

Democracy Confronts Diversity: Deliberation and Representation in Victorian Britain

Greg Conti

The Author

Greg is Junior Research Fellow in Politics at Jesus College, Cambridge and incoming Assistant Professor of Politics at Princeton University. He received his PhD from Harvard in May 2016 for a dissertation on the theories of toleration/free expression and representation in nineteenth-century Britain. He has published in a range of journals in political theory and intellectual history. His interests include the philosophy of toleration and freedom of opinion; the theory and design of representative institutions; deliberative democracy and theories of deliberation more broadly; Enlightenment political philosophy; religion and politics; Victorian political thought; and contemporary French liberal and democratic theory. Among other projects, he is in the (very) early stages of turning his dissertation manuscript into (hopefully) two books, one on each of its thematic halves, under the working titles *“Parliament the Mirror of the Nation”*: *Political Representation and Diversity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* and *Beyond On Liberty: The Theory of Toleration and Free Expression in the Nineteenth Century*.

The Paper

This paper is a very streamlined, schematic version of a few chapters of my dissertation. It was written as a lecture for an American political theory audience, and as a result it is also rather casual in its tone, and it is also quite light on citations to the historical secondary literature; I would be happy to fill out the historical material at greater length during the discussion. A handout diagramming the argument, made for the original presentation, is included as the final page.

Regarding the substance: this paper argues that, for a broad swathe of Victorian politicians and theorists, adherence to the norms of deliberation and descriptive representation appeared inconsistent with a democratic suffrage. At the start of the paper, the reasoning underlying this *mirroring* or *variety-of-suffrages* view is reconstructed. In the second half of the paper, I turn to the response given by democrats to this particular challenge. The paper then concludes with some brief reflections on the relationship between this Victorian debate and the condition of democratic theory today.