

# Thinking for Thousands: Emerson's Theory of Political Representation in the Public Sphere

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*This article develops Emerson's theory of representative democracy as it applies to a deliberative public sphere. By highlighting the democratic content of Emerson's thought, this article challenges tradition readings of Emerson that claim his thought to be elitist or antipolitical. According to Emerson, the public sphere is structured by representative individuals who are analogous to those representatives found in electoral institutions. These representatives make public the beliefs and values present in their "constituencies." They deliberate in the name of their constituencies, saying what their constituencies could and would say, were they to also directly engage in such deliberations. Representative individuals are tied to their constituencies through bonds of "sympathy and likeness." The moral consequences of a representative public sphere include the development of a sense of deliberative justice on the part of the citizenry and the reduction of the possibility of domination and oppression by ideologically oriented elites.*

In his essays and lectures Ralph Waldo Emerson develops a theory of political representation that extends the application of the representative relationship from electoral institutions to the public sphere. Emerson develops this idea by outlining the role of "representatives of opinion," or simply "representative men"—individuals who represent the beliefs, values, and ways of life present in their communities—in the formation of a public sphere. Further, this conception of representation applies to every citizen who participates in public deliberations—by speaking in public each person becomes a representative of the constituency of other citizens who think as they do.

Political participation on a wide basis is one of the hallmarks of democracy. Emerson, like most democrats, considers a sense of belonging and of individual empowerment to be among the bases of democratic political life. For this reason, he shares the concern, as Thomas Jefferson expressed it, that each citizen feel "that he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day" (quoted in Arendt 1963, 257). The value at the heart of Emerson's conception of democracy is the ability of all persons to shape their

lives through thinking and thus to exercise their capacity for self-government. But the opportunity, and even the very possibility, of participation in the governing process seems threatened under the conditions of mass society. The danger to participatory self-government that large, anonymous democracies pose, is that most citizens will fail to participate in any significant way beyond the vote, even after the political and social restrictions on participation have been lessened and removed, and even given their willingness to engage in the process of self-government. This is because the size of such democracies makes the direct participation of more than a miniscule proportion of citizens in the governing process impossible. Emerson suggests that participation in deliberations in the public sphere, like participation in legislative bodies, typically cannot be direct. Just as representatives mediate participation in the branches of government, so too does public discourse center around representative individuals who stake out positions and provide focal points for public debate and deliberation. Such discourse is truly public because of the representative nature of the participants, as Emerson recognizes in his account of the author's role in a democratic society:

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The few scholars in each country, whose genius I know, seem to me not individuals, but societies; and, when events occur of great import, I count over these representatives of opinion, whom they will affect, as if I were counting nations. ("Literary Ethics" 1838, 95)

Rather than finding a prominent role only for opinion leaders or public intellectuals, however, Emerson casts every citizen as potentially such a representative individual. The very act of appearing in public implies, on Emerson's account, that the individual seeks to speak not for him or herself alone, but to speak representatively for others as well.

Emerson develops a concept of representation in the public sphere on the basis of an analogy of the public sphere to political institutions. He writes, "The learned member of the legislature, at Westminster, or at Washington, speaks and votes for thousands . . . As Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Webster vote, so Locke and Rousseau think for thousands" ("Shakspeare," *Representative Men* 1850, 715).<sup>1</sup> Such a representative individual in the public sphere, "stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth" ("The Poet," *Essays: Second Series* 1844, 448). Emerson's theory of representative individuals in the public sphere reflects the indispensability of the public sphere to broad participation in democratic politics. It also reflects the changes in the nature of the public sphere that mirror the changes in institutionalized politics as they become increasingly organized around the ballot: as a polity becomes more democratic, its public sphere becomes at once more inclusive (and more participatory) and more mediated (and less direct).

For Emerson the political community is always the community constituted by the media—including the spoken word—within which political and social issues are raised and debated. Emerson considers that location in which "public opinion" is formulated and expressed, called the public sphere in this article, to be the location of the most fundamental politics. In Emerson's day the public sphere was found primarily in print; today it is found primarily in various electronic fora from television to the mobile telephone. Also important, however, are attendance at public gatherings such as lectures, po-

litical rallies, revival meetings, institutional settings such as the academy and town meetings, and conversation in "public" places such as churches and bars.<sup>2</sup> For Emerson what makes an utterance "public" is not its location, but its representative nature, which means that it is offered not as an individual expression without claim to general acceptance, but with the reasonable expectation that it could be accepted by others. Thus, citizenship is marked by participation in the communicative process of a public sphere, either as author or audience.

## Emerson as Theorist of Democracy

Emerson's concern for public and political relations is often overlooked because he is so useful as the iconic representative of that strain of rugged individualism in American political life that opposes self-reliance to every form of communitarianism, socialism, or collectivism. Unfortunately, the lens of individualism leads Emerson's readers to overlook the richness of his political thought and ignore much of the content of his understanding of democracy. Against some of the main strands of Emerson interpretation, I argue that in his writings Emerson directly and thoroughly engages the American experience of political democracy and that he rejects elitism in favor of an egalitarian understanding of the workings of this democracy.

Those who interpret Emerson as an individualist frequently note the similarities between his notion of individualism and a theory of individual rights and liberties. Matthiessen (1941) and Shklar (1990), among others, find Emerson to be a "transcendental democrat," concerned with the inner, moral equality of individuals. His individualism, embodying a commitment to moral and political equality, is taken as the central tenet of his democratic theory. This form of democracy is primarily concerned with the procedural protection of the equal rights of individuals and not so concerned with public relations among citizens and the collective wielding of political power. Kateb exemplifies the individualist reading of Emerson in *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, where he writes, "Democracy becomes, in its political process, the register of diversity, of

<sup>1</sup>Quotations from Emerson are identified by the essay and book (with original publication date) in which they appear. All page numbers refer to Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1995). The theme of representative public identities runs through Emerson's writings, from the early addresses of the 1830's to the late volume *Society and Solitude* (1870).

<sup>2</sup>This definition of the public sphere is largely in concert with Habermas' which includes the full range of political discourse and is somewhat at odds with some others such as that of Cohen and Arato (1992) who specify that discourse in the public sphere be "disinterested," i.e., not rooted in material interests. Emerson has no compunction about the presence of material interests in politics, so long as they are expressed in a public, i.e., "representative" and general, way.

*individual* diversity, perhaps even of individual uniqueness" (1995, 183). On this view, Emerson has minimal concern for the character of relations among citizens, political participation, public deliberation, and membership in the political community. Rather, democracy is considered the best defender and guarantor of individual liberties.

Sometimes Emerson's individualism is taken to be so extreme as to preclude nearly all social and political content from his philosophy. For instance, Shklar suggests that the "political" involvement Emerson endorses is limited to teaching children and talking to fellow citizens in one's capacity as a private individual (1990, 612). Howe claims that Emerson's "terms are unlikely to satisfy those of us who live, or would like to live, in the public realm" (1986, 41). In *Habits of Heart*, Bellah and his colleagues write, "Emerson in his 1841 essay 'Self-Reliance' even declared the individual and society to be in opposition" (1985, 55). Whicher concludes that Emerson's politics amount to a "radical egoistic anarchism" (1953, 49). Emerson's transcendental individualism is easily seen to result in political quietism, as when West asserts that Emerson presents "human personality disjoined from communal action" (1989, 40). This view is echoed by Patterson who concludes that Emerson has "a reactionary vision of reform as 'inaction' or 'sublime prudence,' a view that ultimately dismantles any real possibility for visible public action" (1997, 98).

Among those who conclude that Emerson's work is not thoroughly apolitical many, including Kateb (1995), Bloom (1985), and Miller (1967) find him to have been an elitist at heart. Miller presents Emerson as an elitist by suggesting that despite Emerson's democratic trappings, he "was still Bostonian, ninth in line of ministers, and by no stretching of his conception of nature could he learn to look upon the naturals who composed the Jacksonian rabble with anything but loathing" (1967, 168). Worse than the apolitical standard of self-reliance, Miller finds "behind it and sustaining it . . . the even more disturbing one of genius" (165). "Emerson," Miller writes, "was frequently on the point of making democratic naturalism signify an open, irreconcilable war between genius and democracy" (169). If Emerson's thought shows signs of democratic leanings, it is only because he resigns himself to the inevitability of a democratic regime, finds it convenient to adopt the veneer of democratic sentiments, or because he is not really concerned with political action at all, and simply ends up adopting the dominant political culture by default (West 1989, 28, 40).

The view of Emerson as an apolitical individualist is, however, at odds with those places in Emerson's texts that

emphasize what he calls "social strengths" and "public power."<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to further the work of recovering these political elements in Emerson's thought begun by such thinkers as Cavell (1989, 1990), Gougeon (1990), and Lopez (1996, 1999). It does this by developing Emerson's pervasive concern for the individual as public and representative. It shows how the representative individual can represent others by synthesizing and giving unity to the disparate beliefs and values that underlie public opinion. Emerson describes how representatives can be said to think or speak for others, and the connections there are between representatives and their constituencies in the public sphere. The article situates Emerson's analogy between representatives in institutional settings and in the public sphere in theories of political representation current in his day. It then goes on to argue that Emerson offers a participatory vision of democracy in which the nature of membership and political engagement is shaped by the representative quality of individuals. It concludes with an elaboration of the moral distinctiveness of representative democracy and Emerson's suggestions as to how representative participation in the public sphere can help ameliorate various political evils.

<sup>3</sup>The important question of how deep politics and sociality go in Emerson's thought need not be answered before addressing his readily apparent conception of representation. However, there are signs that at bottom he offers a profoundly tranquil and strife-free vision of individuality that seems to preclude most of what we know about political life. As he remarks, "Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins" ("Friendship," *Essays: First Series* 1841, 347). In this regard Emerson may be Augustinian, in holding that politics is not fundamental to human being, but is only a product of imperfect conditions. In his essay "Politics" he seems to envision the end of politics, since, "with the appearance of the wise man, the State expires. The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary" ("Politics," *Essays: Second Series* 1844, 568). Thus, in some sense, this article is not a simple explication of Emerson so much as it is an attempt at a reconstruction of Emerson's theory of democracy. Neither is it a historical reading of Emerson and his political commitments, which do bear directly on the themes developed here. "Reconstruction," as Habermas defines it, "signifies taking a theory apart and putting it back together again in a new form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set for itself" (Habermas, [1976] 1979, 95, quoted in Ginsberg 2001, 289). This raises the question of the overarching principle that informs this theoretical reconstruction. I have learned much from Cavell's (1989) reading of Emerson's perfectionism, both through the lens of Nietzsche, and "after Wittgenstein." Cavell draws on Emerson to describe how the individual in his representative role draws out or calls out a new moral community using the expectation and imputation of intelligibility. For Cavell being an Emersonian representative means "expecting oneself to be . . . intelligible as an inhabitant now also of a further realm . . . and to show oneself prepared to recognize others as belonging there" (1989, 125).

## Representative Thinking: A Theory of a Representative Public Sphere

Emerson extends the concept of political representation from the institutional setting into the public sphere. He does this to accommodate the new political conditions of a democracy in which the seat of sovereignty has migrated away from the institutions of government and to the great body of the people. While Emerson downplays the role of institutions, focusing instead on the role of ideas and culture in public life, he finds representation in the public sphere to be broadly analogous to institutional representation. Representative individuals present the interests, sentiments, beliefs, values, principles, preferences, ways of life, aspirations, aversions, and political identities, i.e., all the material that forms the basis of public opinions that Emerson simply calls the "ideas," of their communities. However, they do it in the public sphere, rather than in the halls of governmental institutions. The concept of a representative public sphere marks a shift in the locus of political relations among citizens from the institutional setting of electoral representatives to the media setting of representatives of opinion.

As a result of this shift, means other than the ballot are necessary for selecting representatives and holding them accountable to their constituencies. Even though there is no formal selection mechanism such as election, the public selects and limits those individuals who can be said to represent their communities because representatives must actually share some common interests and desires, must have genuine "sympathy and likeness," with their constituencies, in order to speak in a representative fashion. The representative public sphere thus becomes the locus of a distinct form of the representative relationship, as the electoral relation between citizens and their government is augmented with communicative relations among citizens in the public sphere. The form of "participatory" representation that Emerson describes makes for a richer, more descriptive, and therefore more complete form of representation than is possible within the confines of electoral institutions.

Emerson's vision of democratic society, like that of other American political thinkers, centers on representative relations, but he gives special emphasis to the representation of ideas in the media. Just as participation in the offices of government is mediated by representatives, so too is participation in political society and the public sphere mediated by representative individuals. Public discourse centers on representative individuals who stake out positions and provide focal points for public debate and deliberation. The individual is that which gives shape

to what is public and common. This is possible because, as Emerson writes, "a man is a method, a progressive arrangement; a selecting principle, gathering his like to him, wherever he goes" ("Spiritual Laws," *Essays: First Series* 1841, 311). The individual in his representative aspect makes a variety of values, beliefs, and desires hang together as a coherent whole. In doing so, the representative individual reveals the community to itself. "Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds," Emerson writes, and representatives in the public sphere make possible the reading of the public's mind ("Uses of Great Men," *Representative Men* 1850, 616).

Representation in the public sphere involves the presentation of the ideas of some segment of the people in the media where it can gain an audience. Recall Emerson's central analogy, that, "As Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Webster vote, so Locke and Rousseau think for thousands" ("Shakespeare," 715). That representative individuals "think" for others does not mean that they produce ideas that others accept and adopt as their own. The loss of intellectual self-reliance that this would entail is not only anathema to Emerson, but is incompatible with most conceptions of democracy. His dictum, in "History," is, "Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself, must go over the whole ground" ("History," *Essays: First Series* 1841, 240). Representative thinking is simply thinking in public. Representatives merely give public expression to the particular range of qualities that give the community and its members their identity ("Montaigne," *Representative Men* 1850, 696). The representative in the public sphere is able to represent his community because he has "evinced the temper, stoutness, and the range of qualities that, among his contemporaries and countrymen, entitle him to fellowship and trust" ("Montaigne," 696). Representation in the public sphere is the presentation of the particular constellation of ideas that make up the identity of the community.

The ties individuals have to their circumstances make them representative of their communities. Emerson writes, "He [the individual] cleaves to one person, and avoids another, according to their likeness or unlikeness to himself, truly seeking himself in his associates, and moreover in his trade, and habits, and gestures, and meats, and drinks; and comes at last to be faithfully represented by every view you take of his circumstances" ("Spiritual Laws," 315). This representative relation of an individual and his community is the core of politics in a democratic society. Representation that is effective in bringing to public presence the range of ideas shared with the community is also effective in bringing to bear the public pressure that this representative authority generates. Emerson suggests that

public persuasiveness is in part derived from the fact that the reasons presented by representative individuals are reasons that are representative of that individual's community. He says, "The men who carry their points do not need to inquire of their constituents what they should say, but are themselves the country which they represent: nowhere are its emotions or opinions so instant and true as in them; nowhere so pure from a selfish infusion. The constituency at home hearkens to their words, watches the color of their cheek, and therein, as in a glass, dresses its own" ("Character," *Essays: Second Series* 1844, 496). There is an echo in this of the republican ideal, as expressed by George Mason: "To make representation real and actual, the number of Representatives ought to be adequate; they ought to mix with the people, think as they think, feel as they feel, ought to be perfectly amenable to them, and thoroughly acquainted with their interest and condition" (1993, 607). The representative expresses what lies inherent in the social milieu from which he emerges. The individual is only representative because of a special connection to some salient idea of the people.<sup>4</sup>

Emerson may seem to characteristically overstate the indebtedness of the representative to the people he represents; "great genial power, one would almost say, consists in not being original at all; in being altogether receptive" ("Shakspeare," 711). But he does not mean to exaggerate. The representative differs from his community only in the "range and extent" to which he takes the material provided by the community ("Shakspeare," 710). From within "the thick of events" the representative individual sees "what men want" and shares "their desire." He only "adds the needful length of sight and of arm, to come at the desired point" ("Shakspeare," 710). It is the public individual, in his representative capacity, who lacks maverick creativity and who has become "perfectly amenable" to his constituency. The people out of whom the representative individual comes hold the sovereign power of the creation of ideas.

The similarity between representative individuals and those they represent begins with membership and participation in the life of the community. In order for a representative to express the ideas of a particular people, he must be "in unison with his time and his country" ("Shakspeare," 710). He must have the temperament and qualities appropriate to the community. In this case, it must be true that, "He is not only representative, but

<sup>4</sup>West describes Emerson as an organic intellectual, i.e., someone whose "historical context shaped [his] influential problematic and vocabulary" (1989, 38). He even adopts Emerson's own vocabulary in his description of him as having a socially located "constituency," but West fails to fill out Emerson's account of how a figure like an "organic intellectual" fits into a democratic polity.

participant" ("Uses of Great Men," 619). Participatory representation allows for both the representation of the particularity of the actual constituency in the form of their present ideas and in the form of the further possibilities inherent in those ideas. Representation depends on the establishment of a felt connection between the represented group and the representative. The substantive, constructive content of representation that cannot depend on formal selection mechanisms must rely on a coincidence of values in the individual and in what Emerson calls variously the "public mind," "common nature," "common sentiment," "common conscience," "common heart," and "common life."<sup>5</sup> Emersonian representation aims first of all at producing a greater degree of connectedness among those represented and an increase in the number of connective relationships among individuals.

One effect of the intimate connection between the representative and constituency is to preclude one aspect of the so-called trustee versus delegate controversy in the theory of representative government. Concerns about "instructions" to the representative are obviated because the representative knows what the hearts and minds of his constituents are by consulting his own, for they are coincident. Emerson explains, "Like can only be known by like. The reason why he knows about them is that he is of them; he has just come out of nature, or from being a part of that thing" ("Uses of Great Men," 619). In detailing the connection Emerson describes a criterion by which representatives are identified, which in turn functions as a selection mechanism. The true representative is one who is "known by like." If an individual does not appear to other members of a community as being a "part of that thing" that makes up the public and the community, then that individual will find him or herself without the support of an audience and without purchase in a public space.

Emerson observes that individuals give signs that they are authorized to speak for some community, but that these signs are determined by the character of the community in advance of the appearance of the representative individual. If an individual would be representative and have

<sup>5</sup>These concepts of the public and the common that occur throughout Emerson's writings are main avenues by which he develops the transcendentalism that he first announces in *Nature*.

These and like phrases occur in several places: "public mind," in "The Young American" (1844), "Spiritual Laws" (*Essays: First Series* 1841), "Politics" (*Essays: Second Series* 1844), and "Shakspeare" (*Representative Men* 1850); "common nature," in "The American Scholar" (1837), and "Over-Soul" (*Essays: First Series* 1841); "common sentiment," in "The Young American," "common conscience," in "The Young American," and "Politics," "common heart," in "Over-Soul," "common life," in *Nature* (1836), "The Young American," "Heroism" (*Essays: First Series* 1841), and "Circles" (*Essays: First Series* 1841).

a public identity as a member of his community, he must learn to give the sign of that community. In this sense, the representative must be the audience and the community must be the author. "We lie in the lap of immense intelligence," Emerson writes, "which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity" ("Self-Reliance," *Essays: First Series* 1841, 269).<sup>6</sup> This reception and identification with the "common" is a key notion in Emerson's understanding of how individuals become "public and human in [their] regards and actions" ("The Over-Soul," *Essays: First Series* 1841, 400). It is the quality of being "plastic and permeable to principles" and therefore representative of something common that is the source of political authority and power in Emerson's thought ("Self-Reliance," 272). He explicates his notion of "reliance" in his description of the power of the representative as derived from what is common. He writes, "Who has more obedience than I masters me, though he should not raise his finger. Round him I must revolve by the gravitation of spirits" ("Self-Reliance," 272). Representative individuals do not have a mandate to act or judge independently of their constituencies' values. Such independence in fact destroys the representative relation.

Representation occurs in the public sphere when individuals cultivate and create connections between themselves and their communities and then present themselves publicly so that those connections are visible. The gathering of material, the sniffing out of the sense of the community, and the intimacy which long familiarity breeds, are all part of the work of the representative. The paths by which a community's sense of itself is channeled into representative individuals are largely intuitive. Emerson fills out the picture of this connection: "Show us the constituency, and the now invisible channels by which the senator is made aware of their wishes; the crowd of practical and knowing men, who, by correspondence or conversation, are feeding him with evidence, anecdotes and estimates, and it will bereave his fine attitude and resistance of something of their impressiveness" ("Shakspeare," 715). This process involves the matching of individual genius in the creative individual with the genius of the public mind. All individuals—even the extraordinary genius—are exemplary of their surroundings. Emerson generalizes this democratic principle: "It is easy to see

that what is best written or done by genius in the world, was no man's work, but came by wide social labor, when a thousand wrought like one, sharing the same impulse" ("Shakspeare," 715). The connection between representative individuals and the communities out of which they come into a wider public is affirmed in the concrete identification of the ideas of both. The effect of this democratic principle is to strip power and authority from individuals considered in their unique singularity, just as power and authority was stripped from the individual monarchs and lords who once held it, and invest it in the people as a whole.

Emerson's idea of the connection between representatives and their communities can be understood as a "thin" theory of descriptive representation. Descriptive representatives become representative because they bear the appropriate demographic markers of those represented. Descriptive representation produces substantive representation if the representatives will in fact spontaneously do as the people could have done, since they are of the people and share in their circumstances. The descriptive element of representation in the public sphere is the crucial link that keeps the representation honest, since no formal legal provisions for accountability are available in the realm of ideas.

Emerson, perhaps playing on the idea of the exploration of the Western frontier, describes the way representatives cultivate connections between themselves and their communities as "road-making." By incorporating it into his notion of representation and by turning toward the inner frontier of ideas, he democratizes the frontier experience and makes it available for everyone. He writes, "Engineer, broker, jurist, physician, moralist, theologian, and every man, inasmuch as he has any science, is a definer and a map-maker of the latitudes and longitudes of our condition. These road-makers on every hand enrich us" ("Uses of Great Men," 620). The representative is a "road-maker" when he represents possible connections and forms of relationship that those he represents could make themselves. He does this by forming those connections himself, by presenting them as actualities for himself. This presentation of actual connections in the representative is a representation of the possibilities that the "constituents" have. It serves as an invitation to the constituents to form these connections themselves. The fundamental work of the representative is described as the contemplative action that Plato exemplifies, through which he devises unity and produces connections, correspondences, and relations among individual selves severally and between the community of individuals and the diversity of things ("Plato," *Representative Men* 1850, 645). The representative translates a possibility into the

<sup>6</sup>In one of his comments on this passage, Dewey writes that, "truth lies on the highway. Emerson says, 'We lie in the lap of immense intelligence which makes us organs of its activity and receivers of its truth,' and the Idea is no longer either an academic toy nor even a gleam of poetry, but a literal report of the experience of the hour as that is enriched and reinforced for the individual through the tale of history, the appliance of science, the gossip of conversation and the exchange of commerce" (1970, 74).

“necessary sphere” of the intellect, and makes it available, comprehensible, and usable (“Uses of Great Men,” 619).

According to Emerson, it is the relation of “sympathy and likeness” between an individual and his community that determines whether or not that individual is a representative. The representative expresses ideas present, if only latently, in the other members of the community. Emerson emphasizes that the representative individual only has greater powers of expression, not greater powers of creating new ideas. Thus he writes, “Shakespeare’s principal merit may be conveyed in saying that he of all men best understands the English language” (“Uses of Great Men,” 621). The abilities of exemplary individuals are only a manifestation of the material already present in the community—material that, like the English language, is not their creation, but the creation of the community at large.

“Sympathy and likeness” constitute the true relation of representation. The representative relation can fail, of course, if a representative is not able to “make his talent trusted” (“Character,” 496). The individual is only able to create a representative relation between himself and others if he is able to show a similarity between himself and others. Emerson explains the failure of representation as a failure of the individual to give expression to the politically salient ideas of the community. Individuals who fail to align themselves with a constituency fail to be representative in the way that speakers fail to attract audiences or politicians fail to attract supporters. To these failures, he remarks, “The reason why any one refuses his assent to your opinion, or his aid to your benevolent design, is in you: he refuses to accept you as a bringer of truth, because, though you think you have it, he feels that you have it not. You have not given him the authentic sign” (“New England Reformers,” *Essays: Second Series* 1844, 605). Thus, if a leader finds himself without followers, the fault is with the leader. Emerson draws the individual out with a provocative suggestion, “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius” (“Self-Reliance,” 259). It is, however, only when what is in the individual’s heart is true for all men in the community that representation can be said to occur. This means that the individual, insofar as he wishes to speak publicly and representatively, must *not* stand firmly for what he believes, if that means radically distancing and differentiating himself from his community. Emerson points to the possibility that “a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time” as the sign that the individual is thinking aright (“Self-Reliance,” 259). In describing a would-be public intellectual and representative voice, Emerson says of the

prospective representative individual that “He did not expect a sympathy, with his thought from the village, but he went with it to the chosen and intelligent, and found no entertainment for it, but mere misapprehension, distaste and scoffing. Men are strangely mistimed and misapplied; and the excellence of each is an inflamed individualism which separates him more” (“Montaigne,” 704). Far from celebrating self-reliance to the point at which individuals become unique or separate from society, Emerson worries that “an inflamed individualism” will prevent individuals from connecting with their communities, a state he describes as “solitary imprisonment” (“Montaigne,” 706). Being right in one’s soul, i.e., having a clear conscience, is not in itself enough; the citizen cannot deny the claim that his community has on him and remain a citizen.<sup>7</sup>

## Justice and a Representative Public Sphere

The basic justification of the representative relationship in democracies is a claim of justice that individuals and political constituencies can make: that they be participants and have a public role in the deliberations of the polity. A representative public sphere, in Emerson’s view, affords the widest possible degree of participation in public life. It is thus the best assurance that this claim of justice is met. Emerson fills out this view by outlining how representative individuals further the attainment of political justice by minimizing three kinds of injustice that may be present in the public sphere. A democracy with a representative public sphere is the regime least likely to foster what Emerson calls egoism, which is the inability of individuals to develop a sense of justice. It is the best defense against the domination of any part of a society by any other, whether through the use of the state apparatus or through noninstitutional forms and means of power. It is also the best guarantee against oppression by a dominant part of society, which would prevent new social forms from arising and achieving representative expression.

It may be thought that democracy is the source of the threat of “the despotism of public opinion,” (“Politics,” *Essays: Second Series* 1844,” 565) of the egoism,

<sup>7</sup>That there would be problems with such informal accountability seems likely. The problems that arise when public figures claim to speak or are taken to speak for group or movement constituencies is one of Phillips’ main themes in her discussion of the feminist movement (1991). Emerson’s theoretical solution is the tautological claim that only those who actually represent their constituencies can properly be called representatives. His practical solutions, discussed below, are found in the cultivation of diversity, rotation, and proliferation of representatives.

domination and oppression that Emerson identifies, and which has in the twentieth century been called a product of the rise of the “mass man” (e.g., Mills 1956, 303). Emerson would suggest, however, that it is a mistake to think this phenomenon to be an exclusive product of democracy. He notes the continuity between past forms of ideological domination and the current “idolatry” of public opinion. On the contrary, Emerson thinks that more democracy is the solution to the problem of the stifling effects of a dominant public opinion. Only in a democracy does one see the level of representative diversity necessary to avoid ideological domination and oppression. For Emerson the democratic regime—more than any other—allows “other men, and the *otherest*” to draw near and liberates individuals from their solitude so that they may grow into their “social strengths” (“Uses of Great Men,” 616). Since “All men are at last of a size,” the potential for the diversity, rotation, and proliferation of representatives is greatest in a democratized public sphere (“Uses of Great Men,” 630). When all citizens can “go public” and represent themselves as members of a constituency, indeed of many constituencies,<sup>8</sup> the ideal of participatory representation will allow modern mass democracy to be as inclusive and just as a polity can be.

One aspect of the moral distinctiveness of representative democracy that Emerson's concept of representative individuals illuminates is the way in which a representative public sphere transforms the meaning of citizenship. The public sphere is not simply a forum for the assertion of wills in the form of interests or rights or the location in which individuals express their desires and preferences. Rather, in the public sphere individual citizens speak as representatives: in speaking *to* others, representative individuals seek to speak *for* others. The individual becomes representative when he or she makes it the case that “Reason for one is seen to be reason for another, and for every other” (“Politics,” 566). Reasons are offered in public communication by representatives who present them as actually accepted by their community and possibly accepted by others. The representative nature of the public sphere teaches citizens to recognize that when they seek to become “public and human in [their] regards and actions,” they must themselves become representative, i.e., they must seek to present their ideas as ideas that others could accept. Thus, one main aspect of citizenship in the public sphere is to be representative, i.e., to “think for others” in a representative way. Another corollary aspect of

citizenship is the willingness of citizens to encounter others as representative, i.e., as individuals who potentially think for them, as well. This openness to representation is the precondition for the encounter with others, in which “Each man seeks those of different quality from his own, and such as are good of their kind; that is, he seeks other men, and the *otherest*” (“Uses of Great Men,” 616). The representative relation thus educates citizens into a recognition of the participation of others in the public sphere, which is the foundation of justice appropriate to a deliberative democracy.<sup>9</sup>

Emerson characterizes this representative work as “humanization,” which is the process by which reasons otherwise or formerly inaccessible are made available to citizens. The task of the representative individual is to “make an easy way for all,” and “disenchant” reasons, so that they may “walk forth to the day in human shape” (“Uses of Great Men,” 618). Disenchantment here is demystification, and the elimination of the power of authority and tradition, so that reasons may speak for themselves. Representative individuals make public the ideas that are native to their constituencies' ways of seeing the world. They then take those alternative possibilities and translate them into terms that can be understood by others outside their constituency. The first service of representative individuals, then, is as “a collyrium [a solution used as a cleanser for the eyes] to clear our eyes from egotism, and enable us to see other people and their works” (“Uses of Great Men,” 626). Representative individuals are a defense against our inability to recognize the equal claim to voice and sovereignty of other citizens. Citizens recognize other lives and other ideas through representative individuals. Citizens encounter other citizens mainly through their representatives who bring the members of their constituencies to public presence.<sup>10</sup>

The encounter with plurality and diversity and the need to communicate with others in the public sphere casts the attachments citizens have to their own form of partiality into relief against other possibilities. This self-awareness is a precondition to the communicative nature of the public sphere, in which citizens attempt to persuade one another to adopt new views. Here Emerson offers his

<sup>8</sup>Thompson lists possible constituencies for elected representatives: the nation, a political party, the district as a whole, the electoral majority in the district, and individuals who make direct appeals (Thompson 1987, 100). This list is expanded in Gutmann and Thompson to include future generations (1996).

<sup>9</sup>Gutmann and Thompson (1996) use a form of this principle of reciprocity in deliberation as the basis of their attempt to navigate the divisive pluralism that increasingly characterizes modern democracies. Their notion of what may legitimately be said in a public sphere is narrower than Emerson's view.

<sup>10</sup>Phillips (1995) explores the institutional analogue to this argument and suggests that the actual presence of diverse groups within elected assemblies provides something the politics of ideas cannot. However, Emerson suggests that in the end it is only ideas, those of others and our own, which are present to us.

prescription against egoism and too little acknowledgment of others: “Each new law and political movement has meaning for you. Stand before each of its tablets and say, ‘Under this mask did my Proteus nature hide itself.’ This remedies the defect of our too great nearness to ourselves. This throws our actions into perspective” (“History,” 239). The multiplicity and contingency of ideas gives citizens enough distance from themselves and their own ideas to see that theirs are somewhat contingent and mutable, and not entirely universal and permanent. This recognition makes possible the further recognition that citizens’ attachment to their ideas—the subjective experience of a relation—is contingent as well. The representative public sphere teaches citizens, in the first instance, how to change their own minds, and in the second, how to go about trying to change the minds of others.

The next great service of a representative public sphere is to provide the necessary forum for the degree of diversity in representation that can effectively ward off the risk of domination. In speaking of injustice, Emerson speaks of becoming “underlings” under the “dominion” of others. The danger that Emerson identifies as besetting the public sphere is that of the domination of an overbearing single idea or set of ideas, resulting in a lack of creativity and expression. The threat he identifies is the potential dominion of public opinion over the minds of individuals. This threat arises because “the People” in its incarnation as the present sovereign is a jealous god who will brook no others before it:

Our delight in reason degenerates into idolatry of the herald. Especially when a mind of powerful method has instructed men, we find the examples of oppression. The dominion of Aristotle, the Ptolemaic astronomy, the credit of Luther, of Bacon, of Locke; —in religion the history of hierarchies, of saints, and the sects which have taken the name of each founder, are in point. (“Uses of Great Men,” 623)

The number of individuals comprehended under these names—and other names closer and more familiar—increases as more people read, write, and speak in public. Therefore, democracy demands constant vigilance against the rise of new orthodoxies, new settled opinions, new fixed stars in the social and political constellations. The threat of domination in the realm of discourse does not take the form of *alien* domination. Rather, a diversity of representation must guard against too much influence by any one of the “contemporaries and companions” that populate the current public sphere. Emerson’s worry about the dominion of Aristotle et al. is a worry that people

might too easily let others do the thinking. Domination through the representation of ideas would occur were citizens to come to merely mirror what are represented to them as their own ideas, but which have their sources in a few public figures.

Public opinion unmediated by representative individuals would ensnare the mind of the individual and be a source of domination and oppression. Idolatry is Emerson’s name for the main threat to the openness of the public sphere:

We boast our emancipation from many superstitions; but if we have broken any idols, it is through a transfer of the idolatry. What have I gained, that I no longer immolate a bull to Jove, or to Neptune, or a mouse to Hecate; that I do not tremble before the Eumenides, or the Catholic Purgatory, or the Calvinistic Judgment-day,—if I quake at opinion, the public opinion, as we call it. (“Character,” 499)

Threats to freedom were traditionally thought to arise from repressive government. America was founded on an emancipatory urge that identified a usurping tyrant and an errant government as the source of unfreedom. Emerson turns his attention to a new kind of tyranny, one that works in the medium of ideas. He describes this threat as arising with the new public power conferred upon individuals as citizens: “Each man, too, is a tyrant in tendency, because he would impose his idea on others; and their trick is their natural defense” (“Nominalist and Realist,” *Essays: Second Series* 1844, 582). This trick, or threat, is a defense because representative individuals, as partial and particular examples, balance the potentially stultifying and inhibiting effect of a public opinion that makes everyone too much of one mind. The best way to resist domination, whether it is by the state, by the few, or by the majority, is through enough diversity in the public sphere to ensure multiple independent power bases, each with its own self-authorizing justifications. For Emerson the twin names of this diversity are individuality and democracy. Emerson writes, “Democracy is morose, and runs to anarchy, but in the state, and in the schools, it is indispensable to resist the consolidation of all men into a few men” (“Nominalist and Realist,” 583). Diversity of representation in the public sphere is augmented by “nature’s remedy” of rotation (“Uses of Great Men,” 623). Rotation, as Shklar (1990) points out, is diversity in succession.

The dominion of any particular idea, individual, or faction would be unjust primarily because, as Emerson recognizes, “No man, in all the procession of famous men, is reason or illumination or that essence we were looking for” (“Uses of Great Men,” 630). Emerson observes that

every particular human meaning is partial and incomplete: "We live in a system of approximations. Every end is prospective of some other end, which is also temporary; a round and final success nowhere" ("Nature," *Essays: Second Series* 1844, 552). The partiality and incompleteness of every person and group means that every person and group needs representation; no "general" representation is possible, because of this particularity.<sup>11</sup> This particularity also means that no one is in possession of the complete truth, of the whole of the good, of every form of value, and thus none can legitimately claim to overreach all the others in power and prestige. Emerson formulates this principle in terms of the advantages of knowledge that many minds bring to a question: "Why fancy that you have all the truth in your keeping? There is much to say on all sides" ("Montaigne," 694). Incompleteness necessitates amelioration and proliferation. Emerson writes, "Hence the immense benefit of party in politics, as it reveals faults of character in a chief, which the intellectual force of the persons, with ordinary opportunity, and not hurled into aphelion by hatred, could not have seen. Since we are all so stupid, what benefit that there should be two stupidities!" ("Nominalist and Realist," 582). Democracy is the more valuable, the more "stupidities" are given public expression through representation.

Representation in the public sphere offers a system of checks and balances analogous to the institutional checks and balances elaborated by James Madison in *The Federalist* #10. Emerson's view of representation shows how democratic discourse is channeled in the public sphere. "We balance one man with his opposite," Emerson says, "and the health of the state depends on the see-saw" ("Uses of Great Men," 628). The principle conditions that Emerson identifies for the proper workings of this self-checking action are the freedoms of speech and association ("Uses of Great Men," 629). The key to the continual balancing act is the full representation of the multiplicity of ideas present in the people as a whole. Emerson says representative individuals act as the "checks and balances of nature, as a natural weapon against the exaggeration and formalism of bigots and blockheads" ("Montaigne," 702). Emerson establishes that every individual and every group is partial and is a purveyor of "stupidities." Therefore, every citizen and every representative, in their roles as "bigots and blockheads," participates in the system of checks and balances.

Every constituency has a claim to have its own representative, both in the public sphere and in the institutions of the state. Furthermore, representation in the

public sphere (but perhaps not in institutional settings—Emerson has little to say about this) must be descriptive. In the public sphere, the accurate correspondence and resemblance between representative and constituency is necessary, since the mechanism for the selection of representatives is identification with representatives who are "like us." The descriptive element is necessary since one of the roles of representatives is to convey the views of the constituency to the public at large.<sup>12</sup> The descriptive element is also necessary because another of the roles of representative individuals is to provide public presence for the represented. Having one's own representative to counter the "credit" of others ensures that a social space is preserved for each citizen's own thought and expression. This aspect of Emerson's concept of representation is rooted in the radical democratic ideology of equal participation.<sup>13</sup> The formal "electoral" connection of institutional selection cannot substitute for this "elective" connection between those of like minds in the public sphere.

Citizens let others do their legislative voting for them only when they have good reason to believe that their representatives will faithfully pursue their interests. Likewise, the legitimacy of representation in the sphere of public deliberation is found in the quality of the relation between representative and constituency. This means that our representative must "speak to our want" and that "our want" must take precedence over what the representative may offer on his or her own that is not elementally constitutive of our ideas. The representative individual can speak for others because, "Men see in him their own dreams and glimpses made available, and made to pass for what they are" ("Plato," 644).

Although the size and extent of modern democracies makes direct political participation impossible, representation allows an approximation of such participation. The more varied, or "proportional," the range of representatives, the more closely representation approximates direct participation. Thus, if a single or a few representatives take precedence and exercise dominion over all others,

<sup>12</sup>Pitkin finds the informational account of representation in Downs, who says that representatives are "specialists in discovering, transmitting and analyzing popular opinion," a statement with which Emerson could readily agree, if by popular opinion one understands the "common mind" (1957, 88–91). This would obviate the paradox generated by the fact that "on the many issues on which people have no will, or do not know what they want, 'there is nothing for representatives to represent'" (Pitkin 1967, 83).

<sup>13</sup>Pitkin identifies this "substitute for direct democracy" in arguments in support of the American and French revolutions. Her narrow focus on institutional representation allows her to preserve the link with pre-democratic conceptions of representation. Here she finds an original source of the concept of representation in English in the idea of Parliament in "the thirteenth century in England" (Pitkin 1967, 85–86).

<sup>11</sup>This argument is parallel to the more systematic account in J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*, Chapter 2.

representation fails to be as just as possible. No representative may have a privileged position in the culture such that other constituencies are prevented from being adequately represented. If there is diversity in the people, then there must be an adequate corresponding diversity in the representative public sphere. The claim against domination originates in the principle that each constituency must be represented. The public sphere allows representatives and constituencies to identify themselves and thus be self-ratifying. Emerson recognizes that these factors will change with time. His primary concern is that there be proliferation of ideas, which he believes is inevitable under the conditions of a free and open society. A representative public sphere is the best assurance that the increase in diversity in the people will be reflected in an increase in the diversity of representatives.

The danger of the tyrannous imposition of ideas on others is not the only, and perhaps not even the worst, danger that besets the public sphere. The oppressive force of dominant representatives may also prevent new forms of representation from arising and gaining a foothold in the public sphere. Therefore, the principles of diversity, rotation, and proliferation must apply not only to representatives of already existing constituencies, but also to those constituencies and representatives that are only now or are yet to come into being. For Emerson, therefore, what is strange may in fact be something quite beneficial. "A foreign greatness is the antidote for cabalism" and the presentation of ideas "other" than those adopted by most citizens guards against both stagnation and the tyranny of the received opinion of the majority ("Uses of Great Men," 627). Amelioration is achieved by the workings of rotation, "the law of nature," because this ensures an openness to the new:

When nature removes a great man, people explore the horizon for a successor; but none comes, and none will. His class is extinguished with him. In some other and quite different field the next man will appear; not Jefferson, not Franklin, but now a great salesman, then a road-contractor, then a student of fishes, then a buffalo-hunting explorer, or a semi-savage Western general. Thus we make a stand against our rougher masters. ("Uses of Great Men," 623)

It is only the continual advent of the new form of representation, and the transformation of old forms to meet new social conditions, that ensures the continual health of the democracy.

Any personality, no matter how advantageous in its time, must be eclipsed by another who comes later. That

is because no matter how fresh, how inspiring, how liberating a personality, an idea, or a movement is when it first comes on the scene, it eventually becomes the received wisdom, the traditional authority, the customary manner, the habitual orthodoxy. The power of individuals, even in their representative aspect, must be tempered: "But a new danger appears in the excess of influence of the great man. His attractions warp us from our place. We have become underlings and intellectual suicides. Ah! yonder in the horizon is our help:—other great men, new qualities, counterweights and checks on each other" ("Uses of Great Men," 627). Rotation and succession—in office, before the public's eye, and in the mouths and on the pens of those who represent in the public sphere—is the rule and the watchword for democracy. Otherwise public opinion itself risks becoming an idol and slipping into that condition of the tyranny of the mass mind. However, such idolatry is only possible if the partial and provisional nature of every individual is denied: "No man, in all the procession of famous men, is reason or illumination, or that essence we are looking for; but is an exhibition, in some quarter, of new possibilities" ("Uses of Great Men," 630). Finality and completeness is unavailable to humans, because what is possible is made so through particular individuals.

"The limits of the possible are enlarged," Emerson says, only through actual examples of possibilities, even if they are as mundane as the discovery of a new kind of butterfly.<sup>14</sup> "By acquainting us with new fields of activity," the representative individual, "cools our affection for the old" ("Uses of Great Men," 622). The old activity may be valuable for its own sake, but newly developed activity prevents citizens from becoming mired in their concepts. Emerson is engaged in a continual battle against reification. Representative individuals answer the need that Emerson announces: "We must extend the area of our life, and multiply our relations" ("Uses of Great Men," 620). This extension and multiplication can only take place through the proliferation of representatives. Emerson considered this proliferation to be so important that the final goal of the public sphere is the continual production of representative individuals.

Emerson lauds more than the mere fact of the flux of amelioration and its resultant diversity. Emerson values the virtues of use and acceptance that constitute the proper democratic response to flux and amelioration. Amelioration is a fact of nature and a quality of the social world to which individuals must adapt. It is only heightened

<sup>14</sup>Richardson uses this example of the butterfly to demonstrate Emerson's enthusiasm for science as a vehicle for the advancement of human possibility (1995, 141).

in democracies: "There was never such a miscellany of facts. The world extends itself like American trade. We conceive Greek or Roman life, life in the Middle Ages, to be a simple and comprehensible affair; but modern life to respect a multitude of things, which is distracting" ("Goethe," *Representative Men* 1850, 751). Emerson focuses on the unique response to this multiplicity that a democratic spirit affords. Democracies are in effect societies that have learned to *accept* the ubiquity of amelioration and diversity and have incorporated them into the system of social and political action.<sup>15</sup> Goethe becomes the exemplar not only of the modern individual, (Goethe was "the most modern of the moderns" ["The American Scholar," 1837, 69]), but of the democrat as well, because he is "hundred-handed, Argus-eyed, able and happy to cope with this rolling miscellany of facts and sciences, and by his own versatility to dispose of them with ease" ("Goethe," 751). Emerson teaches that this process of development is liberating for the individual and is the basis for optimism about the social and political prospects of democracies. Emerson's optimism consists in this: moral and political amelioration is possible as long as the public sphere remains open to the representation of alternative moral and political possibilities.

## Conclusion: Participatory Representation

Emerson's understanding of political representation makes an important advance over the concept of representation prevalent in Anglo-American thought up until the democratic revolution in America. Traditional conceptions of representation stressed the relationship between a people (or the politically salient classes or interests of a people) and its government. According to this concept of representation, the people are represented to their government. Mansfield illuminates the pre-democratic roots of this conception of representation in his distinction between medieval and modern representation. "Therefore," Mansfield writes, "medieval representation was 'dualistic' or 'en face.'" The English king faced the people's representatives because he was not a member of the people himself . . . [by contrast] modern representatives in their private capacity are mere members of the people that first consent to government" (Mansfield 1968, 79–80). This fundamental model of the representative relation persists

<sup>15</sup>Mott makes this point in reference both to Emerson's concept of "compensation" and to "his obsession with the mutability of human life that haunts his early journals" (1982, 21).

in modern political theory. Hobbes, Locke, and Burke, for example, all assume that the location of the fundamental political relationship is between the people and the government in its institutional embodiment. More recently, Pitkin (1967) follows the lead of Hobbes and Burke in locating representation exclusively in institutional settings. Her influential book has helped keep work on political representation focused on its institutional variants.

Emerson accounts for the difference that the democratic doctrine of the sovereignty of the people makes by pointing to the fact that in a democracy the people are being represented to themselves, both in institutional settings, and in the public sphere. Representation in the public sphere gives citizens a public presence that they would otherwise lack amid the overwhelmingly large numbers that populate democratic nations. The "republican form of government" guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution extends into the public sphere, where those whom Emerson calls "representatives of opinions" and "representative men" act to constitute the people and amend this constitution by working to represent, and in the process perhaps "revise and enlarge," the ideas of the people.

Emerson synthesizes two theories of political representation, both of which were represented in the Founding period of the United States. The first of these, which corresponds roughly to the Federalist position in the debates over the U.S. Constitution, emphasizes the electoral connection as the mechanism for ensuring the representative's continued responsiveness to the constituency. It views the legislature as an arena for bargaining and even fighting between particular interests. The second, held by Anti-Federalists at the time of the ratification of the Constitution and sometimes known as a republican conception of representation, emphasizes cultural sympathies and descriptive likenesses as the basis of the bond between the representative and constituency.<sup>16</sup> It views the legislature as the location for achieving consensus and enacting a more or less unified conception of the public will and the public good.

The republican conception builds on some distinguishing characteristic that is shared by the representative and the constituency that marks a correspondence of ideas, which will ensure that the representative remains true to the constituency. Simple correlation is not adequate to ensure this trust is well placed, of course, and so this representative bond is based on those attributes that causally form the basis of their ideas. Thus, race, for instance, might be considered relevant not simply because race happens to correlate highly with particular interests

<sup>16</sup>For this sketch of the Anti-Federalist position, I rely on Kenyon (2002).

and particular policy preferences, but because race is considered a socially objective determinant of such interests. In his reflections on this Emerson considers race, gender, geographic and climatic origin, religion, ethnicity, national origin, social status, economic class, education, cultural upbringing, and intelligence as possible determinants of the sorts of ideas (interests, sentiments, values, etc.), that ought to be given political representation.<sup>17</sup>

Emerson's conception of representative individuals in the public sphere preserves elements of a republican ideal of descriptive representation by transposing it from its roots in demographics, to the factor of paramount political salience in a mass democracy: ideas and those who hold them. Republicans argued that communities must be represented by individuals who resemble their constituents: farmers by farmers, townfolk by townfolk. This ensures that representatives possess "the same interests, feelings, opinions, and views the people themselves would were they all assembled" (Ketcham 1986, 265).<sup>18</sup> This ideal is clearly echoed in Emerson's claim that representatives earn the "fellowship and trust" of their community as a result of their "sympathy and likeness" to it. The extension of this ideal to the public sphere may be the only way in which such descriptive representation can continue to have a place in large democratic societies.

Emerson sees the complete realization of both Federalist and republican conceptions of representation—impossible in institutional settings—as an ideal inherent in the public sphere. In the public sphere, the size of the forum in which representation takes place is expanded to a vastly greater size than any legislature could attain, thus ensuring the highest degree of proportionality and correspondence between representative and constituency. The range of representatives can expand to fit every constituency. Thus, Alexander Hamilton, who remarked that "the idea of an actual representation of all classes of the people by persons of each class is altogether visionary," is answered (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 1961, 214). Emerson sees that this vision may in fact be realized in a representative public sphere: here, districts are carved out

<sup>17</sup>Young (1990, 2000) has made similar arguments for the political significance of such descriptive characteristics that mark "difference" in individuals. For Young, as for Emerson, these characteristics are not of significance in themselves, but are so only because they are markers of social perspectives and interests, i.e., ideas, that are themselves of ultimate political significance.

<sup>18</sup>This "Letter from the Federal Farmer" dated October 9, 1787, continues: "... a fair representation, therefore, should be so regulated, that every order of men in the community, according to the common course of elections, can have a share in it in order to allow professional men, merchants, traders, farmers, mechanics, etc. to bring a just proportion of their best informed men respectively into the legislature..." (Ketcham 1986, 265).

of ideational space, constituencies are comprised of like-minded individuals, and representatives perfectly mirror their particular constellation of political ideas.

This is possible because the public sphere is an open, fluid setting, and every individual identifies his or her own constituency and representative, on the basis of his or her own interests, sentiments, and values. No one is consigned to a constituency to which he or she does not belong. The effect of this fluidity is to diminish the importance of the corresponding characteristics—race, religion, geographical location, etc.—and heighten the degree to which representatives are descriptive of and constituencies are identified by their ideas. Thus, the republican conception of representation, which can easily devolve into raw identity politics, is elevated out of the partialities by the communicative character of the public sphere. The ease with which an individual may move in and out of constituencies and adopt and repudiate representatives in the public sphere tends to make the individual's specific ideas the characteristic of them that is represented.

How can so large a number of people as comprise "the people" be said to participate in the public, political life of the community? The political relation of representation, when transferred and extended into the public sphere, enables citizen participation in deliberative democracy that would otherwise be unavailable in large political communities. Emerson sees representative individuals as filling in the gap between the face-to-face encounters in personal life and the mix and flux of the great, anonymous body of the people as a whole. They are also a necessary complement to the role of institutions and civic organizations in the democratic political process. Through their representative function these representative individuals make it possible for great numbers of citizens to have a presence in public life. These "representatives of opinion" are the creatures of a constituency just as much as those who are elected to office. The people can tell when representative individuals go astray, and limit them with the pressure of their approval and disapproval, and by granting and withholding their audience. More importantly, the original and intimate connection of representative individuals to their communities ensures that they represent their communities from the first, and continuously.

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