EDITORIAL 2

REPRESENTATIONS AND REDEFINITIONS?

The question of how something called "the people" can be a political agent has haunted political thought ever since Thomas Hobbes declared that before the establishment of civil sovereignty there are no hierarchies among human individuals, and therefore, no political body capable of formulating a collective will. More recently, several political theorists have considered that Hobbes was right in claiming that we should not understand "the people" as an entity which exists prior to or independently of the institutionalized political order, but wrong in holding that it should be identified with the civil sovereign. Even in the context of a modern representative democracy, "the people" is a constructed political entity, and yet it should be granted certain independence in relation to the political institutions that represents it.

Two articles in this volume address the constructed character of the people in contemporary politics. Claudia Wiesner does this in the context of the European Union, holding that since the EU is not any more a mere intergovernmental regulator but has become a supranational political entity which directly affects people's lives, it is in need of a stronger democratic legitimacy. In this purpose, Wiesner explores the taxing question of how a truly European *demos* could emerge, concentrating especially on a program for constructing a democratic EU identity as an element of multilayered political identities. Wiesner concludes her article with a list of institutional reforms which could serve as top-down measures for increasing democracy within the EU. These include independent EU citizenship and EU-wide Euro-

pean elections, which could be understood to suggest that the EU can achieve democratic legitimacy only by becoming a federalist state, a prospect that is bound to remain highly controversial in the foreseeable future.

Some of the themes approached in Wiesner's article could be further elaborated by what Lisa Disch has to say about the role of the people in a representative democracy. Establishing a dialogue between Pierre Rosavallon's analysis of the French political experience and recent American rediscovery of political representation, she tries to answer how to admit that the people "does not pre-exist the process by which it is represented" without making the Schumpeterian conclusion that a representative democracy means nothing more than universal suffrage in the election of political leaders. Disch finds a way to overcome the dichotomy between organist and constructivist ideas of the people in Rosanvallon's idea that in a representative democracy the people as a political subject is taken as presupposition, i.e., as a principle which "calls for limiting all claims to speak in the name of the society as a whole." What makes a representative government democratic is not an attempt to represent the popular will as accurately as possible, but "the positive affirmation that it is impossible to embody, actualize, and totally represent the people." It is the recognition of the impossibility of a perfect representation which "opens up the field of contest in which democratic constituencies are mobilized" and enlivens the democratic element in a representative regime. In the context of the European Union this might indicate that the much discussed "democracy deficit" should not be understood to mean that EU-institutions do not fully represent the will of the European people, but rather that these institutions fail to recognize that they are even in principle incapable of doing this – an attitude perceptible in the reactions to recent referendums on the EU-constitution.

The rediscovery of political representation is undoubtedly one of the most exciting developments in recent political theorizing, though whether this academic interest in representation will be accompanied by a vitalization of representative politics remains to be seen. In addition to Disch's article, this volume contributes to the discussion on representation with two comments on Frank Ankersmit's article, "Political Representation and Political Experience", published in the previous issue of *Redescriptions*. In his article, Ankersmit criticized contemporary theory of political representation for concentrating solely

on how the electorate is represented by the parliaments and paying little attention on how the citizens represent the political system to themselves. In his comment, Quentin Skinner finds the question of how people imagine the political arena worth exploring, but argues that we should not see such an enterprise as a part of a theory of political representation. Raymond Geuss, in turn, elaborates further Ankersmit's critique of the distinction between the private and public in contemporary political thought. In this context, Geuss points out that it is deceptive to characterize recent political developments in Western Europe as privatization. The customary manner of calling the transfer of public assets to corporations "privatization" should rather be seen as a rhetorical move which gives the impression that the main beneficiaries of such undertakings are "private individuals", whereas in reality they are often international corporations subject to impersonal market forces.

Geuss's discussion on the use of the term "privatization" in contemporary politics is an instance of a rhetorical analysis of concepts which has received much attention in *Redescriptions*, and this volume is no exception. Márton Szabó offers a fascinating account of how the notion of the worker was used to construct a new community of politics in communist Hungary. While the worker was defined in relation to work, he was not an economic subject but a political agent, an alternative citizen. What I find especially interesting is how, after the years of personality cult and heroes of work, the worker became in Szabó's terms "an empty and formalized character" during János Kádár's rule. In accordance with the new ideology of peaceful competition between socialism and capitalism, the worker developed into a somewhat schizophrenic figure who was both a socialist political agent and a *homo economicus* interested in his or her personal well-being. At the same time, the existence of a distinct political class was denied by describing people who spent decades in leading positions by the professions they had at the beginning of their career.

In Szabó's article, the material studied is political in the sense that it deals with governmental activities. Two other articles in this volume, however, find rhetorical redefinitions in highly theoretical discussions. Burkhard Conrad offers an illuminating interpretation of Carl Schmitt's notion of decision as a politicized transformation of Kiergegaard's religiously inspired concept of the Christ-moment. Referring to Hans Blumenberg's notion of the rhetorical situation, Con-

rad asserts that both Kiergegaard's moment and Schmitt's decision assumed a situation characterized by a lack of factual evidence and a compulsion to act. However, whereas Kiergegaard's notion of the moment was articulated within a theological confrontation, Schmitt redescribed Kiergergaad's "decisive theological moment as a political moment of decision", transforming the latter's religious existentialism "into an existential pathos of political decision" in secularized society afflicted by what he saw as the indecisiveness of liberal parliamentarianism. Yet Schmitt retained some of the theological connotations in Kiergegaard's concept of the moment in the purpose of making his own concept rhetorically more persuasive.

If Conrad is analyzing a rhetorical redefinition of a theoretical concept, some might argue that in his article on Max Weber's notion of objectivity, Kari Palonen is doing such a redefinition himself. In fact, Palonen characterizes his interpretation as an application of Weber's rhetorical tactics of "one-sided comparison" to Weber himself. Palonen not only maintains that for Weber the concept of truth was merely a metaphor for the demand that the scholarly dispute "should be kept going on and that everyone should be ready to alter one's standpoint in the course of the debate." He also holds that the only form of objectivity Weber was ready to attribute to cultural sciences had to do with the institutional treatment of scholarly controversies and was inspired by his idealized conception of the English parliament and the idea of fair play. The latter claim relies on rather strong rhetorical associations, but Palonen's juxtaposition of scholarly activity and parliamentary politics brings up a thought-provoking perspective on the academic world.

Ernst Gellner once remarked that the main achievement of anthropological sociology has been to show that every institutionalized practice in modern society can be interpreted as a ritual, if only one wants to do so. It may be that one day something similar will be said about the rhetorical analysis of concepts, but at the moment, this approach is still keeping what Weber called "the ossification of intellectual life" a bit further away from the scholarly world.

Kari Saastamoinen