

Chapter I

Introducing the Metaphysics of Substitution

Metaphor is less in the philosophical text (and the rhetorical text coordinated with it) than the philosophical text is within metaphor.

—Jacques Derrida¹

EXAMPLES AND SPECIFICS

This opening chapter aims to set up an approach to representation by exploring it initially as a general topic within Western philosophical discourse. As always, such an approach immediately confronts the problem of selection and exemplarity. What or whom, specifically, will I choose to talk about? Are these choices “merely examples,” neutral instruments in the service of an idea? That is, are they merely specific instances substituting for a general issue? Are they merely representative or really representative? Is there something special about them? Do they serve a strategic purpose? Or do they contribute more substantively to the development of a philosophical position? Then there is the other critical issue: Is representation really a general topic anyway, one within which political representation functions as merely an instance or version?

Examples are always special, and their selection necessarily involves some granting of privilege, some weighting of an account. More specifically, examples do help constitute

rather than simply illustrate or represent an idea. It is important to acknowledge, for instance, that my decision to address Nietzsche later in this initial chapter serves the strategic purpose of introducing a particular approach to political representation. My decision not to engage “the great thinkers” here as a way of setting up the theme of representation has a similar purpose. The problems and issues do not originate from any particular philosopher or master set of philosophers, and an engagement with the masters at this stage might wind up diverting our focus onto a particular philosopher or society of philosophers and away from an issue that is not only metaphysical but part of a network of historical, social, political, and discursive contexts that are broader than philosophy itself. Philosophy often tends to inflate the originality, power, and value of ideas and to treat them as if they determine or illuminate and are ahead and even independent of specific discursive formations or of broader historical, social, economic, or libidinal (etc.) forces. Moreover, philosophy treats these concepts as if they were independent of specific networks of power and were causes rather than effects, functions, components, or signs (signs read as something like symptoms). It is important, then, to relate political representation to other species of representation, but it is simultaneously important to avoid reducing it to a mere instance of some general metaphysical configuration.

The aim at this point in the project is to display some of the complexes, currents, and general tendencies associated with representation as a theme in Western philosophy. In order to make sense of any particular representational system or network, it is necessary to begin to define the theme of representation as a philosophical problem. That is the task of this section of the investigation. This discussion is not an exhaustive history nor even a general account or overview. Rather, it is simply a suggestion and articulation of some select philosophical complexes related to representation. The turn to Nietzsche’s Thales is not a return to an established origins but is a tour (or detour) of some beginnings or starts. These often provide remarkable contrasts as well as

relations of continuity with what representation has become today in the age of "information" and "communication."

THE ONE AND THE MANY PROBLEMS

Recalling the General Particular

It might be a reductive imposition to equate representation in one context with its relatives from very different historical or narrative contexts, with, that is, distant cousins bearing family resemblances to what representation means today. Advocating such an equation might be one more instance of pushing a representational essence, a transcendental, ahistorical core of logic or meaning at the heart of representation, which one would like to be able to specify precisely. The ideal would be if it were possible to converse with, say, not only Hobbes about his notion of an 'artificial person,' but also Locke and Rousseau, as well as Wollstonecraft, Burke, Jefferson, Madison, and Paine, or even with members of the Athenian boule,² or Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, or, to get to the root of things, with Heraclitus and Parmenides. It may be true that these figures are all particulars who do not together add up to a universal, but maybe a chat with each would help. After all, do we not share a common discipline, a certain language with them, the language of Western philosophy?

In an always ambiguous sense and at least retrospectively of course we philosophers participate in (even if we do not share) a language that is Parmenidean, Platonic, Aristotelian, indefinitely Socratic, and seldom Heraclitean enough. Thus, while it would be futile and absurd to attempt to posit a universal definition of representation—to present representation as ultimately independent of its historical variants—it should nevertheless be possible and helpful to explicate the philosophical domain or traditional concerns to which the phenomenon of political representation is related.

Here, while it is vital to affirm Foucault's insistence on attending to the specificity of discursive and power forma-

tions, we may also take a strategic tip from the Derridean reading of the history of Western metaphysics. This reading is also always specific in its cultivation of distinctions and differences, but it is a reading that simultaneously encounters something like a unity in Western philosophy in the form of a peculiar historical coherence in the economy of truth, which may be characterized as a hierarchically ordered exchange of values and correlative devaluations, a repeated trade or sacrifice in the name of _____.³ This "unity" is not derived from substance or being. That is, it is not derived from some ultimately singular object of thought or condition of thought or anything in between. The "unity" here is synonymous with a general economy of truth, which consists of the repetition of certain philosophical gestures that have no foundation outside of themselves or outside of the circuits constituted by their relations to each other (Derrida calls this "*différance*").⁴ Tapping into Nietzsche, who is so critical of Western philosophy, Foucault indicates something like this "unity" even as he is questioning Unity when he refers to "this will to truth which has survived throughout so many centuries of our history. . . ."⁵

Foucault has become known as the philosopher of discontinuity, which, for various reasons, is not an entirely appropriate appellation.⁶ Nevertheless, it is true that Foucault's approach to history is not an eidetic one. That is, Foucault does not seek to discover meanings or a meaning concealed in the depths of human history. As he describes it in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, his is a method that "transforms documents into monuments,"⁷ rather than treating

discourse as *document*, as a sign of something else, as an element that ought to be transparent, but whose unfortunate opacity must often be pierced if one is to reach at last the depth of the essential in the place in which it is held in reserve; it is concerned with discourse in its own volume, as a *monument*. It is not an interpretative discipline: it does not seek another, better-hidden discourse.⁸

For Foucault, then, documents do not signify or represent something other than what they are on their surfaces, which must be articulated by the critical investigator. This may sound strange, perhaps even willfully naive, but what it means is that historical specificities, such as documents, are to be treated positivistically as objects or artifacts. They are not interpreted in order to recover autonomous meanings but analyzed in order to determine their positions in a given configuration of power/knowledge (of what might more concretely be called discourse-practice). Again, for Foucault, as for others, history is not woven from the strands of meaning immanent in historical specificities, which in proper sequence constitute progress, the ever-onward sense in which Mankind is going somewhere and the present is defined by the future, that is, by that which is not present. As Foucault suggests in "Truth and Power,"⁹ our model for history should be war, not signs.

If there is a counterpart to the notion of progress in Foucault, it might be simply the sedimentary accumulation of marks and monuments (objects and "facts"); the archive does not get better, just bigger and more dense. Foucault's philosophy is archaeological, which means that it seeks not to make the truth present (to represent it), but, more modestly or at least more indefinitely, to brush some of the dust off the marks and monuments, which can only exist in the domain of the contemporary. His philosophy does not attempt to restore something but to write it and display its surfaces. What this ultimately involves is a production of a history of the present.¹⁰ As it must always in many ways be, the interest in the past, which is a conspicuous element of this investigation of political representation, is necessarily part of and motivated by an interest in the present.

Foucault might call some of the general mechanisms that we aim to investigate "regularities"—productive, situated regularities—and he would emphasize the connection with "regulation," and make it explicit. This is not regulation with a definite source, simply invented and imposed from above (again, not the classical configuration of power as purely hier-

archical and fundamentally coercive). He means regularity—regulation—as that which comprises and determines a system of practices and discourse and produces the identities, positions, and terms they contain. This definition seems to be an appropriate characterization of what I am going to be addressing here. This is representation, then, not as an inherently neutral instrument or tool in the hands of an independently existing creature who is its master but representation as coextensive with the creature itself, a sort of self-creation and creator, which articulates itself under the auspices of articulating what it must insist is already there. The interest in political representation is, finally, an interest in the political subject, and it is worth pondering some of the prominent, paradoxical meanings embodied in the following definitions: (1) the subject of the traditional, hierarchical variety, the identity of the vassal, subordinate to a ruler or governor of some kind and associated with hierarchical and repressive forms of power; (2) the subject as it has been linked in the modern period with the identity of consciousness, an identity that is associated with the autonomous, original power of free will, and so on; (3) the subject as something to be operated on, as in subject of an experiment, an identity associated with the productive power of formative techniques and dividing practices; and finally (4) the subject as in ‘subject positions,’ a presentation of the subject as differentially or relationally constituted (and therefore situated), a casting that both resonates off of and yet at the same time deviates from the others, a formulation that aims in part to emphasize the fluidity of effective identity.¹¹

Fluid Unity

If there is unity in the history of Western thought, it must have something to do with the “perennial problem” of Unity, which has persisted in a variety of forms, among which is the problem of the One and the many. As a way of locating representation in Western philosophy and of circuitously foreshadowing the eighteenth-century (and onward) American dis-

course of a mixed government embodying the One, the few, and the many,¹² I begin with some observations about the One and the many made by Nietzsche.

The Nietzschean linkage of philosophy and metaphor—of philosophy and images of the truth—begins at the beginning. This beginning is not the originary source of Western philosophy, which is to say that it is not a wellspring—not a transcendental condition nor signifier—that would perpetually nourish, found, or, in a classical sense, determine the practice of philosophy in Western culture. Rather, the beginning is a specific, contingent, idiosyncratic signature in the Milesian region of our archive, the signature of Thales, the complex of marks bearing his name. Nietzsche's early address of Thales¹³ culminates in the reading of a difference, the difference between Thales' special insight and the discourse that flows from it.

Through what Nietzsche calls a "mystic intuition" and, perhaps better, "the power of creative imagination," Thales grasped the unity of that which is, thereby transiting the gap between the One and the many. However, when he named the fluid gap circulating between the One and the many—when he gave voice to its identity and identified it—"he found himself talking about water!"¹⁴

It is clear that Nietzsche finds this articulation astonishing, intriguing, and even absurd.¹⁵ It is absurd not so much because of what it names but because water marks the disruptive intervention of metaphor—of the image, of representation—into the truth. The articulation of truth necessarily involves an exchange, a substitution—a representation—even though it must also advance its images as literal in order to be counted as properly philosophical discourse. Thales means water when he announces "Water!" which in Nietzsche's reading is what makes him a philosopher and marks his break with the past. For Nietzsche, Thales' truth is in its expression, which means that the expression makes the truth and that it does not, in merely instrumental fashion, express or reflect the Real (the "really-real"), the One that holds the many together.

The point I wish to emphasize—a point I will stress in a variety of ways throughout this study, particularly in connection with the identity of the political subject—is not that Thales' identificative move distorts some prior, pristine, hierarchically privileged insight.¹⁶ While it is important to keep sight of the deviant quality that Nietzsche associates so intimately with the utterance of truth (“truth as necessary error”), the question of difference here is not about the traditional gap posited between an independent reality (True) and words (false), between immediate insight and its necessarily errant expression, or between will (to truth) and its representation.

What I wish to stress instead about Nietzsche's Thales is that he names an *arche*—he gives it a specific identity—and that this name—this metaphor and image—is taken to be the truth. Once Thales utters “Water!” this unifying response floods the cosmos in all of its multiplicity while other possibilities remain apparently (and provisionally) excluded from the space circulating between the One and the many and from the discordant discourse of truth; coherence is established in the specificity of its totalizing utterance.

Like the extant texts of the Pre-Socratics, this point may seem fragmentary. However, Thales' water is the first sign of the truth I hope to cultivate here. More pertinent to the broader theme of this project, its intimate philosophical and historical association with the problem of the One and the many inscribes an initial connection between philosophy and the domain of political representation since the latter, too, is about truth and, in a unity or unitary system of expression, a configuration intimately tied to the problem of political expression and decision. More specifically, political representation has become the instrumental key to the general problem of bringing together the many voices of a society into the one body—ultimately, in the decisions and deployments—of its government (in legislative, executive, and juridical processes, in the apparatuses of bureaucracy, and in the general context of networked “communication”). Just as I want to avoid emphasizing that Thales' identification distorts some prior, pure, unarticulated insight, it is above all necessary to

avoid assuming that political representation is a process that distorts some definite identity existing prior to it, founding it, and independent of it, the originally and finally autonomous political subject that has been posited in the background and as the foundation of the modern discourse of representation.

Water is the principle and ground of Thales' unity, and this observation is taken to be not poetry but the truth. Water is substance, the fundamental (not accidental) property, the Proper, not (from philosophy's perspective) a non-philosophical image nor a myth. What is true about Thales' water is that it is what the many share in common, what unites them and that naming it is an expression of this unity. Thales' water counters the threat of dispersing multiplicity and makes the incoherent coherent. In a way that is related, representation has come to be not only a mechanism—not just a neutral, accidental instrument—but a predominant principle and ground as well as a practical necessity for establishing the unity of the political organization of a society and for articulating and defining the republic. Political representation aims to approximate or takes as its ideal an exchange of unworkable (dangerous, anarchic) multiplicity—necessarily characterized by conflict and contest, marked by difference—for unitary order and univocal decision. The ideal of representation has come to be the true and unmanipulated realization of the political will, opinions, demands, or interests of the people made unified, realized in the One, the body politic, and the one of decision—the ideal, wild multiplicity domesticated and transformed into workable plurality through representation.

While the issue of representation in general and political representation in particular cannot be equated with or reduced to the classical problem of the One and the many (and we must be very careful not to push the analogy too far and not to take it too literally), the play between the One and the many may always be part of representation—part of what it is about. It may be useful to keep the classical aspect of this issue in mind during the ensuing investigation and not only when we get to the decisive, eighteenth-century discourse on mixed government. Insofar as it relates to problems such as that of

the One and the many, the issue of political representation is a thoroughly and profoundly, if not entirely, classic philosophical issue. First, it indefinitely repeats the valorization of the One,¹⁷ the metaphysical gesture par excellence, the figure inscribed and anticipated by Thales' water and tagged by Nietzsche. Unity, stability, and decision are what is at stake as a foundation¹⁸ is established for coherent discourse—water or the United States—and as a space is constructed out of it, a space that enables a discourse and network of power to take shape, to institute itself, and to continue. As the one who is named (elected), the ideal representative is the condensed, mobilized substance of the electorate, of the representative's constituency, and of the political subject. Second, what Nietzsche's astonished reading draws attention to is Thales' substitution of water for the unity he is seeking. Representative government is a manufactured unity, a surrogate for an organic being that would be unworkably dispersed, indecisive, and inexpressible without the substitution provided for it by representation. Hobbes already offers a concise addition to this metaphysics of substitution in *Leviathan*:

A multitude of men, are made one person, when they are by one man, or one person, represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of that multitude in particular. For it is the unity of the representer, not the unity of the represented, that maketh the person one. And it is the representer that beareth the person, and but one person: and unity, cannot otherwise be understood in multitude.¹⁹

Unity cannot be understood in multiplicity—in the many—because it cannot be without the surrogate identity of the political representative. As water provides unity to Thales' cosmos, so representation provides unity to the political cosmos.

In short, while it would be a mistake to claim that representation feeds off of Thales' water, it would also be a mistake to overlook the relationship between the problem of the One

and the many and representation. While it must be insisted that they are different problems and that the former is not just a more general version of the latter, it is also true that the newer one responds to some of the anxieties and complications that gave rise to the older one even if the concerns and stakes are very different for each. As a political discourse and practice, modern representation also reinscribes the metaphysical gestures of unification and order through substitution, as the artificial architecture of representative government is constructed as a dynamic stand-in for an autonomous and organic, but—without the mediation provided by representation—diverse and dispersed political subject.

The problem of the One and the many is an overtly philosophical problematic while political representation is a response to a practical, political range of possibilities; given the dispersal and disparity of a mass of particular subjects—of citizens—how do we pull their many wills, opinions, or diverse interests together into a general union? How do we effectively transform this multiplicity of individuals into a single, unified body politic? Plato's indefinite answer to the general philosophical form of the question of the One and the many—participation—is almost necessarily part of the first stage in answering the political form of this question, a question that might also be translated as, how do we set things up so that the many voices can participate in the (necessarily) univocal voice of the One, a voice that can choose and act, a voice that will not get lost in the cacophony? Differences, including the differences between the many political subjects, tend to generate indecision. A community and thus a government must decide. How, then, should differences get negotiated in the political sphere?

Representation offers or presents itself as a means—a tool—for making participation of the many (the voting citizens) in the One (their elected, governing body) both possible and practicable. The difference between the One and the many and political representation cannot be based upon the fundamentally philosophical profile of the One and the many and the fundamentally political, practical profile of political rep-

resentation. Such a differentiation simply reinscribes the classical metaphysical opposition between theory and practice and revives the danger of such an opposition.²⁰ Both the problem of the One and the many and that of political representation hinge on the at least tacit but decisive assertion of a transcendental signified or condition, in the name of which a substitution is made. Consequently, both are equally metaphysical. That is one of the most interesting and crucial issues here. As Dick Howard has written:

In politics, it is the danger of the One, the Prince or the Party who becomes the unification and incarnation of the Good Society. . . . In theory, the danger is also the One, the Truth or Being which is taken as the "really-real"²¹

Politics and theory are as inseparable from each other as practice and discourse and bear in common the same danger, deference to the One. So philosophy is not the only stronghold of metaphysics. (Philosophy may in fact be one of the more harmless forms of metaphysics.) This current project could be described as an investigation of the metaphysical dimensions of political representation. In its assumption of the "really-real"—of, for example, the original, willful political subject or, alternatively, of capital—the discourse and practice of political representation is as metaphysical as any philosophical resolution of the perennial problem of the One and the many. The danger here is not that of a dictatorial individual or party but of voting for the ontotheology of modern rationalism, which, despite all of its "pluralist" tolerances and its advocacy of "free" markets, may always be working toward unanimity, toward becoming a one-party system, a system of the Truth, that is, metaphysical closure, which is the end.