# Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise

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# REPRESENTATIONAL DEMOCRACY

## An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise

*Frank R. Ankersmit*

It follows from the historicist conception of political systems that each of them may be expected to possess an affinity with a particular type of political problem—with the sort of problem to which each was supposed originally to be a response. If we wish to understand the nature, the possibilities and impossibilities, of an existing political system, we have to examine the kind of political or social problem with which that political system was originally expected to deal. For this origin will continue to determine to a surprising extent the functioning, the reflexes, and, more generally, what we might call the political psychology of that system.

I claim no originality for this way of looking at political systems. Strangely, however, no political theorist, at least so far as I know, has ever investigated the nature of representative democracy by asking what the political problem was that it was expected to solve—and to what extent the character of our contemporary democracies is still determined by that problem. The explanation for this lacuna may be that we are inclined to see feudalism or absolute monarchy as the naive and somewhat peculiar experiments of an earlier and politically less mature age than our own: such systems lost their right to exist as soon as democracy was (re)discovered in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Just as Newton, Lavoisier, and Maxwell put the sciences on the right path during that same period, just as they developed insights that are still accepted nowadays and

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that have proved to be the best point of departure for all further scientific research, so we also conceive of democracy as if it were the unquestionable solution to each conceivable political problem that now or ever will confront humanity. But it is this view, of course, that is naive. For if people had attempted to solve the problems of public safety in the ninth and tenth centuries, or those occasioned by the religious civil wars of the seventeenth century, by means of representative democracy, the list of their disasters would have been lengthened (perhaps tremendously) rather than shortened.

No less than any other political system—forgotten, ridiculed, or even abhorred—representative democracy is also a product of a quite unique and specifiable set of historical circumstances and should be assessed accordingly. If we go back in time to the Restoration, to Romantic Europe after the fall of Napoleon, we will see that the politicians of continental Europe feared civil war no less than their predecessors had done two centuries before, during the wars of religion. As in the seventeenth century, one part of the population found itself in mortal opposition to another. In the religious wars, these parts had been the Protestants and the Catholics. In the years after 1815, two secular religions or ideologies divided the population. On the one hand, many believed that the revolution had been ended prematurely in 1794 and that the social and political revolution should be taken up again as soon as a suitable occasion should present itself. On the other hand, many nobles and members of the higher bourgeoisie recalled with a feeling of nostalgia the prerevolutionary social order and were prepared to do all that they believed necessary to prevent further revolutionary experiments or, perhaps, even to return to the world of the ancien régime. (And between these two extremes, there were, of course, all kinds of more moderate variants that, moreover, differed from one country on the Western European continent to another, according to circumstances prevailing in each.)

However rudimentary this sketch, it should be clear that the conflict in post-Napoleonic continental Europe was essentially different from the one in the religious civil wars. The conflict of the seventeenth century was such that it almost created the state as an institution independent of society. So powerful was the demand for an independent arbitrator that, although the state generally took sides with one of the conflicting religious parties, this fact never really compromised its aloofness from society. The state might well have been pulled into the religious conflict and gone down together with the warring parties in their remorseless internecine fight. It is interesting that this scenario did not occur (though France in the decade prior to Henry IV's accession to the throne came dangerously close to it). Admittedly, the religious conflict tore Germany apart—but, within each of the principalities originating from the arrangement of 1648, the state was no less victorious than elsewhere on the continent. When in practice the state identified itself with the cause of one of the religious parties, the

party favored was elevated to the sublime position of the state; the state was not degraded to the level of the combatant in question. Hence the conflict was such that the state could only benefit from it, as a political entity independent of it; and this pecularity explains both why absolute monarchy was the almost inevitable outcome of the conflict and why the distinction between a civil society, on the one hand, and a state that had now successfully emancipated itself from civil society, on the other hand, gradually came to seem a matter of course. It is one of the paradoxes of Western political history that absolute monarchy and the distinction between state and civil society share an origin and a political logic, such that we might arguably never have had the latter without also having had the former. If only for this reason, we should be a little kinder about absolute monarchy than we tend to be.

Be that as it may, the conflict after 1815 differed from that of the seventeenth century in that the state could no longer place itself, as a neutral arbiter, above the conflicting parties. For the state had itself become the main issue in the conflict. The revolutionaries, liberals, conservatives, Bonapartists, and others were now fighting about who would control the state—and this, self-evidently and sui generis, was a problem that could not be settled by the state itself. Europe now was confronted by a political problem whose extreme urgency no one could sensibly doubt, but a problem that could not possibly be dealt with by existing political machinery. Thus, the problem appeared to be unsolvable. One possibility would have been to allow the discord that was disrupting society to be expressed at the level of the state as well; but a divided state would precipitate rather than prevent an as yet latent social civil war. Had this scenario been realized, the situation would indeed have been similar to that at the beginning of the religious wars of two centuries before, but now the state could no longer play the role of deus ex machina and extricate society from the political morass as it had once done. The alternative possibility was to allow the state to be controlled by one of the fighting parties, but what could then guarantee the other parties that their interests would still be sufficiently reckoned with? All the considerable powers that the state had acquired during its absolutist adolescence could now be used by the party in control of the state against its rival(s). Civil war appeared the inevitable result of this strategy as well. In short, the Restoration's political problem was how to square a political circle.

Parliamentary, representative democracy was the best political framework for the solution devised during the Restoration to prevent Europe from plunging into another series of conflicts, revolutions, and ideological wars. The heart of this solution was the so-called *juste milieu* policy that we ordinarily associate exclusively with Guizot but that in fact sums up most of the political mentality of post-Napoleonic Western Europe. Political people at the time realized it would be impractical to strive for consensus; the gap between the warring ide-

ologies was correctly perceived to be too wide and deep. A still more profound realization was that the political challenge of the time was not how to create consensus out of disagreement but how to square the political circle—how to take action meant to prevent civil war that would not lead to civil war in and of itself. The solution was to strive for compromise rather than consensus. The political logic of compromise demands cooperation (behaviorally), as opposed to agreement (ideologically), and it made sense, in a circumstance where people held violently differing views and were determined to maintain them, that the emphasis shift from ideology to behavior. The invaluable gain from the acceptance of compromise was that people could now live more or less safely under one political roof with opponents who only a few years before would gladly have imprisoned or guillotined them. Representative democracy was the political system best suited for achieving compromise, and the many revolutions of the nineteenth century in continental Europe further contributed to the willingness of responsible statesmen to discover in compromise and representative democracy the only feasible means of avoiding a perhaps permanent social civil war.

To us, the heirs of the *juste milieu* policy, the rationale of this great accomplishment may sound like a platitude. One should bear in mind, however, that the very idea of a compromise about basic political principles was at first experienced as little less revolutionary than the revolution of 1789 itself. After all, compromise meant the embrace of a principled *unprincipledness* by a generation that, only a couple of years before, would not have hesitated to die and kill for the principles in question. Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, never succeeded in making his peace with this, in his eyes, contemptible perversion of politics—a fact that has nothing to do with Tocqueville's conservatism, for exactly the same attitude can be found in such men of the left as Alphonse de Lamartine. Tocqueville's and Lamartine's contempt for *juste milieu* politics and the July Monarchy—a contempt that found its most perfect personification in Julien Sorel, the protagonist of Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir*—amply demonstrates how difficult it must have been for Europeans of two centuries ago to acclimate to a political practice in which the highest and most sublime principles were now negotiated as if one were haggling about the price of a house or a sack of potatoes.

It was the discipline of history that provided the model for the potential successes and advantages to be expected from *juste milieu* politics, and for two fundamental reasons. In the first place, the *juste milieu* politicians realized that the ideologies that they attempted to reconcile by means of compromise were products of Europe's revolutionary and prerevolutionary past: a profound awareness of these historical realities was therefore a prime requirement for the success of their enterprise. The present and future of the nation could only be constructed on historical foundations, and every politician had to be a historian as well. But there was also a *methodological* affinity between *juste milieu* politics and

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the writing of history. The willingness to compromise requires a capacity to transcend (existing) political strife, to see oneself from the outside, as it were, and the willingness to muster an adequate degree of impartiality. Similarly, as (historicist) historians were all arguing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the historian can only succeed in doing justice to the past if he is impartial and only to the extent that he does not identify himself with the political parties whose conflicts he is describing. In this way, one might say that politicians became historicists in this period and that historians adopted a kind of *juste milieu* politics with respect to their subject matter. It need not surprise us, therefore, that the *juste milieu* politicians (such as Royer-Collard, Rémusat, Barante, Thiers, Guizot, or Constant, if we restrict our concern to France) were often excellent historians in their own right, nor should we be surprised that historians, in their turn, felt little reluctance to pronounce on contemporary political issues—two eventualities that gave a depth and penetration to political debate so sadly absent from the politics of our own time. We have allowed political debate to become estranged from any long-term vision and to become entangled in bureaucratic technicalities.

We ordinarily consider our democracy a product of the Enlightenment, and for good reason. But what the Enlightenment did not teach us and that consequently we owe to political Romanticism—to the Restoration and *juste milieu* politics—is the capacity to achieve a minimum degree of peaceful coexistence in a society in which opinions are deeply divided on political principles, and even to use these divisions to the advantage of all parties. It was political Romanticism that taught us the blessings of the principled unprincipledness that is so essential to representative democracy generally and that enabled the nations of the Western European continent to escape long-term conflict between the principles of the revolution and those of the ancien régime. When, several decades later, the even more threatening dispute between capital and labor announced itself, the *juste milieu* mentality again enabled the nations of Western Europe to survive a potentially tremendous conflict largely unscathed. Nothing is a more convincing proof of the unprecedented capacity of representative democracy for resolving apparently irresolvable disputes.

As Carl Schmitt observed in his *Politische Romantik* of 1919, the Enlightenment's mentality of clarity, transparency, and consistency was completely at odds with the principled unprincipledness of parliamentary democracy. Only Romanticism—with its respect for multiplicity, paradox, oppositions, and contradictions—could have created an intellectual climate in which parliamentary democracy could thrive. We have been most unjust toward political Romanticism to summarize it in terms of nationalist pathos or the excesses of utopian socialism, and unjust to so completely forget its contribution to the emergence of a political mentality necessary for the proper functioning of representative democracy.

## The Ambivalent King

The conclusion that parliamentary or representative democracy came into being in the Romantic climate of post-Napoleonic continental Europe would seem to be completely at odds with one of the few uncontested certainties that we have about the origins of modern democracy. For did we not all learn in school that the English parliament is "the mother of all parliaments," and that in the course of the eighteenth century a system emerged in Britain that was the model for all parliamentary democracies to come? And did not the *juste milieu* theorists and politicians themselves look across the Channel to emulate the workings and the successes of British democracy? Moreover, it might well be argued that the most successful democracy in world history—the United States—was constructed by its framers on exclusively Enlightenment foundations.

It would be quixotic to deny the immense plausibility of this objection. However, the continental European problem of a nation divided against itself did not play a role of much significance in England and was a problem of only minor importance in the eyes of the framers of the American constitution. In neither England nor the United States did people fight *against each other* over the question of who was to control the state; they fought *together* to keep the power of the executive within acceptable limits. Whatever was taken from the king or president in this conflict came into the common possession of the representative body that had battled against executive authority. In Britain and many of its mimetic states, the political power united in the person of the monarch still survives in the two-party system, since usually one political party can have an absolute majority (sans coalition) in parliament. Within the logic of British democracy, the party in power may well be seen as the successor of the absolute monarch, whereas an assertion of that kind would be senseless in connection with continental democracies. Perhaps we ordinarily fail to recognize that the former is closer to absolute monarchy than the latter because the Tocqueville of *L'ancien régime et la révolution* has been so extremely convincing when demonstrating for France this continuity from ancien régime to the revolution and democracy. But the logics of these systems differ deeply and consequentially. Anglo-Saxon democracy is so monistically monarchical that, if it had to deal with the large number of smaller parties (none of them possessing close to a majority) that obtain in continental democracies, the result would be as disorienting for the state as if there were an absolute king who wanted several conflicting things at once and was unable to decide among them. In an Anglo-Saxon democracy, the principled unprincipledness of continental democracy would have to be interpreted as pathological ambivalence.

But while the Anglo-Saxon version of representative democracy could not have solved the problem of intense internecine conflict that faced the continent after 1815, it is an open question whether the challenges facing our own social

and political order today are still of the same kind as those for which continental, coalition-based democracy had been invented. For one of the most conspicuous aspects of our current problems is that they no longer set one part of the population against another (as was the case with the conflict between the ideals of the revolution and those of the ancien régime, or with the conflict between capital and labor). Our contemporary problems are rather problems that affect all of us equally and in a more or less similar way. In the first place, we are all as much the authors of these problems as we are their victims. Think, for example, of the problem of traffic jams that ideally exemplifies our new kind of political problem. Sitting in a traffic jam in our cars, we have both contributed to the problem and are paralyzed by it. In the second place, these newer social and political problems typically have their origin in the unintended consequences of our decisions. We invented cars and constructed motorways in order to promote mobility, and the result is that we get stuck in congestion; we desire excellent social services and higher wages, and thus bring about unemployment. But such problems do not divide society against itself, in the way that traditional political problems used to do. They no longer polarize society or the electorate as a whole.

Insofar as our current political problems polarize at all, they polarize the individual: the citizen has himself become an ambivalent king. The transition from monarchy to representative democracy solved the problem of violent social conflict by internalizing it in a parliament devoted to compromise. The situation in which we find ourselves today may signal our transition out of representative democracy into a new political form, since conflict is now becoming internalized in the individual. Indeed, we may daily understand from our newspapers that our representative democracies are not equipped with the means to handle political problems that are not based in external conflict. So much may be inferred from the tendency to see these problems as merely technical. We look for ways to achieve a goal that is never questioned as such and ignore truly political problems about the desirability of the goals themselves. A consequent paradox is that our current political problems have become curiously democratic in the sense that we are all confronted with them in a more or less similar way, yet our democracies do not know how to cope with democratic problems, at least not of this kind. Perhaps democracy is better at solving aristocratic problems, the kinds of problem that we inherited from our aristocratic past—problems having to do, in one way or another, with social inequality. One may well ask whether there is a general principle to be found here, whether political systems ordinarily seem most at ease with the types of political problem created by a previous system while remaining relatively blind to those that they themselves create.

It is possible, in any case, that Anglo-Saxon democracies will experience

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less difficulty than their Western European counterparts in digesting this new type of political problem. The initiating challenge of Anglo-Saxon democracy was the problem of executive prerogative; that of continental democracy was the problem of a state whose paradoxical task was to both express a political polarization and reconcile the opponents to each other. Our new sort of political problem has a greater formal resemblance to the original challenge of Anglo-Saxon democracy than to that of its continental counterpart. For in both our current case and in the case of early modern British and American democracy, the problem confronts the whole citizenry in a more or less similar way; the struggle about royal or presidential prerogative was a struggle about the *constitutional environment*, to put it metaphorically. And it is illustrative that this struggle provoked far less political polarization in England in (or after) 1688 and in the period from 1776 to 1787 in the United States than existed in Western European societies after 1815. But though the political machinery of an Anglo-Saxon democracy may be better equipped for dealing with this kind of political problem, it may be less inclined than continental democracies to seeing a political problem here at all. Whereas continental democracies will have a visceral sensitivity to how these essentially democratic problems stimulate conflict in the mind of the individual voter and will respond in one rather helpless way or another, no such sensitivity is to be expected in two-party democracies because of their relative indifference to the issue of (political) conflict and its reconciliation. In sum, Anglo-Saxon democracies are handicapped with regard to the new kind of political problem we face since they will not see a political problem here at all; and continental democracies, because this kind of problem does not fit well with their political machinery. Thus, the main challenge for our contemporary democracies—both Anglo-Saxon and continental—is to reform themselves in such a way that they can recognize and digest the new genre of political problem that has emerged in the last few decades. Having succeeded only too well in rendering our conflicts more or less anodyne and internal to the individual citizen, our democracies will be in danger if they fail to adapt.

## The Aesthetics of Political Representation

A review of first principles is in order. We describe our political system as *representative democracy*. Democracy, in the sense of government by the people, is already found in classical Athens. But classical democracy was a direct democracy, which left no room for representation (Hannah Arendt and others have of course found this aspect of the Greek polis extremely attractive). Representation is a medieval notion: in the assemblies of the three estates that kings summoned occasionally, the nobility, the clergy, and the "third estate" were *represented*. But this system was by no means a medieval experiment in any form of democracy.

Hence democracy has no intrinsic link with representation, and representation has no intrinsic link with democracy. The miracle of representative democracy is that it nevertheless succeeded in combining these two completely different concepts—succeeded in marrying Athens to medieval Europe—in an extremely creative way. The best means of understanding what occurred, and also what our present options are, is by reference to aesthetics. And only an aesthetic understanding of or approach to politics is finally conducive to either peace or peace of mind.

Representation is a notion borrowed from aesthetics. Two theories about the nature of aesthetic representation need especially to be taken into account in the present context: the theory of representation as resemblance and the theory of representation as substitution. According to the former theory, a representation should resemble what it represents. I see three basic problems with this theory, so attractive at first sight. In the first place, as is demonstrated by the history of the visual arts, no generally accepted or acceptable criteria of resemblance can be given. For each style in the history of art could be seen as the definition of a new set of such criteria. And what could be the use of the notion of resemblance in the absence of criteria of resemblance? Next, as has been pointed out by Nelson Goodman, the resemblance theory can get entangled in absurdities. For if we have (1) Blenheim Palace, (2) a painting of the palace, and (3) a painting of the duke of Marlborough, the resemblance theory would urge us to see (2) as a representation of (1) rather than of (3). But paintings resemble each other more closely than they resemble what they represent: one piece of canvas with dots of paint on it resembles another such piece of canvas far more than it resembles some huge building in the Oxfordshire countryside. In the third place, since words and sentences cannot in any noncircuitous way be said to resemble what they are about, the resemblance theory is inapplicable to language as a medium for representing reality—the counterintuitive consequence of which should be that we cannot speak, for example, of historical representations of the past.

According to the substitution theory—defended first by Edmund Burke and, most recently, by Ernst Gombrich and Arthur Danto—etymology is our best clue for understanding the nature of representation. (*Re)presentation* is a making present (again) of what is (now) absent. More formally, A is a representation of B when A can take B's place; hence, when A can function as B's substitute or as B's replacement in its absence. Words and texts present no problems for *this* theory: we could well say that historiography compensates for the absence of past realities, and substitutes for them. Neither do we need to worry much about criteria of resemblance, since the substitution theory does not require that a representation resemble what it represents. Nevertheless, in some cases (for example, in the visual arts), resemblance (however defined) may help to satisfy us that

B is a satisfactory substitute for A. In which case the resemblance theory could, perhaps, be taken best as a special case of the more generally applicable substitution theory.

Transposing these conclusions to *political* representation is not difficult. The resemblance theory of political representation is one that we intuitively accept. According to this theory, the opinions of the electorate's representatives should be the same as those of the electorate itself. The resemblance theory was admirably defined by the anti-Federalists during the debate over the American Constitution:

> The very term representative, implies that the person or body chosen for this purpose, should *resemble* those who appoint them—a representation of the people of America, if it be a true one, must be *like* the people. . . . They are the sign—the people are the thing signified. . . . It must then have been intended that those who are placed instead of the people, should possess their sentiments and feelings, and be governed by their interests, or in other words, should bear the strongest *resemblance* of those in whose room they are substituted.[1]

The Federalists, in their turn, were struck by the egalitarian undertones in this conception of political representation. And they therefore wished to convince their anti-Federalist opponents that abandoning the principle of identity between represented and representative did not in the least imply a return to aristocratic conceptions:

> Who are to be the electors of the federal representatives? Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names, more than the humble sons of obscure and unpropitious fortune. . . . Who are to be the objects of popular choice? Every citizen whose merit may recommend him to the esteem and confidence of his country. No qualification of wealth, of birth, or religious faith, of civil profession is permitted to fetter the judgement or disappoint the inclination of the people.[2]

James Madison explicitly inferred from this ideal of representation that the citizen and his representative will not only differ from each other (insofar as we may expect the latter to possess greater political wisdom), but that they *ought* to differ. For among the main aims of political representation is precisely to select the best and wisest candidates for the important and responsible office of representing the people in government.

1. Quoted in Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 110.

2. Ibid., 115.

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Strangely, the anti-Federalists had no reply to this argument. The obvious response would have been to say that the kind of identity at stake in political representation is an identity of opinions, not of persons, and that therefore nothing is wrong with sending superior people to Congress so long as they express exactly and without deviation the political opinions held by those whom they represent. Politics, individuals, their social roles, and their opinions seem, in the late eighteenth century, to be still indissolubly related; and the idea of a cake of political opinions, out of which anyone can cut the piece that he or she likes best, belongs to a later and fundamentally different political consciousness. As for the substitution theory of political representation, it was, like its counterpart in aesthetics, formulated by Burke. In a letter of 1774 to his constituents in Bristol, Burke explained, first, what was wrong with the resemblance theory and, next, what view of political representation he preferred should be held. A parliamentary representative, he wrote,

> ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience. . . . These he does not derive from your pleasure,—nor from the law and the Constitution. They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion. . . . To deliver an opinion is the right of all men; that of constituents is a weighty and respectable opinion, which a representative always ought to rejoice to hear and which he always ought most seriously to consider. But *authoritative* instructions, *mandates* issued, which the member is bound blindly and implicitly to obey, to vote, and to argue for, though contrary to the clearest conviction of his judgment and conscience,—these are things utterly unknown to the laws of this land, and which arise from a fundamental mistake of the whole order and tenor of our Constitution.[3]

Just as the work of art has its autonomy with respect to what it represents, so has the representative in Parliament an independence or autonomy with regard to the voters who sent him to Westminster.

There is, to put this another way, a parallel between the gap separating an artistic representation from what it represents and that separating the representative from the voter in politics. We should realize that such gaps are not necessarily an indication of conflict, distortion, or error. Admittedly, we may be justified in ascertaining distortion, even deliberate *mis*representation, under specific circumstances: Cromwell has gone down in history accompanied by his wart, but Louis XIV's portraits are idealized. Portraits, as works of imaginative art, of course differ dramatically from the persons portrayed. To require an iden-

3. *The Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 2 (Boston, 1866), 95.

tity of portrait and sitter bespeaks a rulemaker who does not understand aesthetic representation. And so it is with politics: the adherent to the resemblance theory of political representation believes, falsely, that each difference between the electorate and its representatives is an instance of political misrepresentation. It is clearly less easy in the case of political life to distinguish between misrepresentation and those gaps in representation that are natural. This distinction is perhaps what a voter has most to ponder when deciding after four years about whether he or she has been well represented. Being able to distinguish properly between aesthetic difference and serious misrepresentation is a measure of a nation's political sophistication. A politically naive electorate will see any difference between itself and its representatives as an impermissible distortion; a politically lazy and indifferent electorate will not see distortion even if its representatives have recklessly reneged on all their promises (in this latter scenario, politics becomes, as it were, like expressionist or abstract art). A politically mature electorate will know how to find the *juste milieu*. An implication of this definition of political maturity is that the represented (the voter) is not an objective given. He may change his mind about himself and his own political opinions because of what his representative or his preferred political party has been doing with his mandate since the last election. Interaction between represented and representative transforms the represented, the voter, from a hard and unchanging given into something more fuzzy and continuous with his representative. The parallel with pictorial representation is so easily established that the phenomenon may be a feature of representation as such.

If we compare, for example, Titian's famous portrait of Charles V with the one painted by Barend van Orley, we will probably all prefer the former, but this will not be because Titian came closer to an ideal of photographic precision than van Orley did. Titian and van Orley both painted what they saw—but they saw different things. Titian saw a man who had carried the fate of the whole Christian world on his shoulders and had been deeply aware of the immense responsibilities involved; van Orley saw a man whose princely duties had not yet become part of his personality. There is not a Charles V, the same for all, functioning as a represented that is somehow objectively given to us. Representations help to determine the nature of what they represent: our view of Charles V is in part determined by our preference for Titian's portrait to van Orley's. Historical representation perhaps illustrates this phenomenon even better. There is no The French Revolution, exactly the same to a Michelet, a Tocqueville, a Labrousse, a Lefebvre. We have no French Revolution apart from the texts of these and other historians—though I am, of course, not upholding the silly idealist or postmodern thesis that texts actually create the past: I am making the tautological point that the French Revolution *as a represented* is defined by its representations. Speaking generally, historical reality—as a represented—

only has its face and contours thanks to the representations that historians have offered of it.

This general characteristic of representation is why political representation is so important a phenomenon to democracy. Political representation does not exist simply to compensate for the practical impossibility of assembling the whole nation in one great agora to participate in political decision making. Without representation, there is no represented—and without political representation, there is no nation as a truly political entity. Hence, to put my case provocatively, even were it possible to assemble the whole nation, or to achieve the same effect by frequent electronic voting, we should still prefer representation. Political reality comes into being only when the nation has understood itself as a represented. Without representation, no democratic politics.

Several consequences follow. In the first place, we should be wary of direct democracy. There are problems concerning which no amount or quality of argument is likely to affect opinion, and those are the only problems whose solution is best left to a public referendum. With regard to the quality of life in a neighborhood, for instance, it may be enough to simply listen to the people involved and obey their preferences. People will have pronounced opinions on issues such as these that they are not likely to abandon even after intensive discussion. Political scientists have recently ascertained that local bureaucracies tend to be unexpectedly responsive under these circumstances and react in a creative way. So this kind of relatively local and isolated problem may be left to the interplay of direct democracy and bureaucracy—*bien étonnés de se trouver ensemble*. Plebiscitary democracy may also be the most sensible way to deal with political problems that do not require to be related contextually to other problems, past and present. But representation is the procedure we rely upon when we wish to put matters into wider contexts: when representing the past, the historian labors to show his readers how individual aspects of the past "hang together," and something similar holds for political representation as well. Moreover, seemingly irreconcilable positions are reconciled only by representation. The artist's creativity has its natural and exclusive locus in the gap between art and reality, representation and represented—it is in this aesthetic gap or difference that the artist's creative genius may express and demonstrate itself. So also in politics: the politician's talent for solving problems, his ability to arrive at compromises acceptable to all concerned, depends on his ability to reformulate or redescribe disagreements. The politician must possess the essentially aesthetic talent of representing political reality in new and original ways. Not much can be expected from the political equivalent of the photojournalist.

One might venture the unorthodox thesis that the aesthetic gap in representative democracies has now become too small rather than too large. It is bureaucracy that is the politics of closeness. Think, again, of a painting: we can

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only adequately interpret what we see if the painting is at some distance from us. If we keep it under our noses, all contours are blurred into meaningless strokes of paint. Likewise political meaning can arise only after we have exchanged bureaucratic *closeness* for aesthetic *distance*. Instead of trying to get as close to citizens as possible and explaining in what way government bureaucracy will affect their individual lives, politicians should make an effort to transcend the fragmentation of political reality and of the problems posed by it. An enhanced distance or gap or difference between voters and their representatives also makes clear, in a salutary way, the nature and origin of legitimate political power in representative democracy. When a population divides itself into a group that is represented and another group representing them, the power resides, so to speak, in the representation that both divides and unites them: it belongs to neither of them; there is no sovereign. Which is to say that, in a representative democracy, legitimate political power is essentially aesthetic.

### The Creativity of Compromise

Aesthetic politics is inefficient and messy, like painting; and it is claimed by many people today that, at last, scientific precision—in the form of the universal, transnational financial network and the bureaucratic expert—is at hand and must be welcomed. "Globalization" is taken to be not merely a definition of economic reality but economic reality itself. To interfere with its dictates in the name of national representative democracies would not only be bad politics, these people assert; it would be tantamount to denial of what reality simply *is*. In order to deal with this claim, we had best start with the observation that the domain of action of the financial networks, despite their global reach, is far more narrowly circumscribed than that of better known and more traditional power structures, such as the nation-state. Each network and each expert is like a microscope: an extremely thin slice of reality is perceived with unparalleled clarity and precision, but everything outside it is blurred or even invisible—and there is no supernetwork uniting all the networks and employing all the experts within itself. An implication of which is that a political center where the social realities that have been created by the networks are harmonized and integrated will be just as necessary—if not more so—as when democracy had the more mundane and better known task of reconciling the warring ideologies and interests of its citizens. For it may well be that the citizens of a previous dispensation were more aware of their adversaries than, today, the global networks are of each other. The latter tend to be, and to behave, like the windowless monads of Leibniz. And just as no invisible hand took care of the social and political conflicts that kept nineteenth- and twentieth-century democracies politically divided, we have, to say the least, no a priori certainty that the networks will cooperate to achieve the common

good. Politics is therefore not an activity that we can relinquish as the sad burden of previous generations not yet possessing our scientific instruments for achieving the just and well-ordered society.

But there is a more fundamental consideration. When comparing the advantages of the expert and the network, on the one hand, with those of representative democracy on the other, arguments for the former center on words like *knowledge* and *reality* and *truth*: it is science, and the technological application of scientific knowledge, to which the network and the expert owe both their authority and their aura of efficacy and efficiency. The state in a representative democracy, however, is a *representation* of the electorate, and its functioning is therefore determined by the logic of representation: its focus is on how truth had best be organized into a coherent and self-consistent whole. To appreciate the difference between *truth* and the *organization of truth*, a look at historical representation will help. (Historiography is the discipline in which the logic of representation most clearly manifests itself.) The historian "representing" the past is expected to respect the truth about the past (just as the portrait painter is expected to present us with a likeness of the sitter), but truth is not the decisive criterion for good historical representation. For, as I have argued elsewhere,[4] representations are essentially metaphorical proposals for how to perceive a given part of reality. As has often been argued, historical representation is essentially a matter of selection, of making up one's mind about which true statements to include in one's historical narrative and which candidates, in the end, will have to be left out as unilluminating. The historian can offer his readers many more true statements about the past than he ultimately decides to do; he tends to select those true statements that will together produce the picture or image of the past that he favors. The pros and cons of his metaphorical proposal can be rationally discussed—historical debate is often vigorous—but we cannot meaningfully assert of such proposals that they are true or false. They are sensible, fruitful, helpful, thought-provoking (or not), but, while the data deployed may be true or false, the proposal deploying them cannot be. Again: representation deals with the organization of truth rather than with truth itself.

En route to translating these observations into political language, we must make two apparently contradictory statements about the relationship between the represented and its representation. We can say that the represented is more specific than its representation since *this* representation is just one element out of the class of all possible representations of *this* represented. But we can also argue the other way around and say that the representation is more general than

4. See, for example, my *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (The Hague: Kluwer, 1983) and my *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). For a short synopsis of the views expounded in these books, see my "Reply to Professor Zagorin," *History and Theory* 29 (1990): 275–97.

what it represents, since each representation abstracts in one way or another from the totality of properties that the represented possesses. To assert that a representation is both more specific and more general than what it represents is perhaps too paradoxical. Put more precisely, the representation has a regime of the general and of the specific different from the regime that pertains to the represented. If political representation offers us, as seems obvious, the possibility of rephrasing or redefining political problems in new ways, that is because such problems ordinarily concern the relationship between individual (interests) and general (interests). It is regularly the case that conflicts that appear hopelessly irreconcilable at the level of the represented (the conflicted populace) are ultimately reconciled at the level of representation (the legislature, law court, or cabinet). A new regime in the relationship between the individual and the general is always conceivable where the modus operandi is not knowledge of the truth but, rather, the organization of knowledge. With the organization of truth by representation, we may find ourselves at a higher level than that of truth itself.

## Consensus and Compromise

It might be worthwhile to be more specific about what the foregoing meditations on political creativity mean for political practice. What mechanism in the complex machinery of representative democracy stimulates political creativity most? The best answer, I believe, is political compromise—the pursuit of compromise, that is, as opposed to the pursuit of consensus. Compromise, like representation itself, organizes knowledge rather than discovers or defends it. To the degree that representation is itself creative, so is compromise, and the politician who formulates the most satisfactory and lasting compromise in a political conflict is the political artist par excellence. But whereas compromise stimulates political creativity, consensus kills it.

John Rawls, of course, argues otherwise. Rawls has recently investigated consensus and its potential for political problem solving, and he concludes that consensus may help us to diminish or even to resolve conflicts and achieve a stable political order that respects the rights of its members. Or as Rawls formulates the question that he goes on to answer:

> How is it possible that there can be a stable and just society whose free and equal citizens are deeply divided by conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines?[5]

5. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 134.

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Rawls's main suggestion, in response to the fact he queries, is that such conflicts should not be decided with reference to the foundations of conflicting doctrines. To do so, as Rawls plausibly comments, can only make matters worse, because the deeper you go, the wider the gap will become. Insofar as agreement can be achieved at all, we may expect it to be realizable "on the surface": though it is unlikely that a Calvinist or a Kantian could ever succeed in convincing the other of the truth of his opinions, it may well be that the two will discover (perhaps to their own surprise) far less disagreement with regard to how each translates his beliefs into public behavior. "From the outside," it will often not be easy to distinguish the Calvinist from the Kantian, though the difference becomes manifest as soon as each starts talking about his "inner" moral and religious convictions. Rawls wants to exploit this most fortunate fact in order to ease or prevent political conflict:

> Since we seek an agreed basis of public justification in matters of justice, and since no political agreement on those disputed questions can reasonably be expected, *we turn instead to the fundamental ideas we seem to share* through the political culture. From these ideas we try to work out a political conception of justice congruent with our considered convictions on due reflection. Once this is done, citizens may within their comprehensive doctrines regard the political conception of justice as true, or as reasonable, whatever their view allows. (105–51; emphasis added)

Hence, we start with our "comprehensive doctrines" (Calvinism, Kantianism, etc.) and investigate where, in practice, they can peacefully coexist. Their apparently shared "fundamental ideas" can then become (1) a basis for reaching further agreement and (2) an argument *within each* comprehensive doctrine for persuading its adherents to adopt these shared ideas as an expression of political justice. This process, which is metaphorically horizontal rather than vertical, is what Rawls refers to as the procedure of "overlapping consensus."

The procedure for achieving consensus that Rawls describes undoubtedly provides us with the most effective and painless procedure for achieving political agreement. Moreover, as Rawls himself emphasizes, the procedure does not require us to abandon the philosophical, moral, or religious doctrines we happen to cherish, while, at the same time, it allows us to discover common ground with our doctrinal adversaries. So whenever a political conflict can be settled in this way, it should be. But there are surely comprehensive doctrines that by nature are opposed to the procedure. For example, a Taliban Muslim is not likely to abandon the Koran as supreme legislator for the blessings to be expected from Rawls's overlapping consensus. Rawls recognizes this problem, of course. He tries to get around it by admitting that the procedure for achieving consensus will only work in a community of "reasonable" citizens—that is, citizens who are willing

to provisionally bracket those parts of their comprehensive doctrines that do not fit in with the overlapping consensus. But by excluding theocrats, Maoists, and so on, we exclude precisely those categories of citizen that we would most wish to involve in consensus. The procedure described by Rawls seems to presuppose *itself*, and the aroma of circularity is not easy to dispel. Again, Rawls sees the difficulty:

> If the liberal conceptions correctly framed from fundamental ideas of a democratic public culture are supported by and encourage deeply conflicting political and economic interests, and if there be no way of designing a constitutional regime so as to overcome that, a full overlapping consensus cannot, it seems, be achieved. (168)

To which one may skeptically add that the politician is quite ordinarily confronted with "deeply conflicting political and economic interests," and that it is precisely his job to reconcile them in the absence of "a constitutional regime" that tells him how to do so. So that, precisely when things become interesting and critical from the practical point of view, the procedure of overlapping consensus leaves us empty-handed.

Compromise does not suffer the limitations that hamper consensus, but there can be no doubt about Rawls's very low esteem for compromise. He is indeed at pains to make clear that his overlapping consensus is not, unlike a "modus vivendi" (his term for compromise), something objectionable and base. For this view he has two equally interesting arguments. In the first place, an overlapping consensus, again unlike a modus vivendi, "can be affirmed on moral grounds." Secondly, a modus vivendi is "merely a consensus on accepting certain authorities, or on complying with certain institutional arrangements, founded on a convergence of self- or group interests" (147). On the other hand, Rawls surprisingly upholds the (historical and/or logical) priority of compromise to consensus. When he asks himself the question, "How might a constitutional consensus come about?," he proffers the following answer:

> Suppose that at a certain time, because of various historical events and contingencies, certain liberal principles of justice are accepted as a mere modus vivendi, and are incorporated into existing political institutions. This acceptance has come about, let us say, in much the same way as the acceptance of the principle of toleration came about as a modus vivendi following the Reformation: at first reluctantly, but nevertheless as providing the only workable alternative to endless and destructive civil strife. (159)

Even on Rawls's own terms, it seems to follow that history precedes ethics: without compromise, no consensus. Or, to put it another way, there are apparently

two domains of rationality involved here: on the one hand, there is the practical rationality that people (or their political leaders) appeal to in order to avoid the disastrous consequences of political conflict, and on the other hand, there is an ethical rationality whose role is to demonstrate why the compromise in question is defensible from each of the partisan points of view involved.

Rawls's preference for a rationality merely codifying what has already come into being derives in part from the "prudish contempt" of interests (as opposed to disinterest) that G. A. den Hartogh observes in the writings of Rawls and many contemporary Anglo-Saxon political philosophers.[6] Certainly there are areas where that contempt is justified. Basic political principles of toleration, freedom of thought, and civil freedoms may never be exchanged for economic or financial advantages. Speaking generally, as long as we are thinking of what we have come to see as the citizen's basic rights,[7] it is true that we have no room for compromise. But, with the exception of debates about issues such as abortion or euthanasia, talk of basic rights is a small or negligible part of political debate. Normally, political debate and decision making concern problems such as whether to invest more money in education or in national defense, how much money should be invested in the country's infrastructure, whether to combat crime by hiring more police or by programs for the social integration of dropouts, how to react to the damage done to the environment by industry and transportation systems, how best to fight unemployment, and the like. Any attempt to address such a problem in terms of rights would effectively prevent a workable solution.

The elective affinity between Rawls's model of the overlapping consensus and the vocabulary of political rights signals the virtual irrelevance of the former. Talk about rights is central to the political language of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural law philosophy, and for reasons that no longer pertain. In the first place, the idea of natural rights offered a better safeguard of civil liberties than the haphazard and inconsistent protection of individuals and associations as embodied in the privileges, traditions, or simple agreements of feudal law. In the second place, and no less importantly, we should realize that before the nineteenth century few people saw the state as a creative institution. Apart from conducting foreign policy or waging wars, the state was expected to do little; the notion of a creative state that interfered to remake society would be as strange to our eighteenth-century ancestors as Renaissance perspective would have been to an illuminator of medieval manuscripts. It is not so much that Rawls's notion of consensus and his conception of politics generally are wrong as that they are by now irrelevant. Rawls would make a most interesting discussion

6. G. A. den Hartogh, "Waarheid en consensus in de politieke filosofie van John Rawls," *Algemeen Nederlands tijdschrift voor wijsbegeerte* 84 (1992): 93–121, 117.

7. I explicitly say here "what we have come to see as rights" because we should not forget that even these rights developed from what originally were mere compromises.

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partner for seventeenth-century theorists such as Thomasius, Locke, or Bayle—but not for a generation of political philosophers theorizing about the highly complex and continuously changing political order that has come into being since the Industrial Revolution, or about its moral and political implications.

Rawls's political vocabulary invites us to conceive in terms of rights political issues that should be approached differently. To the extent that Rawls's writings have had a practical effect, it has been to contribute to the tendency in America to see law as the paradigm of all politics, and thus contribute to the consequent predominance that the judiciary has acquired in the United States over the legislative and the executive powers. A society attempting to settle juridically issues that are essentially political may be expected to blind itself to its most urgent problems. It may be helpful, here, to contrast interests with rights. There is no legislation for interests, though after a conflict of interests has been observed (such as between capital and labor), legislation may be produced for dealing with the conflict. Interests are, so to speak, rights *in statu nascendi*. Much, if not all, that is (from a political point of view) new, unexpected, unforeseen, and unforeseeable will initially present itself in terms of interests and emphatically not in terms of rights and legal cases. Sometimes it is only thanks to the existence of conflict that we may become aware that something is awry and needs to be remedied by public decision making. The conflict of interests gives us access to social reality, and without it we are blind, politically speaking. The vocabulary of rights does not give us this access to social reality: it expresses a particular conception of social reality without continuing to test its relevance.

In other words, compromise brings us much closer to what actually happens in the practice of politics than does consensus. It is, to quote Burke, "a very great mistake to imagine that mankind follows up practically any speculative principle, either of government or of freedom, as far as it will go in actual argument or logical illation. All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter. We balance inconveniences, we give and take; we remit some rights, that we may enjoy others; and we choose to be happy citizens rather than subtle disputants."[8] Moreover, compromise by nature inculcates tolerance, trust and trustworthiness, respect of others and of their moral autonomy.[9] Compromise more powerfully contributes to these virtues than consensus, because consensus (especially in

8. "On Conciliation with the Colonies," in *Speeches and Letters on American Affairs* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1908; reprinted 1956), 130–31.

9. In this context, it is of interest to recall the findings of Robert Putnam in his much acclaimed *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). In those areas of Italy (especially the South) where civic traditions are least developed, compromise is distrusted: "to compromise with one's political opponents is dangerous because that normally leads to the betrayal of one's own side." On the other hand, "politicians in civic regions do not deny the reality of conflicting interests, but they are unafraid of creative compromise" (105; see also 115). The readiness to compromise is a sure sign of a mature political culture.

Rawls's conception of it) does not force us to leave the domain of what is rational and justifiable in our own eyes: consensus may at most effect a shift in the center of gravity of our political universe, but it does not require us (in the way that compromise does) to move outside it. Compromise socializes, whereas consensus leaves us the separate individuals that we were.

It is sometimes argued that compromise is at odds with ethical integrity and a willingness to compromise, characteristic of the "moral chameleon," a sign of opportunism, self-deception, and hypocrisy[10]—if nothing worse.[11] But the accusation only makes sense if one conceives of the moral order as a quasi-mathematical system, deductively based on indisputable first principles. Mature citizens participating in a mature political culture will know that the complexity and paradoxes of social and political life resist this simplistic conception of moral truth.[12] The individual willing to seriously consider alternative views, and to risk his own views in discussion and compromise with others, is morally a more respectable person than one who sees in compromise a betrayal of truth. Furthermore, ethical and ideological conflict may well manifest itself in the mind of a single individual—as I argued earlier, this kind of ambivalence is characteristic of the individual citizen in a democracy—and in such cases, the necessity to find the best compromise between incommensurable values is even clearer and no less urgent. Finally, and most importantly, when comparing consensus and compromise, we should realize that consensus represents the static rather than the dynamic aspect of politics. Rawls is interested in the *foundation* (pace Richard Rorty) of a political order in terms of constitutional rights and freedoms but not in what can or should be *constructed* on this foundation. Representative democracy in continental Europe originated, as I have said, from the recognition by politicians (of the post-1815 period) that consensus was wholly unattainable, that political decisions had still to be reached in spite of this, and that compromise would be the only way to do so.[13] Historically, compromise and representative democracy are most intimately linked.

10. Recall Hannah Arendt's most perceptive analysis of hypocrisy and its role in eighteenth-century political thought and during the French Revolution (when hypocrisy was considered, by Robespierre and his Jacobin followers, to be the major political vice for which the guillotine was the only appropriate answer). According to Arendt, "what makes it so plausible to assume that hypocrisy is the vice of vices is that integrity can indeed exist under the cover of all other vices except this one. Only crime and the criminal, it is true, confront us with the perplexity of radical evil; but only the hypocrite is really rotten to the core" (*On Revolution* [London: Penguin, 1990], 103). This is precisely where the hypocrite differs from the person willing to compromise: for compromise, as opposed to consensus, does not require us to abandon our moral or political convictions and is therefore less a standing invitation to hypocrisy, as conceived by Arendt, than is consensus.

11. Martin Benjamin, *Splitting the Difference: Compromise and Integrity in Ethics and Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 8, 46–48.

12. Benjamin follows here the kind of view that was expounded by Thomas Nagel. See Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

13. This recognition has been the contribution of the doctrinal liberals who have done most to introduce representative government in France. And when meditating what enabled them to do so, Guizot wrote: "il n'y a eu dans la Révolution qu'erreur et crime, disaient les uns; l'Ancien

Consensus is essentially conservative and, hence, not creative: nothing that is not already present in the position of the contending parties can emerge through the Rawlsian procedure of overlapping consensus. (Though, of course, the realization of the overlap in the positions of adversaries may introduce something new in political reality.) But since cooperation may be the politician's fate even when no consensus can be realized, compromise may force the politician onto as yet unexplored paths.[14] When the Rawlsian procedure for obtaining consensus fails, political positions must develop that are essentially new. In the first place, since the old positions offered no basis for political cooperation, only new ones can be expected to function as such. Secondly, to the extent that the old positions would remain visible in the compromise, one political party or another might claim victory and thus dangerously weaken support for the compromise proposal. Hence, the more innovative and creative a compromise, the more strongly it will be supported by all the parties involved. In political compromise, each party needs, as much as possible, to include in its final position as little as possible of what was in its original position. This description prescribes not betrayal but metamorphosis. Through the creative process that we call compromise, a new political world may come into being. And the "more complex the problem," as J. H. Carens writes, "the more likely it seems that the most integrative solution will emerge from this kind of creative thinking."[15]

Perhaps no example more perfectly exemplifies the benefits of compromise than the welfare state as it came into being in several countries on the European continent after World War II. The struggle between capital and labor was ended there by means of a compromise that ensured the material well-being of Europe's industrial proletariat while, at the same time, leaving intact the essence of capitalist production. The goal of a welfare state was present neither explicitly nor implicitly in either capitalism or socialism. It was essentially a new idea and was opposed to both of the regnant ideologies. If the welfare state and social security are better developed in continental than in Anglo-Saxon democracies, this surely

Régime avait raison contre elle;—la Révolution n'a péché que par excès, disaient les autres; ses principes étaient bons; mais elle les a poussés trop loin; elle a abusé de son droit. Les doctrinaires repoussèrent l'une et l'autre de ces assertions; ils se défendirent à la fois et du retour aux maximes de l'Ancien Régime, et de l'adhésion, même spéculative, aux principes révolutionnaires. . . . Appelés tour à tour à combattre et à défendre la Révolution, ils se placèrent, dès l'abord et hardiment, dans l'ordre intellectuel, opposant des principes à des principes, faisant appel non seulement à l'expérience, mais aussi à la raison. . . . Ce fut à ce mélange d'élévation philosophique et de modération politique, à ce respect rationnel des droits et des faits divers, à des doctrines à la fois nouvelles et conservatrices, antirévolutionnaires sans être rétrogrades . . . que les doctrinaires durent leur importance comme leur nom." (quoted in Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot* [Paris: Gallimard, 1985], 27). A more striking exemplification of compromise and of the political mentality presupposed by it will be hard to find.

14. No "new" political realities come into being, however, as long as compromise is restricted to the procedure of simple log-rolling where one party abandons certain claims in exchange for the abandonment of certain claims by the other party. See James Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, eds., *Compromise in Ethics, Law and Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 14, 127, 131, 135, 138.

15. Ibid., 128.

is due in part to the fact that the coalition governments of the European continent put a greater premium on compromise than do their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. It certainly is no coincidence that the paean to consensus extensively analyzed in this article was delivered not by a European but by an Anglo-Saxon political philosopher.

**A Paean to Representation; a Hymn to Compromise**

In the face of the new kinds of problem that have replaced the threat of civil war at the center of our national agendas—kinds of problem that representative democracy may be said to have ushered in—our present temptations are: the establishment of direct democracy, the surrender to experts (whether corporate or bureaucratic), and the pursuit of consensus. Each of these options has drawbacks that I have attempted to sketch. Hence I propose that, instead, we make our representative democracies more *representational*: more governed by the aesthetic qualities and considerations that I have outlined here. I propose that the aesthetic gap between represented and representative be widened—that our legislative representatives be less responsive to the daily desires of their constituents and more attentive to the whole picture—in order to allow more room for political artistry, more space for creative compromise. Let us elect representatives less like ourselves, more attentive to composition and form—to arrangements—than to believing things and taking stands and desiring victories. Representative governance is not an exercise in discovering or affirming truth; it is an exercise in principled unprincipledness, an exploration of where agreements can be attained, an organization of truths previously thought immiscible. Thanks to the aesthetic qualities of compromise, representative—representational—democracy may prove capable of squaring yet another deadly circle in our political history.