

Minorities and Individuals

Recently, F. Rosen has reminded us that, although Bentham was one of the greatest advocates of democracy, he never thought democracy should be government by the people. As a democrat, all his efforts were limited to the feasible, to reducing the harm caused by "sinister interests", resulting from government by the "ruling few". John Stuart Mill accepts this idea of the inevitability of minorities in politics and he went further than Bentham with his argument in favour of a limitation of the suffrage. Mill had already put forward, in general, a vindication of minorities in fields such as society, morality, religion, art, sexual freedom. He summed up that attitude in *On Liberty*, in his legitimation of that extreme minority, the individual, where he upheld the importance of respect for eccentricity. The respect for individuality was already present in Bentham (the defence of homosexuality, for example), but his enthusiasm for the objectivity of the rational prevented him from reaching Mill's much more coherent conclusions. The examination of their different attitudes enables us to consider the value of an active role for minorities in society, a role that must be closely controlled when it leads them to the exercise of political power.

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