



Considerations on Representative Government

John Stuart Mill

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1861. John Stuart Mill is one of the foremost representatives of utilitarian thought as well as one of the most influential of nineteenth century liberals. Influenced by his wife, Harriet Taylor, Mill developed a very humane version of utilitarianism that was sympathetic to women's rights, labor unions, proportional representation, and other liberal themes. Contents: To What Extent Forms of Government are a Matter of Choice; The Criterion of a Good Form of Government; That the Ideally Best Form of Government is Representative Government; Under What Social Conditions Representative Government is Inapplicable; Of the Proper Functions of Representative Bodies; Of the Infirmities and Dangers to Which Representative Government is Liable; Of True and False Democracy; Representation of All and Representation of the Majority Only; Of the Extension of the Suffrage; Should There be Two Stages of Election?; Of the Mode of Voting; Of the Duration of Parliaments; Ought Pledges to be Required from Members of Parliament?; Of a Second Chamber; Of the Executive in a Representative Government; Of Local Representative Bodies; Of Nationality, as Connected with Representative Government; Of Federal Representative Governments; and Of the Government of Dependencies by a Free State. See other works by this author available from Kessinger Publishing.

Considerations on Representative Government Details

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Leonardo says

(presenta) un tipo de democracia respresentativa cuyo motivo central está dado por el mérito que esta institución posee de acuerdo con: "el grado en que [ella] promueve el progreso mental universal de la comunidad, incluyendo bajo tal frase el progreso del intelecto, de la virtud y en la actividad práctica y eficiencia" [Mill, 1861, p. 32].

Democracia y Estado de Bienestar Capítulo 1.

10001010001 says

I've been busy recently. But this is an esoteric and painful read. Not that it has a bad style in the sense of Simmel's; with the skills Leo Strauss had taught me, I was able to piece together the vision that Mill deliberately scattered into jigsaws and spread across the book. It was a bleak vision. It was a Templar's vision.

Once there was a colleague who explained to me what the word "woke" means now in slang English: you bring the awareness others into (progressive-left-narravie-compatible) issues that had been neglected so far. I swallowed my gut comment: "So shallow, ignorant and arrogant. These hypnotized people talking about enlightening others."

So what about this: John Stuart Mill, the father of classical liberalism, actually wrote all of his eminent work under a "liberal" guise to revive the totalitarian rule of philosopher-king, following Plato. He didn't want "liberty" amongst the people AT ALL, he wanted a group of prestigious "progressive", well-trained smart people to brainwash the rest of the community. He wanted to deprive our freedom to be stupid -- which, to anyone knows better, is the prelude of wisdom of any kind.

And what about this, quoted from the Chapter 14 of this book:

A most important principle of good government in a popular constitution is that no executive functionaries should be appointed by popular election, neither by the votes of the people themselves, nor by those of their representatives.

Miriam says

Mill published this in 1860, but it reminded me of his much earlier comments on Toqueville's criticisms in "Democracy in America" that democracy as a system promoted mediocrity and could lead to tyranny of the masses. Mill was concerned about the increasing popularity of the Labour party and feared that control of the Empire by elites would wane as populism waxed. He advocated democracy-limiting legislative measures to preserve the role of merit and intelligence against the *danger of a low grade of intelligence in the*

representative body and in the popular opinion which controls it. He felt that direct rule by the masses would unavoidably be ill-informed and self-interested. Democracy itself, however, was desirable because it resulted in patriotism and civic engagement; democratic involvement was therefore beneficial to the populace, if not necessarily good for the country itself. National leaders should strive to educate their citizenry in civic virtue, just as "civilized nations" worked to educate their "dependencies" (note that Mill had worked for the East India Company). Although this position may strike modern readers as paternalistic, the text is a good representation of the issues that resonated with late-nineteenth-century Liberals.

Some of the specific changes Mill recommended:

- establishment of a professional legislative committee to write laws and submit them for Parliamentary approval.
 - limiting suffrage to the literate (of both sexes).
 - creating a second house of men of intellectual merit and distinction to check the power of the House of Commons.
 - an executive judiciary and bureaucracy immune from popular vote or recall.
 - multiple votes for university graduates.
 - proportional representation of minorities in Parliament.
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Jaycob Izso says

What a brilliant book. I would never consider myself a proponent of utilitarian philosophy nor have I ever had a desire to be thought of as a utilitarian apologist, but if there is any work by Mill that could possibly reorient me towards utilitarianism it would be this text. The book is systematically constructed and Mill's arguments are linked from page to page and chapter to chapter (Mill will often remind the reader of this to the point where certain sections can seem redundant). In a recent discussion I had about this book I described it as "ratiocinative"; I can think of no more appropriate term to describe Mill's writing.

The first three chapters are, perhaps, the most critical in terms of Mill's theoretical position. Elements of the first three chapters essentially inform each move and counter-move he makes in his argumentation (albeit he seems somewhat willing to subtly alter his previously defined terms in curious ways so as to fit his latter points: e.g. "activity", "power", etc.). It would be extraordinarily difficult to make sense of Mill's more pragmatic chapters on the actual "business" of government if one skipped or skimmed the first three chapters (and the start of Chapter 4, as he restates his three central conditions from Chapter 1).

The chapters following Chapter 3 are no less interesting or technically nuanced - they simply follow Mill's more rigorous attempts to convert his theoretical propositions into practical suggestions and, finally, apply them to the real-world examples of his day. Some of these chapters will likely seem odd to modern scholars as Mill's proposals vacillate between items that we take as common sense today and proposals that seem relatively bizarre and largely speculative. Yet the important historical caveat to keep in mind at these junctures is the Mill appears to be inventing (or honing at any rate) the architectonics and analytic methods that would develop into contemporary political science in the West.

The detail, pacing, and strategic brilliance of the book bolster the content of the material significantly. Mill has several moments of thought which are quite clearly linked to the ideas of Mill senior and Bentham. But Mill's flourishes of classic utilitarianism in conjunction with his own brand of utilitarian thought are well conceived and seemingly defensible (at least Mill tries on even his most contentious points). This is an absolutely wonderful book for those interested in political philosophy, political history, or Mill's work.

Though I think I would be remiss if did not note that Mill would think virtually everyone in an advanced civilization should and should want to read a text like this.

Luan says

O livro mais enfadonho que tive o desprazer de ler. Fuja!

Aaron Crofut says

The first 8 chapters are well worth reading.

His thoughts on under what circumstances representative government can work is extremely simple, so simple that it is easy to dismiss as useful information, until you realize we are not meeting those criterion. They are 1) the people must be willing to accept such a government (we are); and 2) the people should be willing and able to do what is necessary for its preservation (we fail this). I rather like Mill's idea concerning suffrage, that those dependent on the taxes of others should be barred from voting until they are off the dole and that ignorant people should not be voting, but like Mill I recognize the extreme political and mechanical difficulty in actually implementing this.

We are ruled by fools because we are fools, and we are too damn foolish to know it.

Al Lock says

A surprising number of interesting insights into representative government from a few hundred years ago. I found the commentary on proportional representation especially interesting.

Sarina says

The true value of this book is philosophical. It is fun and interesting to apply Mill's flavor of utilitarianism and ideas of the invisible hand in economics to present day political and economic circumstances in America and Britain. His ideas about representative government are both intriguing and silly and it forces the reader to consider human nature as the driving force in all these. Worth reading but not to be taken too literally as a guide to policy today.

Mao says

My introduction to politics and government. This book covers a lot in representative government. It's worth reading.
