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Rethinking representation: The challenge of non-humans

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This article argues that the standard model of political representation mischaracterises the structure of representation. After surveying the classical types of representation and their application to non-humans, the basic nature of representation is shown to have been unduly centred on interests, responsiveness and unidirectional protocols. It proposes a different structure by drawing inspiration from recent scholarship and developments in political philosophy, as well as the representation of non-human actors. It proposes an ontological grounding of representation in ‘irreducible multiplicity’, and a structural analysis based on the concepts of claim and relation. This abstract form of representation can take into account both human and non-human cases, and works to ground different typologies. The relational structure of representation creates interests and preferences, subjects and actors, power dynamics and seemingly immutable identities.

Keywords: non-human representation; political ecology; political philosophy; political representation; substantive representation

Representation is primarily – structurally – about relations. These are connected to the logic of claim-making and rely on the power of linguistic proclamation. Conceiving of representation as a relational activity of claim-making highlights the multiplicity of subjects at the heart of representation, and brings into focus the fact that when one speaks for another, it is not primarily their interests which find political voice, but rather their political subjectivity. It further underlines the negotiation involved in representing and being represented, not as a process of honing in on elusive interests, but rather as one of amending the political subject. Finally, it shows how this process implies a constant re-evaluation of who ‘we’, the group with political power and voice, want to be. This is the case for both human and non-human subjects. An aesthetic element runs through the core of representation thus understood, and becomes itself a crucial part of its structure. I argue for this

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scheme, by clarifying some elements of the basic structure of political representation. Structure is here understood as the underlying logic of any representative relation or claim, regardless of the intentions of the relevant actors or, for that matter, of who they are (human or not, representative or not).

A theory of political representation has to be able to account for both its human and non-human variants, and this article shows that thinking representation in terms of claims and relations is able to accommodate both human and non-human political subjects. It is openly assumed that the representation of animals and nature has important lessons for the representation of humans, because it highlights the structural deficits at the heart of speaking for others. The argument therefore moves freely between human and non-human representation, spelling out the connective tissue that keeps the concept of representation together across its multiple deployments. It makes use of Saward's innovations in representation theory, supplementing them by arguing that the structure of claim-making has an important ontological component, here designated by the term (borrowed from Badiou) 'irreducible multiplicity'. Grounding claim-making in ontological categories allows us to see that making representative claims is not merely speaking for another, but rather creating the political being of the other. A concept of representation based on the irreducible multiplicity of subjects is able to extend the claim-making framework and contribute to the development of a theory of representation that is neither interest- nor preference-based. As I show, this understanding of representation fits both its human and non-human variants.

1. The standard model

Let us start by situating the reflections in this article against the background of the 'standard model', in order to tease out the elements that I challenge. As Urbinati and Warren (2008: 389) present it, this model of representation has the following features: representation is a principal-agent relation, and it assures some level of responsiveness between representative and represented. This model responds in a particular way to the two most fundamental questions of political representation: what is it about and who does it (Saward 2008a)? The first question asks what representation is supposed to achieve, and the standard model proposes that representation is supposed to realise the interests and wishes of a constituency. This in turn has been interpreted as either a trustee or a delegate model: representatives can either act as trustees of the interests of the represented, or else be delegated to achieve certain outcomes.

The agent¹ is the one said to do the representing. The movement between the agent, as the active party in the representational process, and the principal, the one providing the interests and wishes to be represented, is confined to electoral cycles. In other words, elections appear as the dominant form of *authorisation* for representatives to act on behalf of their constituency. *Accountability* also becomes important as another source of legitimacy for the representatives that do the work of representation. Together, the concepts of principal/agent, trustee/delegate and authorisation/accountability have for a long time been the dominant ones for a theory of representation. Others have been inserted within these dyads, and their internal relations have

¹The word itself implies that representation involves the sequestration of agency: to represent is to proclaim the power to speak in the very act of speaking, which involves the affirmation of one's agency. Whether this works to serve interests or not remains to be seen.

been complicated and contested (Mansbridge 2003). It can nonetheless be said that the standard model offers a particular flavour of representation that is primarily tied to elections and that conceives of this political process as a translation of interests, through various avenues, from the represented to the representative. There is, in other words, a one-on-one relation between constituency interests/preferences and the representative's intentions and actions.²

Pitkin noted that, no matter what kind of representation we might consider, it must involve the 'making present in *some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact' (1967: 8–9). Her definition has been understood as requiring some sort of previous identity that could be made present, again. Yet increasingly scholars have questioned this interpretation (Disch 2011). 'Among academic observers and political actors there is a widespread sense that we are facing a crisis of representation' (Saward 2008c: 93). The idea that representation can and should be conceived of as a kind of correlation (or correspondence) between the interests of one party and the actions of another has been challenged. For instance, this model cannot sufficiently account for how representation can work in international arenas (Dryzek 2000; Held 1995), or generally in explaining issues that are extraterritorial (Benhabib 2004; Bohman 2007; Gould 2004). The standard model functioned under the (not unreasonable) assumption that constituencies are territorially based, but in today's world many of the salient issues are no longer defined by their territorial belonging. For instance, environmental issues such as pollution are global (Dobson 1996). Many different actors who have not been authorised through elections claim to and do indeed function as representatives. Social movements and citizen assemblies, non-governmental organisations and social networks, interest groups and civil-society organisations (Anheier 2004; Saward 2006a; Strolovitch 2006; Warren 2001), have become increasingly important. And the issue of non-human representation has come to question most parts of the standard model (Dobson 1996; Eckersley 1999; 2011; Goodin 1996).

This dominant way of understanding the structure of political representation is not able to account for the kinds of representative activity mentioned above because of certain fundamental assumptions, clearly visible through the classic representative types: formal, descriptive, symbolic and substantive. The notions of formal, descriptive and symbolic representation suggest a bottom-up approach to interests and identities. The latest developments in non-electoral forms of representation (Rehfeld 2006; 2009; Saward 2003; 2006a; 2006b; 2008a; 2008b) have already questioned the salience of these three categories for an understanding of the nature of representation.³ However, the last classical type – substantive representation – is not concerned with specifying directly either institutional forms or the descriptive and/or symbolic makeup of the representative process, but rather with what goes on in representing and the normative legitimacy of its claims. Whether in the first three types the dominant assumption is that of the discoverability of the other, the substantive type introduces the idea that *interests* are fundamental to the working of representation. Pitkin defined substantive representation as 'acting in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them'

²This has led classical theories to advance the concept of congruence as a measurement of the fit between representatives and represented (Disch 2009).

³Their salience for an empirically based, institutionally minded, view of representation is not under question.

(1967: 209). She was careful to stress the complex operations of substantive representation, but her definition left the door open for a one-to-one fit between representative and represented, which suggests that interests already exist before the performative act of the representative. This further implies that substantive representation is amenable to a checklist of interests: if interest A exists, then substantive representation happens when the representative accurately takes up A. This is not exactly a straight line, but the relationship between represented and representative is nonetheless one based on a kind of mirroring, with interests playing the pivotal role (Disch 2009; Mansbridge 1999). The supposition that these can be read-off rests on the assumption that the represented is a unified subject, a some-One. This collapses the inherent multiplicity of the represented – whether they be individuals or groups (see Section 4) – an aspect which I argue is fundamental for understanding what goes on in representing.

2. Non-human representation

The standard model and the primacy of the One suggest that representation is of a referential nature. However, if we think of this scheme in relation to non-human representation, it becomes apparent that the issues of interests, correspondence, identity and so on, become much more problematic. Let us take a quick look at how environmental thinkers have framed the issue of non-human representation, in order to show both its relevance to human representation, and its importance for an understanding of representation based around relationality and claim-making.

Trying to show what different thinkers have thought about the representation of non-humans poses a particular difficulty: given the relative novelty of environmental political theory, the field of political representation *qua* representation is not always easy to delineate. Environmental political theory, where one would expect to find the theoretical foundations I am after, is dominated by environmental *ethics*, which has important connections to representation, but is nonetheless separate from it. There is an already significant tradition of environmental ethics proposing different ways in which moral considerability can come to bear upon non-humans (Callicott 1985; 1989; Francione 1996; 2000; Garner 1993; 2010; 2011; Haraway 1988; 2008; Plumwood 1993; 2000; Regan 2004; Rodman 1977; Rolston III 1989; Singer 1975; Taylor 1986; Weston 1996).

However, there are theorists who have formulated reflections on representation that are more or less separate from their own ethical positions, or that can at least be presented as somewhat independent of moral consideration. Dobson (1996) famously conceptualised non-human representation as requiring ‘proxies’. Dobson’s proxies can be interpreted, in light of the classical forms of representation, as realising formal representation. Indeed, there is no reason to suppose that formal representation cannot work for non-humans. The proxy representatives, which would stand for reelection in a proxy constituency (Dobson 1996), must in some ways act on behalf of non-humans, and hence substantively represent.

The substantive representation of non-humans, following the standard model, has to find some way of postulating non-human interests and preferences. For Dobson, the interests of the non-human subjects are seen as fairly transparent, at least at their most basic level. This recalls the assumption of classical representation that the interests of the represented can be read-off:

The interest of the species lies in being assured of the conditions to provide for its survival and its flourishing. The problem of knowledge, then, is one of knowing what the conditions for fulfilling the interests are, rather than what the interest itself is. (Dobson 1996: 137)

The job of the formal representatives is to find ways in which the immediately obvious interests of their non-human constituency can be fulfilled. I want to stress how interest-language easily moves from the human to the non-human case of representation. As I argue throughout what follows, this is problematic, but it is the non-human case which most clearly shows why, because there the distance between representative and represented is the greatest. Yet speaking in the name of wilderness or in the name of oppressed minorities carries the same structural determinants.

Eckersley has proposed the creation of an Environmental Defenders Office (2011), another proposal for formal representation. She points out that some legislatures have indeed adopted this, for instance, the Committee for the Future in Finland (Eckersley 2011).⁴ She engages with Saward's claim-making framework (see Section 3), but instead speaks of 'nature advocacy' (Eckersley 2011: 236). Fundamentally, what is meant by nature advocacy is very similar to Saward's claims, while recalling Urbina-ti's (1998; 2000) definition of representation as advocacy.

Nature advocacy has to do with the formulation of representative claims that speak on behalf of non-humans. Crucially, this process is aimed at persuasion – the point of the claims is to persuade others of the representative position maintained, while also leaving open the possibility of changing one's own claims in light of being convinced by another claim. Like Dobson, Eckersley maintains a particular connection to the interests of non-humans and does not go as far as saying that the representative claims put forth are *not* about the being of the other. This particular point is surely present in her work: 'whenever we represent nature, we, unwittingly or otherwise, also represent ourselves and the sort of world we wish to inhabit' (Eckersley 2011: 255). However, the status of this self-relation involved in representing non-humans is – to my mind – primary: that is, representational claims or nature advocacy are *primarily* about relations. This is yet to be shown, and I now venture to do that by discussing some contributions that move away from the assumptions discussed so far.

3. Enlarging the view: summoning, creating and performing

Saward proposes a novel way of looking at the *dynamics* of representation, as opposed to its *types*. 'Trustees, delegates, politicians, stewards, perspectival representatives – the shifting taxonomies are often illuminating, but they can distract us unduly from grasping what are the wellsprings of such roles' (2006b: 298). The different forms of representation that we have briefly touched upon too easily allow a dubious conception of what representation *is* to slide. Saward goes on to:

argue the benefits of refocusing our work on representation around what I call 'the representative claim' — seeing representation in terms of *claims to be*

⁴The idea of a Committee for the Future is designed for the representation of future generations, which is similar to the representation of non-humans in that it deals with the representation of subjects that cannot have an immediate presence or voice in the political process. Furthermore, the representation of future generations implies the representation of their (future) environment (see O'Neill 2001; Stone 2010).

representative by a variety of political actors, rather than (as is normally the case) seeing it as an achieved, or potentially achievable, state of affairs as a result of election. We need to move away from the idea that representation is first and foremost a given, factual product of elections, rather than a precarious and curious sort of claim about a dynamic relationship. (Original emphasis. Saward 2006b: 298)

The characterisation of representation as ‘a precarious and curious sort of claim about a dynamic relationship’ allows us to look at the *practice* of representation, and encourages us to think its structure again. The focus on the dynamism of the relationship offers a way out of the ossified interests that wait to be discovered and announced. Here, representations themselves are the primary category in a theory of representation, and through them we can understand the being of both the represented and the representative. Representations might just be the midwives of the subjectivities that dissimulate themselves as prior to their own birth.

Saward argues that ‘There is an indispensable aesthetic moment in political representation because the represented is never just given, unambiguous, transparent’ (2006b: 310). He employs the following example: ‘the painter Paul Klee took the view that painting did not mimic or copy, or even in the first instance interpret, its referent. What it did, first and foremost, was “make visible” the referent’ (Saward 2006b: 313). Becoming aware of the aesthetic moment contained in all representations therefore suggests that the referent is *created*.

Following Saward’s suggestion that the notion of visibility can have interesting repercussions for politics as well,⁵ I turn briefly to Merleau-Ponty. Commenting on the work of Cezanne, he writes:

art is not imitation, nor is it something manufactured according to the wishes of instinct or good taste. It is a process of expression. Just as the function of words is to name – that is, to grasp the nature of what appears to us in a confused way and to place it before us as a recognisable object – so it is up to the painter, said Gasquet, to ‘objectify,’ ‘project’ and ‘arrest.’ Words do not *look like* the things they designate; and a picture is not a *trompe-l’oeil*. (Merleau-Ponty 1993: 68, emphases in original)

He ends the paragraph with this wonderful sentence: ‘the painter recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things’. All this is to say that to think the problem of representation as a tit-for-tat, an (albeit complex) operation of replication, fundamentally misses the point of representations.

Even material objects are not simply mirrored by their representations, but rather made to live anew. Think of what fascinates in depictions of still life: painting a pair of shoes does not simply show us an object as it is, but rather gives a particular existence – one which becomes worthwhile – to something which did not exist, as worthwhile, before being represented. Without this operation, things would remain ‘walled up in the separate life of each consciousness’ which, for politics, means that political subjectivities are made to connect by (and in) the process of representation. Through and by this process, political subjectivities are fashioned, distinct from and

⁵Visibility in artistic terms – what it means to make visible – but also in terms of what it means to count: that is, to make visible in the sense of ‘give existence to’, ‘recognise’ and ‘summon’.

irreducible to existential personhood. Merleau-Ponty here speaks of painting, but his insights are certainly applicable to the political territory that occupies us. However, we must not confuse aesthetic and political representations, even while they reveal their mutual implications. Aspects of the concept remain sealed into their proper terrain. As he aptly suggests in *Eye and Mind*, ‘only the painter is entitled to look at everything without being obliged to appraise what he sees’ (Merleau-Ponty 1993: 123). The politician does not have this luxury. In contrast to aesthetic representations, the maker of political representations must already include the appraisal, or the judgment of the object, into the way in which it is summoned into being. Summoning the image of ‘the immigrant’ or the ‘threatened panda’ is already heavy with appraisal. Painting a shoe need not be.

There is indeed a sense in which presence and absence are intertwined in the various terrains of representation. The task of the painter is to make visible certain features that would otherwise remain ‘walled up’, and the task of the political representative is to make visible certain beings that would otherwise remain invisible.⁶ But this activity does not have to rely on a predefined being of the represented, nor does it have to suppose the existence of interests that can be plucked from the consciousness or the mere existence of another. It is tempting to think that, in speaking for ‘the working class’, there is something pre-existing which is uploaded into the representative claim. Rather, the activity of making visible – of representing – is the medium through which the things we call by the names of interests and identities come into being. Think, instead, of speaking for ‘the river’. There, few would argue that there are predefined interests that the representative picks up. Seen thus, the classical paradigm of present absence – for humans or non-humans – is insufficient and misleading, because there is no objective being previous to the representation that could be considered ‘absent’. As Disch (2011: 105) has suggested, classical representation goes astray by interpreting the etymological roots of representation as a ‘protocol of unidirectionality’. Absence does not have to refer to physicality, but rather to the non-relevance of a latent feature, to something that *as yet* has not been articulated politically. Similarly, presence need not be taken as physically *there*, or else as an evidence (i.e., something being evidently so), but rather as the articulation of something newly relevant for politics.

Let us propose a working definition of the core of representation: *to represent is to summon a thing into being in virtue of select aspects deemed useful for further relations with similarly summoned beings*. This creation always implies a selection of certain aspects, much in the same way that Wittgenstein’s duck–rabbit can be seen now as a duck, now as a rabbit, but never as both at the same time. Differently stated, representation is not about representing beings (human, non-human), but rather about *representing relations*. In the relational, as opposed to the referential, character of representation we find a statement on the nature of representation that offers the possibility of understanding today’s proliferation of representative situations and claims.

4. Axiomatic multiplicity

Building onto Saward’s work, I offered, via the work of Merleau-Ponty, another working definition of political representation, which centres on the activity of

⁶This is so whether the representative and the represented are numerically identical: that is, even when a group speaks for itself. The fundamental point is that in speaking for themselves, they make themselves visible.

claim-making, as well as on the concept of relation. Now I offer an argument for why relations, as opposed to simple reference, need to be reckoned in a theory of representation. In other words, what is meant by a 'relation'? Whose, and to whom (or what)?

In order to describe its various meanings, its foundations and the way in which it is fused in the claim-making process of representation, I co-opt elements from the ontology of Badiou (2002; 2007). The basic idea is that the ontological unit of analysis – that which can no longer be divided – is neither a one nor a zero. Rather, it is infinite and irreducible multiplicity. The bedrock of an ontological analysis (and a theory of representation is in effect a theory of political ontology)⁷ cannot therefore be constituted by a certainty that can be repeated at a higher level, by a solid that can no longer be divided, but rather the bedrock is itself multiple, in such a way as to form a constellation of multiples that, if divided, will only lead back to itself. 'Any multiple is intrinsically multiple of multiples' (Badiou 2007: 45).

Irreducible multiplicity, therefore, designates that which is both multiple and indivisible, plural and totalising at the same time. The implication is that any postulation of a one or a zero, that is to say, any claim of stable and given identity or its opposite, nothingness, can only be done on the horizon of a pre-existing multiple. As such, to claim presence as unproblematic and self-evident and unity of identity as primary is misleading. 'To exist as a multiple is always to belong to a multiplicity. To exist is to be an element of' (Badiou 2002: 25). If we replace the primacy of the One with the axiom of irreducible multiplicity, then the operations of political representation, no matter who is represented, are no longer about translating pre-existing interests into political actions. Speaking in the name of pensioners, or of endangered species, becomes primarily an operation of selection out of the multiplicity that axiomatically exists.

What is represented then is, of necessity, a multiplicity on which a unity can be postulated, not the other way round. Whatever is represented, as well as whoever does the representing, is logically an irreducible multiplicity. The most basic relation of representation therefore signifies the summoning into political subjectivity – the creation of a *semblance of unity* – which is accomplished by the activity of making claims: the presentation of a represented and a representative as solid, coherent, unified, in possession of identities, interests and preferences.⁸ In other words, as political *subjects*. This primary operation is a linguistic one – political subjects appear as full-blown in the act of naming themselves, or of being named.⁹ The represented, though only emerging from the claim, seems to extend into the indefinite past as always having been the case, awaiting the representative's speaking for it.¹⁰ The subjects (on either side of representation) are fused through the proclamative power of the representative claim.

Second, though political subjects seem to arrive ready-formed, the process of representation will soon reveal that to be false, as the indefinite work of contestation and

⁷As Colin Hay explains

ontology relates to *being*, to what *is*, to what *exists*, to the constituent units of reality; political ontology, by extension, relates to *political being*, to what *is* politically, to what *exists politically* and to the units that comprise political reality. (2006: 80, emphases in original)

⁸The first achievement of representation is, therefore, *to make visible* and *to count*.

⁹The logic of this process is nicely captured by the term 'proclamation': to proclaim is to announce that which is inaugurated by the utterance as prior to its utterance.

¹⁰This same doubling, which implies the fundamental relation I describe, holds if I politically speak for myself, in my own name.

new claim-making will unsettle the initial unificatory relation and constantly renegotiate it. Therefore, I will have to explain how and why I can speak for the women of Europe, while some women will question the claim from every conceivable angle, all the while forming new political subjects and new fault lines. What remains constant in the flux of representations is the fundamental character of the process as a linguistic inauguration of subjects. When I claim to represent the ‘interests of the women of Europe’, I construct a relation between a generic ‘us’ (us who speak for the women of Europe) and a generic ‘them’ (the supposed women).

Third, there is the relation of the representative to herself, which is not simply that of the single person to herself, but rather of the group ‘us’ to itself, in other words of the group which privileges her to be a representative (i.e., which gives her power) to its own perception of itself. This is to say that representative claims always invoke a relation of the group with representative power to itself: the relation of ‘us’ to ‘us’. For instance, when nature’s representatives in Ecuador lobbied the Constitutional Assembly to introduce legal rights for nature in the new constitution of the state (Tanasescu 2013), they employed, among many others, a representative claim that constructed nature as a moral subject. Nature is not a dumb matter, they said, but a subject worthy of care and respect. She is our mother. In this image of nature as mother, the group that speaks and that wields the power of the claim signals itself as morally enlightened. It unifies around the notion of a superior moral outlook and, in the same breath, distances itself from all who do not think (or perhaps do not have the luxury to think) nature as a legal and moral subject. Their very voice, and their speaking *as* representatives, confers unto them the power of creators: they have fashioned an image that solidifies their own political subjectivity and sediments their status as morally enlightened.

So when I suggest that representation is primarily about relations, it is these structural meanings I have in mind, which are all connected to the logic of claim-making and rely on the power of linguistic proclamation. This scheme does not exhaust the ways in which representation is about relations. As Saward (2003) points out, there are the relations that involve the audience relevant to representative claims: maker to audience, audience to itself and audience to represented.¹¹ Rather, the scheme offer the coordinates within which other political (or cultural, social, aesthetic) meanings of the term can exist. Substituting the primacy of the One for irreducible multiplicity allows us to describe elements of the structure of representation that make sense of both its human and non-human forms. Interest-language can still be employed, but its place has switched from central to the process of representation to, in a sense, epiphenomenal. Interests and identities are predicated unto the structure given by claims and relations.

5. Substantive representation, interests and knowledge

Let us see what the above structure implies for substantive representation. If we see representation as primarily an activity of claim-making, then we also need to understand the represented as fundamentally unknowable and changeable: that is, as summoned into (political) being in the act of representation. In other words, I can only

¹¹This structural analysis is entirely analytical, that is to say that in practice *all* of these relations are involved at once, in the simplest of representative claims.

claim to *know* what the represented is *as part of my representative claim*, and not as if I merely point out the obvious. Knowledge plays an important role in the representative activity, but its role is one of support rather than trump card: we can never gather enough knowledge about an-other, that would also tell us *how* this being is to be represented.

For instance, acting on behalf of non-humans supposes some degree of knowledge of their situation. This is certainly achievable: ‘those who claim to speak on behalf of those without voice do so by appeal to their having knowledge of the objective interests of those groups, often combined with special care for them’ (O’Neill 2001: 496). Yet claiming knowledge of another being does not imply that we therefore know its ‘objective interests’. This is most clearly seen in representing non-humans, for two reasons: there is a certain intellectual distance that contemplating non-human subjects of representation affords, and non-human others have historically and culturally straddled the border between humanity and its other (Bourke 2011; Derrida 2008; 2009). In other words, the concepts we use to speak of non-human representation betray the mutual implication of animality and humanity.

Consider that, for someone who raises sled dogs, it is in the dog’s interest to be tied to their doghouse when not actively working at the sled. For someone else, this might seem preposterous: it is obvious that the interest of the dog is to be free! This other advocate would cite their own body of knowledge to support their belief, or rather what they see as their objective reading of objective interests.¹² There is no amount of evidence that could lay to rest the disagreement between reasonable people claiming different interests for the sled dogs. What knowledge must necessarily leave out is the part that representation fills in, namely the purposeful delineation of how we want to relate to these beings, in the absence of fundamental and unequivocal and unanimously accepted knowledge that would also interpret itself in the same way for all. If we understand substantive representation as translation of, and responsiveness to, objective interests, I think we miss the point of what we actually do when we make claims in the name of others.

Under this view, a creature’s preference for life (Dobson 1996) is itself a statement about what kinds of relations we find appropriate. This is why we do not talk of the preference for life of vermin or sunflowers, because those are not the kinds of things to which we assign interests. In other words, to say that a creature has an interest in being alive, though unproblematic in a colloquial sense, has to be politically interpreted not as a statement of fact about that creature (or species) as such, but rather as a statement about the kinds of creatures that we are tempted to assign interests to, which signal the kinds of creatures that we are willing to enter into certain relations with (as well as the kinds of creatures we take ourselves to be).

In *Eating Meat and Eating People*, Cora Diamond refers to a poem by Walter de la Mare, entitled *Titmouse*. The poem presents the life of this tiny creature from different angles that invite thoughts of fellowship, companionship, shared existence. In Diamond’s reading, de la Mare achieves the image of a fellow creature with something as potentially removed from us as a titmouse by employing the phrase ‘this tiny son of life’ (2004: 100). Let us suppose de la Mare is a representative of the titmouse, and the ‘tiny son of life’ expression part of the representative claim. Then, we would be

¹²In this vein, some advocates might be opposed to use as such, deeming *that* to be unjustifiable (for instance, Francione 1995; 1996; 2004).

tempted to say, the representative of the titmouse claims that the represented has a life. This much should be unproblematic, which is similar to it being seen as evident that creatures (whether species or individuals) have an interest in being alive (Dobson 1996). However, what the representative's claim is after is not establishing the biology of the titmouse, but rather imprinting into the audience the idea of a fellow creature, which is not a biological idea: it is not amenable to factual checking. Diamond writes that 'it is not a *fact* that a titmouse *has a life*; if one speaks that way, it expresses a particular relation within a broadly specifiable range to titmice'. She goes on to say that 'it is no more biological than it would be a biological point should you call another person a "traveler between life and death"' (2004: 102). What is at stake in all of these expressions – these claims – is not anything to do with objectivity, or the real interests of non-humans, but rather the kinds of relations that we want to promote through the use of analogy to human concepts that invite care (e.g., fellowship). This is the point of interest-language, and not the establishment of facts about the represented.¹³

I have argued that substantive representation is not about objective interests, because political representation itself is not a process of interest-translation, but rather of subject-formation. The nature of representation discussed in Section 3 showed why this is so, starting with human representation, and the non-human case argued further for these concepts being problematic in supposing a precarious symmetry between interests and actions. Instead, substantive representation must work on discursive grounds, as *dialogic scrutiny*. This has been termed reflexivity (Celis 2008; Disch 2011), meaning that the representational arena in which various claims are presented reflects back on itself through dialogue, striving for a modicum of good representation which, crucially, is always *good for now*. As Disch (2011: 111) defines it, reflexivity is 'the measure according to which a representation process can be judged as more or less democratic insofar as it does more or less to mobilise both express and implicit objections from the represented', which can also hold for non-human representation: other representative claims in their name must exist.

If speakers present themselves as representatives, have this claim accepted and can invoke knowledge and care (Eckersley 2011), what we have left in adjudicating between representative claims is survival in open dialogue. In this sense, the best way to ensure substantive representation is through a certain design of formal representation: that is, by encouraging representative situations that remain structurally open to contestation and new claims, though there is a sense in which representative claims themselves can promote or resist dialogic scrutiny, by already establishing themselves as the only moral alternative. The reflexivity of representative claims means openness to scrutiny that allows the irreducibly multiple to claim its own evolving figure time and again. This perspective offers a normative alternative to the dominant congruence paradigm based on interests and preferences, instead suggesting that the structural deficits at the heart of representation can only be counterbalanced by acknowledging them in the representative arena itself. Dialogic scrutiny and reflexivity turn the focus back on the persuasive power of the claim, asking that representations be transparent as to their structure, and hence open to inherent multiplicity.

¹³This should not be misunderstood as suggesting that there is no such thing as knowledge about other creatures.

6. Back to the structure

The relational structure of representation is able to account for both human and non-human representation, by inscribing the ontological multiplicity of subjects in the heart of the process. The idea of dialogic scrutiny – a descriptively based normative standard – implies that a measure of deliberation is needed in order to define what substantive representation can mean, once we have abandoned a view of representation based on interests and identities. Yet the singularity of the subjects involved in such deliberations is not supposed by this relational approach. Quite the contrary, the subjects engaged in representation are conceived of as multiplicities. This implies that, in making representative claims, the primary operation is that of *counting* the subject in a particular way, thus framing the possible interests of the represented through deciding, in advance, their particular mode of being. Dialogic scrutiny therefore refers to the constant competition between different representative claims that try to count the subject of representation in different ways. Normatively, it is hoped that this operation can achieve a kind of representation that demands fidelity from most participants in political life.

Some readers might object that the normative issue has been unfairly ignored, and snuck in through the back door. What, in other words, is meant by a descriptively based normative standard? Though a short answer to an important question is bound to disappoint, I must sketch this view a little further. The issue of the normativity of representations conceived relationally can be seen either in terms of what the ethical commitments of representatives are, or else as the inherent normativity of the process of representation, regardless of particular commitments. From the perspective advocated here, not much more can be said about the first aspect: representatives are expected to have a variety of ethical positions, which themselves can contribute to the multiplicity of claims and hence to the health of representative debate. The second aspect, of the normativity of the structure itself, is what deserves further consideration. But the point is that the normativity of the general structure of representation can only be spelled out after we clarify the elements that are to count as fundamental to representation as such. In other words, describing the conceptual makeup of representation becomes the basis for understanding its inherent normative valence. Therefore, if we consider the constellation of concepts advocated here, I would argue that the normative standard that carries through is that of promoting multiplicity through dialogue, as one way of allowing the inherent multiplicity of subjects to challenge the unifying tendency of representative claims. In saying this, it also becomes *my own* normative position, for which I then have to argue in non-structural ways, by invoking further ethical principles. But the point remains that dialogic scrutiny emanates, in this analysis, from a description of the concept of representation in terms of claims and relations.

To sum up, representation involves: the making of a claim by a (self-appointed or otherwise) representative, who contends to speak in the name of another because s/he knows their situation and cares about them. This can be accepted or rejected by a human audience, and will exist alongside other claims. It signals to the audience a preferred relation to the subject of representation, which constitutes the subject's, the speaker's and the audience's being as this or that kind. This preferred relation will justify, encourage or condemn certain behaviours with respect to the represented. Many similes and metaphors will be used in order to render these relations palpable to

the audience and to convince them of their rightness. Moral language and categories will almost certainly be employed to substantiate the speaker's preferred relations.

The standard model of representation supposed a translation of interests that non-human representation shows to be problematic. Far from being a special case of representation, non-humans allow us to see that the structure of representation as such needs to be reformulated. Crucially, we need to find a general structure of representation that can work for all cases. I have discussed some contributions that I see as making steps in that direction, and I have tried to take them further. I have adopted Saward's claim-making structure and rejected the idea that we can read interests from the physical existence of subjects of representation. I have proposed a modified structure that can take into account more cases of representation. I suggested that the central idea for the structure of representation is that of relations, which can safeguard against the fiction of the unity of the represented or the representative. Starting from the axiom of multiplicity, I have argued that the structural relations of representation imply both an outer and inner directed gaze: representative relations to the other imply a relation to ourselves, and throughout what goes on is the creation of interests and preferences, and not their correspondence.

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