

Metadata of the chapter that will be visualized online

Chapter Title	Two Concepts of Populism
Copyright Year	2020
Copyright Holder	Springer Nature Switzerland AG
Corresponding Author	Family Name Warren Particle Given Name Paul Suffix Organization Florida International University Address Miami, FL, USA Email warrenp@fiu.edu

Abstract	In this paper two concepts of populism are identified, explicated, and critically discussed. Their links with underlying views of democracy are emphasized. It is argued that the second concept, but not the first concept, is both consistent with the values of pluralism and inclusion and also expresses a normatively defensible aspiration for greater economic democracy.
----------	---

Two Concepts of Populism

1

Paul Warren

2

Abstract In this paper two concepts of populism are identified, explicated, and critically discussed. Their links with underlying views of democracy are emphasized. It is argued that the second concept, but not the first concept, is both consistent with the values of pluralism and inclusion and also expresses a normatively defensible aspiration for greater economic democracy.

1 Introduction

8

In what follows I focus on two concepts of populism that are especially relevant for contemporary politics.¹ The first and perhaps most prominent concept views populism negatively. Populism is anti-pluralist in nature and contrary to the norms of liberal democracy in its appeal to tribal, xenophobic, and racist impulses. This approach finds clear expression in the recent monographs of Müller (2016) and Galston (2018). Such analyses seek to explicate the kind of threat that populism poses to democracy, identify its causes, and propose counter-measures to combat it. In short, populism is a malignancy that threatens the body politic of liberal democracies. It needs to be understood, strains of the virus diagnosed, and steps of remediation taken. It is natural to think of this as a diagnostic approach to populism. However, it should be stressed that while it seeks to diagnose, such an approach is embedded in a normative perspective regarding the nature of liberal democracy. In the background is a standard of political health and a normative theory of democracy against which populist politics are found wanting.

¹I will speak for the most part of two concepts of populism, but occasionally will use “account,” “approach,” and “conception” as synonyms.

P. Warren (✉)
Florida International University, Miami, FL, USA
e-mail: warrenp@fiu.edu

23 A second concept of populism, one typically featured in more historically ori-
24 ented accounts, sees it as a form of economic democracy rooted in a critique of
25 inequality and concentrations of economic and political power. As with the first
26 concept, it too presupposes a normative perspective of what a healthy politics and
27 political order should be like. But while there is some overlap with the explanatory
28 and normative framework of the first concept, there are important differences. Unlike
29 the first concept of populism, the second concept is typically used positively and
30 even to self-identify. Populism is not so much an object of diagnosis, but rather taken
31 as a healthy feature of democratic life. Populism and populist are used positively as
32 expressive of democratic values, including recognition of the virtues of ordinary
33 citizens and their capacities for self-government. This concept is embedded in a
34 critique of existing forms of government and politics that are skewed toward the
35 interests of the wealthy and powerful.

36 Part of my aim in what follows is to explicate the features of these different
37 concepts of populism, what they have in common, how they vary, and their political
38 salience. It is in their variations rather than in their commonality that we find what is
39 most normatively and explanatorily interesting about these two concepts of popu-
40 lism. These differences are related to questions in the normative theory of democ-
41 racy. A central point that I try to make is that the populist aspiration for greater
42 economic and political democracy is detachable from populist expressions of anti-
43 pluralism. It is the latter form of populism that is a threat to democracy. The former,
44 in my view, is congenial to democratic values. Indeed, populist aspiration is essential
45 to overcoming current democratic deficits due to increased economic inequality,
46 concentration of wealth, corporate control of politics, and dominance of neo-liberal
47 thought. The normative ideal underlying this concept of populism is more robustly
48 democratic than the first and is fully consistent with the values of pluralism and
49 inclusion. The common contemporary refrain that populism threatens democracy is
50 accurate when directed at populism described by the first concept, but inaccurate
51 when directed at that described by the second concept. It is obfuscating to criticize
52 populism as such as anti-democratic or anti-liberal. Indeed, such a focus can
53 contribute to insulating from criticism current political and economic arrangements,
54 which fall short of legitimate democratic aspirations.

55 The argument for the above claims will unfold through a critical engagement with
56 two recent books, William Galston's *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal*
57 *Democracy* and John Judis' *The Populist Explosion*. Galston provides a clear
58 example of the diagnostic approach to populism as political pathology. He draws
59 attention to anti-pluralism as a key fault of populisms of both Left and Right.
60 Nevertheless, what Galston in fact offers is an account of one concept of populism,
61 not populism as such. This limitation is directly related to shortcomings of his
62 normative views about democracy. These can be brought into relief through con-
63 sideration of John Judis' more historically informed treatment of populism. In Judis'
64 account, original American Populism and its legacy has a key role to play. It was a
65 movement for greater economic and political democracy, whose aspiration was
66 rooted in a critique of economic and political arrangements and broader democratic
67 ideals. Yet Judis' account leaves important normative and analytical considerations

implicit and unexplored. These considerations need to be brought to the fore, stated, 68
and contrasted with Galston’s concerns about populism’s anti-pluralism. My hope is 69
to use the critical discussion of these two works to identify two concepts of 70
populism, clarify what populism is, and to make the case for a pluralist democratic 71
populism that is both timely and important. 72

2 Galston: Populism as Illiberal Democracy 73

According to Galston, populist movements are forms of illiberal democracy whose 74
central feature is their “anti-pluralism.” Galston believes that internal tensions 75
constitutive of liberal democracy make it especially susceptible to populist threat. 76
But he contends that properly diagnosed and explained, remedies to these deformities 77
of liberal democracy can be developed. Thus, his task is to identify the nature 78
and causes of populism, its sources in liberal democracy, and the virtues of liberal 79
democracy that enable it to respond to the populist threat. Galston’s model of liberal 80
democracy serves as an explanatory and normative template in his analysis, diagnosis, 81
and critique of populism. 82

Galston doesn’t agree with those who think that populism is a loose category, 83
used pejoratively against political opponents, but lacking analytical or theoretical 84
substance. Indeed, he offers a quite precise definition of what he takes to be 85
populism’s essential ingredients. He writes: 86

...populism is a form of politics that reflects distinctive theoretical commitments and 87
generates its own political practice. Populists view themselves as arch-democrats who 88
oppose what they regard as liberalism’s class biases. Their majoritarianism puts pressure 89
on the individual rights and the limits on public power at the heart of liberal democracy. 90
(Galston 2018, p. 4) 91

Further: 92

Although populist movements sometimes erode or even overturn democratic regimes, they 93
are not necessarily antidemocratic. But populism is always anti-pluralist. In this key respect, 94
it represents a challenge to liberal democracy, which stands or falls with the recognition and 95
protection of pluralism. (Galston 2018, p. 127)² 96

The first thing to notice is that for Galston populism is not simply an attitude. Nor 97
is just a political strategy or form of rhetoric. It is instead an ideology: it has 98
theoretical commitments and a political practice that follows from those commitments. 99
The core of that ideology is illiberal democracy. It differs from other 100

²In these characterizations of populism different things are attributed to it that might strike the discerning reader as in tension with each other. Indeed, as I will argue below, populism as a form of democracy opposed to liberalism’s class biases (see the second sentence of the first quoted passage) need not be identified with populism as either anti-individual rights or anti-pluralist (see the last sentence of the first quoted passage and the third sentence of the second quoted passage). I thank Richard Nunan for helpful comments on this point.

101 ideologies such as socialism, libertarianism, or fascism that can be aligned on a
102 spectrum from Left to Right. The relevant ideological module in Galston's analysis
103 is extremism, whether Left or Right. For Galston, it is a virtue of liberal democracy
104 that it occupies the Center and avoids the excesses of the populist extremes. Liberal
105 democracy is a mixed system in which liberal and democratic components remain in
106 balance. Illiberal democracy is a form of democracy that bends too far to the Left or
107 Right. The direction in which it bends too far isn't as important as the fact that it
108 bends too far. Populism is a distorted form of democracy that results from the erosion
109 of its liberal components. There can be a variety of events that result in upsetting the
110 balance—changing demographics, economic crises, crises of leadership, etc. . .
111 What's politically imperative is restoring the balance.

112 But what, more precisely, do these extremist, illiberal, and anti-pluralist features
113 involve? That is, what exactly is populist democracy? As his account develops,
114 Galston identifies five main features of populism: (i) majoritarianism, (ii) a critique
115 of liberalism's class biases, (iii) a tendency to overstep individual rights and liberal
116 limits on state power, (iv) a unitary and homogenous conception of the people as
117 virtuous and elites as evil and corrupt, and (v) a political practice that relies on
118 populist leaders to challenge corrupt elites in the interest of the people (2018,
119 pp. 4–5; 35–39; 126–127).

120 These five features are not of equal importance, nor do they each pose the same
121 kind of threat to liberal democracy. Some are explicitly ideological, and others more
122 practical in nature. Features (iii)–(v) are especially dangerous in their anti-pluralism
123 (4–5) whereas features (i) and (ii) are only problematic when coupled with the more
124 specifically anti-pluralist conditions (iii)–(v). On closer examination they are not
125 necessarily anti-liberal at all; indeed, they are needed for a robustly democratic form
126 of liberal democracy.

127 Galston says that majoritarianism is an essential element of the democratic
128 component of liberal democracy. He approvingly cites Robert Dahl's formulation
129 of democratic majoritarianism (Dahl 2015). It requires that: “. . . public decisions are
130 made by popular majorities of citizens whose votes all count equally” and that
131 “democratic decision-making extends to a maximally wide range of public matters.”
132 (Galston 2018, p. 25). Dahl also includes important liberties such as freedom of
133 speech, assembly, and the press in his formulation. Furthermore, democracy requires
134 “equality of all citizens along with broadly inclusive criteria for citizenship.” (2015,
135 p. 25). But Galston argues that pure democracy—that is a political community
136 defined by these elements alone—would not avoid violations of individuals' rights;
137 nor would it be adequate to insure protection of privacy rights. This of course is the
138 traditional Millian problem of the tyranny of the majority. In short, unless tethered to
139 the liberal component democratic principles have the potential to become extreme.
140 Galston's point is perfectly sound. But looking ahead, I would here underscore the
141 importance of two of Dahl's democratic conditions as especially relevant for the
142 second concept of populism. These are the requirements that democratic decision-
143 making extends to a “maximally wide range of public matters” and that there be
144 “broadly inclusive criteria for citizenship.” (Galston 2018, p. 25). These two

requirements are central to the second concept of populism, which is defined by its aspiration to extend democratic agency both in scope and depth.³

Secondly, Galston thinks that populists criticize liberalism for class bias. Class analysis is a complicated matter and Galston doesn't elaborate on how he understands the structure of class bias. It is likely that the kind of class bias that populists might find in liberalism will vary depending on whether their populism is of the Left or Right. More consequential is that being critical of liberalism's class biases doesn't necessarily commit one to extreme democracy or anti-pluralism, just as democratic majoritarianism need not by itself be anti-pluralist. Criticizing liberalism for class bias is strictly separate from extreme democracy: one could accept that democracy needs to be limited by liberal principles, but still think it is beset by class biases. In any case, with respect to these two components ((i) and (ii) above) of populist ideology, Galston thinks that although they are potentially dangerous, they are not the worst things about populism (2018, p. 25). Neither is by itself anti-pluralist or anti-liberal.

The essence of populism in Galston's view really lies in its anti-pluralism. Its first feature is the tendency of democratic majorities to overstep individual rights and to fail to respect the limits of public power. The following passage identifies two other features of anti-pluralism:

The populist vision is dyadic. Society is divided into two opposing forces, each of which is internally homogenous, with a common interest and unitary will. One of these forces (the "people") is completely virtuous: the other (the powerful or elite) is irredeemably malign. . . . Because the good are not powerful enough to overcome the forces of darkness, they need a strong leader to defend them against the evil that oppresses them. (2018, p. 126)

Here Galston's conditions (iv) and (v) are referenced. In further delineation of condition (iv) he points out that populisms can be sorted into Right and Left depending on whether in their definition of the people they emphasize "shared ethnicity and common descent" or "class terms, excluding those with wealth and power." (2018, p. 37).

Thus, there are three defining elements belonging to populism's anti-pluralism: the tendency to overstep individual rights in favor the people, a conception of people understood as "homogenous and unitary," and the reliance on strong leaders who express the peoples' interests against elites (Galston 2018, p. 5). These conditions all focus on the "people." They include: who the people are, what the peoples' interests are, how those interests are to be expressed, who stands opposed to the peoples' interests, and what the people can rightfully do in pursuit of those interests. Pluralism, in contrast, supposes that the people are never unitary or homogenous in their interests, but always plural and diverse. It supposes that there are limits to what the

³Using Dahl's democratic desideratum that "votes count equally" the Constitution of the United States, with its Electoral College and system of Senatorial representation (two from each state regardless of population density) falls short. Further, in most U.S. voting districts what matter are pluralities and not majorities. So, it should be noted that in these respects Galston's account of liberal democracy fails to correspond to liberal democracy as practiced in the United States. I thank Richard Nunan for bringing these points to my attention.

183 people, pluralistically defined, can do within the context of exercising majoritarian
 184 decision-making. It supposes also that such decision-making is not to be channeled
 185 through populist leaders who somehow grasp the peoples' will, but instead through
 186 mediating and representative institutions through which the plurality of interests gets
 187 expressed and acted upon.

188 For Galston pluralism is a broad idea that includes not only a principle of
 189 inclusion and rejection of the notion of a unitary people, but encompasses a view
 190 about representative institutions, the rule of law, and deliberative arrangements
 191 whose aim is to institutionally represent the will of the people. It is this institutional
 192 pluralism and constitutionalism that Galston contrasts with extreme democracy.
 193 Populist movements are susceptible to demagogues who seek to eclipse mediating
 194 institutions and are willing to act contrary to the rule of law. Moreover, populism is
 195 exclusivist in its conception of the people and in that sense both anti-democratic and
 196 anti-liberal.

197 Let me summarize. For Galston all forms of populism suppose a sharp distinction
 198 between the people and elites. Secondly, populist politics are always organized
 199 around a leader who bears their collective will. This view of leadership is anti-
 200 pluralist in an institutional sense (i.e. anti-constitutionalist), recognizing little if any
 201 limits on the will of the people so expressed. Thirdly, and perhaps what's most
 202 threatening to liberal democracy, is its exclusion of those not belonging to the people
 203 defined in race or class terms. Lastly, populisms can be either on the Left or the
 204 Right, although this distinction does not figure in any significant way in Galston's
 205 normative assessment of populism. It is a form of extreme democracy irrespective of
 206 whether the people are understood in race terms or class terms.

207 **3 Some Criticisms of Galston on Populism and Democracy**

208 Absent from Galston's account of democracy is any recognition of the way in the
 209 achievement of democracy in the contemporary sense (as defined by Dahl) was the
 210 product of popular struggles; that is, struggle involving those who were excluded for
 211 reasons of class, gender, and race and who met elite resistance to their inclusion in
 212 the democratic polity. Goran Therborn's extensive comparative study of democracy
 213 charts how recent the achievement of democracy was in the West and argues for the
 214 crucial role of popular movements by workers and minorities in that achievement
 215 (Therborn 1977). It should be emphasized that the aims of these popular struggles
 216 were for inclusion within the institutional structures of liberal democracies from
 217 which the people in the relevant social categories had been excluded. Until the
 218 twentieth century elite opinion never thought democracy was a good thing and even
 219 then, as Galston recognizes in citing the Trilateral Commission Report of 1975 on
 220 the 'crisis of democracy,' elites expressed worries about 'democratic overload.'
 221 (Galston 2018, pp. 7–8). It is thus anachronistic for Galston to talk about a principle
 222 of democratic inclusion without referencing populism or popular movements, in a
 223 positive sense. Moreover, if we consider democracy's roots in Ancient Greece, the

demos or ‘people’ were originally thought of in class terms and not as an aggregation of all the individuals of the polis. Plato and Aristotle both understood the class nature of democracy, which was central to their critique of it. In short, Galston neglects the importance of popular struggle for a proper understanding of the principle of democratic inclusion.

Another worry about Galston’s account concerns his sorting of populisms into Left and Right, using as a sorting principle whether the “people” get defined in racial/national terms or class terms. Since Galston goes on to focus mainly on the Right-wing versions of populism and doesn’t elaborate on the Left-wing variety, what he says is incomplete. His analysis suggests that these forms of populism are perfectly symmetrical, except that people and elite are defined in racial terms for Right populists and class-terms for Left populists.⁴ However, what Galston fails to acknowledge is that there are fundamentally different mechanisms of power operating in the cases of race and class, and that even within these categories social context and in particular relations of domination and/or exploitation are likely to matter a great deal for any explanation or normative assessment of populism. Consider, for example, the case of colonial domination by a minority white population of a majority brown or black subordinate population (e.g. the British in India or Dutch in South Africa). Such cases are quite different both explanatorily and normatively from that of a white majority expressing populist anger against white elites who they accuse of favoring minorities or immigrants. Galston’s suggestion that forms of populism are symmetrical seems dubious.

Thirdly, once we look at historical cases, it is not evident that populism, whether class-based or race-based, is necessarily anti-pluralist. Indeed, most historical studies of the American populist movement, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section, suggest that it was tolerant and pluralist. Galston doesn’t argue otherwise, but simply ignores the important historical case of nineteenth century American populism.

A final difficulty concerns Galston’s views about representative institutions. He supposes that a system of representation requires a division between the people and elite. Representation is needed not simply for reasons of size, but because elections select those who are the best leaders and possess expertise at governing. He follows Alexander Hamilton in referring to an aristocratic coterie that competes for office in democratic elections. Such elections are consistent with what Galston calls the democratic principle. However, they are in tension with what he calls democratic psychology, which he views as one of populism’s sources. Indeed, he calls this a kind of “perennial populism” and believes that it is useful because it introduces a healthy mistrust of rulers and experts that can be a potent counter to the ever-present possibility of corruption. But Galston also thinks that too much populist mistrust can undermine democracy by weakening institutions that are needed for effective governance. Furthermore, while the suspicion of discretionary authority leads to the

⁴This contrasts with Judis’s argument that Left and Right populisms have different structures. See below p. 15.

265 need for rules, there is also populist revulsion at the bureaucracy of rules and the
 266 experts who have mastered them. This mistrust of government is a populist deformity
 267 built into the structure of liberal democracy. On the flip side, the aristocracy of
 268 experts that Galston sees as essential to democratic government has its own deformity
 269 in a mistrust of the people. The rulers think that they genuinely know what's in
 270 the best interest of the people and could achieve better results without interference
 271 from the latter.

272 No doubt there is something correct in Galston's diagnosis of these democratic
 273 pathologies. But there is also something amiss with his democratic principle and its
 274 idealized picture of an elected aristocracy of experts ruling for the good of the
 275 people. To be sure, mistrust of government is very much a source of populist
 276 sentiments; but so is the feeling of political alienation. Unmentioned are the skewed
 277 nature of democratic elections, role of money in politics, corporate-class bias of
 278 democracy in capitalist societies, and disaffection of ordinary citizens from civic
 279 engagement. Even a cursory glance at elections in the United States tells us that
 280 money plays an outsized factor that frequently determines who is able to compete for
 281 office and how political agenda are set. Rather than government *via* a meritocracy of
 282 experts, there is a deep sense that there is a ruling class, and that the people only get
 283 to choose among the members of that class or among those who are beholden to it.

284 None of these concerns regarding Galston's account of democracy undermine
 285 what he says about the importance of pluralism and the defects of movements and
 286 ideologies that are anti-pluralist. Indeed, many contemporary populist movements
 287 are anti-pluralist and for that reason are threats to democracy. But it doesn't follow
 288 that all populist movements are anti-pluralist. Furthermore, what's missing is recognition
 289 of 'democratic deficits' in contemporary liberal democracies, democratic
 290 deficits that are the target of economic populism's critique.

291 **4 A Second Concept of Populism**

292 According to a second concept of populism, it is a healthy feature of democratic life.
 293 Rather than a negative tag meant to discredit, it is used in positive self-identification.
 294 It is populism as economic democracy rather than populism as anti-pluralism. It
 295 represents an aspiration for greater democracy, but it need not be illiberal. It includes
 296 a positive estimation of democratic agency, combined with a critique of concentrations
 297 of political power, and is guided by a vision of a more egalitarian and
 298 democratic political order. It is critical of liberalism's class biases and seeks to
 299 remedy those biases through expanding powers of democratic decision-making to
 300 a wider range of public matters, including those economic matters that are not
 301 subject to democratic deliberation in contemporary liberal democracies, but considered
 302 matters of private power. This second concept of populism also endorses
 303 equality of citizens and broadly inclusive criteria for citizenship. These are important
 304 elements of a normative ideal of democracy that goes beyond the horizons of
 305 Galston's liberal democracy. Current liberal democratic societies with their deep

inequalities and concentrations of wealth and political power are woefully deficient 306
in meeting them. Therefore, according to the second approach, populism can provide 307
a timely response to the economic and political deficits of democracy. Moreover, the 308
concern for greater democracy expressed in this second concept is consistent with 309
acceptance of a widely inclusive conception of citizenship and a rejection of the 310
racist and exclusionary attitudes that characterize the anti-pluralist forms of 311
populism. 312

In *The Populist Explosion*, John Judis does not put things as I have, and doesn't 313
speak of two concepts of populism. But his account is sufficiently rich that it can be 314
usefully drawn upon to explicate the second concept of populism. Because he places 315
populism in historical perspective, he takes a wider look at populism than does 316
Galston, who is more narrowly preoccupied with current anti-immigrant forms of 317
populism. Judis also thinks it is theoretically important to distinguish between Left 318
and Right forms of populism and structures both his historical narrative and account 319
of contemporary populisms around that distinction. Judis places contemporary 320
politicians such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders within the context of a history 321
of American populism that includes the Peoples' Party, Huey Long, George Wal- 322
lace, Pat Buchanan, Ross Perot, Occupy Wall Street, and the Tea Party Movement. 323
In addition, Judis discusses a variety of European populisms, including both anti- 324
immigrant Rightist parties and Leftist groups such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos 325
in Spain. This is not the place to address all of the claims Judis advances in his 326
discussion of populism and I pass over both his account of the economic causes of 327
populism and his use of populism to explain political change.⁵ I focus on Judis' 328
definition of populism, his highlighting of economic populism, and his locating the 329
roots of American populism in the Peoples' Party. This is because a good case can be 330
made that the People's party and original populists were not anti-pluralist in any of 331
Galston's senses. However, they did possess the positive democratic features 332
outlined in the second concept of populism. Judis' more historically focused account 333
helps to clarify the second concept of populism. It also enables us to see that as a 334
form of economic democracy populism was an historical reality and that it continues 335
to hold promise. 336

Judis says that we should not treat populism as a scientific term (2016, 337
pp. 13–14). Rather it is best understood as an ordinary language concept in which 338
we will find family resemblances, but no essence that runs through all the instances. 339
Despite saying this, Judis argues that there is in fact an identifiable political logic that 340
all forms of populism share, even if forms of populism split into Left and Right: 341

The exact referent of the people and the elite don't define populism: what defines it is the 342
conflicted relationship between the two—or in case of rightwing populism three. (2016, 343
p. 15) 344

⁵Specifically, he argues that populist movements are explanatorily important because they are
“early warning” signs that the existing political order is due for structural change. He also ties the
recent explosion of populism to the long crisis of capitalism that culminated in the Great Recession
(Judis 2016, p. 157). These are intriguing claims that require further discussion, but fall outside my
immediate concerns in this paper.

345 Although the contrast between people and elites in some respect runs through all
346 the instances, populisms will differ in terms of how the notions of elite and people
347 are defined. Similarly to Galston, Judis thinks there is a shared ideological module
348 that operates both on the Left and Right; however, unlike Galston he doesn't define
349 that module as extreme or illiberal democracy. Indeed, he argues that there are
350 different structural logics operating in Left and Right populisms respectively, and
351 hence that they are not normatively or explanatorily symmetrical. He writes:

352 Rightwing populists champion the people against an elite that they accuse of coddling a third
353 group, which can consist, for instance, of immigrants, Islamists, or African American
354 militants. Leftwing populism is dyadic. Right wing populism is triadic. It looks upward,
355 but also down upon an out group. (2016, p. 15)

356 Judis, like Galston, recognizes that populism can be either on the Left or Right.
357 However, unlike Galston he does not think that Left and Right forms of populism are
358 mirror images of each other or that they are fully symmetrical in their extremism.
359 Instead Left populism is dyadic, whereas right populism is triadic. To be sure, each
360 form of populism supposes a conflict between the people and the elites, but Right
361 populism posits a third group that falls outside the scope of the people as defined by
362 the populist movement, but that is unduly favored by elites. To take an example,
363 Trump's brand of populism does not simply scapegoat immigrants and other mar-
364 ginalized minority groups, but links those groups to corrupt elites who are said to
365 advance the interests of those groups over the 'people.' This distinction is of course
366 normatively important because it implies that Right-wing populism is necessarily
367 anti-pluralist in endorsing "exclusionary nationalism." (Judis 2016, pp. 154–157).
368 Because Judis is more interested in the descriptive and explanatory features of
369 populism he does not explore the normative significance of his Left/Right distinc-
370 tion. But he is plainly more favorably inclined toward Left forms of populism, even
371 if he doesn't try to provide support for that inclination. Normatively speaking, Judis'
372 Right-wing populism has the anti-pluralist features that we find in the first concept of
373 populism. Moreover, it seems to largely lack the positive features contained in the
374 second concept. While it employs rhetoric about the economic plight of ordinary
375 workers and their betrayal by elites, Right populism does not address itself in any
376 concerted way at the problem of growing inequality or concentrations of economic
377 power and wealth. Nor does it valorize citizen participation or empowerment in
378 democratic institutions, but instead is largely anti-institutional in its posture and
379 relies on demagogues to advance the interests of the people.

380 However, not be misconstrued, my argument is not that the two concepts of
381 populism line up with Left and Right populisms generally. Populisms of the Left can
382 be anti-pluralist, authoritarian, and demagogic as well, and hence fall under the first
383 concept. The point rather is that a populism that fits the second concept and
384 combines an aspiration for greater economic democracy with a commitment to
385 pluralism and inclusion is a political possibility. This is where Judis' focus on the
386 American populist movement and Peoples' party is relevant and Galston's mainly
387 ahistorical account of populism unhelpful.

There have been a number of historical studies of the American Populist movement and the Peoples' party. While Judis provides a helpful summary (2016, pp. 22–28), the work of historians Postel (2007, 2017) and Nugent (2013) can be drawn upon to define its features further. American Populism refers to a late nineteenth century political movement, which was also represented by the Peoples' Party. It was based in the Midwest, West, and South and was largely agrarian, but also engaged in coalitions with the labor movement. The populists had a number of electoral successes, winning governorships and legislative offices, and their legacy was enormously important for early 20th progressivism and the New Deal. Postel points out they proposed a number of reforms in a desire to achieve a more just society:

...a progressive income tax; government regulation of industry and public ownership of railroads and banking; a flexible national currency and farm credits; and union rights and the eight-hour day for workers. (Postel 2017, p. 135)

While they had an agrarian basis, they also called for greater labor rights and at times sought an alliance of small farmers and workers (Postel 2017, p. 136; Wright and Rogers 2011, p. 365).

In addition to their economic agenda, they were intent on demanding greater democracy and countering the corporate control of government. They tried to extend democracy in a number of ways including calling for the direct election of senators and championing women's suffrage. They practiced a form of fusion politics that threatened the hegemony of the Republican and Democrat parties, eventually leading the latter to adopt legislation that made their electoral success more difficult (Wright and Rogers 2011, p. 362). To be sure, the populists supposed conflict between the people and the elites. However, they didn't fabricate this conflict which had a real basis in the social, economic and political conditions of the time.

The claim that the populists were nativist and anti-Semitic was famously made by Richard Hofstadter in his influential book *The Age of Reform* (1955). It came to be known as the revisionist thesis. It was revisionist because as Nugent states, prior to Hofstadter's intervention, the "prevailing interpretation of the Populism of the 1890s was benevolent and approving." (Nugent 2013, p. ix; see also D'Eramo 2013, p. 8). Hofstadter's thesis was put forward in the context of the Cold War and McCarthyism. It maintained that original populism had racist and intolerant features that had morphed into McCarthyism. As both Postel and D'Eramo argue, this was part of an ideological effort by Cold War liberals to discredit mass movements (Postel 2017, pp. 136–137; D'Eramo 2013, p. 16).

There is now consensus among historians that Hofstadter's revisionist thesis has been largely refuted. Nugent writes, "nativism and anti-Semitism, or conspiracy-mindedness and small town ignorance" (Nugent 2013, p. xi) did not in fact characterize populism. Rather it was characterized by a concern with "economic, social, and distributive justice and a willingness and eagerness to use government to redress grievances, end corruption, and rein in the unregulated power of banks and corporations, especially railroads." (Nugent 2013, p. xi).

431 To go back to Galston's conditions for populism, we find that nineteenth century
432 American populism certainly endorsed democratic majoritarianism and a critique of
433 liberalism's class biases; but we don't find any desire to use majority rule to invade
434 privacy rights or to extend the power of the government inappropriately. Yes, there
435 was a desire to use the government, and hence not a Tea-Party-like revulsion at
436 government. But only a *Lochner*-era jurisprudence could suppose that the populists'
437 reform proposals would constitute a tyranny of the majority. Nor did the populists
438 think of the people as homogenous and unitary. They sought racial justice and were
439 coalition builders from diverse occupational and ethnic groups. Lastly, they did not
440 seek a strong or charismatic leader to be the bearer of their interests. Their endorse-
441 ment of William Jennings Bryan was done strategically and as part of their fusion
442 politics. They organized widely, had educational societies and reading groups, were
443 politically strategic, and sought to make reforms within the existing system. Of the
444 five features of illiberal democracy that we identified in our reconstruction of
445 Galston's concept of populism, the American populists plainly lack features (iii)-
446 (v) which were the main anti-pluralist conditions. They were committed to major-
447 itarianism, to expanding decision-making, and they criticized liberalism's class
448 biases. But uncoupled from features (iii)-(v) these features are not necessarily
449 anti-pluralist. Furthermore, we see the positive democratic features identified in
450 the second concept: a view of the people as capable of collective self-government,
451 a critique of corporate power and wealth inequality, and a vision of a more egalitar-
452 ian and democratic society.

453 Populism, while critical of existing economic and political arrangements, is not
454 anti-institutional as such, and need not be linked to a crude form of majoritarian
455 democracy; nor need it rely on charismatic leadership or vanguardism. Even today a
456 number of progressive thinkers and politicians identify with this brand of economic
457 populism. It is plainly not motivated by anti-pluralism in any of the senses of anti-
458 pluralism identified in Galston's discussion. It doesn't require exclusionary politics,
459 nor rejection of representative institutions. More positively, what it offers is a
460 critique of democratic deficits traceable to concentrations of economic and political
461 power. It views the people as virtuous only in the sense that it embraces the
462 possibility of collective self-government.

463 It might be objected that American populism of the People's Party is of historical
464 interest, but not of any relevance for contemporary politics. Times have changed.
465 And, populism, whatever it might have been in the late nineteenth century, has
466 changed. It might be said that the refutation of Hofstadter's revisionist thesis is moot.
467 Demagoguery and anti-pluralist movements of the Right and Left are the present-day
468 expression of populism. It is nostalgic and wishful to suppose that populism can be
469 both democratic and pluralist.

470 My response is twofold. First, Piketty (2014) provides a solid empirical basis for
471 the claim that we currently have levels of wealth and income disparity rivaling the
472 Gilded Age. More recently, Kuttner (2018) has provided a detailed account of how
473 the Golden Age of post-war capitalism, which saw historical levels of both economic
474 growth and increased income equality, has unraveled in the last 40 years due largely
475 to an assault on economic and political democracy. The relaxation on the controls of

capital movement, deregulation of finance, and assault on labor are all key elements 476
 in Kuttner’s narrative, to which he convincingly links the hollowing out of democ- 477
 racy. Indeed, he ends his book by calling for a new, left form of populism (Kuttner 478
 2018, pp. 258–282). Similarly, a number of politicians have self-identified as 479
 populist. In so identifying their intent is not anti-pluralist, but rather to call for 480
 greater economic and political democracy. While wishful thinking is a danger in 481
 normative political philosophy, so is adaptive preference formation—scaling back 482
 one’s aspirations too far, so that when a formerly desired option becomes a possi- 483
 bility, it is no longer desired (Elster 1983). 484

5 Conclusion 485

One might be tempted to reject one or other of the two concepts of populism I have 486
 identified on the grounds that they are not ‘true’ populism. One might say, endorsing 487
 the second concept of populism, but not the first as capturing true populism, that 488
 Trump or Orban, are not genuinely populists, but authoritarian nationalists. On the 489
 other hand, one might also say, endorsing the first concept of populism, but not the 490
 second, that Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren are not populists, but social 491
 democrats. Instead, I have followed the path Isaiah Berlin famously took with 492
 respect to the concept of freedom (Berlin 2002). There are two concepts of populism. 493
 They each identify central features of the populist phenomenon. Perhaps more 494
 importantly, they have different explanatory and normative implications. It would 495
 be a mistake to ignore this complexity. Further, while populism as anti-pluralism 496
 threatens democratic norms, populism as economic democracy seeks to expand 497
 democracy, including the crucial democratic values of pluralism and inclusion. It 498
 is a form of populism worth wanting. 499

References 500

- Berlin I (2002) [1969] Two concepts of liberty. In: Hardy H (ed) *Liberty*. Oxford University Press, 501
 Oxford 502
- D’Eramo M (2013) Populism and the new oligarchy. *New Left Rev* 82:5–28 503
- Dahl RA (2015) *On democracy*. Yale University Press, New Haven 504
- Elster J (1983) *Sour grapes*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 505
- Galston W (2018) *Anti-pluralism: the populist threat to liberal democracy*. Yale University Press, 506
 New Haven 507
- Hofstadter R (1955) *The age of reform*. Vintage Books, New York 508
- Judis J (2016) *The populist explosion*. Columbia Global Reports, New York 509
- Kuttner R (2018) *Can democracy survive global capitalism?* W.W. Norton and Company, 510
 New York 511
- Muller JW (2016) *What is populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 512
- Nugent W (2013) [1962] *The tolerant populists*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 513

- 514 Piketty T (2014) *Capital in the twenty-first century* (trans: Goldhammer A). Belnap Press of
515 Harvard University, London
- 516 Postel C (2007) *The populist vision*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- 517 Postel C (2017) What we talk about when we talk about populism. *Raritan* 37(2):133–155
- 518 Therborn G (1977) The rule of capital and the rise of democracy. *New Left Rev* 103:3–41
- 519 Wright EO, Rogers J (2011) *American society: how it really works*. W.W. Norton, New York

520 **Paul Warren** is Professor of philosophy at Florida International University (Miami) where he also
521 serves as Department Chairperson. He has published articles in the *Social Theory and Practice*, *Res*
522 *Publica*, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *Archiv fur Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, *Canadian*
523 *Journal of Philosophy* and other journals and scholarly collections. His principal teaching and
524 research interests are in the areas of social and political philosophy, Marxism, and ancient Greek
525 ethical and political thought. He has been the recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities
526 Research Award.