

An Analysis of Brennan's Viewpoint – “Better Educated People Should Receive More Votes Than Poorly Educated People” (Against Democracy, 2016)

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Abstract: Despite the rising recognition of citizen participation in government decision-making and negotiation as time progresses, a contradiction exists in the United Kingdom. There has been a significant fall in participation in parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom, which some proponents of democracy attribute to a negative attitude about government participation resulting from a lack of adequate responsibilities. Brennan, on the other hand, holds the opposite position, claiming that a more harmonious society would result if citizens did not participate in politics. According to him, the distribution of political power should be based on the citizens' knowledge and abilities. Using a dialectical method, this study explores Brennan's viewpoints. This study will examine Brennan's theory in regard to the aim of education and the meaning of democratic citizenship.

Keywords: Democratic; Suffrage

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1. Introduction

In recent years, although democracy has gotten more liberal and the government has allowed more individuals to participate in political negotiations, there has been a distinct downward trend in the number of people engaging in British parliamentary elections. Many proponents of democracy argue that citizens have not taken the responsibility of self-government seriously and have formed a negative attitude toward democracy, but Brennan considers this to be a positive development. He holds the view that “political liberty and involvement are generally bad ^[1].” He believes that the majority of people are either indifferent to politics or political extremists; therefore, if we do not participate in politics, we and society will be better off ^[1]. Regarding the issue of democracy, Brennan believes that a paternalistic government should be implemented, and the corresponding political power should be distributed according to people's corresponding knowledge and IQ; those with the most political knowledge and wisdom should make major decisions regarding the country ^[2]. This can construct a better world and deliver the finest results to everyone. This article will examine Brennan's views in depth and an epistocratic type of governance he proposed, discuss the merits and cons of this plan, and put forward thoughts on Brennan's views based on actual conditions.

2. “Against Democracy”: Three types of democratic citizens

In the book “Against Democracy”, Brennan clearly divides democratic citizens into three categories: Hobbits, Hooligans, and Vulcans ^[1]. The first type is mostly indifferent and ignorant of politics. They do not pay attention to most political issues, and they are called Hobbits. Specifically, hobbits lack of political knowledge, their participation in politics is extremely low, and they generally do not participate in political elections ^[1]. The second category of people is called Hooligans, most of them are fanatical fans of political sports and have a strong and basically fixed worldview. However, Hooligans have certain prejudices, they tend to look for information that can confirm their pre-existing political views, while ignoring, evading and rejecting evidence that contradicts or disagrees with their pre-existing views ^[2]. Vulcans are the third type of people who think scientifically and rationally. Their views are based on social science and philosophy. They are interested in politics, but at the same time indifferent, partly because they actively strive to avoid prejudice and irrationality ^[2]. If everyone is a Vulcan, then real democracy can be achieved. But this is just an ideal state. In fact, Vulcans do not really exist in reality, because almost no one can ignore their own selfish desires and abandon their own prejudices. Brennan encourages people to vote in order to safeguard other citizens, as he feels that “political decisions are not for individuals, but for everyone.” If the majority of people make risky judgments, others must also take chances ^[1].

3. Is “Political participation” beneficial to citizens?

Mill ^[3] hypothesized that involving citizens in politics would inspire them. One way to illustrate his hypothesis is that he hopes that political deliberations and participation in representative government will transform Hobbits into Vulcans. Moreover, many arguments have pointed out that political freedom and participation are beneficial to citizens. However, in Brennan's book “Against Democracy”, he mentioned that he believes that political freedom and participation are generally harmful, because most of us are either Hobbits or Hooligans ^[4]. The vast majority of citizens cannot be free from prejudice, and he believes that Hobbits are potential hooligans. Therefore, he suggested that most of our citizens should not participate in politics. If citizens do not participate in politics, the citizens themselves will be better, and even the society will become better ^[2]. Ideally, only a tiny number of people would be concerned with politics, while the others would spend their time engaging in other recreational pursuits, such as watching sports, traveling, or viewing movies.

Triumphalism believes that democracy and extensive political participation are beneficial, as they frequently produce just, efficient, and stable outcomes. In addition, they believe that democracy and broad political participation are worthy ends in and of themselves. However, Brennan argues that political participation is not beneficial for the majority of individuals. Instead, it tends to harden and corrupt us. It gives us civil enemies with justification for hostility ^[1]. Brennan supported some sort of patriarchy in which political power is divided according to ability, skills, and knowledge, based on the notion that political freedom and involvement are often damaging to citizens ^[2]. Actually, the origin of this remark dates back thousands of years. Plato was concerned that democratic voters would be too naive and prone to taking risks, which may easily lead to the demise of the elected government. He felt the ideal type of governance would be led by a noble and sage philosopher monarch ^[5]. The term discipline is used by contemporary political philosophers to describe this theory. This theory indicates the rule of knowledgeable individuals. To be more specific, a certain political system is dominant to the extent that political power is explicitly distributed on the basis of ability, skill, and sincerity in exercising this talent ^[5]. However, Aristotle disagreed with this assertion, as he argued that although this approach appears dependable, there is no philosopher-king. In actuality, the majority of humanity are incapable of overcoming prejudice and egotism, which means that there are no individuals bright enough to play this position, and we cannot consistently train them to be wise or compassionate. If we entrust the post to the state's philosophers, then this

discretionary power will attract the wrong people, who may abuse it for their own objectives ^[1].

4. Forms of restricted suffrage

Brennan recognized that setting expectations on philosophers of the king or guardian class is unreasonable, thus he offered five forms of restricted suffrage: plural voting, enfranchisement lottery, epistocratic veto, and weighted voting ^[2]. The enfranchisement lottery refers to the fact that, by default, no citizen possesses the right to vote, and a random lottery is subsequently used to determine which individual possesses the right to vote. Due to the limited franchise, all laws must be passed through democratic institutions utilizing democratic means. In the weighted voting/government configuration of the simulated oracle, every citizen is allowed to vote but must also pass a test of basic political understanding. Their votes are weighted based on their objective political knowledge, maybe statistically adjusting for race, income, gender, and other demographic factors ^[2]. Similar to a democracy, every citizen has the right to vote in plural voting. Nevertheless, certain voters (those deemed more capable or informed through specific legal procedures) have more votes and greater influence over political decisions ^[6].

5. Comments of different forms of restricted suffrage

Regarding the multiple voting system, Mill expressed his approval. He felt that allowing all citizens to engage in politics would elevate their moral character ^[3]. However, he is also concerned that too many residents will be powerless and that he cannot guarantee the degree of knowledge for every citizen. For some people who are under-educated, they may not be able to make wise choices in public opinion tests. Therefore, he recommends the introduction of voluntary examinations without any restrictions and without discrimination based on race, religion, social rank, economic ability, and other factors, so that everyone has an equal opportunity to take the exam and win votes ^[5]. Therefore, he favors for granting more votes to the educated. Mill argues that government is evaluated based on the composition and relationship of its population ^[7]. It enhances or diminishes the tendencies of the people, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of the work performed by the people for the people ^[8]. In other words, the government's performance should be evaluated from two distinct vantage points: personal growth and societal welfare. Thompson ^[9] proposed separating Mill's guidelines into protective and educative criteria. First, the government should safeguard its citizens from the perspective of protecting their interests. This is what Mill meant by “the caliber of the work it has performed for them.” Second, the government should educate citizens from an “intelligence, practice, and morals” standpoint ^[3]. In other words, the government should encourage the character development of its inhabitants. This is what Mill meant by “improving or deteriorating the natural tendencies of the people.” Moreover, the implementation of a pluralistic voting system will have a tremendous impact on people's educational practices, thereby empowering them to become politically engaged citizens ^[9]. Mill argues that votes must be won in order to enhance the general education level of the populace because some forms of governance may make us stupid and docile, while other forms of government may make us sensitive and active ^[2]. In addition, it will encourage people to pursue education and increase their educational level, as participation in political activities requires proper knowledge and skills. In order to maximize students' political engagement, schools will be held accountable for ensuring that pupils attain the highest feasible educational level ^[1]. And because political errors may impact all citizens, many who defend patriarchy think that even a society governed by the most educated individuals may exclude some people from matters that affect them. However, this is a worthwhile sacrifice, as this strategy can eliminate some ignorance-based errors in judgment ^[3].

Even though Brennan mentioned these patriarchy benefits in “Against Democracy”, I disagree with him. I feel that a patriarchal system of multiple voting should not be introduced such that individuals with a higher level of education have greater voting rights than those with a lesser level of education. This

perspective is fundamentally unequal and discriminatory. Lichtenberg ^[10] recognized his empirical disagreement to Mill's plan and began his explanation by asserting that Mill's proposal may not truly generate the claimed benefits. He embraces the idea of Scandinavian constructivism and believes that no one can challenge the political system in a reasonable manner, and therefore the political system is justified. The standard of contract theory is individualistic; it analyzes the system from the perspective of the individual, as opposed to the society as a whole ^[11]. Furthermore, it appears that Bates intends to restrict justified refusal to “personal reasons,” or “reasons relating to the claims and status of individuals in certain situations. ^[12]” In other words, while rejecting a plan, individuals must only examine their own legitimate interests. The second cost identified by Lichtenberg ^[10] is the impact on self-esteem when political disparity reflects other natural or social disparities. These disparities are the subject of seditious discrimination, or society as a whole is not respectful. Thus, plurality voting is intrinsically unjust. It will result in prejudice, undermine people's self-esteem, and harm those elected with a single vote. When discussing current political philosophy, Rawls ^[13] also emphasized self-respect as arguably the most significant advantage. Regarding this point, Lichtenberg ^[10] emphasized that the evident reduction of influence will be perceived as an insult, communicating public acknowledgement of current degrading societal traditions. Consequently, damage to self-esteem results from public awareness and recognition of actual, potential, societal, and natural inequalities. Waldron ^[14] concurred with Bates that “imposing equal weight or equal potential determinism on individual votes is a way to respect people” in acknowledging the connection between equality and self-esteem. In other words, many votes are unequal. Its very presence is a form of obvious disrespect and discrimination, as this patriarchal acceptability separates even the most extraordinary deviations.

6. Conclusion

Brennan concludes that political engagement and freedom are detrimental to citizens ^[2]. He suggested that the majority of citizens should not participate in politics and that political rights should be distributed based on citizens' knowledge and abilities, as this can prevent some errors caused by ignorance ^[15]. In other words, he believes that political power is distributed depending on people's knowledge and talents, and that those with the most political understanding and sagacity would make crucial decisions for the nation ^[5]. However, a minimum degree of education is necessary to exercise the right to vote. This type of patriarchy is fundamentally filled with disdain and prejudice, and it magnifies inequity indefinitely. This creates an educational and patriarchal dilemma. The objective of education is to produce educated people ^[16], not to distinguish humans via education and to use education as a weight to measure humanity's inequity. Therefore, the ideal approach is for the government to create an education system so that citizens may comprehend political engagement in its entirety ^[17]. The education system enables citizens to properly comprehend and respect democracy, hence patriarchy is unnecessary. Therefore, if we can place a greater emphasis on training people to become democratic citizens, we can enhance the education level of each citizen, enable people to participate in politics, and actualize genuine democracy.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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