal
 - a. No group should be permanently excluded from political participation: this would forgo the beneficial educative consequences of participation
 - b. But, a basic literacy and numeracy test should be required of all persons who wish to vote
 - c. And, multiple votes should be given to persons of greater mental competence
9. A potential objection to the utilitarian justification of democracy
 - a. It be wrong to give educated persons more votes *even if doing so would have the best results*
 - b. Therefore, the utilitarian justification of democracy is defective
 - c. And, the Principle of Utility itself must be mistaken

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