Chapter Four Short Answer (Answers Below)

1. Explain the relationship between justice and democracy.
2. Explain the institutional and cultural impediments to political participation.
3. Explain Edmund Burke’s position on representative autonomy.
4. Explain the problem of the tyranny of the majority.
5. Explain the relationship between liberalism and democracy.
6. Explain how choice, competition, and accurate outputs contribute to greater democracy.

Answers

1. Justice and democracy are interdependent. Ensuring authority cannot harm citizens (justice) supports the possibility of democratic participation by limiting the capacity of authority to restrict or influence public participation in the exercise of authority (democracy). Equally, public participation in the exercise of authority helps to ensure social justice, the equitable distribution of public goods, such that all citizens experience roughly similar protections from authority. When either component is missing, there is the potential to produce a society with democracy and justice for some, but not others. This is one possible manifestation of the tyranny of the majority.
2. Institutional impediments tend to concentrate around issues of information and accountability. Voters have no way of communicating (via the process of voting) the basis of their support. Representatives have no way of knowing what part of their platform a particular voter supports or opposes. At the same time, there is no effective means by which a voter can hold a representative accountable for their actions once in office. Given that there is no guarantee that campaigns will even focus on platform issues, the extent to which voting represents meaningful participation is open to debate. Cultural impediments are often inherited and transmitted through political culture in a community. The institutional barriers to participation can be compounded by the belief that limited participation is good and necessary, in that too much democracy can be a bad thing. Historical suspicion of popular involvement provides a basis to dismiss concerns about institutional impediments.
3. Burke argues that while a representative should listen to and consider the claims and arguments of their constituents, they must not be bound to them. His argument is based on a number of points. First, he points out that an elected representative is imbued with reason and is able to exercise judgment. To reduce the representative to a simple tool of their constituents refutes and insults this inherent capacity. Second, he points out that decisions should be based on deliberation. As the “person on the scene,” that is, the one most exposed to the process of deliberation and who is most aware of the arguments advanced on all sides of an issue, the representative is best situated to participate in decision making. Third, while a representative is accountable to their constituents, and should consider their arguments and desires, those arguments are by their nature partial. He suggests that the responsibility of a representative is not to advance the particular interests of their constituents in conflict with other representatives, but rather to work with other representatives to determine the common interest. The point of government is not to provide an arena for conflict between local interests, but rather to create a unified whole. Note that Burke’s argument precedes the development of party discipline. While many representatives quote Burke to justify taking action that conflicts with local interests, few do so on the basis of conscience; rather, they do so according to the dictates of their party leadership.
4. While democracy allows for people to express and pursue their self-interest(s), it is generally hoped that the process will produce outcomes favourable to the general welfare. One pitfall of democracy, however, comes when a majority of the population exerts control over the entire group for their personal and partial welfare, that is, they advance their interests at the expense of the group. In more extreme cases, this can involve a deliberate exploitation of the minority by the majority, in order to secure the majority’s interests. Discussion about the tyranny of the majority tends to proceed in two ways. One points to countries with visible or ethnic minorities and warns of the potential for oppression, exploitation, and genocide. The other tends to be articulated by privileged elites, who associate the majority with the “common people” (who are assumed to be incapable of governing responsibly). They, therefore, advocate for mechanisms to prevent the popular majority from attacking minority (i.e., elite) interests.
5. Historically, liberal institutions and civil society have preceded democracy and helped to create conditions that would sustain it. Currently, the process of democratization seems to be working in reverse, insofar as countries are becoming democratic before developing the liberal institutions and culture that help sustain democracy. This may account for the tendency for democratization to proceed in waves, followed by periods in which recently established democracies relapse into authoritarian regimes. Since democracy depends on a close interaction between the restriction of authority and the influence over authority by the people, the association of liberalism with the former is key to democratic success. It is an open question whether democracy can bring about liberalization.
6. Choice in democratic elections needs to be meaningful, that is, to involve not just the qualitative number of options but also the qualitative range of difference between them, expressed in terms of ideological and policy choice. It also involves the realistic expectation of outcomes, that those advocating a position have the potential to implement it, and that their position is both clear to the public and an accurate representation of their values and beliefs. Contestation between potential representatives needs to be broadly accessible, that is, the more potential competitors there are, and the larger the pool of candidates with a real chance to win, the better (for example, systems that require vast sums of money in order to have a meaningful chance of victory tend to restrict real participation to a small group). Finally, the products of democratic contests need to accurately reflect the positions that resulted in election; in other words, successful candidates need to do what they said they were going to do. This involves both accountability mechanisms and realistic opportunities to enact a wide range of potential policy.