

# Essay on utilitarianism

Law, Justice



Since the Enlightenment period of the 18th century, there is perhaps no more significant discussion in the field of Political Philosophy than that of the relation of the State to distributive justice. Influenced by Enlightenment social contract philosophy, John Stuart Mill's 19th century proposal suggests that the relationship between fiscal accountability and quasi-participatory forms of governance are the source of economic utility. Based on the precepts of Jeremy Bentham's Introduction to the Principles of Morals (1789), Mill's contribution to British Utilitarianism embraces a 'radicalism' of sorts, arguing that public policy is the most effective measure of economic efficiency in the interest of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" (Mill, 1861).

Community property as a source of "public good" emerges as the single most effective measure of universal emancipation in Mill's work (Mill, 1861). Ownership of property is also the means and *raison d'être* to democratic polity; a vital "resource" for taxation and site of public administration. Here, the legal condition to land title (i. e. ownership) establishes "citizenship," "right" and "contract". For social contract theorists such as Mill, property provides the general framework to "justice" and "sovereignty" as the primary interests of the State.

If economic citizenship is the ultimate exercise of participatory democracy, says Mill, distributive justice is the result of efficacious public policies. Policies dedicated to community property relations are most obvious source of equitable access to resources (Mill, 1861). At the most basic level, participatory democracy is the presence of "liberty" in sovereign agreement with the State. According to Mill, how well a government manages labour

and the commons, is evidenced in the articulation of “right” as a universal legal principle, and premise to citizenship. For this reason, argues Mill, economic justice is the most critical factor in determination of democratic efficiency; ethical regulation of economies of scale to the provision of all, the outcome.

## **References**

Mill, John Stuart, 1998. *Utilitarianism* (1861). Oxford: Oxford University Press.