

CONFERENCE

COMPROMISE AND DISAGREEMENT

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ABSTRACT

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“The Triad: Compromise, Political and Self-Representation”

Why is compromise such a “boo-hurray” concept not just in politics, but in regular parlance as well? Why are politicians sometimes willing to compromise, while other times they refuse the very idea altogether? Why are they sometimes praised and other times blamed for their willingness – or lack thereof – to compromise? The essay attempts to answer these questions by retracing the intellectual history of compromise, as sketched in my book, *Compromise – A Political and Philosophical History* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). This history reveals that the concept is closely related with two other ones, namely political and self-representation. While there is an impressive scholarly literature related with the crisis of political representation, political scientists seem so far surprisingly shy, when compared with scholars from other disciplines, to connect it with the crisis of self-representation, brought to the forefront by the new social media and the digital revolution. Hence, the essay aims, on the one hand, to emphasize the connections between political and self-representation. On the other hand, it claims that contemporary analyses of the self can benefit from the longtime forgotten dialectic of the medieval individual between *forum internum* and *forum externum*. By discarding the one-dimensional self, either liberal or communitarian, the contemporary self mimics, albeit with some important differences, the medieval self.

Furthermore, since compromise presupposes the equality of the parties involved at least where the matter at hand is concerned, it shows that politicians are unwilling to compromise whenever they feel that their identity or the identity of the group they represent is under threat. Thus, the difference between representing people as a collection of individuals and representing people as communities with distinct identities was as crucial then as it is now. From this perspective, the Tea Party supporters and the Occupy Wall Street movements have more history to share than they would care to admit.