1. Political representation: concepts, theories and practices in historical perspective

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of representation is, without doubt, at the centre of what can be termed the most important political *invention* of the last two centuries, that is to say, liberal democracy. As such, it has animated vigorous theoretical and normative debates, has been used as a powerful flag in crucial political struggles (such as those for the extension of suffrage, or today for gender equality) and has inspired fundamental institutional arrangements at national, sub-national and also supra-national level. As a synthetic metaphor for delicate and complex political relations between rulers and the ruled it is a fundamentally polysemic and evocative rather than empirically analytic concept. It is not a surprise, therefore, that its meaning(s) have been highly debated throughout its history, which began well before the breakthrough of contemporary democracy.

We will therefore start by briefly tracing ‘pre-democracy’ discussions on political representation, move to the issue of the relationship between representation and contemporary democracy and then devote our attention to how the debate on political representation has been influenced by the seminal work of Hanna Pitkin (1967). Next, we will discuss how her account has been discussed with regard to several dimensions, such as the direction of the relationship between represented and representatives, the proper object of representation, the normative criteria for evaluating representation and the context in which political representation takes place.

THE ORIGINS OF MODERN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICES

As is well known, the Roman legal tradition developed sophisticated views about representation and the powers and limitations of those standing for other people in judicial proceedings. The persisting cultural legacy of this tradition in Europe has provided, over the centuries, important conceptual elements which could also be applied in the political field. In particular, during the middle ages, when the distinctions between public and civil law were far from as neat as in the modern world, concepts deriving from that tradition were not only abundantly used in judicial proceedings but were easily transposed into other fields. In particular, they offered the bases for significant elaborations to be used for a diverse set of political and ecclesiastical practices where the need arose for people (ambassadors, delegates, etc.) to stand for cities, estates, communities or religious orders in different decisional bodies (councils, chapters, parliaments). Special attention was given to the issue of the *plena potestas* of representatives, that is to say to their ability to consent to decisions taken in their presence and

to guarantee that such decisions would be binding for the communities they represented (Post 1943). Another important theme was that of the *instructiones* they received from those they represented, and which enabled them to be prepared when attending such meetings. Before the absolutist turn of monarchies, medieval legal traditions had thus developed ideas and practices which to some extent contemplated a two-way flow of representation, by which secular and religious authorities, needing the consent of subordinates for extraordinary decisions, could on the one hand summon representatives of communities and estates who had the power to stand for them and thus make the decisions, taken in council, binding for the represented (Marongiu and Woolf 1968). On the other hand, the represented could give instructions to their delegates to voice demands and defend local liberties and privileges. These ‘representational’ experiences had severe limitations, as their degree of institutionalization was often defective and as the top-down dimension was generally stronger than the bottom-up one. We know, however, that in some cases (Britain being the most notable one) they were able to survive until the dawn of modernity.

The rise of absolutism in most European polities silenced these traditions to a large extent and gave a very different meaning to the concept of representation, as it was now the absolute sovereign (and his theorists) who seized and drastically transformed this concept. As expressed theoretically by Hobbes in the *Leviathan* (1651), and more practically interpreted by absolutist kings in real life, the sovereign was now seen as the representative of the ‘commonwealth’, that is to say, of the country seen as a unified body, while the pre-modern pluralism of society was progressively rejected. In fact, it was only through this ‘representational’ relationship between sovereign and country that the polity could be constructed as a unified entity and not reduced to a simple sum of individuals (Runciman 2009). This idea of representation, which also included a notion of authorization of the sovereign by the multitude, did not contemplate any role of control over him by corporate groups and even less by individuals.

However, where traditional representative institutions managed to persist, as in Britain, the United Provinces of Netherlands and Sweden, and were undergoing an evolutionary transformation to face changing historical conditions (see Chapter 7 in this *Handbook*), or as in 1789 France where the monarchy, unable to face a critical situation, had revived them, or as in the United States where they were created in the building of a new polity, discussions about representation gained a new momentum both in intellectuals’ debates and in more down-to-earth political discussions.

The characteristics of representative government and how the latter relates to democracy, the nature of the relationship between representative and represented, the role and freedom of the representative, what was to be the object of representation (individuals, interests, a pluralistic society or a wholistic entity): all these themes which then became the centre of discussions would continue to animate the debate on representation until today in spite of enormously changing social and political conditions.

Montesquieu, in the eleventh book of his *Esprit des Lois*, while developing a comparative analysis of government types and using the English constitution as a model of free government, had already developed an elaborate version of representative government which was to have a fundamental influence on modern political conceptions (Montesquieu 1748). A representative assembly, endowed with law-making powers and capable of transmitting the views of the people, was openly presented as the instrument for ensuring in a large state, where direct democracy was considered impossible, the respect of the principle of self-government that free citizens have the right to enjoy.

Very much along the lines of Montesquieu's contribution, two crucial themes – a new view of society and of its internal articulation and the problem of power limitations – provided the background for lively political discussions in this period. The debate on representation and its institutional forms concerned both aspects seen as the instrument for giving voice on the one hand to the plural interests of society, and on the other hand for limiting absolute power. An important theme was also the problem of how to translate the plurality of voices into unified decisions for the common good.

In Britain, the debate on the respective role of representatives and represented was epitomized in the famous electoral discourse of Edmund Burke to the electors of Bristol. In that speech he very explicitly touched on a point that was to have foundational value for the modern interpretation of representation, but at the same time would continue to be debated under different guises in the following centuries. The Burkean position did not deny the duty of the member of parliament to pay 'high respect' to the opinion of his constituency, as he would put it, implying by this a broadly conceived responsiveness, but affirmed clearly that a representative was not an 'ambassador' bound by 'authoritative instructions, mandates... which [he] is bound blindly... to obey', but a trustee endowed with the freedom (and responsibility) of deciding according to 'his mature judgment', as government is not 'a matter of will' but 'government and legislation are matters of reason and judgment' (Burke 1854 [1774], pp. 446–8).

Central to this idea was the novel interpretation of parliaments and parliamentarians not as instruments for expressing particularistic grievances and demands arising from constituencies, but as governing and legislating bodies. In order that these could perform effectively, their members needed to be able to deliberate freely in order to serve the interests of the country seen as a whole ('parliament is a *deliberative* assembly of *one* nation, with *one* interest') (1854) [1774], p. 448).

This debate inspired the prohibition of the imperative mandate written in many modern constitutions. We must remember, however, that in less principled and more pragmatic ways, the theme of the independence of MPs versus their duties to respect the mandates of the voters has recurrently re-emerged. It was, for instance, central to the empirical research conducted in the 1960s by Wahlke et al. (1962) on representative roles adopted by American legislators. More recently it returns in the discussion on electoral promises or pledges.

The other grand theme was that of the relationship between representation and democracy, which became particularly intense at the turn of the nineteenth century but has continued since then. In the eighteenth century, democracy and representative government were typically presented as alternative systems and the different sides exposed their contrasting peculiarities and the reasons for their preferences. There were practical reasons, linked in particular to the size of the community as in the analysis of Montesquieu and of those building on this tradition. This discussion also implied, however, more explicitly normative reasons. Rousseau's choice of the classic interpretation of (direct) democracy and his disparaging evaluation of representation hinged very much on the idea that the making of laws, as the highest expression of sovereignty (and of the *volonté générale*), could not be alienated by the people to representatives without renouncing liberty (Rousseau 1762). The sovereign people could at most alienate to representatives the governing power interpreted as an inferior function and not an embodiment of sovereignty.

On the opposite side to Rousseau, Sieyès defended the merits of the (indirect) representative model precisely because it created a beneficial separation between the particularism of the

individual voters and the required generality of the law-making function attributed to parliament. Representation was thus seen as the instrument for achieving the common interest of the nation (Sieyès 1789).

THE 'MARRIAGE' BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND DEMOCRACY

In the political practice of Europe, where representative institutions (elected parliaments), inspired by liberal constitutionalism and made possible in most countries by a compromise between monarchies and reformers, became the dominant political form, conservative and liberal ruling classes resisted for decades what had come to be called 'democracy', that is to say, universal male franchise, as a dangerous threat to the established political and social order. But this resistance had to give way, sometimes gradually but in other cases more abruptly, to pressures from below and strategic changes promoted from above, producing in real life the marriage between democracy and representation (Mill 1861), which at the end of the eighteenth century had seemed impossible. This marriage meant that previously excluded social classes could effectively advance representative claims and that these could be satisfied through important changes in the working if not in the form of representative institutions. Representation could no longer be a game played only inside rather restricted circles. The rise of mass parties produced fundamental transformations both in electoral practices and in the functioning of representative assemblies. On the other hand, democracy ceased to be seen as an alternative model, lost the original classic meaning of direct popular government and adopted the central mechanisms of liberal constitutionalism (electoral representation, division of powers, etc.).

What happened in practice (but we must remember that in a significant number of cases this transformation did not succeed and from this failure new models of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes emerged) was also reflected in the new theorizing of democracy. From the extremely influential reading of Schumpeter to Dahl's and Sartori's more articulated formulations, the contemporary standard model of *representative democracy* emerged.

Schumpeter, with his elitist interpretation of democracy focusing on the combined effects of pluralistic competition between opposed elites and the deciding role of elections, stripped representation of much of its normative and symbolic narrative (in particular by contesting the idea of a bottom-up process of transmission of popular will) and reformulated it as a rather blunt mechanism of selection by which top-down dynamics acquired a dominant role (Schumpeter 1943). This view provided an important inspiration for Downs' *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) which, without using the word 'representation', introduced into scientific discourse on democracy a rational theory of the working of electoral representation, which saw the vote maximizing parties (the elites in Schumpeterian language) as the driving engine of the democratic process. Downs, however, compared with Schumpeter, paid much greater attention to the role of voters' rational choices and to their influence in determining the positioning of parties.

Not many years later, in his systematic discussion on the contemporary model of democracy (as opposed to the then significant challenge coming from the totalitarian model) Sartori explicitly and extensively placed the representative character as the centrepiece of modern liberal democracy (1962, ch. VI and pp. 252–66). The opposition between representative

democracy and direct democracy was not based, for Sartori, only on the practical impossibility of the second, but also on the much more relevant combination of representation, political freedom and power limitations typical of the first. With regard to representation, Sartori was particularly keen on highlighting the proposing role of leaders, but also the counter influence of voters, enabled by the mechanism of ‘anticipated reactions’ (Friedrich 1941, pp. 589–91) by which representatives would be pushed to incorporate the orientations of the public (Sartori 1962, pp. 125–6). With a different approach and starting from a more ideal and normative view of democracy, Robert Dahl, particularly in his book *Polyarchy*, wrote that ‘the key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens...’ (Dahl 1971, pp. 1–2). Responsiveness (that is to say one of the aspects of the modern conception of representation), together with the institutional instruments needed to make it possible, which became the empirical attributes for assessing the democratic quality of a country, was thus given a central place in the discussion about democracy. Normative and empirical levels of analysis were in this way linked.

Within this interpretation of democracy, which has become largely accepted in the scientific community, the centrality of representation, but also its internal paradoxes and limitations, has continued to stimulate a lively scientific debate on its multiple meanings and the problems it continues to raise.

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE: PITKIN’S HERITAGE

The contemporary debate on representation has been profoundly shaped by Hanna Pitkin and her enormously influential treatment of the concept of political representation (1967) which soon became the standard reference for both normative theorists and empirical scholars. Building on J.L. Austin’s language theory, Pitkin found that the many different usages of the term ‘representation’ shared at least one core meaning: ‘the making present of something which is nevertheless not literally present’. In this sense, representation has an evidently paradoxical nature. In particular, Pitkin discussed different ways of looking at representation that had often appeared in political thought: *formalistic representation*, *descriptive representation*, *symbolic representation*. Each is seen as a picture of a complex object taken from a different angle: none of them is wrong, but taken in isolation they give an incomplete and misleading idea of the *thing*. Finally, she advances her own definition of *substantive representation* as ‘acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them’ (Pitkin 1967, p. 209). Before analysing this definition more in depth, which is essential to understanding the current debate on political representation, it is useful to summarize the main points advanced by Pitkin in her review of the existing literature. The concepts of formalistic, descriptive and symbolic representation are often cited in the political science literature and we might be tempted to take them for granted. In fact, as often happens with classics, Pitkin’s book is more often cited than read, and some of its ideas have been progressively distorted.

Formalistic views of representation focus on the institutional aspect of representation, but tell nothing of its substantive content. The representative relation is seen as a transaction between two parties and defined either in terms of authorization to act, or of accountability for the actions taken. Theorists who place emphasis on authorization see elections as acts giving officials the status of representatives. For those stressing accountability, a representative is one that will have to answer to another for what he or she does or, in other words, must be respon-

sible to the represented. Putting together these diametrically opposed (though equally formalistic) views, the representative is someone who has been authorized to act and at the same time is to be held to account for his or her actions. However, nothing is said about the activities that a representative should carry out in order for representation to emerge. Similarly, no criteria are given to evaluate the quality of the representative. It is more interesting to discuss which characteristics should be represented, because Pitkin's account of descriptive representation is often misleadingly reduced to the idea of social representativeness. By contrast, according to Pitkin, theorists of descriptive representation usually indicate that the representative assembly should mirror the opinions of the community; it is no coincidence that Downs' spatial theory of party competition (Downs 1957) is included within this group. Pitkin does mention the social characteristics of the representatives, but she is very clear about one point: they are only important inasmuch as they have consequences for the opinions of the representatives.

Symbolic representation has nothing to do with authorization, accountability or reflection of the popular will: however, it is a complement to all these factors. This doctrine reserves a central place to the perceptions of the represented: there is representation when the represented feel loyalty towards the representative. Focusing on the affective and emotional dimension of the representative relations has two main implications: first, 'so long as people accept or believe, the political leader represents them by definition' (Pitkin 1967, p. 102); second, it is worth noting that there are no requirements as to how this belief is formed. Leaders can build such feelings by manipulating the people, and shaping their identity and beliefs: as a consequence, symbolic representation need not be democratic but can be consistent with authoritarian doctrines.

Finally, after reviewing different uses of the concept that give only partial ideas of what representation is and what representatives should do, Pitkin advances her own concept: 'representing [...] means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (1967, p. 209). The focus is here on (substantive) actions rather than on the (formal) authorization to act. What should be represented are the interests of the represented, but representatives must minimize instances of conflict by taking into account the opinions of their constituents. When he or she acts in ways that are not in line with constituents' opinions, the representative must at least have a good reason in terms of their substantive interest. Reacting positively to the demands of the constituents is perhaps Pitkin's conception of responsiveness. However, Pitkin argues that representation is not a kind of person-to-person relationship between a representative and his or her constituency but an institutionalized arrangement involving multiple groups. The activities of single representatives contribute to the functioning of a more general system that can be considered representative insofar as it makes the people (or the constituency) present in governmental action.

TAKING STOCK OF THE CURRENT DEBATE

As the previous discussion has shown, political representation is a complex and multidimensional concept. In order to clarify how contemporary authors contest or distance themselves from Pitkin's definitions it is useful to schematically list four components that are specified in most accounts of political representation:¹

1. the relationship between represented and representatives;
2. the object of representation;
3. the normative criteria to evaluate representation;
4. the political context in which political representation takes place.

Pitkin's concept of representation is inextricably linked with democratic settings. As she later admitted, her book 'more or less equated democracy with representation' (2004, p. 336), treating their empirical equivalence as an axiom on the basis of what, at the time, appeared to be a truism: in modern societies democracy can only be representative (for an in-depth analysis of the relation between democracy and representation see Chapter 3 in this *Handbook*). This point of departure sets obvious constraints to the identity of the two sides involved in the representative relation, which were quite unproblematically identified with citizens and members of parliament. However, what counts is not so much the dyadic relationship between constituents and their own representative as the aggregate interactions taking place at the systemic level. With regard to the object of the representative relation, Pitkin specified that there is no representation unless representatives substantively act in the *interest* of the represented. However, this apparently straightforward view causes a paradox: is there legitimate representation when citizens do not agree with their parliamentarians' actions? The solution proposed by Pitkin is rather vague: the representative must generally avoid this conflict, but when it sporadically emerges he or she must give an explanation of why citizens' wishes are not in accord with their actual interests. In other words, representatives should be responsive to citizens' requests but the proper object of representation is 'interests' rather than 'opinions'.

For several decades since the publishing of *The Concept of Representation* (1967) the theoretical debate on the topic, despite a few exceptions, languished. On the one hand, political theorists were more focused on different concepts, most notably political participation. On the other hand, empirical political scientists often paid lip service to the work of Pitkin without fully grasping its critical significance, and kept working within the *neo-Schumpeterian paradigm* (Urbinati and Warren 2008), as it was elaborated in the works of Sartori and Dahl.

The Relationship between Represented and Representatives

In Pitkin's framework, the relation between citizens and elected politicians is unidirectional: representatives should be responsive to citizens, and not the other way around. This aspect fitted well with the procedural view of liberal democracy which constituted the prevailing view of the time. Pitkin's critique notwithstanding, around the turn of the millennium the formalistic view of representation gained new currency in the empirical study of democratic representation after being translated into the language of agency theory (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Strøm 2000; Strøm et al. 2003). Agency theory is especially concerned with situations in which one actor (the agent) acts on behalf of another (the principal). Representative democracy is thus seen as a chain of delegation of authority going from voters to elected representatives and eventually to bureaucracy, which is complemented by a corresponding chain of accountability running in the opposite direction. While the focus on delegation (authorization) and accountability is not especially new, the tools of agency theory have been used to analyse the mechanisms favouring or impeding the emergence of agency loss, offering an intuitive criterion to judge the quality of the representative relation. One limitation of conceptualizing representation as an agency relation rests in the inherently unidirectional nature of agency theory: when applied to democratic representation it suggests that citizens have endogenously formed preferences that are aggregated (for instance at the constituency level) and then represented. When applied only to the relationship between majority congressional parties and various institutions to which they delegate power, as originally done by Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991), this aspect is not problematic because parties are obviously capable of developing

autonomous policy preferences. However, when broadening the scope of this framework and considering citizens as the ultimate principal, the assumption that their preferences are endogenously formed becomes problematic (Andeweg and Thomassen 2005; Disch 2011). Conceptualizing representation in the form of a principal–agent relation is a constitutive part of what Castiglione and Warren (2006) define as the *standard version* of political representation, but it captures only its formal and institutional structure: a more comprehensive picture needs to recognize that different opinions, interests and identities are formed in a deliberative space involving several actors.

The recent *constructivist turn* in the study of political representation (Saward 2010 and 2017; Disch 2011) brings to the fore the constitutive nature of political representation. While in the principal–agent view the represented are assumed to be fixed, constructivists argue that representation is a dynamic process in which different types of constituencies (for instance territorial, functional or identity based) are constituted by the interaction between those who claim to be representatives and those who are depicted as represented. In other words, the activity of representing has ontological consequences, because it not only mirrors but actively shapes the identity and preferences of the represented. According to Saward, the performative instrument employed by would-be representatives is the representative claim, in which ‘a maker of representations (‘M’) puts forward a subject (‘S’) that stands for an object (‘O’), that is related to a referent (‘R’) and is offered to an audience (‘A’)’ (Saward 2010, p. 36). This framework can be applied to electoral and non-electoral contexts, in democratic and non-democratic settings. It must be noted that this framework is very general because it can be applied not only to cases where an actor is at the same time ‘maker’ and ‘subject’ of the representative claim, for instance when a politician puts herself forward as representative of a constituency, but also to cases in which the maker and the subject are different entities (for instance when a party leader puts forward his party as representative of the working class). It is also important to note the distinction between the object of representation and the referent. In the classic example, a member of parliament (maker) offers herself (subject) as standing for the interests of the constituency (object) to the members of that constituency (audience). In this case the referent consists of the citizens actually living in the constituency, but the object is the depiction of those citizens by the politician (for instance the hardworking people living in the city).

On the one hand, this view can bridge a gap between the unidirectional views of representation and the results of empirical studies stressing that the preferences held by citizens are formed within the political process and with the active role of the political elites. On the other hand, as clearly put by Disch (2015), this account has potentially disruptive consequences for the normative attempt to distinguish legitimate and illegitimate instances of representation because, by equating a successful claim with one that resounds with a certain audience, it leaves no way to differentiate between the case in which someone is subjectively feeling represented and that in which someone’s interests are actually pursued. This problem resembles Pitkin’s scepticism toward symbolic representation: wherever we look at the subjective attitudes of citizens to recognize instances of representation, the problem of the citizens’ capacity to form independent judgements emerges.

The Object of Representation

The question of whether (class and sectoral) interests or citizens' opinions should be represented was widely debated by political thinkers interested in the theory of representation (Birch 1972). The advent of mass politics and the development of party discipline apparently solved a problem, as political scientists saw in the theory of the electoral mandate a solution for avoiding an otherwise unsolvable problem. When the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association (1950), chaired by E.E. Schattschneider, formalized the *responsible party model* it also provided a pragmatic reply to the question of what should be represented: the policy positions presented by the parties in their electoral manifestos. Policy positions belong to the realm of opinions, but as long as voters are conceived as rational actors, their opinions should not differ too much from real interests. Pitkin (1967, p. 236) acknowledged the empirical role of parties and elections in the functioning of representative governments, but guarded against confounding the ideal purpose of representation with the institutions established for achieving it. For Pitkin, the essence of political representation remained as substantively acting for others, pursuing the interests of the represented without going against their wishes. The relative importance of interests and opinions cannot be determined once and for all, depending on the character of the issue at stake.

Among political theorists – who look more at what representation should be than at what it actually is – the idea prevails that *interests* are the proper object of representation. For instance, when discussing the merits of *descriptive* representation, what Phillips (1998) calls *politics of presence*, Mansbridge (1999, p. 630) states that 'The primary function of representative democracy is to represent the substantive interests of the represented [...]'. However, emphasizing the distinction between interests and opinions can be misleading except in cases when there are good reasons to suspect that citizens are systematically manipulated. In more ordinary cases the contrast is artificial because in the words of Plotke (1997, p. 32), 'in interest representation, representatives seek primarily to pursue their constituents' interests as defined by their expressed preferences'.

For empirical oriented scholars, *interests* indeed remain unobservable. For this reason *opinions* and *wishes* have been studied much more. Eulau and Karpis (1977) lamented that in the work of Pitkin, the target of responsiveness was never explicitly specified, leaving political scientists without any obvious way to measure it. On what matters should the representative be responsive to her voters? By overgeneralizing the study of Miller and Stokes (1963) on constituency's influence in the US Congress, many empirical studies equated representation with policy responsiveness: however, policy-making is only a part of the broader activities carried out by representatives.² To overcome this limitation, Eulau and Karpis enumerate four types of responsiveness which, taken together, give form to the representative relation. Beyond policy responsiveness they mention service responsiveness (granting individualized benefits to constituents), allocation responsiveness (attracting funds for the district), and symbolic responsiveness. By doing so they do not question that representation is acting on behalf of the represented, but they elucidate that representation cannot simply be assessed by looking at whether citizens get their preferred policies. The concept of policy responsiveness still has a central place in the debate on the quality of representation (for an overview see Chapter 5 in this *Handbook*), but it is only one component of a broader phenomenon.

Normative Criteria to Evaluate Representation

Agency relations are by definition dyadic, but Pitkin noted that representation should be conceived as a systemic property emerging from multiple interactions. Mansbridge (2003) acknowledges that political representation rests on different pillars, which she labels ‘promissory’, ‘anticipatory’, ‘gyroscopic’ and ‘surrogate’ forms of representation. These are best conceived as complementary mechanisms through which representation takes place, each of them requiring its own set of normative criteria against which it can be assessed. Promissory representation is just another name for the agency view: good representatives simply keep the promises made in the authorizing election. However, empirical research shows that elected politicians often try to anticipate the opinion of future voters even when this means breaking their old promises: these are instances of anticipatory representation. By admitting that voters can change their original opinion thanks to their interaction with representatives, other parties, interest groups or the media, this form of representation gives more space to deliberation. Moreover, the model makes less unrealistic assumptions as it conceives of the represented as having interests related to certain outcomes (for instance economic growth) rather than fixed policy preferences. Traditional accountability vanishes as a normative criterion, and is replaced by the quality of the deliberative relation between citizens and representatives, both conceived as being capable of autonomous judgement.³ What Mansbridge calls gyroscopic representation had been previously referred to using different terms, and basically amounts to the situation in which citizens choose a representative who shares their views and principles: ‘voters affect political outcomes not by affecting the behavior of the representative [...] but by selecting and placing in the political system representatives whose behavior is to some degree predictable in advance based on their observable characteristic’ (2003, p. 521). In this case the normative criterion is the quality of deliberation at the time of the authorizing election or, to translate this into the language of agency theory, the quality of the screening process to prevent the problem of adverse selection. Finally, surrogate representation happens at the systemic level when citizens or groups are represented by someone who has not been elected by them. This mechanism is empirically very important since electoral systems are usually based on territorial representation while at present interests and opinions depend only marginally on the place where one lives and votes.⁴ Since there is no accountability relation between citizens and their ‘surrogate’ representatives the normative criterion to judge its legitimacy cannot be traditional accountability. Rather, at the systemic level, the normative question for surrogate representation is whether ‘each conflicting interest has proportional adversary representation in a legislative body (Weissberg 1978, esp. p. 542) and each important perspective has adequate deliberative representation’ (Mansbridge 2003, p. 524).

The Political Context of Representation

Since the *marriage between representation and democracy* (see above), empirically oriented scholars have tended to judge the legitimacy of political representation by making reference to democratic norms such as authorization, accountability and substantively acting for citizens. Following the so-called ‘representative turn’ in democratic theory, advocates of participatory forms of democracy, among whom liberal democracy was long seen as a form of *thin* democracy (Barber 1984), also rediscovered that representation is central to democracy, not least because it makes participation feasible (Plotke 1997; Urbinati 2006; Brito Vieira 2017). At the

same time, political representation is also found in non-democratic contexts. For instance, the representative of an authoritarian country to the World Trade Organization cannot count on any democratic credential, but is universally recognized as standing for that country. Moving from this paradox, Rehfeld (2006) advanced a general theory of representation which aims to be simply descriptive (i.e. non-normative). At its core, his argument maintains that there is representation whenever a relevant group of people (the Audience) recognizes a particular actor (the Representative) claiming to represent someone else (the Represented) for the purpose of performing certain duties (the Function). Usually the Audience relies on certain rules of recognition to judge whether the claimant can be considered a representative, but these vary considerably in different contexts. In democratic contexts the Audience corresponds with the Represented and the rule to acquire the status of representative is *being elected*. Freeing political representation from the democratic setting, this account radically expanded the applicability of the concept which has been recently used for analysing several political phenomena once studied with different theoretical lenses (see Chapter 4 in this *Handbook*).

CONCLUSION

The concept of political representation has been the object of several heated debates in the history of political thought and among contemporary scholars. Scholarly debates may have endogenous or exogenous causes, depending on whether they are triggered by theoretical innovations in related fields or by the evolution of social and political reality. What makes representation so central to the reflections of both political theorists and empirical political scientists is the central place assumed by the concept within the intellectual construction of liberal democracy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the debates on political representation can only be understood with reference to the political context in which they took place. Redefining representation – its ideal purpose as well as the criteria for evaluating its legitimacy – implies taking positions on the merits and limits of actual democratic systems. Following the marriage between representation and democracy, theorists building on the Schumpeterian view identified in the electoral competition between elites the means to ensure that citizens' preferences are taken into consideration by a responsive government. The work of Pitkin (1967) did not challenge the idea that representation and democracy are fundamentally intertwined, but shifted the analytical focus onto the essence of representation (acting in the interest of the represented) rather than on the institutional settings built to pursue it. After three decades in which political theorists were more interested in participatory practices and empirical political scientists worked in the neo-Schumpeterian paradigm, perhaps based on different value-based considerations about the merits of existing liberal democracies, the reflection on the relation between representation and democracy gained new momentum (Plotke 1997). Since then, political theorists have reflected on various aspects of the representative relation, taking into consideration the insights of different strands of empirical research; for instance elaborating criteria to evaluate different forms of democratic representation or taking seriously the idea that interests, preferences and identities are formed within the representative relation and cannot be taken as pre-existing. Finally, a growing number of authors convincingly argue that representative relations can also be established without elections and even in non-democratic contexts. In turn, these theoretical insights will probably open further empirical streams of research in the years to come.

NOTES

1. We are indebted to Dovi (2018) for showing how making a list of key components of Political Representation helps to build a more systematic review.
2. Eulau and Karpis (1977) wrote a dense critique of the empirical works reducing representation to the so-called policy congruence, a gross oversimplification that they attributed to the vulgarization of the seminal study *Constituency Influence in Congress* by Miller and Stokes (1963). The goal of the Miller–Stokes study was to understand to what extent and under what conditions the local constituency influenced the voting behaviour of congressmen on three different policy areas, and the congruence investigated was that between constituency attitudes, congressmen attitudes, congressmen perception of constituency attitudes and congressmen voting behaviour. While they never explicitly equated congruence with representation or responsiveness, many empirically oriented scholars replicating their study did.
3. This condition was already highlighted in the work of Pitkin (1967), who remarked that if citizens were completely amorphous the leader could simply manipulate their will through propaganda. In that case the similarity between their opinions would not count as representation but only as a distorted version of it, because the leader is certainly not acting for his or her constituents.
4. For a more radical critique of the concept of territorial constituency see Rehfeld (2005).

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