Celebrity Election versus Lottery Selection: A Reconsideration

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In *The Just State*, Richard Dien Winfield has completed his exposition of the immanent logic of ethical life, the earlier parts of which are developed in his books *The Just Economy*, *The Just Family*, and *Law in Civil Society*. The purpose of his exposition is not to discuss isolated or miscellaneous topics pertaining to politics or ethics. Instead, his goal from the beginning has been to show objectively what justice looks like when it is fully embodied in a state's political and social institutions. The just state, as he presents it, is simply the largest possible political framework for maintaining equitable arrangements within a country's already established civil society, a framework that permits civil society to adjust to new contingencies as they arise, be they domestic or international. The purpose of the just state is to preserve, not to tamper with, the political and nonpolitical freedoms of its citizens. The essence of these freedoms is that they are all modes of self-determination, whereby what one does is freely determined by oneself and not by the arbitrary controlling authority of others. An individual whose life is determined by family, by tradition, or by commandment, is unfree. A state whose people are imposed on by a leadership class, or by any authority other than that of the people themselves, is likewise unfree. In order to establish freedom and justice, the citizens of a sovereign state must codetermine their own institutions. In accordance with this purpose, their institutions must be constructed in a particular way, which is the subject of *The Just State*.

The just state is not a state that yearns for justice. It is a state in which justice already exists in the institutions of civil society. Politics in the just state is not concerned with effecting any sort of revolutionary change in the lives of its citizens. Instead, it is focused on preserving or maintaining what Winfield calls 'the preconditions of political freedom' (Winfield 2005: 73), which consist of social practices and social attitudes that already form the basis of an enlightened politics. Since politics in the just state is no longer a desperate or an anguished struggle of opposing interests, many political procedures, formerly taken for granted, have become obsolete. One of these is the method of selecting government officials by election. Despite Winfield's preference for the election system, I shall argue that selecting the highest officials by lottery rather than by election (including the legislators, the authorisers, and the chief executive) is actually more in keeping with the conditions of justice that Winfield himself has described in his book.

The first step is to consider what it means to have achieved the preconditions of political freedom, so that they are already substantially in place. What are these

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263523200000318 Published online by Cambridge University Press

preconditions? Winfield conveniently summarises them in the opening chapters of *The Just State*. They all have to do with the basic mechanisms of family life, economic activity, and civil law. For example, the just family is the family that is liberated from traditional notions of paternalism and gender bias. In the liberated family, husband and wife acknowledge each other as equal partners, with the same rights and opportunities. The social bias in favour of heterosexual marriages with well-defined gender roles is also effectively eliminated.

With respect to economics, the regulation of market activity is such that it prevents the creation of an impoverished or severely disadvantaged class, so that class divisions based on wealth are basically a thing of the past. Equal economic opportunity is not subverted by the presence of concentrated wealth. With regard to the rule of law, every citizen enjoys the same rights, and all discrimination based on cultural, ethnic, racial, gender (including gender-preference differences), or religious differences, has been eliminated.

A society that has accomplished these things is a society that meets the preconditions of political freedom. If it has not met these preconditions, politics will continue to be an uncertain struggle of group against group, or interest against interest. Or it will be the enforcement of an unjust status quo whereby oppression is defended as an appropriate social arrangement. As Winfield puts it, 'if the just state is to come into being, whatever are the preconditions for political self-determination must be at hand' (Winfield 2005: 74). That, of course, is why they are called 'preconditions'. Winfield strongly emphasises this important point before he launches into his description of the institutions of government. Thus, he says:

> Although nonpolitical freedoms may be enjoyed without political emancipation, self-government cannot exist unless citizens are liberated from the suppression of
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> property, household, economic, and any other civil rights on whose maintenance equal political opportunity depends. (Winfield 2005: 67)

Again, we are told:

> [T]he minimal determination of political freedom is predicated upon the pre-political spheres of right both because legitimate politics must uphold their freedoms and because self-government cannot operate unless its citizens have been emancipated from the oppressions that their emergence eliminates. (Winfield 2005: 85)

Indeed, the logic of self-government requires that nonpolitical or prepolitical rights be protected by law 'prior to political association':

> Without legalization and legal enforcement, pre-political rights lack a recognisably objective determination and an objectively secured actuality. Since a deficit on either score threatens individuals with oppressions that block their access to political activity, there must be law in civil society before there can be self-government by and under law. (Winfield 2005: 110)

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Obviously, if the preconditions of political freedom are met and the nonpolitical rights of every citizen are already in place as 'an objectively secured actuality', the agon of traditional politics is over. A new status quo has come into existence, one that is, for the first time, genuinely just. The state itself may now be constituted as an overarching, protective umbrella, safeguarding the interests of all citizens, so that no particular group can squelch the legitimate interests of any other group, whatever their differences in wealth, race, ethnicity, religion or regional culture may be. The agon of traditional politics may now take the form of a friendly competition within the legislature to see which legislators can best uphold the totality of right as the people confront new challenges or changed circumstances.

In the just state, the general population are politically and socially enlightened, in accordance with 'the normative persona of the citizen':

> Agents determine themselves as citizens insofar as they will the universal aim of political association, an aim that simultaneously contains the concordant safeguarding of the nonpolitical rights making equal political opportunity possible and the perpetuation of the institutions of self-government within which individuals determine themselves as self-ruling citizens … Individuals may always act in departure from this governing aim, but in so doing, they violate the entitled prerogatives of free citizenship and thereby obstruct the operation of self-rule. In order to partake of the reflexivity of political freedom, citizens must interact in terms of a realized equal political opportunity that has overcome any subordination to social, household, or any other nonpolitical institutions. (Winfield 2005: 133)

Indeed, as Winfield rightly insists, political freedom 'exists only in virtue of a prevailing degree of rectitude' among the citizenry (Winfield 2005: 161), which means that 'every exercise of political autonomy involves citizens willing the form of the totality of right' (Winfield 2005: 156). In a state where such an enlightened citizenry exists, no individual citizen or group of citizens can 'claim any special expertise or aptitude privileging them' to make political decisions, and consequently, 'rule by experts is precluded' (Winfield 2005: 162). Thus, legislators, authorisers, and even the CEO need not be professionally trained leaders but only 'generally competent individuals' who can be presumed to will the totality of right.

Only one other ingredient is necessary to the profile of the just official. Since the function of the said official is to represent the people (direct democracy being impractical), the question is: what constitutes appropriate representation? In the past, it has often been assumed that legislators must dutifully represent the special concerns of their constituents, whatever these may be. But if that is what they do, legislative deliberation may once again become an agon, with one set of group interests vying against all the others for dominance or maximum attention. This is sometimes defended as appropriate, but in fact it has the negative effect of transforming legislative representation into a form of direct democracy by turning the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263523200000318 Published online by Cambridge University Press

representatives into proxies for particular parts of the population. In opposition to this view of representation, Winfield convincingly argues that legislators should not be bound by prefabricated agendas or public mandates. As he puts it, 'securing identity between elector and bound representative eviscerates legislation and reduces it to a wholly formal appendage to what are in effect corporate referenda' (Winfield 2005: 211); where 'corporate' means any group of citizens whose will is unified by a specific common purpose.

Instead of being tied to the political will of their constituents, legislators in a just state are free to 'legislate for and in the name of the entire body politic':

> In this capacity, representatives act as fiduciaries of the universal political aims of their constituents, rather than as delegates of and bound to particular interests. For this very reason, legislators need not belong to any particular group in civil society, nor share any nonpolitical identity with their constituents. (Winfield 2005: 215)

Furthermore, 'although legislators may well be elected from geographically drawn districts, this break from corporate identity does not render them instruments of the special interest of that locality':

> If district election were to impose regional representation, legislators would be bound to a particular good, antecedently defined by geographic contingencies. The task of legislation would no longer be the pursuit of universal ends enabling rule to be reflexive and supreme but the imposition of a local agenda on the nation at large. (Winfield 2005: 215-16)

In the final analysis, 'representatives should legislate on behalf of the freedoms of the citizenry at large rather than on behalf of any particular sector and its special interests' (Winfield 2005: 220). That being the case, it seems obvious that selecting legislators by means of a lottery system comports extremely well with the character of the just state, and in fact it fits that character better than the election system.

As I have just explained, there are four features of the just state that make it particularly suitable for the lottery system. First, there is the notable circumstance that in the just state all the citizens have civil rights. Equal opportunity has been established as a reality in every sphere of life, which means that political battles have mostly been resolved, and internal strife no longer threatens to disrupt the state. Second, the citizens of the just state are enlightened. They will the totality of right and embrace the principles of self-determination. Third, precisely because they are enlightened, there is no need for a special political class, a ruling class, to steer the people around for their own good. In the just state, politics is a public service, not a career or a profession requiring special skills or craft-based knowledge. The ordinary rational citizen is presumed fit to hold office as a legislator, authoriser or CEO. The fourth feature is that the people's representatives represent all of society, all of the time. They do not think of themselves as representatives of special interests, and they have no sponsors or backers to distract them from their pursuit of universal ends.

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Given the special circumstances of the just state, the chief officials might well be selected in the same way that jurors are selected for jury duty or soldiers are drafted into the army. Service in the legislature (or in the other two branches) would be for a single term of either four or five years. Legislative representatives would be apportioned according to some numerical principle or districting arrangement. After serving one term, each official would return to his or her former occupation. During the term of service, each would be adequately compensated, and the return to former life would be without hindrance. Public service would be voluntary in the same way that compliance with the law is voluntary. Honour would accrue to the representative, but not inordinate power or financial gain.

How will deliberation proceed in a legislature composed of randomly selected, non-professional legislators? First, because the legislators will almost certainly have varied backgrounds, rather than being a tightly-knit club of persons with the same or similar backgrounds, they will already have the advantage of actually being representative of the general population. Instead of having been installed by backers to act as champions of their interests, they will simply be a random sample of the citizenry, and the legislature will itself be a microcosm of civil society as it really is.

But how will this collection of non-experts begin to deal with the problems of legislation? New arrivals will, first of all, have recourse to the wisdom gained by legislators with one or more years of experience. Each year one new group of legislators will replace the legislators who have just finished their fourth or fifth year of service. Every new legislator will probably arrive with a few preliminary ideas about what to do, but each will take a solemn oath to seek new information and, if possible, better ideas than the ones they have brought with them. Indeed, the principal strategy of the legislators will be to seek expert opinions concerning the matters at hand. On the basis of new knowledge, and after listening, like jurors, to the testimony of others concerning proposed legislation (both pro and con), they will deliberate amongst themselves and arrive at a consensus. What makes this possible is the fact that, in the just state, legislative deliberation will have freed itself from factional strife and fruitless ideological posturing.

The problems requiring legislation will now be mostly practical ones that demand practical solutions. Therefore, the main task of the legislators will be to make small adjustments in civil affairs, while preserving the totality of right. Legislation favouring one part of society to the detriment of another will be rejected either by the legislators themselves during their own deliberations, or by the authorisers in an independent review of all 'passed' bills. The importance Winfield attaches to the authorising branch of government is based on his perception that lopsided, interest-based legislation will always be a dangerous possibility in any society. For that reason, every legislative adjustment to the existing order of things must finally be approved by an independent authorising body to ensure that it will not harm the totality of right.

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Because the problems facing them are specific, and because political theory has already been settled, the legislators will not come into office with 'visions' or 'programmes' for reforming the government or reconstituting civil society. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that either an individual legislator or a political party could develop 'a specific view of how the state should govern' (Winfield 2005: 179), because the state already knows how it should govern. The ambition to develop 'a particular vision of justice', or 'a difference in approach' to the way government operates, might be well-meant but is likely to be influenced by an irrelevant ideology. Since the state already knows what justice is, its particular policies must be determined by legislative inquiry and legislative deliberation. They are not likely to be well conceived in advance of inquiry and deliberation, nor can having a preliminary 'vision' of them be regarded as a qualification for admission to the legislative process. In the just state, there are no qualifications for admission other than mental competency and 'a prevailing degree of rectitude', which means that political parties will necessarily function as political clubs, whose highest ambition will be to approach the legislature with ideas for possible deliberation. Indeed, all lobbyists, whether or not they represent a political party, will be invited to submit public petitions to the legislature, but no legislator will be permitted to accept money in any shape or form from a lobbyist. In the absence of elections, the legislators will require no money besides what they receive in their paychecks and expense allowances. In their new role as vision-based clubs, political parties will be a source of ideas and information, not a source of candidates for office.

The trouble with the election process is at least two-fold. In the first place, elections are prematurely divisive. Each candidate feels compelled to defend a prematurely defined set of partisan ideas, in opposition to the ideas of his or her opponents. If a single party is swept into office by a large majority, formal deliberation concerning that party's 'vision' may be deemed unnecessary by party stalwarts. On the other hand, if an election is close, and two or more parties achieve a significant presence in the legislature, legislative deadlock may well be the result, as each party holds fast to its own prefabricated, ideology-driven agenda.

More importantly, elections focus irrelevant attention on the charismatic quality or celebrity status of the candidates, who usually have similar high profiles as lawyers or as business executives, and who therefore constitute a sort of de facto leadership class. The most successful members of this class are likely to become semi-permanent figures in the world of politics, first as junior office-holders, then as senior office-holders. Politics for such persons is a career choice or a profession rather than a temporary public service. However, the state that depends on a leadership class, although it might be well led cannot be construed as a just state. The just state neither needs, nor desires to have, a leadership class on which to draw for its office-holders.

The competition for office by different celebrities, or different public personalities, is also problematic in another way, besides the fact that it depends on, and supports, the existence of a de facto leadership class. It creates the necessity of

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raising vast amounts of money to pay for public relations campaigns or image-enhancement. It is already easy enough, in the communications age, to let the voting public know the essential facts about a candidate's background and political views. It would actually cost almost nothing to provide this information to the voters before an election. However, the election process typically requires that competitive amounts of money be spent to whip up enthusiasm for the various candidates. In order to be successful, a candidate must have the financial support of powerful backers. The higher the office, the costlier the campaign. In the United States, for example, presidential campaigns ordinarily cost hundreds of millions of dollars. The most significant contributions do not come from ordinary persons; instead, they come from the wealthiest private individuals, financial institutions, and corporations. The funding is of such magnitude that the principal funders can determine, by how they direct their money, which candidates will be successful and which ones will not. In the absence of superior financial support, a candidate has almost no hope of winning an election. This circumstance means that the election system permits great concentrations of wealth to control politics, while maintaining the appearance that it is the voters who determine the winners. That the wealthiest sector of society should have the financial power to control election outcomes is incompatible with the principle that no particular group of persons should have political dominance in the just state.

If a state is to have self-determination through representation, its representatives might just as well be representative of the entire social spectrum. According to the Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz, the wealthiest persons in the United States now enjoy an almost perfect dominance over the institutions of representative government. Thus:

> The Supreme Court, in its recent Citizens United case, has enshrined the right of corporations to buy government, by removing limitations on campaign spending. The personal and the political are today in perfect alignment. Virtually all U.S. senators, and most of the representatives in the House, are members of the top 1 percent when they arrive, are kept in office by money from the top 1 percent, and know that if they serve the top 1 percent well they will be rewarded by the top 1 percent when they leave office. By and large, the key executive-branch policymakers on trade and economic policy also come from the top 1 percent. (Stiglitz 2011: 3)

Stiglitz concludes from this that the United States government has actually become, as he puts it, government 'of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%', and he goes on to discuss the various ways in which policy and legislation have been influenced by this circumstance. Assuming Stiglitz is right, the huge financial support that is currently being given to candidates for high office would abruptly stop if office-holders were randomly selected by lottery. Indeed, the intimate connection between concentrated capital and national politics would be instantly severed. Moreover, lottery-selected

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officials would in their origins reflect the whole range of society, making it easier for them to think of society as a whole than if they all came from just one part of society (the top 1%) and had no experience of the other parts.

As it happens, Winfield is not in favour of the lottery system but argues instead for the election system, and his reasons for doing so need to be addressed. While he acknowledges that the lottery system would give every citizen an equal chance to serve in the national legislature (making it possibly 'the one sure guarantor of political equality'), he also finds that lotteries have at least one serious flaw:

> What the equal chance of lottery selection does not offer is precisely any role for choice in either the selection of representatives or in the holding of legislative office. Under a lottery system, representatives are determined by an automatic procedure completely devoid of any exercise of will by citizens. Legislators are not chosen at all, properly speaking, nor do citizens choose to put themselves forward as candidates for legislative positions. Instead the lottery mechanism preempts all such decisions, imposing equal passivity upon recipients of a wheel of fortune, instead of equal opportunity to exercise an entitled freedom. (Winfield 2005: 223)

In Winfield's view, elections are preferable to lotteries because they allow citizens 'equal opportunity to codetermine who their representatives will be', even when they choose not to participate in the election process. Thus, he construes the passivity of nonvoters as a form of active political expression, in contrast to the passivity that is imposed by the lottery:

> Failure to participate [in elections] need not signify any obstacle to equal political opportunity. Indeed, low turnout can itself be regarded as an expression of voter preference or lack thereof. In particular, the abstention of a certain portion of voters determines what will comprise the minimal plurality or majority needed to win office. Accordingly, abstentions, be they officially registered or not, comprise a specific form of political codetermination, rather than an impairment to electoral self-government. (Winfield 2005: 224)

In reply to this, it may be said that, in a just state, the lottery system would be actively chosen or actively willed (not passively submitted to), because, like the jury draft or the military draft, it would give every citizen an opportunity to provide an essential public service to the state. In time of war and even in times of peace, a military draft may be deemed so essential to the security of the state that it is considered to be desirable as a system by virtually every citizen. Accordingly, every citizen implicitly agrees, or 'chooses', to perform military service rather than let the country fail. Likewise, the jury draft has been 'chosen' as a system, because it enables the citizenry to effect just decisions in the courts. In their capacity as responsible members of society, the citizens who are selected for jury duty 'choose' to act as jurors because they know that jury duty represents a form of political empowerment rather than a form of political coercion. In the case of each of these drafts, the

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citizens selected for service 'choose' to serve, just as they 'choose' to accept the laws they do not agree with or the elected officials for whom they have not voted.

The ordinary citizen who identifies with a particular political party usually has nothing to do with selecting his or her party's nominees, even if, eventually, he or she endorses one or another of them in a primary election. The same circumstances that make direct democracy impractical on the level of national government also make it impractical in the machinations of national political parties. Most citizens who identify with a particular party simply accept the fact that they must choose from a slate of candidates that they themselves have not put on the ballot. Arguably, willingness to serve the nation as a drafted soldier, a drafted juror, or a drafted politician, is less a form of passivity than is the willingness to let other people offer themselves or their friends for voter approval at the polls.

The chance of serving the state as a representative of the people would be greater under a lottery system than under the election system. Under the election system, ordinary citizens are expected to endorse the political ambitions of other people, which has the effect of dividing the citizenry into a political class and a sub-political class, the former being a class of doers and the latter being a class of spectators. Under a lottery system, all citizens implicitly agree to be doers as well as spectators, which means that all citizens are volunteers for public service at the highest levels, if and when they are called to serve. In contrast, the election system identifies and stabilises a group of doers and, by implication, identifies and stabilises everyone else – almost from birth – as spectators. The doers explicitly think of themselves as appropriate governors, while the spectators resign themselves to being the group that endures being governed. Shifting to a lottery system would destabilise both groups, making every citizen, at least potentially, a doer. The self-concept of the average citizen would be enormously elevated as a result, and he or she would no longer feel removed from politics by circumstance of birth or profession.

With respect to the election system, it is interesting to consider in what sense voter abstentions do, in fact, comprise 'a specific form of political codetermination, rather than an impairment to electoral self-government', as Winfield claims. One way to approach this question might be to analyze the history of national elections in the United States, where huge amounts of money are typically expended to stimulate voter interest in the candidates and voter presence at the polls. The 2008 presidential contest, for example, is estimated to have cost, all told, at least one billion dollars, and it is now being predicted that much more than that will be spent in the 2012 presidential contest for the sole purpose of turning out the vote. However, in 2008 only 56.8% of the voting-age population actually went to the polls, which was just a little more than the average turnout of 55.2% over the last fifty years of presidential elections. Although Barack Obama received nearly 53% of the votes cast for president in 2008, since only 56.8% of the voting-age population turned out to vote, his candidacy was actually supported by only 30% of the total electorate. The other 70%

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either voted for a different candidate or rejected all the candidates by refusing to participate in the process.

Lyndon Johnson was more successful in 1964. He garnered the largest percentage of popular votes of any candidate since 1820, receiving 61.1% of the vote as opposed to FDR's 60.8% in 1936. However, while this was certainly an impressive achievement, only 61.9% of the voting-age population turned out to vote in 1964, which means that less than 38% of the total electorate actually endorsed him by bothering to vote for him. In 1996, Bill Clinton was elected with the support of about 24% of the total electorate, because in that year only 49.1% of the electorate actually bothered to vote. Four years later, in 2000, George Bush won the presidency with less than 25% of the total electorate voting for him in an election in which the country did not even bother to finish the vote count. This means that more than 75% of the voting-age population chose not to vote for him, for one reason or another.

In the last thirteen elections since the 1956 election, every U.S. president has been elected to office with the support of 24% to 38% of the total electorate. The rest of the electorate – between 62% and 76% – have consistently rejected these presidents, either by not voting at all or by voting for other candidates. Thus, every U.S president from Kennedy to Obama has been the choice of a small minority of the total voting-age population, despite the fact that increasingly enormous sums were spent along the way to whip up enthusiasm for one or another of the candidates.

In a footnote, Winfield records his agreement with law professor George Anastaplo that lotteries would 'undermine the belief that the citizenry are in fact governing themselves' (Winfield 2005: 287), but it seems likely that the electoral system has already undermined it, at least in the United States. In Winfield's sense of the term, a substantial majority of the electorate have 'codetermined' the outcomes of every presidential election for the last fifty years by choosing not to support the persons who eventually became president. A small minority of 24% to 38% supported the winners, but everyone else chose to reject them. That the winners have been 'chosen' by the people in the usual sense of the term is typically not the case, and, moreover, it is never the case. Thus, it appears that the U.S. citizenry are not governing themselves when it comes to selecting a president. Mid-term elections in the United States are even more discouraging to contemplate. The average turnout for these elections is much worse than it is for presidential elections. Whereas in presidential elections the average turnout is 55.2%, in mid-term elections it is only 39.8%. If a winner were to receive only 50.1% of the average turnout, he or she would be elected with the endorsement of less than 20% of the total electorate.

The idea that, under a lottery system, U.S. citizens would be prevented from 'choosing' their own representatives seems based on a misperception that that is what they are now doing by means of elections. Collectively, what they are doing is choosing not to be represented by the persons who end up representing them anyway. And they are doing this not just some of the time but all the time ('National Voter

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263523200000318 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Turnout in Federal Elections: 1960-2010'). If that is the case, then the U.S. citizenry have evidently not achieved political self-determination, and 'the belief that the citizenry are in fact governing themselves' is a belief that ought to be undermined, because it is false. In that country, at least, the election system itself seems to be at the heart of the problem.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263523200000318 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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