EXPANDING THE BORDERS OF DEMOCRACY:
DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND POPULISM

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this dissertation is to expand democratic theory, by comparing and contrasting two of the most important contemporary paradigms of democratic thought: the theory of deliberative democracy and the theory of populist democracy. The dissertation asserts that the deliberative democratic theory does not discuss the issue of power as thoroughly as it should, and that it does not treat the matter of inclusion and exclusion with the seriousness that it deserves. The dissertation proposes that populist mobilization is a necessary corrective to the shortcomings of deliberative democracy. Finally, the dissertation explores ways in which deliberation and mobilization can be institutionalized in ways that are conducive to more democratization. The authors examined in the course of this dissertation are: Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls, Mark Warren, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Kurt Wayland and Torcuato Di Tella, among others.
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I dedicate this dissertation to Pablo, my husband, the love of my life.
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INTRODUCTION:

POPULISM, THE GHOST THAT HAUNTS DEMOCRACY

The 20th century might very well be remembered as the first time in history in which people came to think that democracy is rational. This idea, which might appear commonsensical to us, implies a break with a millennia-old tradition of thought in political theory.

Indeed democracy was regarded for almost 2500 years as incompatible with rational and just rule, from the time that Plato and Aristotle set the foundations of political theory, to some point in the middle of the twentieth century. For it is well known that Plato viewed democracy as the fourth worst regime, out of five possible types; and Aristotle thought that democracy was the degradation of the superior form of politics that he called polity. For both, democracy, the rule of the demos, or mass, was marked by demagogy, instability, and anarchy.

Mistrust of democracy was almost universal until well into the nineteenth century, and it confirmed the political common sense of men like Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, or the writers of the American constitution. For all of them, popular participation in government matters was good only if it could be limited to some matters and concentrated in the appropriate hands. They mistrusted and feared the activism of the masses, and went to great lengths to develop measures with which the political system
could be wired to limit of popular activism.

But then an interesting thing happened. Within a very short span of time—a mere century and a half—most of us became convinced not only that democratic politics is compatible with rationality, but that it is in fact the only rational form of rule. Democracy and rationality are now seen as mutually reinforcing. Only a democratic regime, it is often said, can be rational and just.

Today, the identification of rationality with the rule of the demos does not strike anybody (with the possible exception of some stubborn autocrats, certain fundamentalists, and some democratic skeptics educated in the teachings of Leo Strauss) as scandalous. This is, in itself, an astonishing achievement and one of the explanations for the explosive expansion of democracy in the twentieth century throughout the globe. It is not that we have adopted democracy despite its irrational tendencies, but, rather, that we have done so because we believe it is the more rational form of government.

Upon closer examination, however, even the most optimistic democrats would have to acknowledge that the identification of democracy and rationality was only possible after some radical alterations of the idea of democracy itself. Up to a certain point, if we can say that democracy is compatible with rationality and Plato could not, it is because we are talking about two very different phenomena. When somebody says “democracy” today, chances are she does not mean the kind of radical, participatory and direct form of self-rule to which Athenian democrats aspired but a much more moderate and tame hybrid regime, involving representative government, liberal protection of minorities, a
fairly de-politicized public life, and the differentiation of the spheres of the state, the market, and the private sphere—all of which was either unknown or anathema to the ancient Greek idea of democracy. Moreover mass capitalism and mass culture have transformed representative liberal democracies even further, creating the kind of large-scale, over-institutionalized, bureaucratized, big-party regime that is called “mass democracy”.

The historical process of trial and error that created our contemporary liberal democracies has trimmed their more “democratic” features. Within our current political institutions, the people do not deliberate but their representatives do, the powers of the majority are counterbalanced to protect the rights of the minorities and individuals, and the powers of the state are tethered by checks, balances, and an independent judiciary. Through these constraints, the radically democratic potential of democracy is carefully harnessed to achieve two other non-democratic goals: political stability and the protection of private rights.

Much has been gained by the trimming of democracy: a sense of stability, a commitment to peace and the rule of law, the expansion of the private sphere and the protection of pluralism and diversity have been gained. Each represents a valuable historical acquisition.

Also, it would be hard to argue that the rationalization of democracy has not brought about a wider rationality in political life. For one thing, democracies do not seem to go to war with one another. After 1945, there have been no global armed conflicts, and
the peaceful ending of the Cold War surprised even the most hawkish among hawks and emboldened democrats worldwide. The developed countries enjoyed half a century of unprecedented expansion of the quality of life of their citizens, thanks to the combination of liberal democracy and a capitalist economy. Given this record, it seems obvious that the final push to eradicate irrationality from democratic politics is at hand.

And yet we find that time and again political irrationality of a certain kind continues to appear, like a repressed side of politics that just won’t go away. Maybe there is something here that deserves a second look and a more open-minded evaluation.

**Populism: the Ghost of Democracies Past, Present, and Future**

The intrinsic “irrationality” of democracy is most clearly embodied in populist mobilization, that ancient ghost that, like some stubborn specter straight out of a Shakespeare play, seems to be forever haunting democratic theory.

I came to be interested in populism an indirect way. My primary interest—theories of civil society—brought me into close contact with democratic theory. I quickly became interested in the so-called deliberative democracy paradigm, especially in the writings of Jürgen Habermas, Marion Iris Young, Joshua Cohen, Andrew Arato, Mark Warren, and Seyla Benhabib. It was clear that it constituted the most cohesive, articulated and well-thought-of normative vision of democracy available. But my interest in this contemporary literature did not diminish my love for long dead theorists of republican
rule, such as Aristotle and Nicoló Machiavelli. In fact, the more I read the contemporary literature the more I found striking parallels between these two bodies of literature.

At one point, however, and a long time before the topic of this dissertation became clear in my mind, I began to notice a strange and interesting fact: even though more than two thousand years separated Aristotle and Plato from the contemporary deliberative democracy theorists, and despite the fact that the democratic regimes each of them had in mind at the time of writing were very different, they were haunted by a common fear.

Let’s take three quotations. The first one belongs to Aristotle, the second one to Jürgen Habermas, and the third one to Guillermo O’Donnell:

Another kind of democracy is where all have a part in the offices provided only that they are citizens, but law rules. Another kind of democracy is the same in other respects, but the multitude has authority and not the law. This comes about when decrees rather than law are authoritative, and this happens on account of popular leaders. For in cities under a democracy that is based on law a popular leader does not arise, but the best of the citizens preside; but where the laws are without authority, the popular leaders arise.\(^1\)

…a robust civil society (...) can blossom only in an already rationalized life world (...) Otherwise, populist movements arise that blindly defend the frozen tradition of a life world endangered by capitalist modernization. In their forms of mobilization, these fundamentalist movements are as moderns as they are antidemocratic.\(^2\)


Delegative democracies are grounded on one basic premise: he [...] who wins a presidential election is enabled to govern the country as he sees fit, and to the extent that existing power relations allow, for the term to which he has been elected. The President is the embodiment of the nation and the main custodian of the national interest, which it is incumbent upon him to define. (...) Since this paternal figure has to take care of the whole nation, it is almost obvious that his support cannot come from a party; his political basis has to be a movement, the supposedly vibrant overcoming of the factionalism and conflicts that parties bring about.\(^3\)

The first piece was written to illuminate the democratic politics of the city of Athens twenty four hundred years ago, at a moment when democracy was besieged on all sides; the second was written by a German philosopher writing at a time of peace and prosperity in the West; and the third one belongs to a political scientist who writes about democracy in semi-peripheral countries and is one of the founders of the so-called “democratic transitions” school.

The authors of these three statements are speaking, however, about the same thing. There is fear and loathing of populism reflected in these three quotations, a fear and loathing that seemingly spans the ages. They are referring to what they see as a particular pathology of democracy: a mobilized and unruly people who, manipulated by a demagogic, personalistic leader, rise to replace the rationality of the law with the

irrationality of popular will.

At the same time, none of these three quotes say much about populism, other than to identify it as the opposite of good democratic governance. They suggest that populism is a democratic aberration;\(^4\) they warn us that democracy must be protected from mobilized publics and demagogic leaders, and not much else is said on the matter. Reading such statements I began to see populism as a kind of ghost, forever threatening democracy.

The parallelism of these fears seemed striking to me, and it started me down a path of thought that surprised me. Questions begun to take shape in my mind: is democracy condemned to be haunted by populism? How can it be that, while modern democracies seem to have been able to solve so many problems that once seemed intractable (the tyranny of the majority, the legitimation of representation) populism seems still to haunt it at every turn? Can the threat it poses be eradicated? Should it be eradicated? Or are we talking about something that is part of democracy and perhaps even a positive part of it? I will attempt to answer these questions in the course of this dissertation.

\(^4\) In the sense that, while authoritarianism is the opposite of democracy and usually is referred as something that comes from outside democracy to stifle it, populism is an aberration or corruption that grows inside of democracy Sometimes authoritarian rule is theorized to be the final stage of populist mobilization, as Plato does in his *Republic*. In the *Republic*, an unruly, populist democracy creates such a state of anarchy that the people begins calling for a strong leader that creates some sense of order. But tyranny, even if it is generated by populist democracy, is a different type of regime for Plato. Moreover, a tyranny can come to being without the aid and abetting of populist mobilization, and a tyrant might grab power by force and without the type of mobilizatory support that would be required to call it populist. Some, like Hannah Arendt and Gregory Luebbert, distinguish between “traditional” and “mobilizatory” tyrannies. (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Meridian Books, 1954. Gregory Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.)
The first chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to an in-depth discussion of the epistemological foundations of the theory of contemporary democracy. In that chapter, I begin by giving an overall view of the theory, its normative claims and the epistemological grounding for those claims, as well as the sometimes non-explicit assumptions that underlie such claims. Later on, I divide the broader theory of deliberative democracy into two sub-theories of deliberative democracy, which I call ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ versions of deliberative democratic theory. These two families diverge in their understanding of reason: the first family asserts that reason is species-dependent, while the second one claims that it is culture-dependent. The first family is loosely connected with the writings of Jürgen Habermas, while the second one finds inspiration in the works of John Rawls. I end this chapter with two criticisms to the theory of deliberative democracy: that is usually employs a definition of reason that is too narrow, and that, because of its insufficient theorization of power and the dialectical relation between inclusion and exclusion, it ends up, paradoxically, legitimating the creation of ‘repressed politics’ and potentially un-democratic abuses of power.

In the second chapter, I discuss the inextricable relation between democratic politics and conflict and describe two types of political reason: institutional reason and antagonistic reason (In this section I briefly discuss the theories of agonistic democracy). The first type of reason is closely connected with deliberative politics and functions as its prerequisite. The second type of reason is connected with populist mobilization and functions as its precondition. I end the chapter with the claim that both forms of reason
are part and parcel of an over-arching democratic politics and should be understood in those terms.

The third chapter presents a discussion of Aristotle’s and Machiavelli’s argument about populism. These authors allow me to make three arguments, i.e., that populism is not a creation of late-modernity, but it is part and parcel of all forms of democratic politics; that economic and social stratification and inequality guarantee the existence of periodic outbursts of populist mobilization; and that the best solution to the “populist problem” is not repression but accommodation and tolerance of heightened political conflict.

In chapter four, I move on to a revision of the Aristotelian and Machiavellian notions of the mixed regime. Because my focus is the relation between populist politics and class, I find these notions to be a very useful corrective to the liberal, Lockean versions of the term, which are concerned with the functional differentiation of the powers of government and do not talk about class. Machiavelli and Aristotle envision the mixed regime as a mechanism for accommodating class differences and for allowing class antagonisms to play out in a constructive manner.

In chapter five, I confront the concept of populism directly. I reconstruct the use of this term in 20\textsuperscript{th} century mainstream political science, with a discussion of the “classical” authors (such as Seymour Lipset, Gino Germani and Torcuato Di Tella) as well as the more recent figures (Ernesto Laclau, Margaret Canovan, Kurt Weyland.)

Chapter six is dedicated to re-assessing the normative potential of the theory of
deliberative democracy in the light of some of its empirical implications. In this chapter, I make the claim that equal representation is the number one condition for fair and just deliberations and identify the tendency towards class-bias as the most important empirical threat to it; and I make an argument that populist mobilization is a corrective already available in democratic politics against such bias.

In chapter seven I reassess populist mobilization, in a way that is similar to the reassessment of deliberative democratic theory done in chapter six. In chapter six, I discuss the normative potential of populist mobilization and the threats it can present to liberal democracy. I identify two threats that are specific to populism: the danger of totalization and authoritarian leadership. In this chapter I also highlight the differences between “classical” populisms, which were mobilizatory, future-oriented, and inclusive, and the “neo-populist” phenomenon, which is de-mobilizatory, exclusive, and past-oriented. The chapter ends with a section in which two correctives to the populist anti-liberal edge are identified: deliberative institutionalization and the routinization of a movement into a political party.

In chapter eight, finally, I discuss the two forms of democratic reasons, deliberative and populist, and the way in which they can be institutionalized under present-day social and economic conditions.

Finally, I end up with a comparison between the two types of contemporary populism: that which is found in Latin American countries, such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador, and that which is episodically present in developed Western
societies such as Italy, France, and the US.
For one thing, Orlando had a positive hatred of tea; for another, intellect, divine as it is, and all-worship-ful, as a habit of lodging in the most seedy of carcasses, and often, alas, acts the cannibal among the other faculties so that often, where the Mind is biggest, the Heart, the Senses, Magnanimity, Charity, Tolerance, Kindliness, and the rest of them scarcely have room to breathe.

Virginia Wolf, *Orlando*.

**CHAPTER ONE:**

**DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND THE PROMISE OF REASON**

In this chapter, I will attempt several tasks. First, I will provide a brief review of the theory of deliberative democracy, and I will highlight its more positive features, including the contribution it makes to the contemporary debate about democracy. Then, I will discuss two families of such theories, which I call ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ theories of deliberative democracy. Lastly, I will offer some criticisms of them.

The first criticism is that the theory employs a narrow definition of reason that too often resembles instrumental rationality. Such a narrow definition of reason obscures and excludes other forms of political action that, though not deliberative, also have a rationality of their own.

Moreover, by not providing an adequate and thorough discussion of the concepts of
power and conflict, deliberative democratic theory ends up running the risk of becoming self-defeating: deliberative democracy proposes to eliminate or democratize power but it is, in fact, predicated on the use of power to create the conditions for deliberation. These conditions include the exclusion of certain groups which are judged to be unwilling to deliberate or be incapable of doing so. If the matter of who decides who is to be excluded (and on what grounds) is left un-theorized, deliberative democratic theory might end up serving the current power structures instead of acting against them.

**A Summary of Deliberative Democracy Theory**

Deliberative democracy aims at bringing reason into democratic politics, through a force that is already present in day to day life and can be mobilized to re-enliven politics. This force is deliberation:

The most complete theories of deliberative democracy—Habermas’ for example—aim to address (...) democratic pathologies (...) and to identify and deepen the democratic possibilities that have opened as a result. Deliberative democrats hold that democracy can be revived and expanded, *piecemeal*, by utilizing many of the political forms that already exist or have been found by experimentation such as constitutional procedures, associations, social movements, decentered party structures, and public spheres.\(^5\)

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The most compelling feature of deliberative democracy theory is a promise to link politics and reason. The promise of deliberative democratic theory rests on the claim that deliberation creates rational political outcomes. As Jürgen Habermas puts it: “the democratic procedure is institutionalized in discourses and bargaining processes by employing forms of communication that promise that all outcomes reached in conformity with the procedure are reasonable.”

In short, the ideal of deliberative democracy rests on a strong epistemological claim: that “deliberative democracy is [...] a more rational means of making political decisions than any other available method.” This is a strong claim indeed: if granted, it would indeed point the way to a higher, more promising form of politics.

Deliberative democratic theory wants to bring to fruition the old dream of creating order out of chaos by finding a source of power that is based not on force, or numbers, but on reason. For deliberative democrats, the best form of politics is a regime in which reason is brought to bear through public dialogue. Deliberative democracy links good politics to reason, and in turn anchors reason in communication and deliberation. Deliberative democratic theory promises to reinvigorate politics, not through an appeal to emotions or sentiments, but through the introduction into politics of a higher form of rationality. Good deliberation is that form of public communication that is oriented to

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6 Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 304.

7 Warren, Mark E., Deliberative Democracy, forthcoming, Chapter 8, p. 31.
understanding as opposed to forms that are oriented toward intimidation, mobilization and even pandering. Understanding-oriented communication exists when the speakers are engaged in an attempt to persuade one another in good faith.\footnote{8}{“[A]s soon as the illocutionary forces of speech acts take on an action-coordination role, language itself provides supplies the primary source of social integration. Only in this case should one speak of “communicative action”. In such action, actors in the roles of speaker and hearer attempt to negotiate interpretations of the situation at hand and harmonize their respective plans with one another through the unrestrained pursuit of illocutionary goals. Naturally, the binding energies of language can be mobilized to coordinate action plans only if the participants suspend the objectivating attitude of a observer, along with the immediate orientation to personal success, in favor of the performative attitude of a speaker who wants to \textit{reach an understanding} with a second person about something in the world. (...)} Communicative action, then, depends on the use of language oriented to mutual understanding.” Jurgen Habermas, \textit{Between Facts and Norms}, p. 18, emphasis added.}

Deliberative democratic theory starts from a diagnosis: the problems of contemporary democracies are, at heart, a cognitive matter. The cluttering of public reason—by mass media, by technology, by the differentiation of market spheres, of bureaucratic entities, of social groups and tribes—makes it impossible for common, ordinary people to make sense of the political environments they inhabit. In keeping with its diagnosis, the promise of deliberative democracy is bringing about more clarity and rationality into public matters. The ideal of deliberative democracy is summed up in a few words: “most democrats consider deliberation, as one of many kinds of communication, to be the ideal means for making collective judgment.”\footnote{9}{According to Mark E. Warren. Warren, Mark E., \textit{Deliberative Democracy}, forthcoming, p. 4.}

Deliberative democrats’ wager is simple: they argue that, when properly institutionalized, public deliberation produces better public judgments. Communicative reason, created in and through certain procedures of public argumentation, can increase
the democratic legitimacy and rationality of the political outcomes. For this to happen, the key is to institutionalize the kind of public discursive situations that bring forth and maximize the rationality of the speakers, so that they can deliberate rationally and, therefore, come to rational conclusions.

Deliberative democratic theory seeks to rejuvenate democratic praxis through the institutionalization of public deliberation. Deliberative democrats argue that there are two kinds of power at play in democratic politics. One is the strong but inauthentic power that is created by the forces of money and political authority. The other is the more modest, but more authentic, power that is created in the communicative arenas of civil society and the public sphere. To minimize the second kind of power it is necessary to curtail the first kind of power—and to do so it is necessary to protect the spaces in which deliberation takes place from the intrusion of money and authority. According to deliberative democrats, contemporary democracies have become prey to two opposite but equally damaging tendencies: a pull towards bureaucratization and rationalization on the one hand, and a pull toward irrationality and fanaticism on the other. It is the rationality of democracy that has been lost. To counterbalance these trends, the theory wants to replace the contemporary concept of power—one that links it with economic or ideological domination—with a viable conception of “communicative power”\(^\text{10}\) that is

\(^{10}\) The concept of “communicative power” comes from Hannah Arendt: “[w]hen the Athenian city-state called its constitution an isonomy, or the Romans spoke of the \textit{civitas} as their form of government, they had in mind a concept of power and law whose essence did not rely on the command-obedience relationship and which did not identify power and rule or law and command. It was to these examples that the men of the eighteen-century turned when they ransacked archives of antiquity and constituted a form of
based on the empowering effects of rational dialogue and discussion.

The most fundamental wager of deliberative democracy, then, is that deliberative political institutions make for better political outcomes because the outcomes generated through such deliberation tend to be more rational, and hence superior to, those achieved through other means.

Two assumptions support this claim. The first has to do with the structure of the human mind; deliberative democracy assumes at the very least a general human tendency toward rationality. The second has to do with the structure of language: deliberative democrats also assume the presence of a universal rationality ontologically already present in or “under” natural language and everyday discourse.

These two assumptions about language and the human mind support the claim that public discourse has positive effects on individual rationality. The proponents of deliberative democracy argue that public dialogue develops in such a way that it creates “understanding-oriented” discourse, and that public deliberation draws people toward understanding-oriented types of communication. According to these principles, most people, when participating in public communication, are oriented by a desire to

government, a republic, where the rule of law, resting on the power of the people, would put an end to the rule of man over man, which they thought “a government fit for slaves.” Hannah Arendt, On Violence, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970. p. 40.

11 “Even the most fleeting speech-act offers, the most conventional yes/no responses, rely on potential reasons. Any speech act therewith refers to the ideally expanded audience of the unlimited interpretation community that would have to be convinced for the speech act to be justified and, hence, rationally acceptable.” Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norm, p. 19.
understand others and make themselves understood.

These premises form the epistemological infrastructure of deliberative democratic theory. Based on such a portrayal of human reason, language and deliberation, the theory constructs a vision of deliberation that envisions it as a process that gently but relentlessly compels the participants to compare and contrast their different world-views and arguments, give and receive reasons, and finally select among the different points of view presented, choosing the argument that is more rational.

Deliberative democrats are not, however, unreasonable optimists. Understanding-oriented communication does not mean understanding-reaching communication. Understanding-oriented communication operates, as it were, within sight of the moving target of consensus: while consensus might never be reached, it operates as a horizon under which understanding-oriented dialogue can take place. Deliberative democratic theory does not ask for actual consensus, but only for a consensus-seeking attitude. If the speakers are oriented toward consensus, then they will seek it, giving and hearing reasons and arguments. If the deliberating body does not agree on one course of action and is pressed—as it always is—to finish deliberation, the body might resort to some second-best compromise, perhaps reached through some non-deliberative procedure such as simple-majority voting. But even this second-best solution is going to be better than one achieved without deliberation. While consensus might be very well remaining forever over the horizon, it is the talking itself that matters. If all the speakers are willing to speak their minds and listen in return, it will be easier to move beyond particular interests
and reach acceptable compromises, even in the absence of unanimity.

This concept of *communicative rationality* carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the *unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech*, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their life-world. [...] An assertion can be called rational if the speaker satisfies the conditions necessary to achieve the illocutionary goal of reaching an understanding with at least other participant in communication. [...] From the one perspective the telos inherent in rationality appears to be *instrumental mastering*, from the other *communicative understanding*.

There is something inherently appealing in this image of politics as an activity by which citizens engage in the give-and-take of politics and discourse. Underpinning this theoretical architecture, is a very compelling perspective on the phenomenon of human communication and, more precisely, the powers of day-to-day language. Deliberative democrats argue that, in language, ideas and arguments reveal their self-conveying force:

I have provided a broad characterization of the theory of deliberative democracy. I want now to discuss two issues raised by this theory in more detail: its rejection of metaphysical claims and its proceduralism. For the sake of clarity, in this section I will

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13 “Corresponding to the openness of rational expressions to being explained, there is, on the side of persons *who behave rationally*, a willingness to expose themselves to criticism and, if necessary, to participate properly in argumentation.” Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, p. 19, emphasis added.
treat what is a diverse and complex body of literature as if it were a single, unified entity.

**The Theory of Deliberative Democracy’s Rejection of Metaphysics**

One of the main claims of deliberative democracy is that it is post-metaphysical. This means that its proponents aim to steer clear of any broad, general claims about the structure of reality or human nature. But the rejection of metaphysics must be done carefully because the theory wants to retain a normative edge, avoid moral relativism, and utilize an idea of reason that is not synonym for rationality.

These theorists refuse to let go of the brighter side of the Enlightenment heritage: its quest for autonomy, self-actualization and emancipation through reason. But, being well-versed in the post-Enlightenment critiques of rationalism—especially that of Max Weber—they believe that reason has to be reconstructed. Their answer to the post- and anti-Enlightenment thinkers is, in Jürgen Habermas words, that “modernity is an incomplete project” and that, while it must certainly be re-formulated, it continues to have emancipatory potential. Reason is thus defined, in the light of critical theory, as the capacity to take a reflective stand from which to analyze, comprehend and, if necessary, criticize the conditions within which it exists. In the words of Iris Marion Young, the aim is “both to reveal moral deficiencies in contemporary democratic societies and at the same time to envision transformative possibilities in those societies.”

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The first step in the reconstruction of reason is the acknowledgement that we are now living in a post-metaphysical world and that all forms of metaphysical language must be abandoned. Political theory in the post-metaphysical era must be “non-foundational”; it must avoid the kind of broad generalizations that fall under the rubric of “ontology”. Theorists must avoid ontological foundationalism by constructing their theories with historically situated, empirically precise judgments that do not claim to be universally true.

But at the same time deliberative democratic theory rejects post-modernism and any kind of moral relativism. The appropriate theoretical path is to avoid metaphysics while allowing for judgments on political matters to be passed—moral relativism is to be avoided as much as moral teleology. The key issue, then, is to find grounding for moral judgments, but without falling back into discredited teleology and transcendental metaphysics. The way to do this is a form of deliberative critical theory.15

Critical theory aspires to an immanent critique of history.16 It seeks to ground

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15 In this regard, deliberative democratic theory sees itself as the heir of critical theory, a path first opened by G.W. F. Hegel and later continued by the Frankfurt School. “The task of philosophy is not stubbornly to play the one against the other, but to foster a mutual critique and thus, if possible to prepare in the intellectual realm the reconciliation of the two in reality. Kant’s maxim, ‘The critical path is still open’, which referred to the conflict between the objective reason of rationalistic dogmatism and the subjective reasoning of English empiricism, applies even more pertinently to the present situation.” Max Horkheimer, The Eclipse of Reason. New York: Continuum International Publishing, 1974, p. 174.

16 Critical theory seeks to fulfill the Kantian ideal of individual autonomy by finding firmer grounds for reason than simple empiricism, while all the time rejecting any form of philosophy of natural law. The first inspiration for critical theory was Hegel’s criticism of the Kantian formulation of the categorical imperative. Kant himself strove to find a general principle that could bring together freedom and determination; one that would make possible to replace the causation of natural law by the autonomous determination of a self-given law of reason. This self-given binding principle is the categorical imperative.
universal ethics in the very ideals that human cultures have created. Critical theory reconstructs the empirical ethical aspirations that all cultures possess and confronts them with the social and cultural structures of power and opportunity.

Reflection is a central component of critical theory because it is necessary to evaluate the norms and ethical standards that are present in any given culture to determine which ones should be universalized. Deliberative democratic theory is unique because it argues that the kind of critical reflection that is the basis for moral and political autonomy can only be practiced collectively.

Deliberative critical theory is based on the assumption that human beings possess an inherent capacity for reason or, at the very least, reasonableness. This capacity is obscured, but no eliminated, by ‘distorting’ factors such as power relations, ideology and unreflective traditional beliefs.

However, this solution presents problems as well because the categorical imperative is itself also a formal rather than a substantive principle. It does not predicate what to do in each particular case, it is “contentless.” It is neither a law nor a principle but a rule with which to test empirical moral propositions—presented as “ought to” propositions”—against a formal “measure” given by reason. The categorical imperative and critical reason itself also end up mired in formalism. Hegel argued that formal principles—such as the categorical imperative—simply cannot ground morality. “Pure” “formal” morality is something so utterly lacking in meaning that it can never operate as a moral compass if not guided by ethical values that are historically created.

Habermas’ placing of ideology at the same level than religion or ethnic alliance is especially problematic. Ideology is a purely modern form of political identification; while it is acknowledged that ideologies are largely irreducible to one another, they are supposed to be based on rationally developed premises based on certain fundamental substantive values. Habermasians like James F. Bohman use of the word ‘ideological’ as synonym with ‘irrational’, ‘disingenuous’ or ‘manipulative’. Democracy itself was an ideology during the 19th century: the ideology of the democratic-minded working class. It is not clear how, or why, could democracy separates itself of an ideological component. (See James F. Bohman, “Communication, Ideology, and Democratic Theory,” in The American Political Science Review, Vol. 84, No. 1. Mar., 1990, pp. 93-109.)
We call a person rational who interprets the nature of his desires and feelings [Bedürfnisnatur] in the light of culturally established standards of value, but especially if he can adopt a reflective attitude to the very value standards through which desires and feelings are interpreted. Cultural values do not appear with a claim to universality, as do norms of action. At most, values are candidates for interpretations under which a circle of those affected can, if occasion arises, describe and normatively regulate a common interest. [...] For this reason, arguments that serve to justify standards of value do not satisfy the conditions of discourse. In the prototypical case they have the form of aesthetic criticism.\(^1\)

Religious or cultural values are, according to Habermas, of a different nature than arguments. Because of this, they can be subjected to criticism, reflection and, ultimately, evaluation. For Habermas, the very linguistic nature of arguments, and especially of public arguments, sets them apart from self-expressive uses of language or aesthetic criticism. Arguments are linked to reason in a way that other uses of language are not. There is, then, a linguistic reason that is capable of transcending differences of culture, class, gender, and age, if not time and space. And linguistic reason and the rationality it creates are bestowed on the procedure of deliberation itself.\(^2\)

Moreover, deliberative democrats also want to take social differentiation and

\(^{1}\) Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, p. 20, emphasis added.

\(^{2}\) “Habermas shifts the focus of the critique of reason from forms of transcendental subjectivity to forms of communication. Kant, moving within the horizon of individual consciousness, understood objective validity in terms of structures of *Bewusstein überhaupt*, consciousness as such in general. For Habermas, validity is tied to reasoned agreement concerning defeasible claims. The key to communicative rationality is the appeal to reason or grounds—the unforced force of the better argument—to gain intersubjective recognition for such claims. Correspondingly, Habermas’ idea of a “discourse ethics” can be viewed as a reconstruction of Kant’ idea of practical reason in terms of communicative reason.” Thomas McCarthy, “Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue” in *Ethics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Oct. 1994, pp. 44-63, p. 45.
pluralism we find in modern capitalist societies seriously. They take into account Marxist, feminist and post-colonial criticisms to the false neutrality, universality and disembodied-ness of the Enlightenment philosophy. Deliberative democrats argue that in modern bureaucratic capitalist societies, the differentiation of functional spheres and the separation of ethics for morality are a given. Even more, differentiation and pluralism are in fact good: they are the conditions for the kind of liberal regimes and modern civil societies that are the requisites for a deliberative democracy. Pluralism and diversity create effective conditions for the replacement of reified, un-reflective forms of authority with others based on rationality, autonomy and free communication.

For Habermas, it is this modernization of the cultural spheres of the lifeworld that makes possible (but not necessary) the development of post-traditional, communicatively coordinated and reflexive forms of association, publicity, solidarity, and identity. This cultural modernization, as its results feed back from specialized institutions into everyday communication, powerfully fosters the transformation of the cultural-linguistic assumptions of the lifeworld and their mode of operation in relation to action. A modernized, rationalized lifeworld involves a communicative opening-up of the sacred core of traditions, norms, and authority to processes of questioning and the replacement of a conventionally based normative consensus by one that is “communicatively” grounded.

20 “Post-conventional societies include a pluralism of moral positions, closely attached to moral identities. These identities are in turn embedded within religions, secular moralities, and life-styles. A hallmark of the post-conventional era is that we choose our moral identities from among an array of possible options—even if this amounts to affirming an inherited identity. Our choices are not, of course, choices in the sense, say, that we choose what to consume. They are self-constituting, defining who we are, what we stand for, how we present ourselves to others. They are deeply embedded in personality formations, and are ‘choices’ only in the sense that (typically) we now are aware that they are not universal: in principle, we could alter our convictions even though it might be psychologically dislocating to do so.” Mark E. Warren, Deliberative Democracy, (forthcoming) p. 24.

However, differentiation and pluralism are not easy to reconcile with claims to universality—even a potential or hypothetical universality. The reconciliation of a critical reason that wants to retain a universal edge with historicity and cultural pluralism is not easy. Deliberative democratic theory proposes that it is possible to reconcile the two as long as the theory has a limited goal:

If modern pluralism seriously means renouncing the idea that philosophy can single out a privileged way of life or provide an answer to the question, How should I (we) live? That is valid for everyone, it does not, in Habermas’ view, preclude general theory of a narrow sort, namely, a theory of justice. Accordingly, the aim of his discourse ethics is solely to reconstruct the moral point of view from which questions of right can be fairly and impartially adjudicated.\(^\text{22}\)

But the problem of how to square pluralism with the need for collectively-binding political decision making does not go away easily. Any political discussion—from foreign policy to taxes— touches upon broader questions, such as how we should live. Political deliberations have the added weight of being binding for the entire community. It is never an easy task to reconcile the aspiration for universal justice with the equally valid aspiration to respect the diversity of cultures, religions and moral orientations.

This debate is often framed as a stark but ineludible choice between ethnocentrism and radical relativism.\(^\text{23}\) Deliberative democrats want to find a third way between the

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\(^{22}\) Thomas McCarthy, “Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue,” p. 46.

\(^{23}\) One possible theoretical, ethical and political solution is to embrace one unified system of ethics,
two. They refuse to choose between “traditions” and “universalism”. If they are aware that “the burden of proof on moral theorists who hope to ground a conception of justice in something more than the considered convictions of our political culture is enormous,” they also want to “show that our basic moral intuitions are rooted in something deeper and more universal than particularities of our tradition.” They see the task of a critical deliberative theory as “reflectively to articulate, refine, and elaborate—that is, to “reconstruct”—the intuitive grasp of the normative presuppositions of social interaction that belongs to the repertoire of competent social actors in any society.”

There are conflicting visions, however, of the way in which this reconstruction must be undertaken, or what the extension of this “common core” of shared moral insights is. But despite these differences, the critical aspect of the theory comes from an emphasis on public, open and self-reflective deliberation. By replacing the idea of an abstract reason with a deliberative procedure, the theory is able to ground rationality in the world of politics rather than in the sphere of private morality.

But problem remains. A ‘rational person’ might desire to engage in self-criticism, but one still has to wonder what the theoretical preconditions are that make such criticism even possible. What does ‘being rational” mean? For deliberative democratic

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theory, the ground for rationality lies in two conditions: a general tendency towards rationality and the structure of argumentative language. Deliberative democrats want to construe critical reason in a way that is completely non-transcendental and non-a priori. But it is hard to see why some form of universal (if not transcendental) rationality is still not a theoretical precondition for deliberative critical theory. (This assumption of a species-specific tendency towards rationality is one of the most problematic aspects of the theory. This is an issue that I will deal with in the section on ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ definitions of reason.)

**The Theory of Deliberative Democracy’s Proceduralism**

The need for “public reason” and for the “community of speakers” of a “reading public” is a common theme in Kant’s political philosophy; his community of public communication, however, is less a phenomenological reality than a theoretical, though necessary, hypothesis. Kantian impartiality is achieved by “comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man;”  

communication but in a self-activated exercise of the mind and the imagination.  

Deliberative democrats find such an indirect approach to intersubjectivity to be utterly unsatisfactory. Political action and moral judgment always happen in the world, they recognize, among a plurality of peoples, ideologies and cultures. Deliberative democrats, having rejected the ideal of a disembodied transcendental consciousness, come to the conclusion that it is necessary for the participants in dialogue not only to imagine the other’s position but to seek him out and effectively ask him what he thinks. In deliberation, the “community of speakers” can thus be actualized and the thoughts and preferences of others actually become known instead of merely being imagined.

The theoretical ‘discovery’ of deliberation makes several things possible. First, it permits the theorist’s question to advance from the isolation of the transcendental ego to the intersubjectivity of the community of speakers. Second, it enables the theory to relate moral judgment to the historical-ethical circumstances of the particular community in the midst of which deliberation is taking place. Third, it allows the theory to avoid the twin dangers of a metaphysic of reason, on the one hand, and the radical individualism of a purely subjective idea of reason, on the other. Deliberation brings reason down from the noumenal heavens of Kantian transcendentalism and it roots it in the ‘middle ground’ of intersubjective dialogue. Lastly, it redefines impartiality: while no individual can claim

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26 “[C]ritical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut itself off from all “others.” To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides.” Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p. 43, emphasis added.
to be completely impartial, the community of speakers can move towards it.\footnote{Validity [in the case of political issues] is a product of procedure, suggesting that institutionalized deliberation can establish the epistemic validity of claims and assertions. Second, like science, politics works at the frontiers of validity, although in a different sense. Political issues emerge precisely when epistemic authority is questioned or has yet to be established. In politics, factual issues are intermingled with normative and expressive issues, so that the authority deriving from knowledge of facts is not as easily achieved within political contexts as within the relatively insulated institutions of science. This is why experts—scientists, economist and the like—do not have the kind of authority they may be able to take for granted in other contexts. In politics, they must argue and convince." Mark E. Warren, \textit{Deliberative Democracy}, forthcoming, p. 33.}

Deliberative democracy breaks, at least partially, with all of the earlier theories of democracy. Broadly speaking, theories of democracy have tended to fall into one of two camps: they are either “procedural” or “substantive”. “Substantive” theorists often regard procedures as secondary to the achievement to a set of substantive political, social and economic goals: equality, universal justice, and the elimination of class domination. ‘Substantive’ theorists tend to define democracy in terms of the goods it must make available to all, while ‘procedural’ democrats argue that democracy must not commit itself to any a priori set of ends and should only define itself in terms of democratic means.\footnote{Authors with a “substantive” definition of democracy include C.B. Macpherson, Giovanni Sartori and Ian Shapiro. (C.B. Macpherson, \textit{The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. Giovanni Sartori, \textit{The Theory of Democracy Revisited}, Chatham: Chatham House, 1987. Ian Shapiro, \textit{The State of Democratic Theory}, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.)} “Procedural” theorists refuse to link democracy to any given set of substantive ends, because, they argue, that would mean arbitrarily and \textit{a priori} choosing one given set of substantive ends, at the expense of other possible sets. They note that the most important substantive theory of democracy, Marxist socialism, ended up in an oppressive
regime that stifled pluralism and dissent in the name of achieving equality. In their view, democratic theory has to be minimalistic; it has to theorize democracy as a set of fair and just procedures for collective decision making and a catalogue of individual- and minority-protecting rights, and nothing more. As Adam Przeworski once famously wrote, democracy should be understood “…only (as) a system for processing conflicts without killing one another,” and not as the quest for perfect equality, justice, and welfare.

Deliberative democratic theory attempts to synthesize these two paradigms. It approaches the question of how to theorize what the best kind of democracy is from a different perspective. It does not commence by discussing which goals democracy should distribute—since it is not committed, a priori, to any given set of ends—nor does it restrict itself to the purely formal aspects of political procedures—it disregards voting paradoxes and such. Deliberative democracy unties the Gordian knot of procedures vs. end-goods by assuming that there must be one kind of procedures that generates the best

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29 “Country X is a political democracy, or a polyarchy: it holds regularly scheduled competitive elections, individuals can freely create or join organizations, including political parties, there is freedom of expression, including a reasonably free press, and the like. Country X, however, is marred by extensive poverty and deep inequality. Authors that agree with a strictly political, basically Schumpeterian, definition would argue that, even though the socioeconomic characteristics of X may be regrettable, this country undoubtedly belongs to the set of democracies. This is a view of democracy as a type of political regime, independent of the characteristics of state and society. In contrast, other authors see democracy as a systemic attribute, dependent on the existence of a significant degree of socioeconomic equality, and/or as an overall social and political arrangement oriented toward the achievement of such equality. These authors would dismiss country X as "not truly" democratic, or as a "facade" version of it.” Guillermo O’Donnell, “Poliarchies and the (Un)Rule of Law in Latin America.” Paper presented at the Meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, September 1998, p.3.

30 Adam Przeworski, Democracy and the market: political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 95. The “procedural” definition of democracy has come to be nearly hegemonic in political science.
outcomes. If its proponents can sustain this claim, that would mean that a set of “good” procedures could be identified as always producing the best outcomes; and this in turn would make it possible to overcome once and for all the separation between democratic form (the procedures) and democratic content (the outcome of such procedures.)

The question of what the “best” political outcome is must be, of course, pursued further. We know that a “good” political outcome must be a just one, but what does “justice” mean? Deliberative democrats define a just political decision as one that has been achieved through a participatory procedure in which most, if not all, the people that are going to be affected have some say. The key issue here, however, is that while a purely procedural understanding of the political process cannot say anything about the substance of the law, norm or decision made, deliberative democrats believe that they can reasonably argue that if the law, norm or decision has been achieved through a participatory deliberative procedure, it can be assumed to be a good one.

Validity [in the case of political issues] is a product of procedure, suggesting that institutionalized deliberation can establish the epistemic validity of claims and assertions. Second, like science, politics works at the frontiers of validity, although in a different sense. Political issues emerge precisely when epistemic authority is questioned or has yet to be established. In politics, factual issues are intermingled with normative and expressive issues, so that the authority deriving from knowledge of facts is not as easily achieved within political contexts as within the relatively insulated institutions of science. This is why experts—scientists, economist and the like—do not have the kind of authority they may be able to take for granted in other contexts. In politics, they must argue and convince.  

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31 Mark E. Warren, Deliberative Democracy, forthcoming, p. 33.
Thus explained, deliberative democratic theory sounds highly attractive. It promises to break the deadlock between the parsimonious, elegant and neutral, but ‘contentless’ and formalistic definitions of democracy and the ‘content-filled’ but potentially oppressive substantive ones. It does so, moreover, with a neutral approach that does not advocate one given political ideology but simply calls for the participation of all groups and individuals in public deliberation.

Now, it is important to keep in mind that the key condition that makes it possible to vouch for the legitimacy of a deliberatively-made decision is the participation in the deliberations of all those who are going to be affected by it. And this presents a problem. For if this truly is a necessary condition, then the theory needs to move into the direction of identifying the empirical factors that impede equal representation, and how to change them. This would mean confronting the issue of power (especially, but not only, economic and political power.) But this means moving the theory into the kind of substantive structural social critical theory—such as Marxism—that deliberative democrats want to avoid.

The issue of power relations and, more broadly, social and cultural conditions is a source of internal differentiation in the field of deliberative democracy. If authentic deliberation is only possible after power has been equalized, then deliberation is possible only in certain societies, in which very precise social, economic and cultural conditions
are in place. If communicative reason is only dependent on the procedures, then reason will prevail, no matter under which circumstances.

‘Thick’ and ‘Thin’ Models of Reason and Deliberation

I have spoken so far of ‘deliberative democratic theory’ as if it were a single, unified theoretical family. It is in fact a large, diverse and often contentious collection which has at least two ‘camps’ that diverge precisely on the two issues we have just discussed: the universality of reason and the exclusivity of culture.

The first sub-family is based on Jürgen Habermas’ works on communicative action and discourse pragmatics; the other on John Rawls’ liberal contractualism. I will label the first theoretical family “thick” deliberative democracy, and “thin” deliberative democracy the second. ‘Thick’ theories of deliberation are based on the idea that hidden inside the structures of public discourse is a ‘core’ of communicative reason and that, because this ‘core’ is not culture- but species-specific, public deliberation can move towards impartiality and consensus—or at the very least, towards a potential or hypothetical consensus. The ‘thick family recognizes the inspiration of the theory developed by Jürgen Habermas in his many works, including, but not limited to, The

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Theory of Communicative Reason and Between Facts and Norms.

The ‘thin’ camp rejects Habermas’ idea of a teleological, universal reason and embraces more limited and culture-specific forms of deliberation aimed at a somewhat more contingent but equally legitimate form of consensus-seeking; they assume that while it is impossible to vouch for the ultimate rationality of the results of deliberation, deliberation continues to be nonetheless the best way of achieving legitimate democratic results. This second family of thought is loosely related to John Rawls’ dialogic liberalism, as it was developed in A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism.

In a seeming paradox, the teleological idea of reason advanced by the “thick” camp makes room for a more open and inclusive definition of deliberation, while the narrower, “post-metaphysical” definition found in the works of people in the ‘thin’ camp can have precisely the opposite effect: to legitimize the exclusion of cultures and groups and their political claims from public deliberation.

**Jürgen Habermas’ ‘thick’ concept of deliberation**

‘Thick’ theories of deliberation start from the assumption that there is a non-contingent relation between public deliberative decision making and rational political outcomes; that is, that public and open deliberative decision making yields more rational and just political outcomes. To justify this posited relation between deliberation and rationality, ‘thick’ deliberative democrats link reason with the philosophy of language. In
a nutshell, they argue that a rational, deliberative politics is possible, or at least thinkable, because reason, as a capability embedded in language, transcends the particularities of interests, culture and history.

If Jürgen Habermas, according to Thomas McCarthy, wants to argue that “basic moral intuitions (...) include an “abstract core” that is not culture- but species-specific,” this does not mean that ‘thick’ theories of deliberation imply a metaphysic of reason or any kind of transcendental subjectivity. The ‘locus’ of reason is no longer the consciousness of a transcendental mind but the factuality of the ‘language games’ played in everyday linguistic communications. Deliberative democratic theory wants to be normative, but not prescriptive:

Discourse theory invests the democratic process with normative connotations stronger than those found in the liberal model but weaker than those found in the republican model ... discourse theory reckons with the higher-level intersubjectivity of processes of reaching understanding that take place through democratic procedures or in the communicative network of public spheres.

Jürgen Habermas avoids foundational thinking as well as a metaphysics of transcendental reason—whether in its a-historical Kantian formulation, or the historicist Hegelian one—


34 “Once one gives up the philosophy of the subject, one needs neither to concentrate sovereignty concretely in the people nor to banish it in anonymous constitutional structures and powers. The “self” of the self-organizing legal community disappear in the subjectless forms of communication that regulate the flow of discursive opinion- and will-formation in such a way that their fallible results enjoy the presumption of being reasonable.” Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 301.

35 Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 299.
and he is careful never to make ontological claims about the ‘nature’ of the human ‘mind’, ‘spirit’, or ‘consciousness’. There is in his theory neither a transcendental subjectivity nor a teleology of the inherent rationality of the human mind. Rather, the key idea is that deliberative politics is a more rational form of politics because public discourse brings about or calls forth a form of reason that lies beneath, or within, linguistic communication. The analytic philosophy of language, or what is usually referred to as the “pragmatics of language,” does the job without having to make strong claims of a teleological nature.36

To provide a thorough description of the highly technical subfield of contemporary philosophy of language is beyond the goals and capabilities of this dissertation. It will do to say that analytic philosophy of language is built upon the works of modern philosophers, mainly the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein and subsequent analytic philosophers, such as Gottlob Frege and Karl-Otto Appel, and that it offers a description of language that suits deliberative democrats perfectly. For analytic philosophy, language serves primarily a communicative purpose, that is, it is above all a communicative device that employs signs as conventional markers with which men can refer to the world that surrounds them.37

36 Although one could argue that the ontological claims are simply placed elsewhere: when there used to be a teleology of transcendental reason, or of history, or of the human mind, now lies a teleology of language understood as an impersonal rational-logical structure of communication.

37 To the analytic of language it is opposed a phenomenology of language. Language phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, take offense of the reduction of language to its function of acting as an information algorithm: “We must recognize first of all that thought,
Analytic philosophers, of course, do not ignore that there are many possible uses of language and that communication ‘oriented towards understanding’ always coexists with many other kinds of communications: oriented to self-expression, community-building, humor, manipulation, or deceit. Analytic philosophy asserts that, regardless the variety of possible linguistic uses—or ‘genres’—language is, at its core, referential. The ‘added’ or ‘secondary’ uses of language—poetic, manipulative, humorous—cover a ‘core’ of assertive power related to the basic function of linguistic reference.

The important point is that we can read the structure of thought from the structure of sentences; (...) sentences are those elementary components of grammatical language that can be true or false. (...) At any rate, the members of a language community must proceed on the performative assumption that speakers and hearers can understand a grammatical expression in identical ways. Every complete thought has a specific propositional content ... but beyond the propositional content, every thought calls for a further determination: it demands an answer to whether it is true or false. 38

Habermas’ ‘thick’ concept of deliberation is based on the assumption that that, among the many different modes of language—aesthetic, expressive, imperative and so on—the original one is language oriented towards understanding39. Language is oriented towards

in the speaking subject, is not a representation, that is, that it does not expressly posit objects or relations. The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought. In the same way the listener does not form concepts on the basis of signs. The orator’s ‘thought’ is empty while he is speaking and, when a text is read to us, provided that it is read with expression, we have no thought marginal to the text itself, for the words fully occupy our mind and exactly fulfill our expectations, and we feel the necessity of the speech” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1962, p. 180.

38 Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, pp. 11-12, emphasis added.

39 Jürgen Habermas, Theory of Communicative action, p. 18.
understanding because language is above all a cognitive and communicative tool that is used for referring to the world. Because all language uses share this common feature, speakers belonging to a community of language can isolate their “validity claims” and pass judgment about their “truth value”.40

On this fundamental assumption rest a number of related premises: that there is a special force associated with communicative action oriented toward understanding;41 that individual rationality can be defined as the “capacity for and sensitivity to the weighing of reasons in speaking and acting—or as the capacity to discern whether a particular sentence refers correctly to the world or not”;42 and that there is a distinction between the ‘core’ validity of a sentence and the ‘added’ elements such as its aesthetic value or the references to power.43


41 “Participants in argumentation have to presuppose in general that the structures of their communication, by virtue of features that can be described in purely formal terms, exclude all force—whether it arises from the within the processes of reaching understanding itself or influences it from the outside—except the force of the better argument (and thus it also excludes, on their part, all motives except that of a cooperative search for truth). From this perspective argumentation can be conceived as a reflective continuation, with different means, of actions oriented to reaching understanding”. Jürgen Habermas, Theory of Communicative Action, p. 25, emphasis added.


43 The conceptual tools for this enterprise is the distinction between illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. Whereas a perlocutionary act is defined by “the peculiarly asymmetrical character of concealed strategic actions”, a “speech act composed of an illocutionary and a propositional component is presented as a self-sufficient act”. Jürgen Habermas, Theory of Communicative Action, p. 288, cited in Gerald Wagner and Heins Zipprian, “Habermas on Power and Rationality,” p. 104.
Habermas wants to thread together a pragmatics of language (also commonly referred to as an “ethics of language”) with a theory of political action. The fundamental claim is simple: in deliberation, people talk because they want to convince other people of their views. Their sentences and speeches make certain validity claims whose “truth-value” can be ascertained by careful weighing and discussion. Deliberation, then, is the process through which the participants discuss, measure and adjudicate the validity of the assertions made by different speakers. The movement of deliberation, as it were, has the capacity to change the speakers’ minds: it has “motivational force.” In this respect, deliberation has the power to “non-coercively coerce” speakers through the contrasting of validity claims.

We use the term *argumentation* for that type of speech in which participants thematize contested validity claims and attempt to vindicate or criticize them through arguments. An *argument* contains reasons or grounds that are connected in a systematic way with the *validity claim* of a problematic expression. The “strength” of an argument is measured in a given context by the soundness of the reasons; that can be seen in, among other things, whether or not an argument is able to convince the participants in a discourse, that is, to motivate them to accept the claim in question.

This does not mean that deliberation always works smoothly, or that understanding is

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44 The discursive character of opinion- and will-formation in the political public sphere and in parliamentary bodies, however, also has the practical sense of establishing relations of mutual understanding that are “violence-free” in Arendt’s sense and that generative force of communicative freedom. The communicative power of shared convictions issues only from structures of undamaged subjectivity. This interpenetration of discursive law-making and communicative power formation ultimately stems from the fact that in communicative action reasons also have motivational force.

45 Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, p. 18, emphasis added.
always achieved. But Habermas’ key claim in this respect is that unburdened deliberation will tend to move towards understanding, regardless of time and place, because it is in the nature of language to do so. The problem is the distortions to communication that take place in contemporary societies. The most common distortions fall into four main categories: power relations, ideology\textsuperscript{46}, private interests—especially of the economic kind—and traditional beliefs and values. Power, interests, passions and traditions: all these are distortions that need to be eliminated, or at least suspended, to make room for undistorted dialogue, i.e., to make possible the kind of communication which allows for the validity claims of different arguments to be compared so that the best, more rational argument can demonstrate its convincing force.

Habermas presents the ideal speech situation as a purely theoretical model of undistorted communication. An ideal speech situation has the following features:

(a) Processes of deliberation take place in argumentative form, that is, through the regulated exchange of information and reasons among parties who introduce and critically test proposals. (b) Deliberations are inclusive and public (...) (c) Deliberations are free of external coercion. The participants are sovereign insofar as they are bound only by the presuppositions of communication and rules or argumentation. (d) Deliberations are free of any internal coercion that could detract from the equality of the participants. [...] (e) Deliberations aim in general at

\textsuperscript{46} Habermas’ placing of ideology at the same level than religion or ethnic alliance is especially problematic. Ideology is a purely modern form of political identification; while it is acknowledged that ideologies are largely irreducible to one another, they are supposed to be based on rationally developed premises based on certain fundamental substantive values. Habermasians like James F. Bohman use of the word ‘ideological’ as synonym with ‘irrational’, ‘disingenuous’ or ‘manipulative’. Democracy itself was an ideology during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century: the ideology of the democratic-minded working class. It is not clear how, or why, could democracy separates itself of an ideological component. (See James F. Bohman, “Communication, Ideology, and Democratic Theory,” in The American Political Science Review, Vol. 84, No. 1. Mar., 1990, pp. 93-109.)
rationally motivated agreement and can in principle be indefinitely continued or resumed at any time. Political deliberations, however, must be concluded by majority decision in view of pressures to decide. ... (f) Political deliberations extend to any matter that can be regulated in the equal interest of all. ... (g) Political deliberations also include the interpretation of needs and wants and the change of prepolitical attitudes and preferences. Hence the consensus-generating force of arguments is by no means based only on a value-consensus previously developed in shared traditions and forms of life.  

This ‘thick’ model of deliberation rests on the following four theoretical presuppositions:

that reason is present—at least potentially—in all linguistically able human beings; that reasonable objectivity is achieved by subsuming the particulars into universals; that rational arguments have self-evident consensus-forming force; and that, while relations of power, strength, and other inequalities do exist in contemporary societies, they do not make impossible the institutionalization of protected spaces for rationality.  

The ideal speech situation is of course a theoretical construct that can never be completely realized in the real world. Its utility, however, is twofold: first, it serves as a blueprint for the political design of real life participatory institutions; second, it can be utilized as a regulatory ideal against which to judge the rationality and openness of existing processes

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47 Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, pp. 305-6.

48 The most crucial among these are parliaments and other legislative bodies, and the public spheres of civil society. The institutional criteria for a well-functioning public sphere are as follows: “First, they [the institutions of the public] preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether (...) The parity on whose basis alone the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social hierarchy and in the end can carry the day meant, in the thought of the day the parity of “common humanity”.... Secondly, discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned.... Thirdly, the same process that converted culture into a commodity (...) established the public as in principle inclusive.” Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, (Translated by Frederick Lawrence.) Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999, p. 36-7.
of public communications.

Once one gives up the philosophy of the subject, one needs neither to concentrate sovereignty concretely in the people nor to banish it in anonymous constitutional structures and powers. The “self” of the self-organizing legal community disappear in the subjectless forms of communication that regulate the flow of discursive opinion- and will-formation in such a way that their fallible results enjoy the presumption of being reasonable.⁴⁹

The ‘thick’ theories of deliberative democracy have a number of theoretical advantages. They are able to preserve the sense of historical progress that the Kantian/Hegelian philosophies of consciousness had without their historical determinism; they avoid the solipsism of the transcendental consciousness and advance into an intersubjective understanding of reason. They are also epistemologically solid, thanks to the combination of insights from linguistic pragmatics, discourse ethics and systems theory, among many others.

“Thick” theories are also, at the end of the day, more socially inclusive. Because ‘thick’ theories of deliberation posit a fuller, more universal concept of reason they are able to accept the inclusion of all aspects and dimensions of social and cultural life in deliberation. To put it in an overly-simplified manner, to argue that communicative reason lies in the very structures of natural language and discourse means asserting that reason is species- and not culture-specific. And, if that is the case, then all cultures, groups, classes, can engage fruitfully in deliberation and no issue of political life must be

⁴⁹ Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 301.
a priori deemed taboo.

Political deliberations extend to any matter that can be regulated in the equal interests of all. [..] In particular, those questions are publicly relevant that concern the unequal distributions of resources on which the actual exercise of rights of communication and participation depends. [..] Political deliberations also include the interpretation of needs and wants and the change of prepolitical attitudes and preferences. Here the consensus-generating force of arguments is by no means based only on a value consensus previously developed in shared traditions and forms of life.\(^{50}\)

However, ‘thick’ theories of deliberative democracy sometimes seem to fall back into the kind of metaphysical language that they claim to reject, implying as they do that reason is species-specific. The universalistic drive of the approach causes it to abandon the specificity of place and time it wants to retain—a contradiction that Habermas seems to be always at the verge of succumbing to.

But maybe to rely on a teleology is a small price to pay. The positive aspect of these theories is that—in an apparent paradox—by embracing the kind metaphysical assumptions that contemporary political theory frowns upon, they are able to posit a limitless deliberative process and to claim that no topic should be taboo, nobody should be excluded, and nobody’s sensitivity should be protected, because, in the end, deliberative reason will find a way to move things to a better outcome.

For instance: in Habermas’ view, the “neutrality principle” should apply to the procedure but not the topics brought up in deliberation. Other, more stringent theorists—

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\(^{50}\) Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 306, emphasis added.
most commonly, those belonging to the ‘thin’ camp that I will discuss in the next section—want to define deliberation more narrowly, in order to insure the neutrality of the speakers or to protect the private sphere from the intrusion of the public gaze. For these theorists, deliberations should only be concerned with public matters and leave private matters outside the institutions of deliberative decision-making.\textsuperscript{51} Habermas underscores the distinction between \textit{procedural} constraints on public discourse and \textit{limitations on the range of topics} that the public can discuss.\textsuperscript{52} Publics should be free to engage in deliberations about ethically relevant questions about the good life—such as what constitutes “domestic abuse”—without necessarily seeking to regulate them, since “making something that so far has been considered a private matter a topic for public discussion does not yet imply any \textit{infringement} of individual rights.”\textsuperscript{53}

‘Thick’ deliberative democrats argue that the very logical dynamic of deliberation is always able to push individuals toward a \textit{reflective} position, in which she is able to take a step back, as it were, and reflectively interrogate her own worldview and positions.

\textsuperscript{51} Feminist deliberative democrats have discussed the issue of the protection of the private sphere at length, precisely because they fear that the liberal objection against the opening of political discourse is instrumental for keeping “private” forms of abuse and domination against women invisible. “Until quite recently, feminists were in the minority in thinking that domestic violence against women was a matter of common concern and thus a legitimate topic of public discussion. The great majority of people considered this issue to be a private matter ... Eventually, after sustained discursive contestation, we succeeded in making it a common concern.” Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” in Craig Calhoun, (ed.), \textit{Habermas and the Public Sphere}, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992, pp. 109-142, p. 129.

\textsuperscript{52} Jürgen Habermas, \textit{Between Facts and Norms}, p. 312.

\textsuperscript{53} Jürgen Habermas, \textit{Between Facts and Norms}, p. 312.
Individuals, in this view, do not need to enter the deliberative process unencumbered by body and history, but they need to be able to see that their bodies and history are one particular version of a number of possibilities, all of which need to be reflectively explored. Deliberation, in this view, allows the mind to ‘go about exploring’ and to open up perspectives in a way that allows people to transcend the “provinciality of their spatiotemporal contexts that are inescapable in action and experience.”

John Rawls and ‘Thin’ Theories of Deliberative Democracy

The premises of “thick” theories regarding neutrality and the limits of public reason are hotly contested. The main charge against “thick” theories comes from authors writing within the liberal tradition, who criticize the Habermasian model for being at the same time overreaching and insufficient.

The “overreach” objection underscores the paradoxical nature of the Habermasian formulation of the ‘non-coercive coercion’ that “characterizes the binding force of communication oriented toward reaching understanding.” Critics argue that, in fact, if such a thing did exist, there would be no deliberation at all: public discourse would be at best the unveiling of a Truth that would be already there, always present for the speakers

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54 Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 323.

55 Gerhard Wagner and Heinz Zipprian, Habermas on Power and Rationality, p. 103.
to discover.

The “insufficient” objection takes aim at the epistemological conditions that must be met to advance towards the understanding-oriented communication of the ‘ideal speech situation’. Critics argue that purely procedural conditions are insufficient to guarantee objectivity in pluralist, complex, large societies such as the ones we live in today.

Most proponents of the ‘thin’ forms of deliberative democracies want to construct simpler, less exacting models of deliberation. These ‘thin’ models abandon the ideal of impartiality and replace the ”thick” model with some minimal conditions of reciprocity, respect and inclusion. The minimalist ideal of deliberation presupposes that speakers are motivated by a different set of motives: instead of being motivated by a desire to reach a consensus, they are motivated by the ‘lower’ desire of avoiding open conflict while being constrained by mutual respect. Such motivations combine to encourage speakers temporarily to consider the other speakers’ points of view, thereby adopting a broader perspective on questions of public interests. ‘Thin’ models conceive of deliberation almost as a rhetorical activity, in which the speakers engage in reciprocal argumentation, trying to “appeal to reasons that are shared or could come to be shared by [their] fellow citizens.”

Deliberation, thus, ceases to be the collective “weighing of reasons” or

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56 As Gutmann and Thompson put it: “The core idea is simple: when citizens or their representatives disagree morally, they should continue to reason together to reach mutually acceptable decisions”. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 2.

57 Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, p. 14. According to Mark Warren, the state of mind that is necessary for deliberation can be best achieved in a “cognitive” and “distant”
arguments that seek logical validation, and becomes instead a collective effort to persuade and convince using arguments that are common to that particular community.  

Proponents of ‘thin’ models of deliberation argue that ‘thick’ models are normative, idealistic and even potentially oppressive in their attempts to make ‘philosophers out of men,’ before they are even speakers. Most importantly, ‘thin’ approaches to deliberation reject the very mention of universal reason, or of anything resembling teleology. They argue that to speak of a universal capacity for judging truth claims—even if as a more limited rationality embedded in the logical structures of language—is to take a step in the direction of making teleological generalizations and constructing a foundational theory.  

Critics justify their claim that Habermas and the ‘thick’ theories engage in teleological thinking by citing paragraphs such as the following:

Anyone who engages in argument always already presupposes two things: first, a real communication community whose member he has himself become through a process of socialization, and second, an ideal communication community that would in principle be

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58 ‘Thin’ deliberative democracy thus abandons the impossible pretension of guaranteeing normatively “rational outcomes” and wants to concentrate on rendering de facto legitimate results. As Gutmann and Thompson put it, “[w]e do not assume that deliberative democracy can guarantee social justice either in theory or in practice. Our argument is rather than in the absence of robust deliberation in democracy, citizens cannot even provisionally justify many controversial procedures and constitutional rights to one another.” Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, p. 18.

59 According to Bruce Ackerman, the goal of Rawlsian liberalism is to design a doctrine that, as much as possible, “does not depend on the truth of any single metaphysical or epistemological system.” Bruce Ackerman, Social Justice in The Liberal State, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, p. 365.
capable of adequately understanding the meaning of his arguments and judging their truth in a definitive matter. 60

‘Thin’ theories of deliberation want to do away with the theoretical existence of any “ideal communication community” or anything of the sort.

To a large degree, proponents of such ‘thin’ theories of deliberative democracy are responding to the objections to the previous, ‘thick’ versions of the theory posed by two groups of critics: Communitarians and Post-Modernists.

Communitarians, such as Charles Taylor, 61 Alasdair McIntyre 62 and Michael Sandel 63 have dedicated a fair amount of work to debunking the twin myths of a universal reason and a rational unencumbered self. They have argued extensively that individuals do not enter the ‘public sphere’ or the ‘original position’ as unencumbered entities, free of all preexisting moral commitments; in fact, it is not clear that people are even able to achieve the reflective relation with their own preexisting moral commitments that is the

60 Karl-Otto Appel, quoted in Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 322. Habermas himself admits that “...this formulation could mislead one into thinking the “ideal communication community” has the status of an ideal rooted in the universal presuppositions of argumentation and able to be approximately realized. Even the equivalent concept of the “ideal speech situation,” though less open to misunderstanding, tempts one to improperly hypostatize the system of validity claims on which speech is based.” Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 322.


necessary condition for impartial deliberation to work. Men and women simply cannot
distance themselves from their bodies, their gender, their beliefs, their histories, and their
culture. In short, writers of this school do not believe in the kind of ‘context-transcending
claims’ proposed by Habermas. We are born, they argue, already enmeshed in moral and
political communities; and these communities of origin do not function as static stages or
backdrops against which deliberation takes place: they are part and parcel of deliberation
because they are part and parcel of the constitution of the participants’ selves. Culture is
not the ‘context’ of deliberation but a part of it, it is itself a dimension of deliberation.

The Communitarian objection to the universality of reason is complemented by
another objection coming from Post-Modernist social theory. In our contemporary
society, Post-Modernist theorists argue, social, religious, cultural and ethical differences
are too strong and run too deep for us to even entertain the idea that one ‘rational’
standpoint exists from which we can judge every disagreement. Under the conditions of
‘radical pluralism’ it is naive to expect people to agree on the rationality of one
argument, or even to agree on what reason is. In fact—feminists and postmodernists have
also warned about this repeatedly—the mere idea of universal reason is laden with the
danger of a potential exclusion of dissident voices through violence or absolute
indifference. There is no single Reason to be found out there, but only multiple reasons
embodied in multiple cultural and personal perspectives, each one with its own
legitimacy.⁶⁴

Responding to the Communitarian and Post-Modernist criticisms, advocates of ‘thin’ models of rationality argue that such models are more realistic, more achievable and more inclusive than the ‘thick’ version. Because of this the ‘thin’ versions have an evident appeal. They present a set of conditions for deliberation that seem at the same time to be both normative and within reach. Their goals are modest: deliberation is no longer thought of as a guarantee for the morality or justice of the outcomes, but only of their factual legitimacy. The idea is to embrace the plurality, diversity, and empirical give and take of politics.

Despite the appeal of such a posture, problems remain. Stepping down from universality into culture and context is a movement with perils of its own. The main difficulty is the paradoxical closure of reason into cultural exclusivity that comes with the movement away from universal reason.

According to Thomas McCarthy, ‘thick’ deliberative democrats mediate between critical theory and a teleology of reason—at the very least, Habermas and others in the ‘thick’ camp would agree on the statement that communicative reason is an ergon belonging to the species and not to a particular culture.⁶⁵ But if a theory abandons the

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⁶⁵ Reason, as an ideal or a potential, is species- and not culture-specific regardless of the fact that the conditions for its realization appeared first in one particular culture. This is pure Hegel, of course: all
teleological grounding of reason it becomes not less, but *more* prone, to cultural provincialism: i.e., to conclude that rationality is exclusive to one particular time and place. One prime place to look for these problems is the work of John Rawls, as he made the transition from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism* and in the process moved from a thicker to a thinner notion of reason.

*A Theory of Justice* is commonly referred to as a neo-Kantian because of its reliance on the principles of autonomy and universality. In *Political Liberalism*, however, Rawls seems to have abandoned such principles to treat liberalism as a cultural specificity. In the “last” Rawls, the concept of person that is utilized no longer comes from any philosophical analysis but is understood as reflecting a certain type of society. Reason is, in the same vein, construed as a capability for weighing reasons that is only made possible by an attitude of tolerance and respect that is not species-specific but culture-specific. The (new) Rawlsian theory of justice no longer is addressed to all rational and reasonable individuals, regardless of their situation in time and space, but only to those who are identified with the public culture that is characteristic of the liberal-democratic societies.66

After *A Theory of Justice*, the Rawlsian interest switched from decision making to kinds ideas *appear* in particular contexts; some of them are inherently rational and hence universalizable. An ethical idea can be created in a particular culture but always transcends the cultural boundaries in its journey towards universal realization.

66 Confront with Rawls’ previous definition of the original position as stated in *A Theory of Justice*: “My suggestion is that we think of the original position as the point of view from which noumenal selves see the world.” John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 255.
**decision-justification**: the process by which policy makers justify decisions to citizens.\(^{67}\)

In this regard, public deliberation is conceived as the process by which constituencies discuss and evaluate the decisions being made in the political arenas. Crucial to this model is the qualified requirement of moral neutrality.\(^{68}\) Moral neutrality refers to the demand that the participants in deliberation avoid appealing to divisive positions or comprehensive moral doctrines. The concept of moral neutrality means, in a nutshell, that only those who have explicitly abandoned any previous commitment to a given set of moral principles: whether they come from a religion, a political ideology, or even a set of strong moral imperatives.\(^{69}\) In its most extreme formulation, the neutrality principle takes the form of a sort of vow of moral silence: “we should simply say *nothing at all* about [any] disagreement and put the moral ideas that divide us off the conversational agenda”.\(^{70}\) In less radical formulations, it presents itself as the requirement that all moral

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67 “Whenever anybody questions the legitimacy of anyone’s power, the power holder must respond not by suppressing the questioner but by giving a reason that explains why he is more entitled to the source than the questioner is.” Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State*, p. 4.

68 “No reason is a good reason if it requires the power holder to assert: (a) that his conception of the good is better than that asserted by any of his fellow citizens, or (b) that, regardless of his conception of the good, he is intrinsically superior to one or more of his fellow citizens.” Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State*, p. 11.

69 The neutrality principle is loosely based on the neutrality requirements of the original position that Rawls posed previously. “It suffices to recall that people’s conceptions of the right are also bracketed. To the extent that our conceptions of the good are connected with notions of rights, they should also not be known.” John Rawls, “Fairness to Goodness,” in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (Oct., 1975), pp. 536-554, p. 538.

reasoning invoke “relatively reliable methods of inquiry”. The theoretical necessity of moral neutrality comes directly from the rejection of teleology. Religion and culture are viewed as a threat to the liberal public sphere because, it is assumed, there is no common ground from which they can be critiqued by the speakers from within. For ‘thin’ theories of deliberation—which are supposedly more attuned to pluralism and cultural difference—religion, ideology and moral commitments function like straightjackets that impede rational judgment.

Central to Rawls’ understanding of deliberation is the discussion of what must not be deliberated upon. Deliberation for Rawls happens only within the limits of a very clearly demarcated public sphere. Contrary to the Habermas—who argues that public and private are the two poles of an organically related continuum of communication—Rawls wants to demarcate public discourse in a more stringent way. In Political Liberalism Rawls defines “public” uses of reason—deliberation—as those “connected with governmental and quasi-governmental venues and functions—for example, parliamentary debates, administrative acts and pronouncements, as well as the workings of the judiciary, but also political campaigns, party politics, and even the act of voting.”

“Non-public” reason, on the other hand, is defined as what takes place in

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71 “The other requirement of reciprocity refers to the empirical or quasi-empirical claims on which moral reasoning often depends to achieve its practical purposes. When moral reasoning invokes empirical claims, reciprocity requires that they be consistent with relatively reliable methods of inquiry.” Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, p. 56.

nongovernmental venues and functions—for example, churches, universities, professional groups, and voluntary associations in civil society.\textsuperscript{73} The reduction of public reason to governmental or quasi-governmental venues and functions aims at exiling to the “private” realm discussions about comprehensive moral, religious or philosophical doctrines as well as the radical pronouncements that could potentially criticize current political arrangements.\textsuperscript{74} The reduction of the idea of public discourse to governmental or quasi-governmental decision justification is necessary because after \textit{A Theory of Justice}, Rawls relies on a conception of the rational person that identifies rationality with a certain conception of society, namely, liberal-secular Western societies. The theory is still Kantian only because the concept of person that is implicit in the culture of the liberal societies coincides in general terms with the concept of person that was delineated by Kant.\textsuperscript{75} The (new) Rawlsian theory of justice no longer addresses the totality the rational and reasonable individuals, regardless of their situation in time and space, but only those who are identified with the public culture characteristic of the liberal-democratic societies. This identification of liberal public culture with rationality,

\textsuperscript{73} Thomas McCarthy, “Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue,” p. 50.

\textsuperscript{74} Not to mention that the identification of churches and voluntary associations with “private” use of reason would give liberals like Kant and Tocqueville much pause. Note how, after these theoretical operation, public deliberation loses its critic edge and is reduced to a sort of Weberian instrumental rationality. For, if deliberation cannot touch upon any moral ends, it can only be about means. Deliberation transforms itself into some kind of administrative discussion about instrumental matters.

moreover, becomes explicitly prescriptive:

In other words, in public discussions of fundamental issues, the reasons offered on opposing sides should be ones that all might reasonably be expected to endorse in view of their shared political conception of justice. Put negatively, they should not be reasons particular to a particular comprehensive moral, religious or philosophical doctrine.\textsuperscript{76}

The condition for deliberation in the later Rawlsian version is \textbf{culture}. It appears that the exclusion of teleological statements about universal reason or even the pragmatics of language leaves no possible ground for universality, even in the hypothetical sense of somebody \textit{convincing} somebody or both changing their minds through public discussion. Moral deliberation, or even the second-best “overlapping consensus,” is not always or everywhere possible. They are the products of long processes of historical and cultural learning. Moral deliberation is possible in plural and tolerant societies that have been formed in a certain way by certain historical experiences. The implication is that other cultures, or those groups within cultures that are based on different “comprehensive doctrines,” cannot deliberate properly.

‘Thin’ theories of deliberation add cultural conditions to institutional or procedural ones. These conditions involve, according to Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, a common orientation towards reciprocity, mutual respect, and a shared deference to a secularist outlook on public affairs:

\begin{center}
Deliberative reciprocity \textit{expresses two related requirements}, one
\end{center}

primarily moral an other primarily empirical. When citizens make moral claims in a deliberative democracy, they appeal to reasons or principles that can be shared by fellow citizens who are similarly motivated (...)

The qualifying phrase “similarly motivated” indicates that a deliberative perspective does not address people who reject the aim of finding fair terms for social cooperation; it cannot reach those who refuse to press their public claims in terms accessible to their fellow citizens. No moral perspective in politics can reach such people, except one that replicates their own comprehensive set of beliefs.\textsuperscript{77}

The unintended consequence of this definition of deliberation is an argument that people who do not belong to liberal societies are not fit to deliberate publicly, since, by definition, they do not share the cultural grounding that makes such a “similar motivation” possible. In this version of deliberation, the issue of personal motivation becomes central while it was only secondary in the ‘thick’ version. The language, moreover, becomes normative: those who come from a different culture are cast as people who refuse to talk to fellow citizens in common terms because they are outside their shared moral perspective. Deliberation and justice become a matter of attitude:

The principles of accommodation are based on a value that lies at the core of reciprocity and deliberation in democracy—mutual respect. It is what makes possible cooperation in fair terms. Like toleration, mutual respect is a form of agreeing to disagree. But mutual respect demands more than toleration. It requires a favorable attitude toward, and constructive interaction with, the persons with whom one disagrees. It consists in an excellence of character that permits a democracy to flourish in the face of fundamental moral disagreement.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{77} Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, p. 55, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{78} Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement, p. 79.
The main problem with the ‘thin’ model of deliberation comes from its definition of culture. In the ‘thick’ models, as we have seen, culture is a product of deliberation, since it is created by and through language, sociability and discourse. Cultures are not fixed or unmovable things that have to be somehow ‘protected’ from criticism or change: all of them have strong ethical insights that can be taken used, shared, and taught. All of them are works in progress, existing within societies that have inequalities, injustices and power asymmetries that must be addressed and criticized, both cultural and politically.

The ‘thin’ version of deliberation de-historicizes and reifies culture, imagining that somehow criticism is a threat, and not a resource, for deliberation:

In making these justifications, we are to appeal only to presently accepted beliefs and norms of reasoning found in common sense, and the methods and conclusions of science when they are not controversial… As far as possible, the knowledge and ways of reasoning… are at rest on the plain truths widely accepted or available to citizens generally.79

The paradoxical consequence of this claim is that true liberal deliberation would only be possible if we were willing to exclude any member of the community that for some reason rejected the “plain truths” of that culture. The problem with this formulation is that it too easily opens the door to the identification of a historical-cultural contingency with normative prescription. This theoretical operation impedes or even negates the possibility of criticism and self-criticism within and between cultures. It also reifies

cultural differences: every culture has its own “plain truths” that have been historically constituted but that does mean that cultures do not, or should not, change. As McCarthy argues, “for to suppose that the stock of shared political ideas and convictions is in some way a given, there to be found and worked up, or that it could somehow be fixed by the theorists, is to hypostatize or freeze ongoing processes of public political communication whose outcomes cannot be settled in advance by political theory.”80 It is one thing to post an ideal as a norm to strive for, and it is something quite different to take an already-existing culture as normative. As Bruce Ackerman says, Rawlsian liberalism looses its critical edge:

Instead he [Rawls] is engaged with Locke and Mill, Kant and Hegel. The power of Rawls’s work owes itself entirely to his creative reshaping of abstract philosophical arguments inherited from the Western tradition. Given this fact, it is important to recall that neither Locke nor Kant nor even Mill wrote at a time when liberalism was ascendant in the “public political culture”. Instead, they wrote with the intention of changing their cultures in profound ways. So should today’s political liberals. No nation on earth has achieved the kind of social justice to which political liberalism aspires. As a consequence, every existing political culture is papered over with thousands of apologetic documents that explain why justice cannot be done. […] Political liberal would turn into provincial rationalization if it followed Rawls’s advice. […] The task is to criticize political culture, not rationalize it; to change it for the better, and struggle against authoritarian regression. 81

This outlook, moreover, involves an idea of citizenship that is identical to self-restraint.

80 Thomas McCarthy, “Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue” p. 61.

Citizens must internalize the various thematic, cultural and political limits to what can be said and argued, even to the point of agreeing to say nothing at all about moral disagreements. The problem, however, is that such an arrangement will always be relative to the existing relations of power and privilege, be they cultural, social or economic. Deliberations, conducted in this manner, will never have the capacity to advance society towards a more just future.

An Assessment of Deliberative Democracy Theory:

The theory of deliberative democracy is an extremely solid and appealing body of work. For those of us who do not find moral relativism to be satisfactory but who are also uncomfortable with overly rigid ideological prescriptions, it offers a good way out. Its way of linking procedures with the quality of final outcomes is certainly very appealing. There is much to applaud about the call for a more rational form of political governance, and it is clear that infusing more rationality into the contemporary democratic institutions would be a necessary step for their improvement.

82 “[I]f neutrality were in addition to require that ethical questions be bracketed out of political discourse in general, then such discourse would forfeit its power to rationally change prepolitical attitudes, need interpretations, and value orientations. [...] On this premise, however, the neutrality of procedure could be secured only by rules of avoidance (or “gag rules”) and would depend on received distinctions between private and public spheres, delimitations that for their part are excluded from discussion. Such a rigid constraint (...) would at least implicitly prejudice the agenda in favor of an inherited background of settled traditions. Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 309.
But this fundamental claim of deliberative democracy theory rests on an even more fundamental consideration, which is often insufficiently theorized: what exactly does “being more rational” mean in the context of contemporary politics? I raise this question because it seems to me that the (often implicit) definition of reason that the theory employs tends to be narrow, and it finally undermines the normative project it is designed to uphold.

Not I am alone in holding this view. Mark Warren, among others, has warned that the theory must avoid relying on a definition of communicative reason that is too narrow or rigid:

But neither should deliberation be constructed to narrowly—especially not as the classical ‘gentlemanly’ give and take or arguments among people who respect one another, in spite of disagreements. To be sure, the ideal political deliberation might very well look like this, exemplifying, in Seyla Benhabib’s terms, commitments to the principles of universal moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity. But we cannot define deliberation—in terms of individual’s prior commitments to reasonableness, nor to their intents to seek consensus, nor even to their respect of opponents. Barring the epistemological and political problems of identifying such commitments, it would in effect de-politicize deliberation, limiting it to the ‘easy’ kinds of politics that can take place once these commitments are secured.83

I find that, with a few exceptions such as the one cited above, these warnings are not always accompanied by a real reconstruction of the idea of reason. I do not think that it

83 Mark E. Warren, Deliberative Democracy, p. 15.
is clear what precisely is gained from the rejection of the universalistic, metaphysical and teleological overtones that were so prevalent in the earlier, neo-Kantian or neo-Hegelian Habermas. After the rejection of Kantian universalism, the theory’s concept of reason begins to look a lot like instrumental rationality. Reason was defined by Immanuel Kant very broadly, and it included the capacity for instrumental calculation, and the capacity for intuitively grasping ethical and normative ends, visual imagination and memory. Deliberative democracy’s definition of reason often resembles Weberian rationality more than it does Kantian reason. For Weber, rationality means that alternate ways of combining resources are constantly and systematically evaluated to assess whether they are the most conducive to maximum economic gain, without any attention to their ends.\footnote{“A starting balance is established and calculations are carried out before each separate transaction takes place; at every stage an instrumental assessment of the utility of potential translations is calculated; and, finally, a concluding balance is calculated and the origin of the “profit” ascertained.” Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, London: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2001, p. 153.}

The problem, I believe, rests with the theory’s proceduralism. Even the ‘thicker’ versions of the theory are designed to remain in the procedural camp, which means that deliberative democratic theory focuses on developing formal, not substantive, criteria for evaluating a norm or decision: it cannot pass judgment on the value of the norm, just on the process by which it was created. But if the ethical-political ends belong, by definition, to a realm that cannot be subject to deliberation—a view that is prevalent in the ‘thin’ versions of the theory, which has become hegemonic in the field—then this sets rather stark limits on what deliberation can accomplish. But, if it is defined thus, it is
not clear how communicative reason is something very different from instrumental rationality, in the Weberian sense of the term.

In other words, deliberative democratic theory views deliberation as the process by which individuals with a diversity of interests and opinions find a way to solve a problem that affects all of them; their task is to find a workable solution through discussion and compromise, and they must do so not out of reciprocal sympathy but because the alternatives—doing nothing or using violence—are much worse. Deliberative democrats argue that, as long as some modicum of good will and properly understood self-interest exist, the epistemological force of deliberative reason can be trusted to move deliberation along towards a reasonable outcome. But, again, the question of what a “reasonable outcome” means needs further theorization. Are there any substantive criteria with which to evaluate the results of deliberation, beyond cost-benefit analysis? It seems to me that it is easier to deliberate about matters that are, in Oakeshott’s terms, problems: policy dilemmas that are very clearly set, that involve a limited number of choices that can be judged upon using some form of efficiency standard, and that do not involve fundamental ethical/moral claims.\(^8^5\)

But how can an observer vouch for the rationality of the results of deliberation, when there is not and cannot be any criterion for evaluation other than the procedure by which

the conclusion was generated? It would be very hard to argue that empirical consensus is always and forever identical with a just consensus: there are too many examples of apparently rational consensuses revealed as sub-optimal compromises. (I shall discuss this matter in depth in chapter six.)

And, even more, there are some political situations that do not entail differences about means, but rather, radical disagreements about ends. As Weber showed, and as Oakeshott affirms, there can in fact be no deliberation about ethical-political ends, but only about means. Rationality in this sense tends to transform complex situations into “means to an end” kind of problems. In these types of situations there can indeed be understanding-oriented communication, of the kind that deliberative democracy favors. These kinds of situations call for another type of reason, another type of political action that, while it is not deliberative, is also not at all ‘irrational.’ But there is more than one type of political reason. While understanding-oriented communicative reason is certainly one of them, there are others.

This brings me to a second concern: the inadequate theorization of the issue of power and the dialectical relation between inclusion and exclusion.

To be clear, I am not arguing that deliberations should always be opened to all

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86 One corollary of deliberative democratic theory is that intractable ethical dilemmas should be ‘broken down’ into more tractable empirical problems that can be analyzed in concrete, numeric terms. This approach is sometimes advocated in issues like abortion, matters of cultural integration, or inter-religious dialogue. It is an interesting fact, however, that some important religious philosophers advocate against this road. For Emanuel Levinas, for instance, religious tolerance is not a process that can be brought about deliberatively, but that requires an acceptance of the other as other, as who she is. Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism and the Other*. University of Illinois Press, 2005.
people, all the time. This is unrealistic. As a matter of fact, in chapter six I make the case that the presence of a strong moderator with the power to exclude disruptive or manipulative speakers is one of the conditions for successful deliberation. My point is that the dialectical relation between inclusion and exclusion, and the cause and result of that dialectical relation, which is power, is too important to be left untheorized. The theory of deliberative democracy needs to give better answers to the questions of who decides who is to be included in deliberations, with what power and legitimacy, and which is the better way to insure that the excluded voices are kept to a minimum.

The dialectics of inclusion/exclusion are of paramount importance for deliberative democrats in at least two ways. The first reason is this: all theories of deliberative democracy have to discuss and propose legitimate forms of exclusion, i.e., limits to citizenship and participation. As we have seen, some of them even view exclusion as a condition for deliberation: ‘thin’ models want to exclude certain types of doctrines, certain types of themes, and finally, certain types of people from public discussion: people with strong religious convictions, people who do not accept scientific results as the ultimate arbiter of social decisions, or people who spouse an illiberal set of “plain moral truths”. Such formulations, however, beg the question of who, exactly, does the “excluding,” based on what authority, and by which means.

Even when one is prepared to accept—as I am—that some forms of political exclusion are necessary, the theory needs to answer the question of what is to be done with those that have been excluded. People must accept the grounds on which their
exclusion is determined and ‘gag’ themselves, or, alternatively, they must be kept out of the public arena through the use of some kind of power. Power again becomes the gate-keeper of reason in this respect, since self-limitation is often inadequate.

But the use of power to enact rules of discourse can generate what I shall call “repressed politics”. Repressed politics happens when excluded groups have claims that are not recognized as legitimate and then see themselves as progressively cut off from the political system. The danger of “repressed” politics is that when groups feel completely separated from the democratic political system, they can choose to rise up against it

**Conclusion**

Deliberative democratic theory argues that the legitimacy of a deliberative political process can be established by insuring that if everybody affected by the political decision being made participates in the process of decision-making—this imperative is of factual, and not only theoretical, significance. But if there are “repressed politics” at work, it is simply impossible to know whether everybody that should be participating is, in fact, present:

*The normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the decision-making processes and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes.* Calls for inclusion arise from experience of exclusion—from basic political rights, from opportunities to participate, from the hegemonic terms of the
debate. Some of the most powerful and successful social movements of this century have mobilized around demands for oppressed and marginalized people to be included as full and equal citizens in their polities.\textsuperscript{87}

If one accepts as a premise that the normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the decision-making then it becomes necessary to discuss the theoretical and factual grounds for inclusion (and exclusion). But deliberation cannot do that by itself; it can only profit from an equalization that must have occurred before.

Jürgen Habermas makes very clear that, for deliberations to make sense, power needs to be neutralized in such a way that free discourse can take place. But such neutralization is something that takes place before deliberation, and that is a prerequisite for it. Power relations must have been equalized somehow before the deliberations happen, but if they did not, the participants probably will be unaware of it.\textsuperscript{88}

That is, the issue of power must be dealt with directly. Power cannot be counterbalanced by deliberation alone, since we have seen that power is one condition for deliberation, in the form of the dialectic between inclusion/exclusion.

\textsuperscript{87} Iris Marion Young, Inclusion and Democracy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 4, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{88} “Bargaining aims at compromises the participants find acceptable under three conditions. Such compromises provide for an arrangement that (a) is more advantageous to all than no arrangement whatever, (b) excludes free riders who withdrew from cooperation, and (c) excludes exploited parties who contribute more to the cooperative effort than they gain from it. Bargaining processes are tailored for situations in which social power relations cannot be neutralized in the way rational discourse presupposes. (...) Moreover, bargaining first becomes permissible and necessary when only particular—and no generalizable—interests are involved.” Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, pp. 166-7, emphasis in the original.
Deliberative democratic theory’s own epistemological and theoretical structures (especially, but not only, its reliance on ‘thin’ definitions of rationality) leave a blank space at the very heart of deliberative democracy.

For deliberations to be successful, power needs to be neutralized so that (a) every affected group is represented and (b) discourse can flow freely. Deliberation, by itself, cannot do such things: the neutralization of power relations is a requisite for deliberation, not its result. When the issue of power is not theorized adequately, it creates a serious problem. Deliberative democracy requires the effective inclusion of all those that are to be affected by the decision being made in the process, or otherwise it will create repressed politics and reinforce exclusion. There has to be some other type of power that is able to gain people who would not be invited to deliberate a seat at the table, otherwise, deliberation can in fact undermine democracy, instead of expanding it.
CHAPTER TWO:

THE DUAL LOGIC OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

In this chapter I will expand on some of the arguments presented in chapter one, to the effect that there are two types of political power and two types of political conflict, and that deliberation is not enough, by itself, to realize democratic ideals.

At the beginning of the chapter I will analyze briefly the theories of agonistic democracy. Then, I will describe what I call the two logics of democratic politics. Finally, I will present for the first time the concept of populist reason.

Repressed Politics and Agonistic Reason

To begin my inquiry into the nature of other, non communicative-types of political reason, I would like to follow the path pointed out by Mark E. Warren in the following statement: “[i]n order to conceive the location of democracy, then, we shall need to see it as a good of responding to politics (that is, the domain of contested decisions) as well as the domain of suppressed politics (that is, potential conflicts suppressed by power, cultural, or economic organization).”

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89 Mark Warren, Deliberative Democracy, p. 11.
These observations open up an unexpected path: that perhaps there are not one, but two types of political conflict. The first type is the one we know and understand best: it is the conflict created when there is more than one possible solution to a common problem. These are the disagreements that contemporary theories are most attuned to. But Mark Warren alerts us to the existence of another type of political disagreement. In this second type, disagreement is not limited to finding the possible solutions to a common problem but engulfs the very idea commonality. In other words, the very definition of the political community is contested.

Jacques Rancière, in his book called precisely Disagreement, presents a similar thesis:

> Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. I propose to call it the police. [...] I now propose to reserve the term politics for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configurations whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration—that of the part of those who have no part.\(^90\)

A good starting point for a correct understanding of the relationship between deliberation and mobilization has been provided by theorists of agonistic democracy. Theories of agonistic democracy start from a simple insight: that in politics, people are not driven by

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the desire to cooperate, but by the desire to win.\textsuperscript{91} Mark Warren (not an agonistic democracy theorist himself) presents a similar insight,

> There are at least two kinds of reasons why deliberative democrats should avoid the temptation to define deliberation by referring to deliberative commitments. First, there is a psychological issue. Because political conflict arises precisely because commitments are not shared, politics often brings out the worst in people rather than the best. In politics, people want to win, often even if it means willful misunderstanding of opponents, distorting their claims, questioning their motives, and attacking their character. These attributes of politics are pervasive, and a theory of deliberative democracy needs to show that reasoning can make headway even under these circumstances.\textsuperscript{92}

The “desire to win” is the agonistic dimension that underpins all politics, and that exists, as it were, alongside the deliberative dimension. Both dimensions are unavoidable, and any theory of politics that tries to eradicate any of them from politics is doomed to fail, theoretically \textit{and} empirically. (This must be kept in mind when models of political institutionalization are debated; it must be remembered that, while deliberation deserves to be properly institutionalized within contemporary democracies, the wise legislator must also institutionalize protected spaces for contestation.)

Chantal Mouffe has worked extensively on the project of comprehending the agonistic dimension of democracy, with the overall goal, as she puts it, of showing how

\textsuperscript{91}Carl Schmitt is the founding father of agonistic democracy. His classic book \textit{The Concept of the Political} states that the distinction between friend and foe is the most basic political structure. Car Schmitt, \textit{The Concept of the Political}. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

\textsuperscript{92}Mark Warren, “Deliberative Democracy,” p. 11.
“antagonism can be transformed so as to make available a form of we/they opposition compatible with pluralist democracy.” Antagonistic politics play a crucial role in the transformation or sublimation of conflict by offering the occasion and space for a dramatization of political conflicts. She quotes a paragraph by Elias Canetti, the Romanian philosopher, that roots democratic power in its *metaphoric representation of war*:

A parliamentary vote does nothing but ascertain the relative strength of two groups at a given time and place. Knowing them beforehand is not enough. One party may have 360 members and the other only 240, but the actual vote is decisive, as the moment in which the one is really measured against the other. It is all that is left of the original lethal clash and it is played out in many forms, with threats, abuse and physical provocation which might lead to blows or missiles. But the counting of the vote ends the battle.⁹⁴

This is a recurring theme in the history of political theory: that politics is an antagonistic endeavor driven by the desire to conquer. Democratic politics therefore must offer a chance for a metaphorical expression of the drive to win. Of course, the actual realization of the pair victory/defeat must be eliminated—the conflict must not escalate from the political to the personal—but, paradoxically, democratic politics must retain the power of metaphorically representing death *if it wants to provide an alternative to actual death.* Democratic politics must transform enemies into adversaries; to do so, it must stage a


symbolic battle, with all the paraphernalia of war, including the celebration of the victor and the (symbolic) death of the vanquished:

The solemnity of all those activities derives from the denunciation of death as an instrument of decision. Every single vote puts death, as it were, on the side. But the effect that killing would have had on the strength of the enemy is scrupulously put down in figures; and any one who tampers with these figures, who destroys or falsifies them, lets death in without even knowing it.

The metaphoric representation of battle can only take place in a politicized society, and such politicization requires “the production of a conflictual representation of the world with opposing [political] camps with which people can identify, thereby allowing for passions to be mobilized politically within the spectrum of the democratic process.”

Populist discourse is central to the dichotomization of the political field, since such dichotomization requires the fusion of ideological arguments with the kind of mobilizational rhetoric, emotional appeals and charismatic leadership that have always been associated with populism. Populism, in this regard, is linked with what Mark Warren calls “subaltern politics.”

I think that it is important to keep in mind, however, that democratic politics is not only about the metaphoric representation of battle and death. It is one thing to say that

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96 Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, p. 25
there is an inextricable agonistic dimension in democracy; it is a very different thing to say that this is the only dimension of democratic politics. Negotiation, accommodation and administration are clearly as legitimate parts of democratic politics as antagonism is. Both types of political praxis are useful, both are necessary, and both can get out of control, if not carefully balanced.

There are two political logics at work in democratic politics. The first logic governs the kind of politics that takes place, quietly or noisily, within the existing boundaries of the regime. This is the logic that governs such processes as goods and resource allocation, negotiations between social actors and individuals, legislation, and day-to-day politics in general. Parallel to this, or perhaps underneath it, we find a more obscure and extraordinary political logic that governs the act of setting and defining the very boundaries of the political community. As outlined, the first logic operates within the boundaries of the regime, and it follows a set of more or less defined rules of engagement; the later logic, however, has to do with the very process by which those boundaries and rules are defined. It is only after the boundaries of the political community are established that politics as it is defined by the regime can take place.97

The second logic has to do with boundary-changing: that is, with defining what can properly be called political at any given time.

Regardless of how conflictual they are, the institutional politics generated by the

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97 This presupposes that political boundaries are forever contingent and contestable and that political history is not teleological. That is, that all political systems—even modern, liberal democracies—are perfectible and, for the same reason, subject to criticism.
first logic are constrained by the rules and norms that are accepted in a given regime: constitutional structures, electoral regulations, parliamentary norms and habits, the traditions of the party systems. These rules and regulations seek their own continuation; their own weight allows them to reproduce themselves over time. The second logic is constantly calling into question the boundaries of the existing institutions of any given political community, operating in the opposite direction. This first logic—which we might call “institutional politics”—creates and utilizes a language of stability and order, while the second creates and utilizes a language of disruption and transformation. This ‘hidden’ or ‘submerged’ logic has proven to be much more difficult to grapple with for the social sciences in general and political theory in particular; as Sheldon Wolin argues, “the tradition (…) [of social science] has been rich in the language of order. One thinks of Weber’s discussions of bureaucracy, organization, and authority, as well as of Durkheim notions of solidarity and collective representation. But concerning revolution, there was no corresponding richness, only silence.”

Institutional politics and what Wolin calls “revolutionary politics” are different because they are rooted in different types of political power. The power of institutional

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98 As long as actors move within these sets of institutions, a common “rationality” of norms and procedures can be supposed to be operating. “The point of such a [proceduralist] understanding is this: the democratic procedure is institutionalized in discourses and bargaining processes by employing forms of communications that promise that all outcomes reached in conformity with the procedure are reasonable.” Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 304.

politics comes from the performative weight invested in rules and regulations; it is power created in and by the system. The roots of the power of revolutionary politics lie outside the system and are disruptive to it.

It is notable that again and again we encounter the same pair of concepts, expressed differently. Jürgen Habermas makes a similar point and distinguishes between institutionalized power and emergent power.\footnote{Jürgen Habermas uses these terms in passing, when discussing Hannah Arendt’s concept of communicative power. “To be sure, with the concept of communicative power, we get hold of only the emergence of political power, not the administrative employment of already constituted power, that is, the process of exercising power.” Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 149, emphasis added.} Mark W. Warren speaks of “democratic politics” and “repressed politics”; Jacques Rancière speaks of “politics” and “the police”; Sheldon Wolin speaks about the “politics or order” and “revolutionary politics”. Habermas' choice of terms is adequate for my purpose: to speak of emergent power is correct, insofar as such a term hints that the source of that power must lie elsewhere, beyond the institutions of the regime (after all, in politics, as in life, nothing is created out of nothing). The source must be located outside, or beneath, the regime. In my reading, the source for all emerging power is that obscure and uncomfortable source of instability that ancient Greeks called the demos and that we used to call the people. Thus, I take it that the only proper name of the second type of power is populist power, a type of political praxis that is not, in itself, irrational but radically antagonistic and oriented towards seeking recognition rather than understanding.

If this is to be properly understood, I argue that the focus of analysis must be
changed from deliberative politics to mobilizational politics, and especially to what I will call “populist mobilization”. I will propose that populist mobilization, far from being a danger to deliberative politics, is a necessary complement and corrective (and vice versa: deliberative politics might be also a complement and corrective to populist mobilization) to it. Populist politics can act as a corrective to the exclusionary dangers of deliberative institutionalization because populist mobilization makes visible excluded groups and seeks their political recognition. Populist mobilization is the condition for many groups to gain a seat at the deliberative table: hence, it can serve as an ally, not a foe, of deliberative politics.

**The Populist Power and the Populist Reason**

In the following pages I will explain why I use the term “populist politics” to characterize thus the alternative political logic, and why this populist logic of political conflict is equally, if not more, necessary than the better recognized one for the renovation and reinvigoration of contemporary democratic politics.

To use the term “populist” to refer to the realm of what Mark Warren has called “repressed politics” and Jacques Rancière calls “politics” might strike the reader as an incorrect or even disingenuous choice. I have chosen it, however, because I understand this type of political action to be inherently tied to one specific collective political actor: the people. To use Mark Warren’s terms, ‘repressed’ politics are the medium of those
not represented in the current regime: ‘repressed’ politics is the politics of the excluded. And there is a name in political theory for the class that gathers together the class-less of a regime: “the people.” The political logic that is proper to the political expression of the repressed must be called populist, since it cannot be comprehended without referring to that particular actor.\textsuperscript{101} I, then, use the term “populist politics” to refer to the kind of political activity that is engendered by, and is an expression of, the politics of the repressed and excluded: the demos, the plebs, the people.

“The people” is, however, an old-fashioned notion, and one that has fallen into theoretical and practical disrepute.\textsuperscript{102} The groups to whom it refers are often discredited as antidemocratic forces that long for “pre-modern” values and end up supporting authoritarian demagogues,\textsuperscript{103} or, more generously, are said to be disappearing, thanks to the individuation, secularization and globalization brought about by “post-materialism.”\textsuperscript{104} And those who still believe “peoples” exist usually blame them for the

\textsuperscript{101} A “people” is not equivalent to a Marxist class, or and interest group, or an ethnic group, or any other form of political “identity”. A people is at the same time it the precondition for the existence of such identities and the result of the determination of identitarian boundaries.

\textsuperscript{102} “Once one gives up the philosophy of the subject, one needs neither to concentrate sovereignty concretely in the people nor to banish it in anonymous constitutional structures and powers. The “self” of the self-organizing legal community disappear in the subjectless forms of communication that regulate the flow of discursive opinion- and will-formation in such a way that their fallible results enjoy the presumption of being reasonable.” Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 301.

\textsuperscript{103} Jürgen Habermas argues that, “a robust civil society (...) can blossom only in an already rationalized lifeworld (...) Otherwise, populist movements arise that blindly defend the frozen tradition of a lifeworld endangered by capitalist modernization. In their forms of mobilization, these fundamentalist movements are as moderns as they are antidemocratic”. Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 370.

\textsuperscript{104} See for example, Ronald Inglehart, Modernization and Postmodernization : Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997 and Ronald Inglehart,
poor democratic quality of semi-peripheral, “pre-modern” or “modernizing” countries, especially as they cope with the challenges of industrialization or modernization.\textsuperscript{105}

I contend that political theory ought to take a second look at populism and its impact on democracy. While it is true that some populist movements have curtailed democratic freedoms, the history of populist movements as a whole reveals a more complex record. Populist movements have often brought about dramatic expansions of the democratic franchise that made possible the political inclusion of previously excluded classes: peasants, small farm owners, newly-mobilized industrial workers and especially women of all classes. Through history, populist mobilization seems to have been especially well-suited to change the rules of the political game in ways that, to use language presented before, turned repressed politics into democratic politics.

This is not to say that populist movements do not have anti-institutional or anti-democratic tendencies, which they sometimes do. This ambiguity is precisely what makes populism so difficult to comprehend, and why it is such an interesting object of study. The remainder of this chapter will try to clarify this dual nature of populism: its democratic thrust, on the one hand, and its non-democratic perils, on the other. To do so, I will start with two premises: that populist mobilization is as much an inextricable part

\textsuperscript{105} In his influential work on modernization, Seymour Martin Lipset developed an explanation of populism in recently-industrialized countries that connected the rise of demagogic leaders with the influx of rural migrants to the newly industrialized cities. Such migrants, uprooted from their traditional, rural lifestyles generated an “available mass” that was easily mobilized. Seymour Martin Lipset, \textit{Political man: the social bases of politics}, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.
of politics as deliberation, and that some forms of populist mobilization can have a valuable democratic potential.

Any serious inquiry into the nature of populism must begin with its proper protagonist, namely, *demos*, or people. This is a concept, however, that is notoriously difficult to define. As a preliminary approximation, it can be said that a people is that political collective actor whose demands cannot be processed by the problem-solving oriented institutions of an existing political regime (deliberative or otherwise) because those demands include a challenge to the insufficiency and inadequacy of those institutions; that a people is the political collective actor that does not demand the temporary suspension of power relations (*alla* Habermas) but pushes instead for a radical alteration of those asymmetries of power; that “a people” is the performative expression of pre-existent political, sociological and cultural conditions of exclusion; and, finally; that a people does not and cannot operate in a deliberative manner because it is governed by another type of political reason that is specific to populist mobilization.

In the rest of the dissertation I will use the term “populist mobilization” instead of “the people”. I will do so to avoid the essentialism the word “people” connotes: I do not want to imply that ‘a people’ is a substance, a fixed and unmovable entity whose nature can be dissected and analyzed. To avoid such a mistake is crucial because a people is an ephemeral entity that only exists in mobilization and for as long as it endures. When mobilization stops and “normal” politics begin again, the people will break up into its
components, or what we call, for lack of a better term, “individuals”.  

If it can be argued that every political regime creates and distributes power—and it would be hard to argue otherwise once one has read Weber and Foucault—, this in turn must mean that every political regime creates at the same time zones of powerlessness: a regime creates modes of representation while it generates at the very same time mechanisms of disenfranchisement and its very norms and rationality conjure their own forms of arbitrariness and specialized discourse. The paradox of any political order is that the more the system aims for perfect institutionalization and rationality, the more it creates in its own midst the voices that will demand for transformation. (We follow Weber when we argue that rationality engenders its own opposite. And even Jürgen

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107 For a contemporary take of the issue, see Guillermo O'Donnell: “Institutions incorporate AND exclude. Institutions establish what agents, on the basis of what resources, claims and procedures, are accepted as valid voices in their decision processes, both in making decisions and in implementing them. These are necessarily selective criteria, which fit (and favor) some agents, may lead others to reshape themselves in order to meet that criteria, and which for various reasons are impossible to meet, or unacceptable, for others.” Guillermo O'Donnell, “Deliberative Democracy?,” Kellog's Institute Working Paper nº 172, p. 6.
Habermas recognizes that power inequalities cannot always be cleared out of the way.)
The dual nature of any political order articulates in dialectical relation representation and repression, inclusion and exclusion, voice and silence. This duality creates openings for resistance, protest, and the sudden voicing of demands for change.

I believe, however, that the final indeterminacy of any political order must be approached by democratic theory as a positive phenomenon and not a problem. Democracy, understood as a formula for an inclusive yet stable politics, requires at the same time channels for institutionalized representation and of permanent challenges to those channels and all forms of representation. The broadening of inclusion requires the action of democratic subjects while its stabilization needs routinized practices and discourse. The theoretical question, then, is if there is some way of systematically identifying the conditions under which populist movements lead to democratic expansion and under which conditions it becomes anti-democratic.

To begin doing so, in the next chapter I will trace back the intellectual history of populist mobilization to its Greek origins, and more specifically, to Aristotle; then I will discuss the issues raised by the works of Nicoló Machiavelli. I will also review Max Weber’s thoughts on charismatic authority. Such a “long” historical view allows for two things: it helps clarify the intrinsic connection between democratic politics and populism, and it makes clear the peculiar political logic that is particular to populist mobilization. In the next chapter, I will proceed to review and evaluate the modern thinking on the topic, with an emphasis on the works of Max Weber, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.
CHAPTER THREE:

THE POPULIST IMPULSE IN ARISTOTLE AND MACHIAVELLI

In this chapter, I will review and discuss Aristotle’s thoughts about democratic politics and Machiavelli’s writings on the proper role of the people in a republic. I have chosen these two authors because they offer a number of valuable insights, namely: that populist mobilization is not irrational, but that there is a certain rationality to it that must be properly understood and defined; that populist mobilization is part and parcel of democracy and, as such, is not eradicable from democratic politics; that it is an unstable and volatile force upon which no stable regime can be established; but that it has a proper place in a well-institutionalized regime. Both Machiavelli and Aristotle argue that the power of the demos cannot be eliminated but that it should be transformed in a political asset through the transformation of the turbulent demos into the more stable citizenry.
Aristotle: the Politics of Those that Have no Part

One of the issues that the inclusion of Aristotle and Machiavelli in this study is meant to highlight is the fact that populism did not begin in the 20th century, or even in modern times, for that matter. In fact, populist mobilizations have been around for as long as democratic politics has existed—the two appeared, side by side, in 5th century BC Greece.108 Plato’s Republic was written, among other things, as an anti-populist pamphlet. Aristotle was perhaps more forgiving of populism, but the topic of how to neutralize its excesses is also a central preoccupation of his Politics. (In fact, given the very early date of the first philosophical reflections on populism, it is hard to understand how political theory has come to ignore it, or, even worse, to assume that it can be willed out of existence by a theoretical fiat.)

Aristotle and Plato not only alert us to the fact that populist mobilization is part of politics itself, they also underscore the fact that populism is entirely a democratic creation. They both argue that only in a democracy can the forces of populist mobilization be unleashed (as had happened in Athens, were the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes created a radically new political actor they called the demos.)

108 The view that populism is not a modern creation has become quite prevalent in contemporary theoretical writings about the issue. For a good reconstruction of the historical roots of contemporary populism, see Margaret Canovan’s The People. She reconstructs the very complex history of populism, beginning with the mixed constitution of republican Rome, (where power was shared between elected consuls, the Senate and popular assemblies, obliging aristocratic contenders for power to seek plebeian support), and going through Cicero’s claim that the res publica itself amounts to res populi, the Whigs interpretation of the 1688 Glorious Revolution, and even John Locke’s defense of the right to civil rebellion. Margaret Canovan’s The People, London: Polity Press, 2007.
The negative freedom of the demos

Aristotle begins his inquiry by reflecting upon the nature of the city, man’s natural political community. To understand the nature of politics, Aristotle employs a structural approach; hence, he begins by dissecting the city into its structural components: social classes. He defines a good regime as the political formula that achieves the best combination possible of justice and stability. To achieve this combination, each of the constitutive elements of the city, that is, its social classes, must be given that which it is entitled to. Such a regime—the one that gives each class its due, no more, no less—is the “regime to be prayed for,” or the best achievable regime. 109

The division of the city in its three parts is produced by the differing ownership classes have of what we today would call some tangible and intangible goods: property,

109 In this respect, Aristotle’s Politics is less preoccupied with individuals than with collectives. The minimal conceptual unit with which the city can be analyzed is not the individual, but the classes that are formed by individuals with the same characteristics. Individuals are either typical to a class, or so exceptional as to constitute a class of their own, in which case they are un-analyzable. Aristotle’s distinctive approach would be called “structuralist” today and is often misunderstood or directly denied by his modern liberal readers like Hannah Arendt, that are committed to methodological individualism. Hannah Arendt treats Aristotle’s concept of plurality as if it refers to the plurality of individual human beings and their deeds: “Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. (...) Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct...” Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, Chapter V, p. 176. Aristotle, on the other hand, is concerned with the plurality of classes and their inclinations.
wealth and virtue (what might be defined today as a combination of social status, higher education, and political expertise). Each class is defined in terms of the particular property and virtue or functional characteristic \( (axiai) \) that is shared by its members. There are three classes: the best, the few, and the many. The class of the best is defined by shared possession of virtue and excellence. The class of the few is composed of those who possess property. And, finally, the third class, “the many,” is formed by the majority of those that own neither wealth nor virtue. The many do not own anything; thus, the only property that they have is purely negative: it is the freedom of having nothing. The many are unencumbered by possessions—be it money, property, education or experience—so they are free, in the most basic, and dangerous, sense of the term. The best and the few are complex beings who own earthly and spiritual possessions, but the many are in a sense only bodies. The collective formed by the bodies of the many is the people.

The essential difference between the liberties of the best and the few, on the one hand, and the freedom of the people, on the other, introduces a structural imbalance at the very core of Aristotle’s analysis of the city: while the qualities of the best and the few

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110 “Further, since the city is made of dissimilar persons—as an animal is made of soul and body, for instance, soul of reason and appetite, and a household of man and woman and master and slave, in the same way a city is made up of all of these, and in addition to these it consists of other dissimilar kinds [of persons]—the virtue of all the citizens is necessarily not single, just as that of a head and a file leader in a chorus is not single.” Aristotle, Politics, Book 3, Chapter 4, ¶1277al.

111 “Since there are three things disputing over equality in the regime, freedom, wealth, and virtue…” Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapter 8, ¶1293bl.
are substantive—wealth and merit—, the quality of the demos is indeterminate. It is the negative quality of being free or having freedom (eleutheria).\textsuperscript{112} The freedom of the people is an empty property (or, as Jacques Rancière puts it, the part of the people is to “have no part.”)\textsuperscript{113}

What makes democracy and oligarchy differ is poverty and wealth: wherever some rule on account of wealth, whether a minority or a majority, this is necessary an oligarchy, and wherever those who are poor, a democracy. But it turns out, as we said, that the former are few and the latter many; for a few are well off, but all share in freedom—which are the causes of both [groups] disputing over the regime.\textsuperscript{114}

Another key element in Aristotle’s analysis of the city is his assertion of the inescapability of social inequality. For Aristotle, the city will always be unequal, since men will always desire power, care for acquisition and seek distinction—for him, these impulses are rooted deep in the human psyche.\textsuperscript{115} Inequality generates class difference,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} “Now the presupposition of the democratic sort of regime is freedom. It is customarily said that only in this sort of regime do [men] share in freedom, for, so it is asserted, every democracy aims at this.” Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, Book 6, Chapter 1, ¶1317al.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Jacques Rancière, \textit{Disagreement}, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, Book 3, Chapter 8, ¶1280al, emphasis added.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Aristotle accepted social and economic inequality as a fact of human life, and thought that politics must function, among other things, as a way to temper and limit the worst effects of such inequities: because he argues that, in fact, all men are not created equal, he is ready to accept that social and economic inequalities must be kept below an acceptable threshold through policy. Interestingly, modern liberal though reversed the equation: because it proclaims that all men are made equally rational, it accepts that inequalities are the result of moral (thus voluntary) deficiencies such as laziness or ineptitude. “God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it to them for their benefit, and the greatest convenience of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational (and labour was to be his title to it); not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious.) John Locke, “The Second Treatise on Government” in John Locke, \textit{Political Writings}, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2003, p. 277.
\end{itemize}
and class difference creates the possibility of the creation of a people. But the existence of a people cannot be explained by economic determinism. In fact, none of the classes is determined in such a simple way, and the political stance of a social class is by no means reducible to or explained only by the possession of any set of objective elements.\footnote{The multitude is defined as “these being whoever is neither wealthy nor has any claim at all deriving from virtue”; it can be inferred that lack of wealth is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for belonging to the people. It is also necessary to be in such a position that one is not entitled to “claim” political representation based on virtue. Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, Book 3, Chapter 11, ¶1281b.} The dispossessed of a rich city might be in fact wealthier, by any objective standard, than the middle class of a very poor city; inversely, the rich classes of a poor city might strike the middling classes of a rich city as poor paupers.

According to Aristotle’s analysis of the city, politics are engendered by, but are not reducible to, the economic and social structures of the city. Aristotle makes clear than the difference between an oligarchy and a democracy rests not on the number of those who rule, but on the general principle upon which rule is predicated. An oligarchy is institutionally designed to ensure representation to those that have wealth, be they few or many, while a democracy is built on the principle of guaranteeing representation to the poor, be they few or many. Of course, the nature of wealth itself leads to its accumulation in a few hands, since an economic regime based on the free production, trade and consumption of goods and the unfettered pursuit of profit \textit{always} generates inequalities, as Aristotle knew well. So there are no known examples of an “oligarchy of the many,” but the theoretical distinction is key. The roots of populist mobilization do not lie in
poverty but in a shared perception of economic and social inequality that is combined with political exclusion. It is not just that poor people mobilize; it is poor people who become conscious that they are poor relative to some other classes and who know that the status quo cannot be politically challenged are capable of mobilization.  

(They also need “independent leadership in action” to mobilize, but more on this later.)

The people lack substantive *axiài* but possess a negative freedom: these two facts create a source of political imbalance that continuously challenges the stability of the political regime. If the freedom of the people is not institutionally anchored it will be a perpetual threat to the city: the populace can always topple the regime—even if, by virtue of the indeterminacy of that very same freedom, they are not able to sustain a stable democratic regime in the long run. It is this double-layered nature of the people’s liberty that makes the problem of populism so intractable: a city without a people is both impossible and undesirable, but a completely democratic city is equally so. A city without a people is impossible because, simply put, there will always be people who own fewer *things* (money, property, education) than other people. Inequality for Aristotle is a relative measure, and human communities are perpetually creating their own modes of internal differentiation, so perfect equality is just impossible. But a city without a people is also undesirable, because the people, collectively, are good at performing some core

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117 “Democracy exists when the free and poor, being a majority, have authority to rule; oligarchy, when the wealthy and better born have authority and are few.” Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 4, Chapter 4, ¶ 1290bl.

118 I have said that populism is engendered by democracy, and this is not quite correct. Oppression creates resentment, which in turn creates the *demos*. Democracy, however, makes possible and even incentives the political expression of the *demos*. 

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functions, such as judging and deliberating. Thus, a good city is the one that does not want to dispense with the people but instead makes use of it for the common good. A city ruled only by the people, however, cannot be, because—as I have said before—the people lack the virtue, constancy and self-knowledge that are necessary for sustained rule.

From demos to citizens

Aristotle flatly rejects the possibility of total repression of the demos, for both substantive and prudential reasons. Substantively, Aristotle recognizes that it is unjust to put the people under the unconditional domination of the wealthy or even the virtuous;\(^{119}\) prudentially, he argues that the wise man has to recognize that a city that does not offer at least some promise of social justice and some political representation to its people will be constantly threatened from within its own walls.\(^{120}\) The pragmatic solution favored by Aristotle, or what he calls the mixed regime, is neither purely coercive nor purely

\(^{119}\) “There is a question as to what the authoritative element of the city should be. It is either the multitude, the wealthy, the respectable, the one who is best of all, or the tyrant; but all of these appear to involve difficulties. (…) If the poor by the fact of being the majority distribute among themselves the things of the wealthy, is this not unjust? (…) But is it just, therefore, for the minority and the wealthy to rule? If they act in the same way and rob and plunder the possessions of the multitude, is this just? Aristotle, Politics, Book 3, Chapter 10, ¶1281al.

\(^{120}\) “On the other hand, to give them [the multitude] no part and for them not to share [in the offices] is a matter of alarm, for when there exist many who are deprived of prerogatives and poor, that city is necessarily filled with enemies. Aristotle, Politics, Book 3, Chapter 11, ¶1281bl.
democratic; it involves two elements: the participation of all classes in what he calls a “mixed government” and the promotion of property ownership to further the middle classes and diminish the number of the dispossessed.\textsuperscript{121} Aristotle’s hope is that these two elements will help making citizens out of the \textit{demos}.

In Aristotle’s mind, the best type of regime is a polity, that is, a regime in which the middle class rule:

If it was correctly said in the (discourses on) ethics that the happy life is one in accordance with virtue and unimpeded, and that virtue is a mean, then the \textit{middling sort of life} is best—the mean that is capable of being attained by each sort of individual. (...) Now in all cities there are three parts of the city, the well off, the very poor, and third, those in the middle between these. Since, however, it is agreed that what is moderate and middling is best, it is evident that in the case of the good of fortune as well a middling possession is the best of all.\textsuperscript{122}

The cities that are fortunate enough as to have a good number of middle-class citizens have a better chance at becoming a polity and being well governed\textsuperscript{123}, because of a number of factors. First, because the middling element of the city is the one best equipped for public life since “…neither do they desire the things of others, as the poor

\textsuperscript{121} For Aristotle, “pure” regimes are doomed to fall, regardless of their virtue, by the very fact of human plurality; thus, he advocates for a mixed regime containing some elements of an oligarchy and some elements of a democracy. “Simply speaking, polity is a mixture of oligarchy and democracy. It is customary, however, to call polities those [sorts of polities] which tend toward democracy, and those tending more toward oligarchy, aristocracies.” Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapter 8, \S 1292bl.

\textsuperscript{122} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 4, \S 1295bl, 25, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{123} “It is clear, therefore, that the political partnership that depends on the middling sort is best as well, as that those cities are capable of being well governed in which the middling element is numerous.” Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 4, \S 1295bl, 35.
do, not others their (property) as the poor desire that of the wealthy.”\textsuperscript{124} Second, such a city will avoid internecine conflict more easily, because “(i)t alone (the middling element) is without factional conflict, for where the middling element is numerous, factional conflicts and splits over (the nature of) the regime occur least of all.”\textsuperscript{125} However, the cities that have these two conditions—a middle class that is not only large in number, but has also a certain cultural preeminence and political standing—are very rare.

But the establishment of a polity depends on a number of contingent factors, such as the geographical setting of the city, the economic structure and the cultural templates. Polities are, therefore extremely rare.

But, I would add, the establishment of a pure polity very improbable on purely theoretical grounds, because, even when there is a strong middle class, there is always going to be a \textit{demos} pushing against its rule. Even in a rich city there is going to be a demos because, on the one hand, wealth itself creates inequality and, on the other, such inequality is never purely economic but also springs from differential access to symbolic and cultural assets.

But this democratic resistance is not entirely without reason for Aristotle, and, as such, it must be accommodated. The only possible stable regime, then, is a \textbf{mixed}
government that gives certain functions to the people, others to the oligarchy and others to the virtuous, while being stabilized by two factors: the rule of law and what we would call today the cultural hegemony of the middling element of the city, the one part that naturally tends toward moderation, frugality and respect for the law.\footnote{126} Aristotle’s solution is a pragmatic one, combining popular participation in deliberation, a modicum of economic equality and a strong control—mostly through popular scrutiny—of the acquisitive impulses of the oligarchy, all this stabilized by universal respect for the law brought about by a mixture of education and culture.

The discussion then moves to the question of how the people should participate in the government. Aristotle, having completed his analysis of the social structures of the city, goes on to do a functional analysis of the city’s government: he discusses which functions must the city perform, and then matches each particular function with the axiai of the class that is most suitable for performing that function. The basic functions of government are three: deliberative,\footnote{127} executive,\footnote{128} and adjudicative. The question, for Aristotle, is who should be in charge of each one of these necessary functions, because

\footnote{126} “The city wishes, at any rate, to be made up of equal and similar persons to the extent possible, and this is most particularly the case with the middling elements. To this city must necessarily be governed in the best fashion it is made up of the elements out of which we assert the city is by nature constituted. (…) It is clear, therefore, that the political partnership that depends on the middling sort is best as well, and that those cities are capable of being well-governed in which the middling element is numerous—most particularly if it is superior to both [of the other] parts…” Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapter 11, ¶1295bl.

\footnote{127} “The deliberative element has authority concerning war and peace, alliances and their dissolution, laws [judicial cases carrying penalties of] death and confiscation, and the choosing and auditing of officials.” Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapter 14, ¶1298 al.

\footnote{128} Or the “power of an office”: “By power of an office I mean, for example, having authority over revenues or having authority over defense.” Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapter 15, ¶1300bl.
“[a]s long as they are in a fine condition, the regime is necessarily in a fine condition.”

Aristotle’s claim that the people can participate in the performance of the common functions must have sounded rather striking at a time when most members of the elite classes argued that the people lacked any virtues and should be kept out of public life. To be sure, he recognizes that the people cannot be in charge of executive functions because these tasks need speedy resolution and individual accountability. But the other two functions—deliberative and adjudicative—are uniquely suited, he says, for the exercise of the people’s virtue.

The many, of whom none is individually an excellent man, nevertheless can when joined together be better—not as individuals but all together—than those [who are best], just as dinners contributed [by many] can be better than those equipped from a single expenditure. For because they are many, each can have a part of virtue and prudence, and on their joining together, the multitude, with its many feet and hands and having many senses, becomes like a single human being, and so also with respect to character and mind. Thus the many are also better judges of the works of music and of the poets.\(^\text{129}\)

Aristotle argues that the people can and should participate in deliberation and judgment, for reasons both substantive and prudential.\(^\text{130}\) Their participation in deliberations can act as a force countering domination, since the people care not for personal aggrandizement but for the maintenance of equality between the classes.\(^\text{131}\) The people are most suited to

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\(^{129}\) Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 3, Chapter 11, ¶1281bl.

\(^{130}\) Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 3, Chapter 11, ¶1281bl.

\(^{131}\) “Some engage in factional conflict because they aim at equality, if they consider that they have less in spite of being equal to those who are aggrandizing themselves; other, because they aim at inequality and preeminence, if they conceive themselves to be unequal but not to have a greater share, but an equal or
be in charge of the performance of deliberative functions—participating in the legislative activity—, to serve as jurors, and to act as auditors and controllers of the executive officers, etc.

Aristotle’s democratic tendency, however, only goes so far; it is tempered by his emphasis is the rule of law and the cultural hegemony of the middle class. The people’s desires, by nature, are neither enlightened nor lasting; therefore, a regime only based on their power will never be stable enough to last:

The first sort of democracy, then, is that which is particularly said to be based on equality (…) when the poor are no more preeminent that the well off, and neither have authority, but they are both [treated as] similar. (…) Another kind of democracy is where all citizens of unquestioned descent share, but law rules. Another kind of democracy is where all have a part in the offices provided only they are citizens, but law rules. Another kind of democracy is the same in other respects, but the multitude has authority and not the law. This comes about when decrees rather than law are authoritative, and this happens in account of the popular leaders.  

But, even though Aristotle is very clear about the shortcomings of democratic rule, he also claims that “the aggrandizement of the wealthy is more ruinous to the polity than those of the people.” The aggrandizement of the wealthy is “more ruinous” than the aggrandizement of the people for the polity because the wealthy are greedy to the point

132 Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapter 4, ¶1292al.

133 “The better the mixture in the polity, the more lasting it will be. Many of those that want to set up aristocratic regimes as well [as polities] thoroughly err not only by the fact that they distribute more to the well off, but also by deceiving the people. For in time from things falsely good there must result a true evil, and the aggrandizement of the wealthy are more ruinous to the polity than those of the people.” Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapter 12, ¶1297al.
of being ultimately dangerous, not only to themselves, but to the whole city. They will blindly accumulate riches and political power, without seeing that in so doing they will create the conditions for the destruction of the city: their own greed will create an underclass whose revolt will make the city’s walls crumble from within.

The people, however, are not oriented toward acquisition but seek to defend of their own freedom. The wise man, hence, will seek to put limits to the acquisitive instincts of the wealthy, and to do so he will use the people as a counterbalance. Of course, he will also put in place another element to counterbalance the fickleness of the people: and that is the middle class; so the good regime is like a scale that is carefully balanced. 134

To sum up, Aristotle is by no means a populist, and his preference was for the rule by the middle class, not the people. But he presents persuasive prudential arguments to defend the position that the negative freedom of the demos should not be eradicated, but accommodated and put to good use inside the institutions of the mixed regime.

The Power of the People in the Machiavellian Republic

The topic populism all but disappeared in medieval political philosophy; its reappearance in the Florentine republic suggests that populism is part of any form of

134 “Moreover, the regime made up of the middling elements is closer [to rule] of the people than to [rule of] the few, and this is the most stable of regimes of this sort.” Aristotle, Politics, Book 5, Chapter 1, ¶1302a1.
politics that relies on democratic self-government. The greatest theoretician of Renaissance republicanism, Nicoló Machiavelli, both continued and modified some of the classic Aristotelian ideas on the subject of populism in his *Discourses* and in the *Prince*.

Like Aristotle, Machiavelli differentiates at the very onset of the *Prince* between two types of political freedoms: the freedom of the prince (and, to a lesser extent, of the nobility) and the freedom of the people. According to Machiavelli’s subtle political psychology, these two radically different types of freedom are engendered by two kinds of political desires: the desire to dominate and the desire to be free from domination. The prince is driven by an active desire or even a passion for ruling: he wants to pursue the creation of a lasting state, so that his creation makes him famous forever, carrying into history his fame and name. The people, however, have no desire to rule over others. The popular classes are motivated by their desire to avoid domination, to be left alone so as to continue with their unencumbered private lives:

>[The prince] should first ascertain what the people really desire, and he will always find that they want two things: one, to revenge themselves on those who have been the cause of their enslavement, and the other, to recover their liberty (...) he will find that a small part of them wish to be free for the purpose of commanding, whilst all the others, who constitute an immense majority, desire liberty to be able to live in greater security”\(^ {135}\)

This statement echoes Aristotle’s argument about the differences separating the souls of

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the ruler from the souls of the ruled: for both, class differences are about souls and minds: political souls understand freedom as freedom to act; private souls see it as freedom from external domination. The prince asks for executive capacities; the people seek nothing “but not to be oppressed.” Machiavelli, however, goes beyond Aristotle in that he does not care at all for sociological stratification. Prince and people are for him pragmatic categories, having to do with types of action and motivations, stemming from anthropological or psychological traits. In the Machiavellian universe, the prince’s legitimacy is not defined by his virtue, wealth, knowledge or industrious spirit; in fact, history show that princes can be of noble origin, like Alexander, or of ignoble descent, like Cesar Borgia. (Machiavelli’s political universe, it must be noted, paid no attention to the Church approved doctrines of god-given authority.) The prince, whether of noble birth or not, must always make himself, and, if he succeeds, it will be because of the strength of the passion guiding and motivating him: which is the passion, the consuming desire, to rule.

Conversely, a people cannot be defined in terms of yearly income or any other sociological characteristic. The people is simply the mass formed by those who lack the desire and the capacity for ruling—regardless of how wealthy or educated or virtuous they are. In the end, the people are those who do not have political souls. 


137 “He will find that a small part of them [the masses] wish to be free for the purpose of commanding. Whilst all the others, who constitute an immense majority, desire liberty so as to be able to live in greater security.” Nicoló Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 163.
Prince and people are present in all political communities that have a modicum of political liberty and organization. They are also forever in tension, struggling with one another: one wants to rule, the other to avoid from being ruled. And because every republic contains within itself these two powers pulling in different directions, its political life is perpetually unstable and tensioned from within. Prince and people fear and yet need one another; thus, republican politics resemble a complex and fascinating dance of antagonism and seduction.

The prince knows that his fight to rule is really a battle against time: his quest for domination is a quest for fame; and fame is nothing but a synonym for timelessness. Fame means conquering immortality, not for one’s earthly being, but for one’s name and legend. The real prince is not only interested in domination, but in lasting domination—he does not want to be a despot but a “founder of republics.” To become one he needs the people, because they are the only ones who can maintain the laws and mores created by him, as the people of Israel became the bearers of Moses’ laws or the people of Rome the keepers of Numa’s republic.\(^{138}\)

And, conversely, the people also need a prince. They need him because they lack the inclination, wisdom and willpower that are necessary for sustained rule. The people must know that they also fight against time: without a ruler, they will rapidly degrade into a mob and they will never be able to form the kind of strong and powerful nation that is

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\(^{138}\) Note Machiavelli’s emphatic rejection of mercenary armies in *The Prince*. 

able to endure. A people needs the laws and mores of a ruler to fulfill its own destiny.

There are three main institutions that at the same time connect and separate the prince and the people: laws, mores—or culture in today’s language—and religion. Of the three, religion is the most crucial for Machiavelli. Religion operates as a force mediating between the present and the future, and thus is a critical tool in the prince’s struggle against the corrosive power of time.\textsuperscript{139} We already know that the stability of domination in the long run is determined by consent; hence, the use of religious mandates as an insurance against the eroding of lawful domination by the force of sheer temporality is logically necessary given Machiavelli’s negative view of human psyche as mutable and self-obsessed.\textsuperscript{140}

And whoever reads Roman history attentively will see in how a great degree religion served in the command of the armies, in uniting the people and keeping in them well conducted, and in covering the wicked with shame ... In truth, there never was any remarkable lawgiver amongst any people who did not resort to divine authority, as otherwise his laws would not have been accepted by the people.\textsuperscript{141}

Religion, then, performs the crucial function of bounding the temporal horizons of citizens by infusing duty, mores, civic loyalty and repeated rituals into their hearts.

While the founding of a new state requires a strong and sometimes brutal prince, the

\textsuperscript{139} Or to put it in a more technical fashion, religion connects the foundational moment described in \textit{The Prince} (the coming to power of the new ruled) with the republican moment described in the \textit{Discourses}.

\textsuperscript{140} “For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble, dissimlers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain; as long as you benefit them, they are entirely yours; [...] but when [necessity] approaches, they revolt.” Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{141} Nicoló Machiavelli, \textit{Discourses}, p. 147.
possibility of its stability through time requires the drafting of good laws, since the “welfare, then, of a republic or a kingdom does not consist in having a prince who governs wisely during his lifetime, but in having one who will give it such laws that it will maintain itself ever after his death.”\textsuperscript{142} It is thus conceivable that the cold and calculating power the prince has utilized to secure his authority must also be employed in securing the people’s acquiescence to the laws designed by him. But if the people can be trusted to recognize the authority of a well-armed prince who also happens to be a bit of a demagogue, it is much more difficult to guarantee their future fidelity to the abstract construct of the law once the prince is physically gone.\textsuperscript{143} Religion is the key, or at least one of the key, conditions for the people’s lawfulness.\textsuperscript{144}

However, there are for Machiavelli two types of religions. Much as he previously distinguished between the freedom of the prince and the freedom of the people, he now differentiates the religion of the prince from the religion of the masses. The religion of the many is to believe, the religion of the prince is to make believe: for a religion to be able to command the behavior of the masses, they must truly believe in it. But this cannot

\textsuperscript{142} Nicoló Machiavelli, Discourses, p.148.

\textsuperscript{143} Machiavelli speaks of things like affections, loyalty, traditions, and the constructive role that they play in republican politics. The constructive functions of affections in democratic politics, however, is a topic that continues to be taboo for deliberative democratic theorists, who continue to be true heirs of Kant and hence abhor the mixture of passion and politics. I will come back to this point later in my discussion of Max Weber.

\textsuperscript{144} “I conclude that the religion introduced by Numa in Rome was one of the causes of the prosperity of that city, for this religion gave rise to good laws, and good laws bring good fortune, and from good fortune results happy success in all enterprises.” Nicoló Machiavelli, Discourses, p.148.
apply to the prince.\textsuperscript{145} The prince must be able to see religion for what it really is, and manipulate it accordingly.\textsuperscript{146}

Machiavelli’s treatment of religion leads into the topic of the problematic relation of prince and people. On the one hand, they need and constitute each other. But on the other, they also fear each other. Much like Aristotle did a thousand years before him, Machiavelli argues that any prudent prince must live in fear of the people’s power. The power of the people stems from its indeterminate freedom, and it consists in the power to revolt. No matter how many mercenaries he hires, or how good his spies may be, or how many priests preach about his rightful authority, the prince will never protect himself against a rebellious populace once it has decided he is a tyrant.\textsuperscript{147} Conversely, the people fear the prince’s power: the power that is always imposing on them, trying to turn them into submissive and passive bodies, that is always telling them what to do and what not to do, extracting money from them, and using them as soldiers to fight wars that they don’t understand.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Like Numa did when he dispersed the myth of his one-to-one conversations with a nymph.
\item Some will say that the Machiavelian prince is a cynic who does not believe in anything. Leo Strauss has championed the interpretation of Machiavelli’s prince as an unrefined cynical and a “teacher of evil.” (Leo Strauss, \textit{Thoughts on Machiavelli}, Chicago, University of Chicago Press. 1984.) But I argue that the cynicism of Machiavelli’s prince is not total. He believes in two things: for one, he must believe in his fatherland’s destiny. This, however, is not his deepest faith. Even if the prince has to regard religion in general instrumentally, a true prince must be consumed with one particular kind of fervor. He must be convinced of the greatness of his own soul, and the validity of his claim to glory and immortality. At the end of the day, he will have to be the first priest and the first believer in the inexorability of his own destiny. This will be his only true religion.
\item Nicoló Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, p. 36.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
But Machiavelli appreciates this struggle: for him, the tension between the power-loving nature of the prince and the freedom-loving nature of the people is the mechanism on which the health of a republic hinges. The people and the prince must be in a state of perpetual struggle for the health of the republic—this is the only way to avoid tyranny in the long run, because, by his power-loving nature, the prince will tend to overreach and go from leader to despot: the people must always be vigilant and counterbalance the prince’s power-grabbing:

> [F]or if we compare the faults of the people with those of the princes, as well as their respective good qualities, we shall find the people vastly superior in that which is good and glorious. And if princes show themselves superior in the making of laws, and in the forming of civil institutions and new statutes and ordinances, the people are superior in maintaining those institutions, laws and ordinances, which certainly places them on a par with those who established them.  

A republic can only function for as long as its three main parts—the prince, the nobility and the people—function in their own spheres and keep each other’s freedom in check.

But only the people can be the guardian of the republic’s liberty: by guarding their own freedom, they conserve it for the republic as a whole.

It is important to understand, as John McCormick notes, that for Machiavelli the

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149 "When there is combined under a constitution a Prince, a nobility, and the power of the people, these three powers will match and keep each other reciprocally in check." Nicoló Machiavelli, *Discourses*, p. 115.

150 "Whose hands [people or nobility] it was best to confide the protection of liberty?" Nicoló Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 121.
effective counterbalancing of the power of the elite by the people will not be achieved through deliberative means, but only through active, and sometimes ferocious, conflict.\textsuperscript{151} Hence, the wise lawgiver will necessarily protect the right of the people to engage in class-struggle because only the people can act as guardians for the collective freedom.\textsuperscript{152}

We tend to forget that Machiavelli’s and Aristotle’s understanding of the mixed regime is different from its modern, Lockean analogue. The latter is an institutional arrangement having to do with the functional separation of the branches of government. But for Aristotle and Machiavelli the mixed regime must be mixed not only in an institutional sense, but in a sociological one as well.\textsuperscript{153} To be more precise, the

\begin{flushleft}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{151} As do formal or minimalist approaches (e.g., Dahl 1971; Przeworski 1991; Schumpeter 1942), he specifies and justifies electoral mechanisms for elite control; and similar to recent civic culture and participatory approaches (e.g., Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Putnam 2000; Sandel 1996), he encourages more direct and robust modes of popular engagement with politics. What is more important, by combining the strengths of each approach Machiavelli overcomes their respective weaknesses. (…) Contemporary democrats who focus on civic culture render the minimalist model more substantive by promoting political participation characterized by civility, trustworthiness, deliberation, and reciprocity. Yet I show that Machiavelli’s preferred sociopolitical milieu is one of intense socioeconomic animosity and political contestation between elites and the people. John P. McCormick, “Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism,” in \textit{American Political Science Review}, June 2001, pp 297-313, p. 297.}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{152} “According to Machiavelli, the people deserve this position simply because they are more trustworthy than the nobility or the great. In accord with the distinction between elite and popular appetites mentioned above, the people will not use such a power to dominate, but only to defend themselves from domination (I.5; I.46).” John P. McCormick, “Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism,” p. 299.}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{153} Machiavelli confirms for us, quite simply, that elections are not enough. Popular primacy in his republic means more than just choosing elites through elections. Merely electoral standards certainly make it possible to interpret a republic according to the traditional Aristotelian/Polibian criterion: A good republic should appear to be both an oligarchy and a democracy, depending upon how you look at it. Electoral standards of democracy allow us to say that elites rule but that the people choose which elites do the governing. The system is therefore oligarchic and democratic. In Machiavelli’s estimation, the electoral standard, like most of the great standards of political philosophy, traditional or modern, humanistic or}
\end{flushleft}
Machiavellian and Aristotelian mixed regime is about the institutionalization of class animosity:

Contrary to later republican practice, and especially the practice of liberal democracy, Machiavelli suggests that a direct manifestation of the people within government, alongside a representation of them, is necessary to carry out successfully an appropriate patrolling of elites. Whereas most classical political science, conservative and liberal, is concerned with controlling the people—either first and foremost, or with equal vigilance devoted to elites—Machiavelli gives highest priority to the control of elites.\textsuperscript{154}

The question then is not only about what branches of the government should do what, but what \textit{classes} should be in put charge of what branches of the government and, moreover, through which mechanisms can the people’s presence and power be protected. And this protection not only allows for but requires a high degree of animosity, and even resentment, on the part of the people.\textsuperscript{155} Discord, in short, is a good thing: it makes for better policy and makes the people stronger.\textsuperscript{156}

\phantomsection\addcontentsline{toc}{subsection}{References}


\textsuperscript{155} “A Machiavellian paradox perhaps lost on civic-culture theorists of democracy is that socioeconomic and political conflict may breed stronger allegiance than the active pursuit of a consensually derived common good (see Shapiro 1996, 108). Along these lines, how might our political and perhaps socioeconomic elites be handled more aggressively?” John P. McCormick, “Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism,” p. 310

\textsuperscript{156} “The active civic life enjoyed by Machiavelli’s (perhaps romanticized) popularly based Rome is not—contemporary neorepublicans and communitarians take note—a peaceful, bucolic, or tranquil arrangement of social interaction. Although Machiavelli never makes the distinction, discord seems to be good for two
Machiavelli goes one step further than Aristotle. Like Aristotle, he claims that the power of the demos can do positive things for the republic. He also goes beyond Aristotle in claiming that the popular classes cannot oppress. But, even so, he agrees with Aristotle that the power of the demos is too unstable to sustain autonomous and stable rule.

**Conclusion:**

For both Aristotle and Machiavelli there is a certain logic to populist mobilization, and their view is that this logic should be brought in and included in the mixed institutions of a well-designed regime.

They alert us to the fact that populist mobilization is not generated out of nothing, that it is not pure anarchy or anomie, but instead rooted in social pluralism and the existence of social classes. Populism, in these readings, is an inevitable dimension of democratic politics and, as such, it needs to be accommodated within a well-ordered political arrangement—these final insight gives impulse to the Aristotelian and Machiavellian solution of the mixed regime. Populist mobilization, while very unstable and by definition ephemeral, can have positive or negative effects, according to how it is institutionally channeled.

Aristotle’s and Machiavelli’s have a similar idea: that by creating some institutional channels for the people’s expression, the *demos* could be transformed into a citizenry, that is, a political body that exists beyond extraordinary or revolutionary times. This new *demos* could act as a source of legitimacy and even wisdom for the new republic. The *demos* can only exist while it is mobilizing, but those who were part of the demos could become citizens and engage in politics productively, albeit in a different fashion than those of the other classes.

Aristotle and Machiavelli share a partial answer to the problem posed by the tension between the freedom of the prince and the freedom of the people. They both propose a version of the mixed regime. The mixed regime combines two kinds of institutions: institutions in which the different classes are expected to collaborate, and institutions in which the same classes are encouraged to oppose one another. The two, however, realize that institutional designs are not enough and that a “softer” connection is necessary for the evolution from despotic rule to long-lasting lawful domination.\(^{157}\) This softer connection is provided by culture, habits, and religion. In the next chapter the idea of the mixed regime will be discussed in more depth.

\(^{157}\) Antonio Gramsci created the term “hegemony” to refer to the cultural, religious and ethical elements that are created—not necessarily in an intentioned manner—by the political and intellectual elites and then go on to infuse the life-world of the popular classes and generate implicit support for a political order. In Gramsci’s reader of Machiavelli, “hard” power or power based on coercion, is un-economic and cannot prevail in the long run—the only, since the only possible way of achieving so would be a perpetual threat of the Prince over each one of its subjects “Softer” forms of power are ultimately more efficient and clean, and they even offer room for at least some negotiation of meanings between the elites and the popular classes (what Gramsci called “counter-hegemony”). Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*. (Translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari.) New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
CHAPTER FOUR:

RETHINKING THE MIXED REGIME

The Mixed Regime in Aristotle and Machiavelli

Any extrapolation of Aristotle and Machiavelli’s ideas for contemporary politics should begin with the insight that there is no one-size fits all institutional panacea for all political problems. While in some political communities more deliberation is indeed needed others would benefit from the presence of more populist mobilization. Moreover, all political communities need to figure out ways for these two logics to coexist. The question, from this point of view, is not so much how to eradicate populism and replace it with rationality, but how to construct the institutions of a mixed regime in such a way as to reach a balance between the deliberative and populist aspects of democratic politics.

To pursue this aim, we need to go back and revisit an old and proud notion from the history of political theory: the mixed regime.\textsuperscript{158} It is necessary to note, however, that I will deal with this concept in a rather unorthodox way, since I will not be concerned with

\textsuperscript{158} Aristotle lists fours problems that an adequate social science must address: “First, the theoretical understanding (\textit{theoressai}) of the best regimen or regime "according to prayer". Second, knowing what regime will be best under less than optimal, providential conditions, when we cannot take stability and integration for granted. Third, the social scientist must be able to say how any political culture, no matter how imperfect, can be made more stable and coherent—how, in other words, to bring about the necessary, not constitutive, conditions of political activity. Fourth, to know the techniques to bringing existing regimes closer to the best.” Stephen G. Salkever, \textit{Finding the Mean}, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 91-2
the modern, liberal definition of the term but instead will take another, older, road. I do so because I want to look at the concept of mixed regime from the point of view of social classes, a theme that is not very present in the works of modern political theorists who have written about the subject.

Liberal theorists of the mixed regime—Locke and the early American philosophers especially—were concerned primarily with the institutional separation of the branches of power; that is, with the need to rethink the functional aspect of sovereignty which had been centralized in the hands of absolutist monarchs. Thus, when the question “who gets to do what” is asked to a classic liberal, the answer is framed in terms of which institutional branch of the government does what. A liberal mixed regime is a mixture of institutions, rules and regulations.

My focus, however, is somewhere else. I want to shed light, not on the functional differentiation of the branches of government, but on the social grounds of such differentiation. The focus of this dissertation is the relation between two logics of democratic action—deliberation and populist mobilization—and social pluralism. I am interested in how social pluralism—and more specifically, class differences—translates into political biases and generates political exclusion and democratic deficits, and what are the most effective ways to democratically counterbalance such biases and exclusion.

Liberal political theory, however, is not very helpful for someone wanting to tackle this particular family of problems because the issue of how to process class-based grievances in a political, non-repressive way is a subject that almost disappeared in the
writings of such figures as John Locke.

The proponents of liberalism, in both classic and contemporary forms, like to believe in the existence, or at the very least the possibility, of a class-less society. In chapter two, however, I indicated why I believe this belief is ungrounded and unrealistic, and I noted that one does not need to embrace Marxist social theory to argue that a class-less society is impossible. In fact, I suspect that Aristotle would take Marx to be a hopeless optimist because, for Aristotle, the cause of inequality was not just the economy but human nature itself. Even without capitalism, a class-less society is impossible, he thought, because social pluralism is not an economic but a human condition. People are different in many ways, and economic differences are just one source of social differentiation. For instance, for Machiavelli, there is a radical difference between those who want to rule and those who just want to be left alone, and this is in itself the source of class-differences in the republic. And Aristotle warns that class-differences are based on perception as much as objective realities: the perception of differences in wealth and status engender class differences, and thus classes exist in rich and poor cities alike.

I believe it will be useful to me to try to recover this ancient way of understanding what a mixed regime is. In this theoretical tradition, a mixed regime is not defined from the point of view of which institutions do what, but rather, which classes do what in which institutions.

159 In almost all human cultures there seems to be an internal drive towards social differentiation and stratification. Complex communities have complex forms of social stratification: through cultural consumption, through technology, through different “life-styles.”
For Aristotle and Machiavelli, a mixed regime is the result of a “mixture” of classes, and the challenge the wise legislator faces is how to give adequate political representations to all the social classes. There is, however, a crucial difference between the Aristotelian and Machiavellian versions of the mixed regime. For Aristotle, the solution to the political problems of the city is the rule by the middle class, and his blueprint for a mixed regime is designed to give as much representation as possible to the middling element, and to strengthen the political and cultural hegemony of the middle class over rich and poor alike. In Aristotle's mind, a mixed regime should be designed in a way as to empower the middle class, to the detriment (one might say) of the other classes. Only in this way, he thought, would the political culture become more moderate, and only by embracing moderation could the city become better organized.

Paradoxically, Aristotle combined a deep appreciation for the almost sacred status of politics with a conviction that an over-politicization of public life was detrimental to the city as a whole. In his view, excessive politicization ends up in factionalism and it makes people unable to imagine, or even to care for, the good of the city. Because of this, Aristotle argues that the regime must be constructed in such a way that it draws all the classes away from contention and factionalism and towards the center; a mixed regime is a mean to achieve that end. If created right, a mixed regime will reward the most moderate and civil behaviors. Such political moderation, in turn, will be made possible by the de-politicization of public life that would be generated by the empowerment of the
least political class of all—the middle class.¹⁶⁰

Machiavelli's mixed regime, however, is a completely different animal. It is not designed to eliminate distrust and contention, but to keep it alive and even stoke it; it does not see danger in the rebellious spirit of the people but instead in the power-grabbing nature of the prince and the elites; and, instead of wanting to de-politicize public life, it wants to instill the public of the republic with a robust and even vociferous interest in political matters.

**Aristotle's Mixed Regime and the Rule of the Middle Class**

At first reading, it might look like the Politics is a treatise on pure regimes, but Aristotle's interest in mixed regimes goes against that notion. While he is concerned with pure regimes, both in their correct and deviant subtypes, his introduction of the idea that a regime can be good, or at the very least good-enough, even though it consists of a mixture of elements from the other types is nothing short of revolutionary.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ “Now when the farming element and that possessing a moderate amount of property have authority over the regime, they govern themselves in accordance with laws. For they have enough to live on as long as they work, but are unable to be at leisure, so the put the law in charge and assemble only for necessary assemblies.” Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, 1292bl, 25.

¹⁶¹ In Aristotle's classification of the regimes, there are three correct and three deviant types. Regimes in which the many rule—as opposed to regimes where only one rules, or where the few rule—can be correct, or deviant. The correct type is called a polity, and deviant type is called democracy. The distinction between polity and democracy rests on the social class which is called upon to rule: in a polity it is the middle element who rules, while in a democracy the poor rule.
The regime is, for Aristotle, the single most fundamental arrangement of a city; a regime is more than a simple mechanism for majority rule: it is an engine for the creation, distribution and accumulation of power. It is the institutional framework that distributes power over public matters among the various classes and groups that inhabit the city. The institutions of the regime—from which the laws are derived, and not the other way around—dictates who has the power to do what in a city. It empowers different social actors differently; it shapes and conditions political conduct by rewarding some behaviors while punishing others, and it engenders its own reproduction thanks to the cultural transmission of the same behavioral patterns to subsequent generations: the patterns of political behavior that are more successful in a given regime are repeated across time, so they become recurrent. Regimes create political cultures—which are, for Aristotle, the most important political mediation of all.

The concept of the mixed regime is central to Aristotelian political philosophy because it helps provide a key connection between Aristotle’s ethics and political thinking. The mixed regime is the answer to Aristotle's preoccupation, which was not driven by pure speculation, but by the aim of discovering which type of regimes made possible the best type of life for their citizens as they actually are; i.e., as human beings.

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162 “For laws should be enacted—and all are in fact enacted—with a view to the regimes, not not regimes with a view to the laws. For a regime is an arrangement in cities connected with the offices (establishing) the manner in which they have been distributed, what the authoritative element of the regime is, and what the end of the partnership is in each case.” Aristotle, Politics, 4, 1, par. 1289 a1, line 15.

163 To use a blatant anachronism: we should say today that regimes “shape the preferences” of political actors.
of imperfect virtue:

What regime is best and what way of life is best for most cities and most human beings, judging with a view neither to virtue of the sort that is beyond private persons, nor to education, in respect of those things requiring (special advantages provided by) nature and an equipment dependent of chance, not to the regime that one would pray for, but a way of life which it is possible for most to participate in, and a regime in which most cities can share? For those that are called aristocracies—the ones we were just speaking of—either fall outside (the range) of most cities, or border, on so-called polity; hence we may speak of both as one.\textsuperscript{164}

What is more striking about Aristotle’s development of the idea of a mixed regime is his rejection of purity and his defense of political hybridity. The human world is, for Aristotle, a complex, multilayered entity that is defined by the principle of plurality: the coexistence of a multiplicity of cities, cultures, geographical environments, and types of persons. Plurality and uniqueness are, for Aristotle, more than superficial phenomena: they are ontological conditions that shape all that there is or could be in the world of men. This radical, inescapable plurality is not completely chaotic, however; it presents itself in pattern and these patterns can be used as templates with which to create a conceptual order.\textsuperscript{165}

But the patterns that we can distinguish in reality are not discrete, fixed categories

\textsuperscript{164} Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1295al, 25, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{165} The most important among those patterns is the notion of species—a concept that Aristotle extracts from the study of biology and extrapolates into the social order. The concept of the human species is the primary tool for the understanding of social phenomena: cultures are, for Aristotle, somewhat of a functional equivalent to what species are for animals.
that can be reduced to a simple set of immutable characteristics. They are broad generalizations, and the plurality of human things is forever challenging and altering the categories with which we analyze things. Plurality (of people, of cultures, of cities, of terrains and crops, of the weather, of social classes) can be made sense of by the careful use of reflection, but it cannot be reduced or explained away, once and for all.

Men are not gods and the earth that they inhabit is not Olympus, therefore they would be wiser if they let go of their attempts to create divine abodes on earth and sought instead to perfect their common arrangements with a view, not to the perfect life, but to a better life for all. Aristotelian thinking is always more at home with complexity that with purity, and it tends to think in term of mixtures, hybrids, and multiple possibilities.

Aristotle's comfort with hybridity and mixture is palpable in his denunciation of the Platonic doctrine of the regimes. Like Plato, Aristotle recognizes that a true aristocratic regime is impossible; it is a type of regime that can be thought about or “prayed for” but not truly experienced on earth. Unlike Plato, though, he claims that there is still room for good-enough forms of self-government. In fact, at the very beginning of his discussion of the regimes Aristotle breaks with the notion that the impossibility of aristocratic rule leaves no choice but to be ruled by a tyrant or a mob. Very quickly (literally very quickly: it takes him only a couple of lines to dispatch with the notion) he replaces aristocracy with polity as the regime to strive for (defining “best” as the kind of regime whose virtue is not beyond private persons.) In fact he also adds that even if a polity is not possible, there are good alternatives still, the mixed regime being the best of them all.
In fact, he goes beyond that claim to make the even more striking claim that some forms of democracy can be more moderate than oligarchy.\textsuperscript{166}

He is also willing to make the bold statement that a truly virtuous city will not be constructed on the virtue of the best and most virtuous, but instead by giving preeminence to those with the most average situation in life:

If it was correctly said in the (discourses on) ethics that the happy life is one in accordance with virtue and unimpeded, and that virtue is a mean, then the \textit{middling sort of life} is best—the mean that is capable of being attained by each sort of individual. (...) Now in all cities there are three parts of the city, the well off, the very poor, and third, those in the middle between these. Since, however, it is agreed that what is moderate and middling is best, it is evident that in the case of the good of fortune as well a middling possession is the best of all.\textsuperscript{167}

The cities that are fortunate enough as to have an important number of middle-class citizens have a better chance at becoming a polity and being well governed\textsuperscript{168} because of a number of factors. First, the middling element of the city is the one best equipped for public life since “…neither do they desire the things of others, as the poor do, not others their (property) as the poor desire that of the wealthy.”\textsuperscript{169} Second, such a city will avoid

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\item \textsuperscript{166} “To tyranny is the worst, and the farthest removed from being (a regime); oligarchy is the second worst, for aristocracy stands far from this regime; and democracy is the most moderate.” Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 2, $\S$1289bl.
\item \textsuperscript{167} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 4, $\S$1295bl, 25, emphasis added.
\item \textsuperscript{168} “It is clear, therefore, that the political partnership that depends on the middling sort is best as well, as that those cities are capable of being well governed in which the middling element is numerous.” Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 4, $\S$1295bl, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{169} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 4, $\S$1295bl, 30.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
internecine conflict more easily, because “(i)t alone (the middling element) is without factional conflict, for where the middling element is numerous, factional conflicts and splits over (the nature of) the regime occur least of all.”

However, the cities that have these two conditions—a middle class that is not only large in number, but has also a certain cultural preeminence and political standing—are very rare.

The reasons for this rarity have to do with economics, a matter I discussed in the second chapter. Just as Aristotle's political science can only be comprehended if one grasps his sociological insights correctly, his view is shaped by the implications of his economic insights.

It is not an original statement to say that Aristotle appears to have been the first one to fully grasp the political consequences of an economy oriented towards unrestricted exchange and accumulation. But not only was he the first, he was also one of the most subtle thinkers on the matter.

For Aristotle was the first one to notice that, left to their own devices, the logics of politics and the economy clash in potentially destructive ways. Citizenship depends on

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170 Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1296a1, 5.

171 Only a handful of modern thinkers have delved deeply into the social and cultural effects of unfettered wealth accumulation. Karl Marx, Marx Weber and Karl Polanyi’s are probably unparalleled among them. Karl Polanyi compares the modern market economy as a “satanic mill” that destroys the fabric of social relationship with its unrelenting pressure. The autonomous market transforms everything into a commodity, including human life. Labour power is bought and sold as any other commodity, disregarding that such a thing affects the human individual. "No society—Polanyi says—could stand the effects of such a system of crude fictions (the market) even for the shortest stretch of time unless its human and natural substance as well as its business organization was protected against the ravages of this satanic mill." Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation, Beacon Press, 2001, p. 73.
political equality because only those who are equal can engage in full and productive political action. Yet the economic activity of the city—an activity that the city needs in order to survive—creates economic inequality, which in turns bleeds into politics in destructive ways.

For the city to be a functioning political entity, the city needs a modicum of economic equality—even more so if the city is to become a polity, which is based on the rule by the middle class. But that is not the way in which money operates. Money engenders the thirst for acquisition and accumulation, and, not unlike political power, once the dynamics of acquisition are started they take a life of their own. Those that have a little bit more money than others at the moment of the foundation of the city, or that happen to make a little bit more money afterwards by chance, find it easier to make even more money, and those that a little bit less than others find that the deck is stacked against them in ways that they could not foresee. Thus, the economic middle ground upon which a middle class is created erodes away, as some of them become part of the moneyed elite and most of them are drawn towards the destitute classes. By its own nature, unfettered economic activity—what we would call “capitalism” today—generates economic polarization, that is, a city slowly divided in two, with a fistful of the very rich at the top and a majority of the very poor at the bottom. In such a divided city, a regime ruled by the middle class is impossible:

It is also evident from these things why most regimes are either democratic or oligarchic. For as a result of the fact that the middling element is often few in them, whichever is preeminent,
whether those owning property or the people, oversteps the middle (path) and conducts the regime to suit itself, so that either (rule of) the people comes into being or an oligarchy.\(^\text{172}\)

Aristotle is saying that, far from being a natural creation, a middle class is a political creation. The conditions which make possible a middle class—the restriction and regulation of financial transactions, the restriction of the acquisitive impulses of the rich, the banishment of measures such as the enslavement and destitution of debtors, the distribution of wealth towards the poor by way of different types of subsidies—are political creations and must be put in place and defended through politics and culture.

If these conditions do not exist, or if they do, but are not maintained properly, the city will drift towards oligarchy, or rule by the wealthy. In such a regime, the fusion of economic power with political power will reinforce itself, and economic inequality will breed even greater political inequality. If this cycle of increased polarization is not reversed, Aristotle says, the city itself will be jeopardized, because a city so divided cannot last. The majority will revolt, and they will topple the oligarchic regime just by their sheer number.

So, with these elements in mind, Aristotle recommends that the mixed regime be designed with a view to strengthening the hand of the middle element, even if it is a minority in the city. If the city has a dominant oligarchic class, then the laws should be written in a such a way that they add a middle class element to the oligarchic class—the

\(^{172}\) Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1296al, 25.
laws will look democratic, for they will be aimed at loosening the grip the oligarchy has on political affairs. If the city is ruled by the popular classes, the laws should encourage the participation of the middle class in public affairs; under these conditions, laws will appear to have an oligarchic tint, since they will be aimed at drawing into public affairs the least political class of all, the middle class. 173

A mixed regime is constructed through the combination of elements from oligarchies and democracies. The best type of mixed regime is constructed in such a way that, by combining certain common elements from democracy and oligarchy, it ends up functioning as a mean between these two. Or, a polity—Aristotle argues—will balance out the worst excesses of democracy and oligarchy, and keep itself on the wisest and most centered path, a virtuous mean. Lesser types of mixed regimes will simply combine elements from one or the other, without aiming at finding the virtuous mean. But even a lesser type of mixed regime can be a positive outcome if the circumstances are unfavorable to the formation of a polity:

There are three defining principles of this combination or mixture. One is to take elements of the legislation of each as for example concerning adjudication. In oligarchies they arrange to fine the well off if they do not take part in adjudicating, and provide no pay for the poor, while in democracies, they provide pay for the poor and do not fine the well off. What is common to and a mean between these is to have both (arrangements), and hence this is a characteristic of polity, which is a mixture of both.

173 “The legislator should always add those of the middling sort (to the dominant class) in the regime. If he enacts oligarchic laws, he ought to aim at the middling sort; if democratic ones, he ought to these to them. (...) The better the mixture in the polity, the more lasting it will be.” Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1297al, 5.
Another is to take the mean between the arrangements of each. For example, in the one case they attend the assembly on the basis on no assessment at all or a very small one, and in the other the basis of a large assessment: what is common here is neither of these, but the means between these assessments. A third is (a selection) from both arrangements, taking some from the oligarchic law and some from the democratic. (...) It is characteristic of aristocracy and polity, therefore, to take an element from each—from oligarchy making offices elected, from democracy not doing it on the basis of an assessment.\(^{174}\)

To prevent the institutionalization of mob democracies, Aristotle recommends the formation of mixed regimes instead of advocating for pure forms that rely on reason.\(^{175}\)

In fact, at times he seems to imply that a polity is not a pure regime based on the rule by the middle element but a mixed regime itself.\(^{176}\) And he even goes as far as to imply that a polity has more in common with democracy than aristocracy:

> Simply speaking, polity is a mixture of oligarchy and democracy. It is customary, however, to call polities those (sorts of polities) which tend toward democracy, and those tending more toward aristocracy, aristocracies, on the account that education and good birth particularly accompany those who are better off.\(^{177}\)

After discussing the ideas of polity, mixed regime and middle class rule, Aristotle then

\(^{174}\) Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1294al, 35, emphasis added.

\(^{175}\) “Since there are three things disputing over equality in the regime, freedom, wealth, and virtue (for the fourth—what they call good birth—accompanies the latter two, good birth being old wealth and virtue together—, it is evident that a mixture of the two—of the well off and the poor—is to be spoken of as polity, while a mixture of the three should (apart from the genuine and first form) be spoken of most particularly as aristocracy.” Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1294al, 25.

\(^{176}\) “So it is evident that if one wishes to have a just mixture, elements from both must be brought together—(for example) the ones being provided pay, the others fined; in this way, all would participate, while in the other way the regime comes to belong to one side alone.” Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1297al, 40.

\(^{177}\) Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1293bl, 35.
moves on to discuss democracy, in rather striking detail. While Plato treated democracy as single entity with unequivocally negative connotations, Aristotle distinguishes two basic types: democracy under law and a democracy of the multitude, as well as several subtypes of these two.\textsuperscript{178} While clearly inferior to a polity, a democracy subject to the rule of law might be an acceptable form of government, but a democracy of the multitude is the worst type of democratic regime.

Both sub-types of democracy depend on the realization of the most basic tenet of political equality: the principle of one man, one vote. Under these conditions, the political differences between rich and poor disappear, and political power depends on the ability to rally the greatest number of citizens. It is easy to see that such a regime will be heavily tilted towards the popular classes, since the class of the poor is by definition greater than the class of the rich, and even the middle class.

However, there is a key difference: in a democracy under the rule of law, the rich, the middle class and the poor alike respect some core rules for political engagement, such as that all matters will be resolved by majority vote, and that no class will have authority \textit{per se}. One might also speculate that in such a regime some other core political principles are respected, such as some minimalistic procedures for decision making (voting procedures, i.e.) and other norms prohibiting the use of political violence on the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{178}“Many of those who want to set up aristocratic regimes as well (as polities) thoroughly err not only by the fact that they distribute more to the well off, but also by deceiving the people. For in time from things falsely good there must result a true evil, and the aggrandizements of the wealthy are more ruinous to the polity that those of the people.”} \text{Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 4, \S1297al, 5.}\]
part of the majority against the minority.\textsuperscript{179}

In a democracy of the multitude, however, there are no laws except the will of the mob; instead of a majoritarian rule that is bound by some procedural constraints, we have a democracy in which majority decisions become the law. In a democracy ruled by the mob, there are no laws but only decrees, which are by definition arbitrary. If even the most basic legal limitations are ignored, a crucial threshold is crossed and lawful majoritarian rule devolves into rule by the mob. The defining element in creating such a democracy is the popular leader, or demagogue, who flatters the people and seeks to replace the weight of the law with the popular will.\textsuperscript{180}

Another kind of democracy is where all have a part in the offices provided only that they are citizens, but law rules. Another kind of democracy is the same in other respects, but the multitude has authority and not the law. This comes about when decrees rather than law are authoritative, and this happens on account of popular leaders. For in cities under a democracy that is based on law a popular leader does not arise, but the best of the citizens preside; but where the laws are without authority, the popular leaders arise.\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{179} “The first sort of democracy, then, is that which is particularly said to be based on equality. The law in this sort of regime asserts that there is equality when the poor are no more preeminent that the well off, and neither have authority, but they are both (treated) similar. For if freedom indeed exists particularly in a democracy, as some conceive to be the case, as well as equality, this would particularly happen where all participate in the regime as far as possible in similar fashion. But since the people are a majority, and what is resolved by the majority is authoritative, this will necessarily be democratic.” Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1291bl, 30.

\textsuperscript{180} “(T)he popular leader popular leader and the flatterer are the same and comparable. These are particularly influential in each case, flatterers with tyrants and the popular leaders with peoples of this sort. These are responsible for decrees having authority rather than the laws because they bring everything before the people.” Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1292al, l. 20.

\textsuperscript{181} Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1291bl 30.
Aristotle's description of the role of demagogues is strikingly similar to the way in which contemporary theorists define the notion of delegative democracy. As I discussed in the previous chapter, scholars distinguish between liberal democracies and delegative democracies, and the core difference between them is the existence of personalistic leaders who are not constrained by any sort of horizontal accountability. And, similarly, Aristotle observes that such leaders often reach their position of preeminence by playing on the people's sense of resentment and wrongdoing: such leaders convince the people that others have hurt them and restitutions are in order.

However, it is very interesting that Aristotle, after explaining why a democracy is not to be trusted, closes his argument with some words that appear to be more tolerant of popular rule. For one thing, he seems to be making the very same argument that Machiavelli will make in his writings, i.e., that the people are not violent per se, and that they only act when they feel wronged.182

Finally, Aristotle makes an intriguing argument that is closely related with the main object of this dissertation. In a manner that is fully compatible with his methodology, he asks this question: given democratic rule, what are the mechanisms that might move it closer to a democracy under the rule of law, and away from a democracy of the mob? Firstly, he seems to advocate deliberative democracy in that he finds common

182 “For the poor are willing to remain tranquil even when they have no share in the prerogatives, provided no one acts arrogantly towards them nor deprives them of any of their propuerty. Yet this is not easy; for it does not always turn out that those sharing in the governing body are the refined sort.” Aristotle, Politics, 4, 4, ¶1297bl, 5.
**deliberation** to be the answer to this question:

In the sort of democracy which is most particularly held to be democracy (I mean, the sort in which the people has authority over the laws), it is advantageous with a view to deliberating better to do the same thing that is done in regard to the courts in oligarchies. For they arrange to fine (for nonattention) those they want to adjudicate to ensure that they do adjudicate, while the popular sort provides pay for the poor. **This should be done in regard to assemblies as well. For all will deliberate better when they do so in common—the people with the notables and these with the multitude. It is also advantageous if those who deliberate are chose by election of by lot in equal numbers from the parts of the city.** And where the popular sort among the citizens greatly exceeds (the notables) in number, it is advantageous too either not to provide pay for all but only for as many balance the multitude of notables, or else to exclude the majority by lot (from receiving pay).\(^{183}\)

But secondly, and more crucially, he makes a point that I have repeated often in the previous chapters: such public deliberation will only be meaningful if measures are taken to make sure that the different social classes are equally represented in the deliberations, on the one hand, and that deliberations are structured in such a way that they do not have the power to topple the regime, on the other.

In oligarchies it is advantageous either to elect additionally certain persons from the multitude (to serve as officials), or to establish an official board of the sort that exists in some regimes, made up of those they call “preliminary councilors” or “law guardians,” and to (have a popular assembly that will) take up only that business that is considered in the preliminary council; for in this way the people will share in deliberating but will not be able to

\(^{183}\) Aristotle, *Politics*, 4, 4, ¶1298bl, 15.
overturn anything connected to the regime.\textsuperscript{184}

The more basic measure to insure popular participation was, of course, paying the poor to participate, either directly or through indirect incentives.

To summarize the Aristotelian concept of a mixed regime, its primary goal is to prevent a dangerous division of the city into the warring factions that is generated by the economic division of the city in two opposite classes, the rich and the poor. Continuing the Aristotelian theme of moderation and a middle way, the mixture must be aimed at stabilizing the political regime, by employing the middle class as a balancing influence. Political reforms should be enacted with two goals in mind: first, to strengthen the power of the middle classes, by giving them more political power, and to move the regime away from the extremes in a very gentle fashion. Reforms should never be approached with a one-size-fits all strategy because it is necessary to take into account the previous state of the regime: if it is too oligarchic, reforms should be democratic—but not \textit{too} democratic, lest it slip into rule by the mob. If the regime is too democratic, it should be made slightly more oligarchic, so that the middle classes are given more power—but not so much so that the regime becomes a full fledged oligarchy.

As it is easy to see, the fine-tuning of regimes is not easy to accomplish; it is dependent on many contingencies, and there are no guarantees for success.

For Aristotle, political regimes ought to accommodate human plurality, not stifle or

\textsuperscript{184} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 13, 1298b 26.
deny it. Any regime that is built up over a single principle or is meant to be the realization of a single idea will end up in failure, no matter how virtuous the intentions of the founders. A regime cannot be built on a single virtue or presume that all men are alike: that they are all virtuous, or rich, or war-like, or reasonable, or greedy. It has to be built in a way that accommodates the fact of human plurality, instead of working against it. A regime, in shot, cannot be pure. A regime that seeks purity—a pure aristocracy, a pure monarchy, a pure democracy—has but two possible outcomes: either it will fail and devolve into anarchy, from which another regime will grow, or it will become too rigid and coercive, finally requiring the forceful eradication of plurality. Because of this, a regime should be a hybrid, combining different principles and characteristics.\textsuperscript{185}

\textbf{Machiavelli’s “ferocious populism”}

While the notion of a mixed regime is central to any reading of the \textit{Politics}, the same concept is seldom associated with Machiavelli’s work. However, I agree with John McCormick when he notes that readings of Machiavelli’s \textit{Discourses} have all too often overlooked one of its most important themes, which is precisely his defense of the mixed regime.

Machiavelli’s thinking about the mixed regimes has some points of contact with

\textsuperscript{185} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 4, 4, \S 1294bl, 15.
Aristotle's because his primary concern is the relation between the institutions of government and the social classes of the city. But the way in which Machiavelli defines a desirable mixed regime can hardly be more different from the Aristotelian answer to the same question.

While Aristotle views the mixed regime as the best way to steer the political life of the city toward moderation, Machiavelli sees it as the best way to keep alive the fighting spirit that is necessary for republicanism. While Aristotle wants to depoliticize the political culture and keep politics contained, Machiavelli wants to use political contention to keep the public's interest in politics high. And while Aristotle wants to balance out the differences between the classes so that no factionalism arises, Machiavelli theorizes ways in which to institutionalize class animosity, i.e., “more extensive, constant, and, especially animated modes by which the people might control elites.”186 In the following paragraphs, I will review Machiavelli's position and contrast it with Aristotle, to determine which of the two is most useful as a resource in our contemporary democratic context.

Like Aristotle, Machiavelli theorizes the mixed regime in close relation to the issue of class-based grievances. He is also concerned with the possible concentration of political power in the hands of the few or the one. Machiavelli, however, sets up the basic powers of the republic differently than Aristotle. In his view, the basic powers of a

republic are three: the Prince, the nobility, and the people. Machiavelli's hope is that these three actors will control and constrain each other, since “...(w)hen there is combined under a constitution a Prince, a nobility, and the power of the people, these three powers will match and keep each other reciprocally in check.”

It is notable that there is a fundamental difference between Machiavelli’s language and the words used by someone like Locke. Both Machiavelli and Locke were concerned with avoiding oppression. But Machiavelli does not refer to the parliaments, the courts and the executive as pure institutional arrangements that have no relation to class; he always keeps his thinking grounded in class-specific terms. Locke, and, subsequently, the American founding fathers were thinking in terms of two-coequal branches of government keeping the executive power in check. Machiavelli is first and foremost concerned with the popular masses and the prince keeping economic and political elites in check. Machiavelli’s concern is how to put class-based balances in place that keep the acquisitive and power-grabbing impulses of the elite in check, and he is uninterested in the dangers of a monarchic centralization of power. He envisions the people, on the one side, and the nobility, on the other, with the prince as an intermediary figure. (Interestingly, the prince is something of a wildcard, in that he can come from the

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187 Nicoló Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 115.

188 He could not be concerned with the centralizing tendencies of monarchic absolutism, because he clearly thought that the only way of achieving the status of a great power in his era was to complete such centralization. One of his main concerns was that Italy was not set in a path towards becoming a unified, centralized nation state of the kind that France and Spain were. The last chapter of The Prince is an impassionate plea for a prince that might be like Charles V or Francis I.
nobility or the people. The prince, as it were, has no social class.)

More specifically, Machiavelli's solution to the centralizing and antidemocratic tendencies of republican rule is to grant substantive power to the people—much more so than Aristotle—in order to make it the watchdog of the power-grabbing elites.

To begin with, Machiavelli shares the Aristotelian idea about the people being only capable of action when they feel they are being oppressed. But Machiavelli goes beyond Aristotle in his belief the people cannot oppress, or that they can only do so under very specific circumstances and for a very short period of time. This is so because the masses have no desire to rule. As I mentioned in chapter two, Machiavelli envisioned two kinds of persons: those who want to rule, and those who just want to be left to their own private lives. The popular masses are composed mainly of this last type, and they have two basic political impulses: a desire for freedom, and a thirst for revenge against those who have enslaved them. But if enough freedom is granted to the people, and if they are protected from tyranny, Machiavelli thinks, they will be content to go about their own business. For Machiavelli, the people's power is reactive: they will act only if and when they feel someone is trying to dominate them.

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189 Yet this is only possible when people have not become corrupt. "...where the mass of the people is sound, disturbances and tumults do not serious harm; but where corruption has penetrated the people, the best laws are of no avail, unless they are administered by a man of supreme power that he may cause the laws to be observed until the mass has been restored to a healthy condition [but] I know not whether such a case has ever occurred." Nicoló Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 166.

190 "The masses have two desires. the first is to revenge themselves on those who have been the cause of their slavement. The second is to recover their liberty.” Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 163.
Machiavelli also echoes Aristotle in that he grants the people a substantial capacity for collective judgment. Machiavelli recognizes three positive substantive characteristics in the people: “…fairness in distributing offices, their justice in deciding cases of public accusations, and their ability to recognize the best argument from among public speeches.” 191 Thus, because Machiavelli has a positive evaluation of the nature of the people, he is willing to grant the popular classes substantial political leeway, much more so than later political theorists. More specifically, Machiavelli seems to think that, while individual persons are not to be trusted, when they are combined in a people their demands become more reliable. 192 The crux of Machiavelli’s argument is that, because “(t)he demands of a free people are rarely pernicious to their liberty” 193 the republics that gave a bigger power to the people, such as Rome, had a more turbulent and factious public life, but they also had the energy and ability to achieve greatness. 194

Because the people have no desire to rule but have an active interest in preventing tyranny, their energies are best put to use in a republic as “guardians of liberty;” that is, as the people should be put in charge of accusing individual citizens or magistrates for


192 “Moreover, it also demonstrates that the plebs are guileless: They are incapable of the deception and treachery advised and practiced by the nobility.” John McCormick, “Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism,” p. 300.

193 Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 120.

194 Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 127. Moreover, while there can be direct control, or even violent elimination, of the Prince and the elite few, the masses cannot be disposed of. “The more cruelty he [the ruler] employs [against the masses] the feeble will his authority become”. Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 162.
any attempt against public liberty. This has the beneficial effect of preventing conspiracies and providing a space for venting the ill humors of the people. The masses must have an opportunity to vent their demands, otherwise they will revolt.

As John McCormick argues,

Machiavelli adds procedures for the popular indictment of officials, popular judgment on many kinds of legal cases, and, generally, interprets the social and political institutions of republican Rome in more direct rather than representative way. But this does not situate Machiavelli neatly in the camp of substantive or participatory democracy today. Contemporary democrats who focus on civil culture render the minimalist model more substantive by promoting political participation characterized by civility, trustworthiness, deliberation and reciprocity. Yet (...) Machiavelli’s preferred sociopolitical milieu is one of intense socioeconomic animosity and political contestation between elites and the people.

This is the most notable part of Machiavelli’s argument: the goal of avoiding domination by democratic means is better served by intense socioeconomic animosity than by the depolitization of public life, by collaborative deliberation, or by the rule of the middle class. Machiavelli’s portrait of a republican mixed regime is a turbulent and antagonistic picture, one in which public life is dominated by discord and distrust.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that Machiavelli’s argument for a “sociopolitical milieu of intense socioeconomic animosity” did not translate into a call

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195 Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 130.
196 Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 131.
for direct democracy. He thought it necessary to institutionalize the power of the people in such a way that it could serve to fight and prevent domination, but he never advocated that the people become dominant. In his view, the people's powers should restorative and reactive:

In this spirit, the powers of the tribunes [of Rome] created and restored as a result of these three episodes, were, in many cases, reactive or preemptive rather and constructive. The tribunes could veto most official acts through the intercessio; invoke the auxilium, a form of habeas corpus, on behalf of individual plebs; and could not touched physically, since their body integrity was declared inviolable (sacrosanctitas). All these are protections against, or recourses from, aggressive action or encroachment on the part or the nobility or the magistrates.  

Machiavelli’s doubts about direct democracy and popular rule were connected to his reading of the Roman example: while the people of Rome were the cause of his endurance, strength, and greatness, they were also the cause of its downfall. Measures must be taken to insure that the people does not cross certain boundaries.

So, to sum up: for Machiavelli, as Aristotle before him, the mixed regime is the solution to the problem of avoiding political domination. Machiavelli and Aristotle both argue that the functional differentiation of the sources of power is necessary to prevent undue concentration of power in the hands of the few. In both cases, moreover, the institutional framework of the mixed regime must be connected to the social structure of the city: they are both thinking in terms of how to and institutionalize class-based

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grievances, supposing that these kind of grievances can be dangerous for the well-being of the political community. For both of them, the erosion of the sentiment of commonality caused by factionalism is the biggest challenge to self-government.

There are two main differences in their treatment of the notion of the mixed regime, however. The first one is a difference in the political culture each one favors: Aristotle wants to steer the political culture of the city towards moderation and civility, while Machiavelli argues that the common good is better served by a more antagonistic and raucous public life.

The second difference lies in their theorization of the ways in which a republican regime might be spoiled. For Aristotle, a polity or a mixed regime must avoid degenerating into an oligarchy or a democracy, and he proposes a number of institutional and cultural solutions to this problem. But Machiavelli seems to be only concerned with preventing the concentration of power into the hands of the few because, for him, the degeneration of a republic into an oligarchy is a possibility, but its degeneration into a democracy is impossible. This position is in keeping with his previously stated position that the people cannot oppress, but only react against oppression.

Contrary to later republican practice, and especially the practice of liberal democracy, Machiavelli suggests that a direct manifestation of the people within government, alongside a representation of them, is necessary to carry out successfully an appropriate patrolling of elites. Whereas most classical political science, conservative and liberal, is concerned with controlling the people—either first and foremost, or with equal vigilance devoted to elites—Machiavelli gives highest priority to the
For Aristotle, controlling the people is as important as controlling the elites, while for Machiavelli only elites need controlling, and the people must act as the controllers. But the two of them share two key arguments that are central to this dissertation: that populist power can, and should, be utilized against the illegitimate injection of class privileges into the political regime, and that deliberation can, and should, be utilized to create bulwarks against the rule of the mob.

**Conclusion**

Aristotle and Machiavelli both make an argument that is central for this dissertation: that a republican or mixed political regime can accommodate and channel the freedom of the people adequately, but it needs to do so in a way that prevents factionalism and anarchy. Aristotle and Machiavelli underscore the fact that populist mobilization is ephemeral: it tends to follow a cyclical pattern in which, after the initial outburst, it exhausts itself because the people lack the capacity to create and sustain a regime of stable populist domination. The “people” itself only exists insofar it is actively mobilizing against domination, but it dissolves into the plurality of their private lives—or

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the plurality of their “preferences,” in our contemporary jargon—once the mobilization has run its course. This means that after the peak of mobilization has passed, a populist movement must transform itself into something else. Logically, this leaves us with two possibilities: it might disappear, or alternatively it might give birth to a new regime of stable domination. In our terms, populist mobilization needs to be institutionalized in order to have some lasting political impact.

The power of the people is the most useful—if not the only—bulwark against the insinuation of class privileges into the political system. But the power of the people is such that it cannot sustain autonomous rule, and the *demos* tends to be a bad judge of the consequences of its own power in the long run. So, deliberation has to be utilized as a bulwark against the rule of the mob. Deliberation slows down the pace of political change and gives the classes a chance for negotiating their differences in a more reflexive manner. However, deliberation and populist power are both necessary dimensions of republican government for Aristotle and Machiavelli.

Aristotle and Machiavelli alert their readers of the power that the *demos* has and of the relations between that power and citizenship. The transformation of democratic power into institutionalized citizenship transforms the turbulent energy of the *demos* into the more productive institutional power of an engaged citizenry. Thus, the *demos* is transformed into an entity that can participate in day-to-day politics.

But to understand the relation between *demos* and political institutionalization it is necessary to understand the groundings and nature of democratic power. I will
approach this issue in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE:

THEORIZING POPULISM

Conceptualizing Populism

In chapter three and four I discussed the ideas of populist mobilization and of the mixed regime in Aristotle and Machiavelli. I did so to accomplish two goals: to argue that populist mobilization is inseparable from republican rule, and to argue that the best way to channel populist mobilization into republican institutions is to utilize some form of mixed government.

In this chapter I want to approach populism more directly. The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to gain better knowledge of what kind of mixed regime is more adequate to the current times; but, to do so, it is first necessary to have a better understanding of what the particular characteristics of the contemporary demos are. Aristotle and Machiavelli will not be helpful for this particular objective. In this chapter, I will lean on the work of those contemporary political theorists—such as Max Weber, Jacques Ranciere, Chantal Mouffe, John McCormick, Margaret Canovan and Ian Shapiro—who endeavor to do just that.
To follow Aristotle, I will also begin with an emphatic affirmation of the fact of social heterogeneity. Society is never homogeneous: it is not a unity, and it is not an aggregation of equal atoms called “individuals”. It is a heterogeneous totality, constituted from a variety of different groups, classes and strata. Far from being a superficial “problem” that, once solved, will make it possible for the “true” nucleus of a perfect transparent society to reveal itself, social heterogeneity constitutes the central fact of social order.\textsuperscript{200}

As society can never be made one with itself, much less so can politics. Society can never be reconciled with itself, and politics can never be reconciled with society: the utopia of the perfect political community is an illusion. The cause of this impossibility is the fundamental asymmetry between the political totality—the \textit{polis}, the republic, the community of speakers—and the \textit{plebs}. The \textit{plebs} (the part that is less and at the same time more than the whole) by its very existence prevents the coalescence of an unified systemic political order. The excess that the \textit{plebs} embody constantly eludes and conflicts with the political order, and it is this “excess” that political theorists often try to eliminate.\textsuperscript{201}

\textsuperscript{200} “Thinking the ‘people’ as a social category requires a series of theoretical decisions that we have made in the course of our exploration. The most crucial is, perhaps, the constitutive role that we have attributed to \textit{social heterogeneity}. If we do not assign the heterogeneous this role, it could be conceived, in its opacity, as merely the apparent form on an ultimate core which, in itself, would be entirely homogeneous and transparent. That is, it would be the terrain on which the philosophies of history could flourish” Ernesto Laclau, \textit{On Populist Reason}. London: Verso, 2005, p. 227.

\textsuperscript{201} “(W)hile police involves the attempt to reduce all differences to partialities within the communitarian whole—to conceive any differences as mere particularity, and refer the moment of universality to a pure, uncontaminated instance (the philosopher-king in Plato, state bureaucracy in Hegel, the proletariat in
To really understand populist mobilization on *its own terms* it is crucial to advance toward a more precise definition of the concept of ‘a people’. To do so, I will begin by revising the literature produced on the concept in the middle of the twentieth century; then I will discuss more recent works on the subject. I will use as sources both works of political theory (Max Weber, Jacques Ranciere, Margaret Canovan) and mainstream political science (Kurt Weyland, Torcuato Di Tella) since there the two disciplines largely overlap on this particular issue.

In this chapter I will: first, revise Max Weber’s formulations on the routinization of charisma; second, discuss the works included in the literature about the “classical” populist regimes; third, weight the relevance of those works vis a vis the contemporary versions of populist mobilization (i.e., “neopopulisms”); and, finally, offer my revised definition of the concept.

**The Routinization of Charisma**

I will begin the chapter with a discussion of Max Weber’s concept of charismatic authority. Such a discussion is a necessary condition for the revision of the literature of classical populism and of neopopulism that will come afterwards. One of the key

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problems that these bodies of work share is a confusion as to whether populism is to be understood as a form of political leadership or as a type of political movement. While some authors, such as Kurt Weyland, view populism solely from the point of view of the leader, others, such as Margaret Canovan, regard it only as a form of popular uprising.

The problem is that populism is both things at once. It is a form of leadership, and it is a form of popular mobilization. And, to make the matters worse, populism is at the same time a form of political regime, once it has become institutionalized in a government. Populism is not one, nor two, but three things at the same time. To make sense of this confusion, I believe the best place to start is with Max Weber’s sociology of charisma.

Weber concept of “charisma” does not overlap with our notion of populist mobilization perfectly, but the parallels and connections between the two are relevant enough so as to make a discussion of Weber’s sociology of charismatic authority necessary. First, because it is often noted that populist mobilization is inseparable from personal leadership and charismatic authority. Thus, very often the literature on populist mobilization speaks about of “personalist leadership,” “direct relation of the leader with the masses” or “Cesarist acclamation” as the defining characteristic of a populist movement. A charismatic leader is a structural necessity for a populist movement to

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202 Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” in Max Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, p. 77. I agree with Weber’s definition of politics, which puts leadership at the forefront. Weber rejects the commonsense definition that links politics with resource allocation, rational administration, and norm creation, and regards it primarily about the creation of meaning; he underscores the creative and prophetical dimension of political leadership over its potential for the creation or order or even justice. And
coalesce, and populist politics is functionally similar to charismatic politics.\textsuperscript{203}

According to Max Weber, there are three basic sources of legitimacy for political domination: tradition, charisma, and legality.\textsuperscript{204} These three concepts are ideal types, stylizations of very different phenomena, analytic constructs that never completely replicate the complexity of history. In real life, tradition, legality and charisma coexist in every political regime, relating to one another in complex and dynamic patterns.

It is clearly mistaken to predicate that charismatic authority belongs solely to pre-modern or traditional societies, when Weber himself argues that there is a type of charismatic politics that is a particular creation of mass capitalistic society: \textsuperscript{205}

\begin{quote}
he also point out that, in a secularized era there are but few religious prophets and true artists, the function of politics is more crucial than never before. “[H]e [Max Weber] sees politics as a uniquely human activity, one with the potential both to create and to manifest the responsibility and dignity of individuals in an increasingly secularized world. This positive concept of politics is what accounts for Weber’s fear that bureaucratization reinforces what I call a Nietzschean world—a world in which individuals are unable to create durably meaningful lives through goal-directed actions.” Mark Warren, “Max Weber’s Liberalism for a Nietzschean World” in \textit{The American Political Science Review}, Vol. 82, No. 1. (Mar., 1988), pp. 31-50, p. 31.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{203} “And because mundane arrangements for political participation by ordinary people rarely enable us to see the people in action, modern democracy has a hole at its centre, a stage on which we can imagine that special people appearing to make a new start (Lefort 1986.) The easiest way to fill that empty space – a route often taken by populist movements – is to project our hopes on to a leader who can seem to embody the people.” Margaret Canovan, \textit{The People}, p. 90.

\textsuperscript{204} “To begin with, in principle, there are three inner justifications, hence basic \textit{legitimations} of domination. First, the authority of the “eternal yesterday” (…) There is the authority of the extraordinary and personal \textit{gift of grace} (charisma), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership. (…) Finally, there is domination by virtue of “legality,” by virtue of he belief in the validity of legal statute and functional “competence” based on rationally created rules.” Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” p. 79.

\textsuperscript{205} The first mistake that is often made when using Weber’s conceptualization of the three sources of authority is to historicize them; that is, treat them as if they were three distinct \textit{stages in historical evolution}. According to this view, political communities everywhere evolve, teleologically, from traditional/patriarchal rule to charismatic rule, and finally, into legal-rational rule; this evolutionary journey
These modern forms are the children of democracy, of mass franchise, of the necessity to woo and organize the masses, and develop the utmost unity of direction and the strictest discipline. “Professional” politicians outside the parliaments take the organization in hands. (...) They expect that the demagogic effect of the leader’s personality during the election fight of the party will increase votes and mandates and thereby power and, thereby, as far as possible, will extend opportunities to their followers to find the compensation for which they hope. Ideally, one of their mainsprings is the satisfaction of working with loyal personal devotion for a man, and not merely for an abstract program of a party consisting in mediocrities. In this respect, the ‘charismatic’ elements of all leadership are present in the party system.  

Weber states clearly that charismatic authority in modern politics does not exist separately from legal rationality but is, in a sense, conjured up by it; or, as Fred Dallmayr says, “the formal rationality of rules (which can never be fully stipulated or defined) inevitably conjures up as its supplement the non-rationality of decision and

has often been described as the “transition” from traditionalism or pre-modernity to full-fledged Modernity with a capital M. In this view, to enter political modernity entails the definitive replacement of irrational forms of political authority—political personalism among them—with rational forms of authority, embodied in impersonal, abstract and rational political institutions. See for example Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional. Modernizing the Middle East*, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1958. Jürgen Habermas seems to follow this pattern when he refers to “traditional” and “modern” societies, as he does repeatedly. (For example, Jürgen Habermas, *Between in Facts and Norms*, p. 371.)


207 Such an interpretation, however, is clearly superficial, if not outright wrong. For one thing, it must be noted that Weber himself never saw Western modernity as a kind of Hegelian “final” historical stage: he did not see history as the unfolding of a universal reason, and did not see it as evolving towards better things. On the contrary, he was among the harshest critics of late-modern rationalism and devoted a good portion of his life to map out the ways in which the structures of modern, capitalistic modernity engender their own forms of injustice and irrationality. He saw clearly that the institutionalization of an *impersonal, abstract rationality* carries with it the creation of its own sources for power and irrationality.
power.” Contrarily to deliberative democracy’s emphasis in rules and regulations for an open, powerless deliberation, it must be argued again that abstract rules, procedures and institutions do not supersede or eradicate power, irrationality and arbitrariness: they create their own specific form of power and irrationality. Or, as Guillermo O'Donnell explains,

Institutions induce patterns of representation. For the same reasons noted, institutions favor the transformation of the many potential voices of their constituencies into a few that claim to speak as representatives of the former. (...) Insofar as this capability is demonstrated and the given rules of the game are respected, institutions and the various interacting representatives develop an interest in their mutual persistence as interacting agents. (...) Institutions stabilize agents/representatives and expectations. Institutional leaders and representatives come to expect from each other behaviors within a relatively narrow range of possibilities, from a set of actors that they expect to meet again in the next round of interactions. Certain agents may not like the narrowing of expected behaviors, but they anticipate that deviations from such expectations are likely to be counterproductive. This is the point when it may be said that an institution (which probably has already become a formal organization) is strong: it is at equilibrium, and it is in none of the agents' interest to

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209 Giapaolo Baiocchi says, writing about the deliberation-based participatory budget of the city of Porto Alegre, that the single most important feature to explain the success of public deliberation in low-income neighborhoods was the involvement of experience activists, acting as moderators of public deliberations: “Without a core of experienced and respected activists to manage these conflicts, the interruptions in Nazare took over meetings, created personal conflicts between activists, and at times caused other participants to leave feeling that these meetings "were pointless" or "too disorderly." Baiocchi, Gianpaolo Emergent Public Spheres: Talking Politics in Participatory Governance’ in American Sociological Review, Vol. 68, No. 1, (Feb., 2003), p. 65.
change it except in incremental and basically consensual ways.\footnote{210}

If, as Weber says, modern politics are shaped by the “the conflict between bureaucracy and politics or between technical expert and politician,”\footnote{211} then the relationship between legal-rational domination and charisma must be constructed using radically different terms.

First, we must accept that charismatic authority is engendered by legal-rational political institutions—and probably with a greater force the more a legal-rational mentality tries to eliminate it. Second, we must also accept that charisma has a good side, since it in fact acts as a corrective to rationalization\footnote{212}. The democratic dimension of charisma comes from its capacity to puncture the seemingly compulsive pull toward the rationalization and bureaucratization of political life, a pull that is driven by the twin forces of economic commodification and cultural rationalization.\footnote{213}


\footnote{212} Michael Oakeshott made a similar point regarding the relation between the ‘politics of faith’, which are characterized by enthusiasm, optimism and a quest for salvation in this world, and the ‘politics of skepticism’, marked by realism and distrust of government: “Without the pull exerted by faith, government in the skeptical style is liable to be overtaken by a nemesis of political quietism.” Michael Oakeshott, The Politics of Faith, p. 108, cited in Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy” in Political Studies, XLVII, 2-16, 1999, p. 9.

\footnote{213} “In contrast to any kind of bureaucratic organization of offices, the charismatic structure knows nothing of a form or of an ordered procedure of appointment or dismissal. It knows no regulated ‘career’, ‘advancement’, ‘salary’, or regulated and expert training of the holder of charisma or of its aids. It knows no agency of control of appeal, no local biliwicks or exclusive functional jurisdictions.” Max Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, p. 246.
However, Weber pushes the reconsideration of charisma as a positive phenomenon only so far. Charisma *punctures* legal rationality; it alters the equilibrium of the system and forces a sudden rearrangement, but nothing more. The relationship between legal-rational domination and charismatic domination is dialectical; rather than embodying incompatible phenomena, they constitute different moments in a single cycle of political life. For one thing, this is so because charismatic mobilization—much like populist mobilization, of which it is very often a specific characteristic—is by its very nature, very unstable.²¹⁴ Because charisma cannot be externalized in the form of rituals, regulations, codes or statutes, charismatic authority does not know any legitimacy other than the strength of the personal qualities emanating from the leader. The charismatic leader is constantly tested and must prove him/herself in the eyes of the followers. Charismatic authority is constantly under tension and hence cannot last forever.

Weber ends up in the same place regarding charisma that Aristotle and Machiavelli did, regarding populist mobilization: these are potent, transformational phenomena that have a finite life.²¹⁵ So, “[i]t is the fate of charisma, whenever it comes into permanent institutions of a community, to give way to powers of tradition or of rational


²¹⁵ Weber’s conception of the charismatic leader is in continuity with the concept of “genius” as it was created by the Italian Renaissance. In this regard, and even though Weber does not directly quote Machiavelli, the way in which he characterizes the true political leader is in directly in line with this tradition.
socialization.”

Even the most successful charismatic movements must at some point bring forth their own demise: they must either devolve into traditional domination or they must transform themselves into a bureaucratic/rational regime that is marked by the existence of an apparatus of legal administration.

The charismatic “moment,” then, is related to the conformation of a discourse that creates an antagonistic political boundary; ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘the cause’ and ‘the system’. Yet this discourse is in itself unstable, and will tend to break into particularities. Weber sees the genuine charismatic situation quickly give way to incipient institutions, which emerge from the cooling off of extraordinary states of devotion and fervor. As the original doctrines are democratized, they are intellectually adjusted to the needs of that stratum that becomes the primary carrier of the leader’s message.

To understand a charismatic or populist movement, the analyst must be careful to grasp its full arch: its inception, its rise to power, and its institutionalization. Any approach that focuses on only one of the stages of this arch is bound to be incomplete and will not be

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217 “According to his proper vocation, the genuine official—and this is decisive for the evaluation of our former regime—will not engage in politics. Rather, he should engage in impartial administration. (…) To take a stand, to be passionate—ira et studium—is the politicians element, and above all the elements of the political leader. His conduct is quite different, indeed, exactly the opposite, principle of responsibility from that of the civil servants.” Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” in Max Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, p. 95.

218 “A charismatic movement can be routinized into traditionalism or into bureaucratization. Which course is taken does not depend primarily upon the subjective intentions of the followers or of the leader; it is dependent upon the institutional framework of the movement, and especially upon the economic order.” H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, “Introduction,” Max Weber, From Max Weber, Essays in Sociology. New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 54.

able to illuminate its object of study.

Which is to say: any serious study of populism must be historical, in the sense that it cannot be purely theoretical, since there is not one populism but a historical plurality of “populisms.” There can be no adequate understanding of populism without reference to its time and place of occurrence. There is an element of contingency in the institutionalization of charisma (and of populism), and it is incorrect to assume that one given path is obligatory in all cases.

With these caveats in mind, I will revise the works of the “classical” literature on populism now and then advance to the more recent contemporary statements.

**Historicizing Populism: Classical Interpretations:**

The classic literature about populism was developed in the twentieth century to describe and explain the populist movements that arose from roughly the 1930s to the 1960s in the developing countries, especially in Latin America. The object of study of this literature was the regimes led by charismatic figures such as Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina, Getulio Vargas in Brazil, Omar Torrijos in Panamá, Juan Velazco Alvarado in Perú, and Gamal Ander Nasser in Egypt.\(^{220}\)

This literature was concerned with governments and regimes, and not so much with the movements that brought those leaders to office. These movements shared some features: all of them arose in countries which had undergone rapid, state-led industrialization; they drew their core of support from the industrial, recently-urbanized working classes; and they were led by middle-class (or elite) charismatic figures, who were often military men. Once in power, these movements had a secular and modernizing, nationalistic and anti-liberal agenda; their regimes expanded the democratic franchise and introduced expansive distributive policies, and they were rewarded electorally by doing so. In their heyday, they were extremely popular among the working classes and unbeatable at the polls. Yet they ended up mired in protracted internal political conflicts with severe economic problems, such as inflation.

In all these cases, they did not complete the transition to full-fledged authoritarian regimes: elections were frequent and reasonably clean and free; legislative bodies continued to function; and in many cases the franchise was significantly expanded.\textsuperscript{221} Social and political rights were also dramatically expanded, usually through the granting of labor rights, and important investments were made in public health and education.

\textsuperscript{221} (Juan Domingo Perón passed a law allowing women to vote, with much opposition at the time.)
On the other hand, while none of these regimes went as far as to be characterized as a dictatorship, these movements were quite heavy-handed in their treatment of opponents (sometimes banning opposing political parties and controlling the press), and often they disregarded or eroded mediating institutions—especially parliaments—by relying heavily on popular mobilization and other plebiscitary measures of direct democracy. In a context in which the opposition forces were markedly anti-democratic, and the liberal dimensions of democracy were weak to begin with, the antagonistic relations of these movements with the urban middle classes and with the economic elite meant that, in many cases, when the economic situation took a turn for the worse, the regimes they created lost support quite rapidly and, in some cases, were replaced by military dictatorships.

The literature on populism that was written in this context (by such authors as Seymour Martin Lipset, Gino Germani and Torcuato Di Tella) was adequate for describing these movements and subsequent regimes: these authors understood populism to be primarily a particular kind of class-based regime, supported by movement with a urban working-class base and a middle class leadership. A classic example is from the work of Torcuato Di Tella:

Populism, understood as a historical subject, is a movement with: a) wide support on the part of the masses, which are mobilized but lack autonomous organization, b) a leadership that is strongly anchored in sectors external to the working or peasant classes, and c) the

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222 Since all of these classical populist regimes came to be in the context of oligarchic, illiberal and even outright repressive regimes.
relationship between mass and leader is, to a great degree, charismatic.\textsuperscript{223}

The problem with these regimes, for many of these writers, is that populism corrupted the “proper” forms of political representation. Instead of having a clear-cut left-right cleavage, with one party representing the interests of elites and another one representing the interests of the working class, populist countries had one mega-party that claimed to represent the interests of the working class in a progressive manner but actually manipulated the working-class masses against their own interests.

Also, all these authors coincided in judging the public policies implemented by these regimes to be irrational in economic terms: by focusing on short-term distribution and by tying social assistance to political clientelism they undermined the prospects for long-term economic growth.

Kurt Weyland gives a good summary of the “classical” definitions of populism that assumed the political characteristics of populism were determined by it socioeconomic characteristics:

Most authors noted a personalistic style of political leadership as a defining characteristic of populism. A charismatic individual wins and exercises power by maintaining direct, unmediated contact to a largely unorganized mass of followers. But his political attribute was widely seen as part of a package of equally central social and economic characteristics. Accordingly, authors commonly stressed the heterogeneous social base of populism, defined as amorphous

mass, an urban multiclass movement, or a broad alliance of urban classes. They also emphasized the provision of material incentives—the pursuit of expansionary, developmentalist economic policies and the extension of social benefits—as crucial instruments in maintaining mass support. Finally, many authors situated populism historically in certain developmental stages, such as the transition from traditional to modern society, the rise of mass society after the fall of oligarchic rule, or the early, “easy” phase of import-substitution industrialization.  

At this point, it is fair to ask what is the real relevance of this body of literature. Classical populism do not exist anymore, nor do exist the social and economic conditions that made it possible. There are structural conditions that make mobilizatory populism unlikely: widespread modernization, weak industrialization, and a more liberal and plural political culture worldwide. It is necessary to assess whether it would be better to abandon the use of the term altogether.

**Historicizing Populism: Contemporary Interpretations**

In the early nineties, most of the then-called “third wave democracies” were undergoing moments of deep transformation and crisis: most of the new democracies in Latin-America and Eastern Europe were hesitatingly navigating the transition from

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totalitarian or authoritarian regimes to democracy, and from state-centered economic regimes to market economy. In both regions, there were very strong deficits in political participation and democratic collective action, as well as in autonomous civil society associativism. It is probably not surprising that both in Eastern Europe and Latin-America the nineties were the decade in which delegative populist regimes gained salience—a phenomenon that Kurt Weyland and others have labeled “neopopulism.” Lately, others have expanded this concept to include other leaders, sometimes from Western Europe or USA, that rely heavily on the mass-media and the polls as ways with which to bypass more traditional political mediations.

The classic populism of mid-twentieth century were antagonistic and forward looking. They were also very mobilizatory, depending on the political activation and organization of the urban working classes for support. The “us” thus created—urban, organized, and working class—usually antagonized a “them” that was closely identified with the traditional, land-owning and anti-modern elites. Although by no means identical with Marxist class-based political parties (classical populisms were almost universally anti-Marxist) there was a class component in its discourse and political action.

The “classic” Latin-American populism of the pre- and post-Second World War period were not traditionalist, but modernity-oriented. Juan Domingo Perón, Getulio Vargas or Velazco Alvarado though their forms of populism constituted historically

225 Of the most “classic,” not populist, kind. The military dictatorships of the seventies were not mobilizatory, distributionist, or concerned with the expansion of inclusion in any significant way.
unique, nationally adequate paths to modernity. Juan Doming Perón, for example, defined Peronism as the “third way” to political and economic modernity, as opposed to Western liberal democracy and Soviet socialism. In fact, one often-overlooked feature that Perón, Vargas, Velazco Alvarado had in common is their anti-traditionalism: they explicitly rejected the predominant narratives of the times that portrayed their countries as basically agrarian, postmodern and Catholic, and inserted, or try to insert, a new narrative that underscored modernity, secularism and industrialization. (Perón, for instance, took education, health and social services away from the Catholic church. A protracted conflict between the Church and the Peronist regime ensued; the Church would later support the anti-Peronist coup of 1955 and the resulting proscription of the Peronist party from Argentine politics until 1973.)

The classic Latin American populisms of the pre- and post-World War II era were all future oriented. But, neopopulist movements were and are past oriented. (In a similar vein, Margaret Canovan distinguishes between romantic and republican populisms.) Some recent European populist movements (from Le Pen in France to

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226 Perón clashed repeatedly with the catholic church, and systematically undermined traditional means for catholic cultural hegemony. He cut off the state funds for religious charities and strengthened state education and health services vis a vis catholic charities.


228 I am referring here to the mythical aspect of populism. “These backward-looking myths of the popular foundation of polities are complemented by forward-looking myths of political renewal, to come about when the People take back their power and make a new start.” Margaret Canovan, The People, 126.

229 Canovan distinguishes between romantic and republican populism: “Romantic nationalists like to think
Berlusconi in Italy or Jörg Hader in Austria) are more backwards-oriented: more religious, more xenophobic, and less inclusive.

The contemporary versions of populism, on the contrary, are not mobilizatory, and they target primarily urban and rural lower-middle classes, who feel threatened by the rapid pace of disruptive social changes brought about by globalization and technology. These new populisms are defensive and reactive. Classic populisms also were sparked by a process of rapid social change brought by industrialization and urbanization; however, these processes seemed at the time to be bringing about prosperity, and the distribution of that prosperity was the source of contention. The effects of social changes brought about by globalization are much more mixed, and their effects are a source of much anxiety and unrest for large swaths of suddenly threatened middle-class. Margaret Canovan:

Populism understood in this structural sense can have different contents depending on the establishment it is mobilizing against. Where economic policy is concerned, for example, populists in one country with a hegemonic commitment to high taxation to fund a generous welfare state may embrace an agenda of economic liberalism, while other populist elsewhere are reacting against a free market hegemony by demanding protectionism and more state provision. This does not in itself demonstrate (as is sometimes claimed) that populists are either unprincipled or confused: merely that what makes them populist is their reaction to the structure of that their peoples were part of the order of nature, growing to maturity in an organic process of historical development, whereas classical republicans had always taken the view that a people of citizens was no more a natural growth than the city they inhabited. Cities needed to be built, an so (according to republican traditions) did people's, usually by some heroic founder or law giver (...) in the republican imagination the people is a product of political will.” Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 48

Neopopulism is, for these reasons, often past-oriented, defensive, and markedly xenophobic in nature. And they are much more anti-elite in discourse and action. Oftentimes, populist leaders single out social groups, especially migrants, as their aim. Neopopulism is not modernist, but reactionary, and it is not distributive, but exclusionary.

Kurt Weyland offers two variables that would help predict which variant of populism emerges in each case.

Since populist leadership rests on mass support, populism has two versions, depending on whether its constituency has some minimal traces of organization or is completely unorganized. Correspondingly, populism's mass base either has more of a collective, public character, or consists of a dispersed set of private individuals. Populist leaders appeal either to the people, an imagined singular actor, whom they evoke to collective manifestations in public, or to the common man and woman, a plurality of actors, whom they reach in the private sphere through television and opinion polls. These variants correspond largely but not perfectly to the classical populism of the 1930s and the neopopulism of the 1980s and 1990s. Which variant emerges depends on two factors, the organizational saturation of the polity and the leader’s instruments for mobilizing followers and demonstrating mass backing.\footnote{Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism and the Study of Latin American Politics,” p. 15.}

Neopopulism is less institutionalized than classical populism, and it is anti-organizational. It is also less inclusive, and less redemptive, but it seems to be more

\footnote{Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 4.}
compatible with liberal democracy:

Thus, neopopulism is even less institutionalized than classical populism. It adopts a more anti-organizational stance, reaches followers in the private sphere, and depends on the confidential responses of individual citizens, not on collective manifestations by the people in the public sphere. (…) Neopopulism is therefore less mobilizatory, transformational and redemptive than classical populism, and its inclusionary character is more symbolic than effective. But by appealing to the whole citizenry and by ascertaining the will of the people through votes and poll responses, neopopulism is more representative than classical populism and more compatible with liberal democracy.233

So, while populism is not dead, it does not seem to be in such a state of good health, either. Classical, mobilizatory and inclusive movements seem to have given way to de-mobilizatory and exclusive one. The silver lining is that these versions of populism are more compatible with liberal politics that the old versions of populism. But how can it be that it is even possible to refer to the old populism and the new versions with the same term? Should a new term be coined to refer to these new type of regimes? I would like to argue that this is not the case.

A final theorization of populism

In the words of Margaret Canovan or Kurt Weyland, it is necessary to acknowledge that populism is a form and not a content. As with any other form, it can take different

contents in different times and places. Kurt Weyland puts the matter this way:

And the appeal of (contemporary) leaders who are usefully labeled neopopulists, like (Alan) García, primarily to the informal labor, makes it inadvisable to stipulate any specific class base as the foundation of populism. In general, while most populist leaders seek mass support groups that are less well-off (the popular sector), other personalistic, plebiscitarian, that is, populist leaders, such as Mario Vargas Llosa in Peru and Joaquín Lavín in Chile, won stronger backing among better-off sectors. Thus, populism should not be defined by the class composition of its main constituency.

There are examples, throughout history, of political coalitions that combined an upper-class leadership with a working class base but were not populist movements. Gregory Luebbert shows that such a class alliance—a working class base with a middle class or upper class leadership—made possible the survival of the liberal regime in interwar Great Britain. Of course, the British class alliance that Luebbert describes did not take a movement form, and its leaders were not charismatic. This goes to show, however, that the explanatory variable is not the sociological composition of the movement, but the way in which that particular coalition of groups is mobilized. The key elements in identifying populist mobilization is the charismatic nature of the leader, the anti-elite rhetoric that he or she employs, and an appeal via political myths to a common origin.

Populist mobilization’s content can vary because it is always a reactive phenomenon:

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Populism in modern democracies is best seen as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of society. [Populist movements] involve some kind of revolt against the established structure of power in the name of the people. (...) populism challenges not only established power-holders but also elite values. (...) **Populism understood in this structural sense can have different contents depending on the establishment it is mobilizing against.** Where economic policy is concerned, for example, populists in one country with a hegemonic commitment to high taxation to fund a generous welfare state may embrace an agenda of economic liberalism, while other populists elsewhere are reacting against a free-market hegemony.\(^{235}\)

The reactive nature of populism, and the many contents that the same political form can take, have long obscured an adequate understanding of the subject. In my view, populism should be understood as a particular kind of political logic: that is, a form of reasoning that shapes political action according to its own preferred goals, preferred means of political action, and preferred modes of internal legitimation. There is a communicative reason, whose means is deliberation, whose goal is understanding, and whose functioning is ruled by the authority of arguments; similarly, there is also populist reason, whose means is mobilization, whose goal is the dichotomization of the political field, and whose functioning is governed by the authority of the numbers, or votes. Each of these features must be understood and analyzed on its own terms.

The concepts of classical populism and neopopulism are highly stylized ideal types and they should be dealt with carefully, since the examples found in reality do not

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\(^{235}\) Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy” in Political Studies, XLVII, 2-16, 1999, pp. 2-16, pp. 3-4, emphasis added.
conform to such clear-cut categories. It is important, however, to keep in mind that populist or quasi-populist mobilization can take very different contents, and that it is unwise to de-historicize the study of populist movements and regimes. Populist movements take up a content depending on their time, and place, and they are never “pure” phenomena. I will deal with the difference between classical and neopopulism in next chapter, when I will attempt to sort out which type of populism is likely to be more prevalent under today’s social and cultural conditions. I will end this chapter with a theoretical re-definition of populism.

In chapter two I quoted Margaret Canovan's definition a people (or, in my language, populist mobilization) as “a mobilized public in which individuals have become engaged”;

I refined this definition, however, in the following fashion: a populist mobilization is a mobilized public in which individuals have become actively engaged; such mobilization is centered around a charismatic leader; it deploys an antagonistic rhetoric against a political “other;” and the movement expresses itself in forms that bypass the mediatory political institutions, (these form of direct expression might include direct action and protests, or can take place primarily through plebiscites,

236 Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 114.

237 “If they are to make effective use of whatever institutional channels may be available, confrontational populists need to play on popular concerns that are not being addressed by the people's existing representatives. The salience of particular grievances varies from one country to another, but common themes include high taxes, unemployment, strains on the welfare state crime and (increasingly) immigration and its consequences. As a spur to populist antagonism, these have been sharpened by constraints on elected governments' responses to popular pressure, constraints imposed (particularly in the European Union) by a combination of constitutional commitments and liberal ideology.” Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 82.
intensive media-campaigns, and other non-mobilizatory form).

**Conclusion**

To draw these threads together I will attempt to provide a revised definition of populism. But I first need to make some methodological decisions.

First, I think it is best to treat populism as a form, and not a particular type of content, since the variety of populist experiences in the past and present work against a substantive approach. To be more precise: abstract claims about populism can only be plausible if they remain at a rather high level of generality, referring only to the populist *form*. But claims about populism as a particular type of political *content* can only be valid if and when they are only made with a high degree of specificity with regard to time and place. The classical definitions of populism, for instance, were probably adequate for that time and place but they are not appropriate for all times and places.

A possible solution to this problem would be to refuse to use the term to refer to anything other than the mobilizational regimes of the mid-twentieth century. But such a strategy, though rigorous, would certainly be unwise, since, on the one hand, the use of the term populism and the related notions of the *demos* and popular mobilization preceded these regimes and, on the other, there are contemporary phenomena—such as religious or right-wing mobilizations—that might be illuminated by the use of the term.
However, the decision to treat populism as a form has perils of its own. For instance, Ernesto Laclau speaks of populism as a type of political discourse, without any reference to determined social or economic structures. This solution is appealing, but I do not completely agree with it. It transforms populism into something so vague that it is completely diluted: if every political movement is populist, then nothing is. The term becomes a synonym for politics pure and simple.

Populist claims do not derive from social conditions directly—crude sociological reductionism must be rejected beforehand—but neither are they unrelated to such conditions. They can have different types of contents, as Margaret Canovan claims, yet they cannot have any type of content. It is impossible to think of a populist movement, or regime, that has not been tied to a charismatic figure, or that has not had to retain a strong mobilizational aspect.

Populism should be understood as a political phenomenon for the reasons Kurt Weyland presents:

A political definition of populism is therefore preferable. It conceptualizes populism as a specific way of competing for and exercising political power. It situates populism in the sphere of domination, not distribution. Populism first and foremost shapes

238 “Populism understood in this structural sense can have different contents depending on the establishment it is mobilizing against. Where economic policy is concerned, for example, populists in one country with a hegemonic commitment to high taxation to fund a generous welfare state may embrace an agenda of economic liberalism, while other populist elsewhere are reacting against a free market hegemony by demanding protectionism and more state provision. This does not in itself demonstrate (as is sometimes claimed) that populists are either unprincipled or confused: merely that what makes them populist is their reaction to the structure of power.” Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” p. 4.
pattern of political rule, not the allocation of socioeconomic benefits or losses. This political redefinition captures best the basic goal of populist leaders, to win an exercise power, while using economic and social policy as an instrument for this purpose. (...) In spousing anti-elite rhetoric and challenging the status quo, populism rests on the distinction of friend versus foe that constitutes politics. Historically, it arises from a leader's promise to protect the enemy from a pernicious enemy. Originating in real or imagined conflict, populism is thoroughly political. Therefore, populism is best defined in political terms.\textsuperscript{239}

Weyland himself views populism as a domination strategy, utilized by smart but unscrupulous politicians to obtain and keep power. He defines populism thusly:

Under populism an individual leader seeks or exercises government based on support from large number of followers. Thus, elections, plebiscites, mass demonstrations, and most recently opinion polls are the crucial instruments with which populist leaders mobilize and demonstrate their distinctive power capabilities. Populists aspirants whip up support from largely unorganized masses to win office. Populist chief executives constantly invoke their broad mass support to boost their own influence and overpower their opponents' institutional bastions. (...) When pushed to the wall, they invoke and thus reveal the ultima ratio of populism: broad mass support.”\textsuperscript{240}

While I agree completely with Weyland's defense of the political (rather than socioeconomic) nature of populism, I disagree somewhat with his emphasis on the role of leadership. In his view, populism is a top-down creation, and the leader becomes almost a demigod. This view simply turns populism into one of many political strategies that are

\textsuperscript{239} Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism and the Study of Latin American Politics,” p. 11.

available to the leader, and it makes it appear that becoming a populist leader is a strategic choice like any other such choice. I believe the picture is more complex than that, and that many times populist leaders become so by a mixture of luck and accident rather than choice.

For one thing, it should not be forgotten that Max Weber believed that charisma was a real thing, whose power should not be denied. More than simply being a manipulative cynic, a charismatic leader is often the first one to believe in his own charisma. But it also must not be forgotten that many of these leaders found, at moments, that their control of the mobilized masses was rather tenuous. Or, to put it differently, a charismatic leader of a populist movement can only continue to be leader for as long as he does what the movement expects him, and pushes him, to do. The Argentine historian Daniel James coined an apt metaphor for this relationship. He argued that Juan Domic Perón was not so much controlling the movement as “riding a tiger,” perpetually trying to satisfy the demands of the diverse social actors, maintain his authority and keep the movement from breaking apart.241 The relationship between the leader and the followers is more complex therefore than simple reflexive adoration, and I believe that it tends to

241 “Now, for those who controlled the political and social apparatus of Peronism this oppositional culture was a burden, since it meant that Peronism was unable to establish itself as a viable hegemonic option for Argentine capitalism. (...) Finally, however, they had to recognize that this was akin to riding the tiger. (...) From the point of view of Peronism as a social movement, however, this oppositional element represented an enormous advantage since it gave to Peronism a dynamic substratum that would survive long after peculiarly favourable economic and social conditions had faded (...) It would be this substratum which would form the basis for rank-and-file resistance to the post-1955 regimes and lay the basis for the reassertion of Peronism as the dominant force within Argentine worker’s movement.” Daniel James, Resistance and Integration. Peronism and the Argentine Working Class. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 40.
be some degree of negotiation and tension between the two.

This is not say that populist leaders are benevolent figures whose policies are always wise. But populist movements are more substantial phenomena than political science often gives them credit for.

The opposite way to define populism is from the point of view of popular mobilization. Thus, Margaret Canovan's defines a people (what would in my language be called “populist mobilization”) as “a mobilized public in which individuals have become engaged.” But this definition is disconcertingly vague, in that it equates any sort of popular revolt with a populist movement. But not all popular uprisings are populist: to be considered so, they must become organized in a process of continuous, sustained political organization. I find this definition to be lacking a key ingredient as well, in that it lacks any reference to a leader or a type of leadership.

Definitions of this sort ought to be refined in the following fashion: a populist movement is formed when (a) mobilized public in which individuals have become actively engaged, undertakes some form of protracted direct collective action (including the occupation of the public space and others forms of protest) while at the same time coalescing around (b) a charismatic leader (or small cadre of leaders) who deploys antagonistic rhetoric against a political “other.”

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243 My definition of a populist movement is somewhat related to the mainstream definitions of the social movements literature. (For example, Donatella Dell Porta and Mario Diani define a social movement
This definition will be examined more deeply in chapter seven. (I will add two other features to it; the model of distance and the redemptive myth.) For the moment, I will leave it standing and turn to assessing deliberative democratic theory.

thusly: it involves informal networks, is based on shared beliefs and solidarity; it employs collective action focusing on conflicts and often entails the use of protest. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani. *Social Movements. An Introduction*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 14-5.) This is deliberative, since I think that populist mobilization is a hybrid phenomenon, that belongs to the political realm as much as it does in the social realm. My own definition, however, wants to emphasize the properly political aspects of the mobilization, hence the explicit mention to the charismatic leadership and the antagonistic rhetoric.
CHAPTER SIX:

REASSESSING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

In the preceding chapters, I discussed two different takes on the meaning of the term “democracy”: deliberative democratic theory and populist democratic theory. To recapitulate: the first family—deliberative democracy—defines it as a participatory endeavor that seeks to create, through the establishment of deliberative institutions, a rationally organized political order. The second family—populist democracy—argues that democracy should not be oriented towards the goal of building a more-rational form of politics, but, in Ian Shapiro’s phrase, towards the goal of “managing power relations as to minimize domination.” Deliberative democracy is normative and often describes itself as critical theory; it aims at finding a theoretical foundation for democratic politics that respects the a metaphysical pluralism of ends while at the same time embracing the view that justice must be more than pure contingency. Populist democratic theory, on the other hand, regards democracy from the standpoint of class antagonism, and it lacks such a universalistic drive. Deliberative democrats argue that politics, when done right, can transcend the particularities of interest and advance towards a realm of consensual solutions; populist view politics as, essentially, a zero-sum game, in which the well-being of the people (an entity which is at the same time the whole and the part) is threatened by

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the acquisitive impulses of elites. The political logic of deliberative democracy operates mainly through persuasion and dialogue; the political logic of populist democracy operates mainly through rhetoric and direct action.

This brief recapitulation, however, is not meant to imply that there can be no point of connection between these two theoretical families and that every democrat must opt for one them. Instead, the primary goal of this chapter will be to show that deliberation and populist mobilization should not be construed as polar alternatives—as much of contemporary democratic theory does—but rather viewed as two distinct but nonetheless correlated *moments* in a larger cycle of democratization. The overall normative argument I intend to advance is that a truly democratic regime must respect and include both political logics.

I do not think, however, that the two families can or should be merged into one, since their normative objectives and epistemological assumptions are too distinct to allow for such an experiment. But I do believe that a dialogue between the two paradigms can be instrumental to the overall goal of strengthening democratic theory, and, even more so, democratic practice. Deliberation and mobilization are two distinct democratic phenomena, but the question is whether a definition of democracy that is complex enough and dynamic enough should not encompass both. The definitions of democracy that have been discussed so far—deliberative and populist—can in some respects be considered complementary.

Contemporary democratic literature, however theoretically diverse, seems to agree
that there are three main threats to the vitality and health of contemporary democracies: political disinterest; class resentment bred by enduring or rising inequality, and cultural anti-democratic fundamentalism. These threats exist in developed or non-developed nations alike, although in different socio-historical contexts their relative salience will vary. As I will explain later, I will propose the concept of a mixed regime as a possible solution to some of these problems. I will develop the notion, however, in a way that differs from the liberal usage, since I will not be concerned with the functional differentiation of branches of government but with the differentiation and institutionalization of deliberative and mobilizational arenas. More specifically, I examine the conditions under which such a mixed regime is (and is not) possible. Hence, I will begin with a discussion of the shortcomings of deliberation and then conclude the chapter with a discussion of the necessary correctives. (In the next chapter I will do the same with populism.)

**The Shortcomings of Deliberation: The Problem of Representation**

The proponents of deliberative democratic theory have written abundantly about the benefits of deliberation but sparingly about its shortcomings. Critics of deliberative democratic theory, however, often focus on the epistemological structure of the theory or its empirical implications.
I have discussed the most common epistemological criticisms of deliberation extensively in the first and second chapters, and I will not revisit them here. Instead I will focus on criticisms that have to do with the empirical conditions of deliberation. I will argue that the main empirical shortcoming of deliberative democratic theory is that, by focusing on the procedural and epistemological aspects of deliberation and disregarding its economic and social conditions, deliberative democratic theory tends to be oblivious to the very real effects of social, cultural and economic exclusion on the political process and because of that, it can actually reinforce such exclusion. (In the next chapter, I will turn my attention to the theories of populism and will revisit the main shortcomings of those theories; mainly, that its proponents often overlook the threats that populism poses to the rule of law, as well as the tendency of populist movements to morph into personalistic and delegative regimes.)

The focus of this dissertation is at the intersection of political theory and social theory: it has to do with understanding and enhancing the efficacy of democratic politics in contexts of both great social inequality and exclusion. The relation between exclusion and democratic politics is somehow blurred by democratic theory today, which tends to have a middle-class focus and views “poor people politics” sympathetically but from a distance. The problem for any serious democrat is, however, that it is under conditions of profound injustice that politics becomes most crucial, and it is for the poor and excluded that democracy should matter most. Poor, excluded groups, urban and rural alike, have a vital interest in political outcomes, since more often than not politics is the only effective
means of redress they possess.

Collective action is always difficult for the poor. When poor people have political demands, they often lack effective means to voice them. To obtain something that is needed, there are usually three possible strategies available: to purchase it in the market, to obtain it through social capital networks and other such informal exchange mechanisms, or to mobilize politically, demanding that the good in question is made available to them through public policy. To poor people, it is often useless to engage in market transactions since, by definition, they are excluded from market relations or are in a position of great asymmetry and disadvantage vis a vis other market players. Poor people also cannot obtain what they need through the informal exchanges we call “social capital” because their stock of social capital is very low, or it includes only people inside their own, poor, communities. \(^\text{245}\) So political action is often the only resource available for poor people’s communities, and even there they are also at a disadvantage. Poor people’s needs and demands are very often neglected or ignored in public life, and they are often inadequately represented in political institutions. Businesses, financial institutions, corporations and middle-class workers have lobbies and unions to defend their interests day in and day out, but poor people lack such focused and active representation.

And yet, paradoxically, poor people are the most vulnerable to political decisions,

since they lack the resources to deflect or avoid the adverse consequences of public policies. They have a weak voice, as well as a weak capacity for exit, which is the worst combination of all. The democratic paradox in an unequal world is that those who are the most affected by the outcomes of political processes are those who most often cannot participate in them or influence them in any way. Lacking money and social capital, and having a weak capacity for exit, they are at the same time the most affected by the outcome of political decision making and the least able to affect those outcomes.\textsuperscript{246}

In conditions of great inequality, poverty and/or exclusion, and whenever large populations have weak capacity for collective action through non-political means, it is important to emphasize that, in the words of Ian Shapiro,

\begin{quote}
(...) the legitimacy of decision-making processes varies with the degree to which they are both inclusive and binding on those who make them. Deliberative processes are not exceptions. [...] This is most obviously true when there are substantial differences in the capacities of different groups to escape the effects of policies on which they are deciding. [...] When there are great differences in capacity for exit, what is often needed is not widespread deliberations but action to protect the vulnerable.\textsuperscript{247}
\end{quote}

The crucial question is: “is deliberation always the most adequate means with which to protect the vulnerable”? The answer to this question is, it seems to me, “it depends”; or

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{246} Admittedly, this might also be said about other vulnerable groups, among them for example, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, the old, and women. Any social group that has a weak voice and a weak capacity for exit is, by definition, very vulnerable to political outcomes. The combination of class, ethnicity and lifestyle choices creates different types of exclusion, each one of them with its own challenges.

\textsuperscript{247} Ian Shapiro, \textit{The State of Democratic Theory}, p. 29, emphasis added.
\end{footnote}
as Shapiro says, “sometimes deliberation creates costs that outstrip its advantages”. Deliberative processes can counterbalance the exclusion of vulnerable groups or reinforce it, depending on how they are designed and conducted. The key consideration in deciding whether deliberations are actually going to advance the interests of the most vulnerable citizens is the representation or absence of the groups in question in the deliberative processes, i.e., whether they are adequately represented in them, or not. But the claim that legitimate deliberations must include at least some representation from every group affected by them leads to the problem of how to make sure that all relevant voices are represented, and what happens if they are not—issues that are quite contentious, from point of view of the theory of deliberative democracy.

“Thick” and “Thin” Definitions of Reason and the Issue of Representation

The issue of class representation is a contentious issue for deliberative democrats since not all theorists agree with the necessity for class representation. Many deliberative democrats argue that the theory does not need an explicit sub-theory of representation, and that equal representation is not a precondition for deliberative democracy, which operates on the power of communicative reason. Some theorists, such as Habermas,

Cohen and Arato, Gutmann and Thompson and Benhabib, argue that the universality and impartiality of communicative reason makes the factual presence of all points of view unnecessary—a position I have called a “thick” understanding of communicative reason. In fact, here lies precisely the attraction of “thick” theories of deliberative democracy: they have an appealing optimism because if there is universal reason that operates behind people’s backs, then the factual circumstances of deliberation do not matter much.

But such a claim—that the extent of representation does not matter because a thick communicative reason can be expected to move the deliberations towards a reasonable outcome in all contexts, provided only that some minimal procedural and attitudinal conditions are met—contradicts the non-metaphysical claims of the other type of theories which have come to dominate the field.249 (As I said in chapter one, theories with a 'thin' definition of reason reject the Kantian definition of reason as an impartial, trans-historical universal metaphysical standpoint from which to anchor impartial judgments; they want to deny the universality of reason and renounce of impartiality while affirming pluralism, historicity and subjectivity.)

This creates a dilemma. To repeat the argument advanced in chapter one, without a normative, metaphysical idea of universal reason, it is impossible to say a priori that the outcome of any deliberation will be just or unjust: without universal reason, every consensus becomes contingent. It can be a just consensus, or an unjust one, depending on

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249 The attraction of a ‘thick’ theory of deliberative democracy is so strong that we find that many deliberative democratic theorists often slip into teleological and metaphysical language, even if they insist that they are using a “thin”—that is, non-teleological and non-metaphysical—definition of reason.
many factors, of which the composition of the deliberative body is arguably the most important of all.

It is obvious that the issue of representation should be a pressing concern for 'thin' theories of deliberative democracies. They must answer the question of under what conditions a deliberative consensus can be considered to be legitimate and under what conditions it cannot be so; they must make explicit their theoretical stance on representation along with its empirical institutional implications. For, if the universality of reason is not the guarantor of deliberations, there is really no way to judge the legitimacy of the outcome other than to know how adequately all the factual groups affected by the matter participated. A 'thin' theory of deliberative democracy needs to explain how it is possible to ensure that a real, factual plurality of voices are present in the deliberative processes. This is especially pressing in the case of the poor, excluded, and vulnerable, which have higher stakes and less chance of voice and exit. If there is no universal reason moving deliberations beyond biases and prejudices, then the theorists of deliberation must show how it is possible to empirically empower those who are most vulnerable and have the weakest voice to be effectively represented in the deliberations. The crucial issue is not how to set the rules for deliberating, but how to give power to those that need it most.

This brings me to repeat the central claim made in chapter two: the fairness and legitimacy of deliberative institutions cannot be construed in purely procedural terms; that is, the fairness, openness and reasonableness of the deliberative procedures alone do
not guarantee the ultimate fairness and universality of the outcomes.

The reasons for this are theoretical as well as empirical. Theoretical, because if there is no such thing as a 'thick' universal reason guiding the deliberations towards reason, then there is no basis for the claim that every empirical consensus coincides with a just solution. Empirical, because when some group is not actually represented in the deliberations, its needs and opinions will be overlooked, even if the deliberations not procedurally flawed and they are conducted by well-meaning citizens.

Take the case discussed by Ian Shapiro's in his examination of the often-praised public deliberations the state of Oregon employed in 1990 to decide which cuts were going to be made to the public health care system of the state. He points that while these deliberations were conducted in an impartial and open fashion, no explicit measures were taken by the organizers to ensure that the voices of the non-elderly poor were adequately represented even though the non-elderly poor were the group most directly affected by these decisions.\(^{250}\) The deliberations included mostly health-care professionals, legislators and citizens at large, but there was no representation of the non-elderly poor.\(^{251}\) As a result, the cuts decided by the process affected the services for the non-

\(^{250}\) According to Norman Daniels, the deliberative process was criticized because it “did not involve a representative cross-section of Oregonians. Some 50% were health workers; too many were college educated, white, and relatively well-off. Moreover, whereas 16% of Oregonians are uninsured, only 9.4 of community meeting participants were uninsured, and Medicaid recipients, the only direct representative of poor children, were underrepresented by half.” Norman Daniels, “Is the Oregon rationing fair?” in Journal of American Medical Association, May 1, 19991, Vol. 265, No. 17, pp. 2232-2235.

\(^{251}\) Shapiro notes that the most positive outcome of the Oregon deliberations was that the legislature appropriated additional funds for the health care program. But, as he says, the cause of such appropriation was not deliberation per se but the politicization that the process made possible: “Notice that the
elderly poor adversely and disproportionately.

I think it is easy to see that no one can claim that the results of these deliberations did in fact protect the interests of the non-elderly poor. Shapiro does not question that the deliberations took place in an open, heated but reasonable, and generally well-intentioned manner, or that a unanimous consensus was achieved. But he shows that the deliberations failed to protect the interests of the non-elderly poor as they understood them.

Similarly the literature on participatory policy-making contains abundant examples of how poor groups and social technicians view the interests of the poor in completely different ways. The anthropologist Luis Archetti painted a very illuminating portrait of the disconnect between the technicians' and the beneficiaries' views in his book about the relationship between peasants and food in Ecuador. He tells the story of the time when he was hired to discover why a new policy program designed to encourage the commercial, for-profit breeding of guinea pigs (or cuises) in the Central Andes farming regions was an utter failure. Peasant families throughout the Ecuadorian Andes (as well as in the Andean regions of Perú) had raised and eaten guinea pigs from before the times of the Inca Empire; the guinea pigs are raised strictly for family consumption, much like chickens, and they are consumed on holidays and religious festivals. The technicians in the Ecuadorian federal government thought it would make sense to

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legislature’s decision to appropriate additional funds was unrelated to the substance of the deliberative meetings (...) It was not a product of reciprocal deliberation exchange whereby citizens with moral disagreements came closer together. It was, rather, a fortunate externality, for the uninsured poor of the deliberative process—such as it was—in that the publicity it generated helped spotlight their plight in the media and the legislature.” Ian Shapiro, The State of Democratic Theory, p.28, emphasis added.
encourage the families to breed the *cuises* in a more systematic manner, and sell the surplus to the market, as a way of providing them with a much-needed income supplement. The program included subsidies to build state-of-the-art pigsties, money for grains, and training in genetic selection and breeding. But after a few months, technicians were concerned because there was in fact no enhanced production, and the families were leaving the program in droves.

It turns out, as Archetti found, that the guinea pigs were a female responsibility, and the *cuises* were bred by women in a very informal way, in which they were left to roam free and were fed vegetable peels and other organic garbage; in this way, they almost raised themselves. The new methods of production, on the contrary, required a rather large commitment of labor and time to succeed, a commitment which the women of the families were not willing to add to their already crowded schedules. The added work was not worth the future benefits.

This disconnect had nothing to do with the intentions of one or the other; in fact, very often the technicians were surprised to see how different their views were from the people they were trying to help, despite their best intentions.\(^{252}\) It is easy to see how disastrous the prospects of a deliberative process about guinea pig farming would be if it did not include those who have the primary interest in the topic, that is, the women who raise them. (Of course, I am not claiming that the views of the poor themselves are

always better or more just; no social group has a monopoly on truth. It does not matter who is right or who is wrong; my point is that projections about what other people, or groups, think about a given issue are often wrong, even when done with the best of intentions. Our own biases are undetectable for us, but evident to others.)

Another problem is that a deliberative consensus achieved without any measures being taken to make sure that the views and arguments of all of those affected by the decision were adequately represented might end up being worse than a non-deliberative one, because it would confer legitimacy on a flawed policy.

In the last years, such a colonization of the deliberative processes by vested interests has been apparent. If at first participatory initiatives were often resisted by business or corporate lobbies, they are now widely accepted, as long as they feel they can control the outcomes. After all, to be able to claim that “independent citizens” made an unpopular decision can be the best way to force it on the public. The question that now presents itself before us is what is the best way, theoretically and empirically, to make sure that the vulnerable are adequately represented in deliberations.

**Deliberation, context and politicization**

Deliberations conducted without an explicit regard for equal representation are usually burdened with biases (be they based on class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age,
and so forth.) I will focus here on the middle-class biases, which is, I think, especially important to keep in mind when debating deliberative democracy. I will concentrate on the exclusion of poor groups, and not so much in the exclusion of multi-class groups, such as ethnic minorities or gay groups, since these multi-class groups probably have a better capacity for voice than poor groups.

It is a generally accepted fact that participatory institutions are more prone to having a middle-class bias, because middle class people usually tend to participate more in this type of institutions. The economic elite also have free time, but they generally do not engage in political collective action. Their preferred means for advancing their interests tend to be market exchange, direct lobbying and the use of their extended networks of social capital. In contrast, the middle classes have more free time to spend and thus participate more. And, because middle class people have typically spent more time in participatory settings—educational institutions and white collar jobs that reward managerial and interpersonal skills—they tend to have better verbal skills than other classes.

The people whose participation matter the most in most discussions about public policy—the poor and excluded—often lack the time and other resources necessary to participate, or to do so effectively. This is tragic because deliberations that take place


without them can—as I have said before—reinforce their exclusion. They are much less likely to participate, given their lack of free time and other resources; they are usually excluded from the networks, formal or informal, through which the information about public matters circulates; and, when they do participate, they are often less skilled at public speaking and negotiating.\footnote{Ellen A. Brantlinger, \textit{Dividing Classes: How the Middle Class Negotiates and Rationalizes School Advantage}, Routledge, 2003.}

A classic solution to this problem would be to actually pay poor people to participate—I say a classic solution because this was one of the cornerstones of Athenian democracy. The idea is to monetarily compensate people for the time they spend deliberating.

This solution seems fair, yet it creates some problems of its own. First of all, participation is viewed by most as a right and not a job, something that should only be done freely and voluntarily.\footnote{Giovanni Sartori, \textit{The Theory of Democracy Revisited, Part I: The Contemporary Debate}, p. 169 and prior pages.} Most theorists of deliberative democracy argue that deliberation is best when it is voluntary, and that ideal is reflected in the vision of a subjectless, free-flowing public sphere comprised of voluntary associations. On a more concrete level, I have often found while doing field research on deliberative processes taking place among the poor that a very common complaint of poor people is that, far from enjoying their participation in deliberation, they feel \textit{forced} to participate in it just to be able to obtain goods and services that more affluent people obtain from the market,
with much less time and effort. Deliberation about common matters can create a sense of ownership, but it can also feel like an imposition.

Secondly, such a measure would only reinforce the commodification of politics. It would also technify deliberation because the tasks of seeking people out, selecting them, training them, and so forth, would require a specialized bureaucracy.

Another solution would be to continue opting for strictly voluntary participation, even with the evidence of biases. But then the trade-off seems to be stark: on the one hand, if deliberations are kept strictly voluntary, they cannot be protected against middle class bias; on the other hand, if deliberations are orchestrated in such a way that social pluralism is enforced, they will lose much of their freedom and spontaneity.257

To find a way out of this dilemma we must make a slight change in our theoretical focus and concern ourselves not only with what happens inside deliberative institutions but also, and primarily, with what happens outside of them, in the social, political and cultural context in which deliberations take place. The scholarly literature has emphasized the procedural conditions for deliberation; I want now to do the same for its contextual conditions—i.e., the political and social settings in which deliberation can

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257 But voluntary associations, as Mark Warren notes, are not without flaws. On the one hand, voluntarism encourages pluralism and personal initiative. On the other, however, voluntary associations tend to be more internally homogeneous and to stifle dissent. Because exit is easier in voluntary associations, internal conflicts are usually resolved through the exit of the dissident groups. Hence, nonvoluntary associations (such as unions) are more diverse because the costs of exiting it are bigger. In non-voluntary associations, people are stuck with one another, therefore, the internal processes will have to favor voice over exit and the organization will develop better conflict-solving processes. Mark E. Warren, Democracy and Association, p. 104-105.
thrive.

Some scholarly analysis is beginning to make inroads in this direction. Sociologist Gianpaolo Baiocchi analyzes the participatory budgeting processes of Sao Paulo, one of the biggest, most durable and most successful examples of deliberative democracy among the poor.\textsuperscript{258} On the one hand, Baiocchi is enthusiastic about the effects of the participation of the poor in discussions:

Ethnographic evidence shows how participants in assemblies of the "participatory budget" in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, created open-ended and public-minded discussion in two of the city's poor districts. The urban poor of Latin American have often been treated as unlikely candidates for democratic engagement, but in these meetings participants regularly carved out spaces for civic discourse and deliberation, deploying a language of the commonality of needs as a vocabulary of public interest.

But while Baiocchi argues that the deliberative process was beneficial on the whole to the poor communities, he notes that the benefits of deliberation were not automatic and universal. He found that the quality and results of the deliberations varied greatly among the different neighborhoods of the city. In one of the districts, the deliberations stayed

\textsuperscript{258} The participatory budgeting was created by the Partido Trabahlista’s government in the city of Porto Alegre in the eighties. Every year, the municipal government set aside a portion of the funds available for public works investments and organized a series of public meetings so that the neighbors could decide how those funds would be put to use. The participatory budgeting process was seen as a success and has been widely copied throughout Latinamerica. Academic evaluations on the actual success are mixed however: “PB programs can have decision-making attributes, can promote deliberation, and can help empower citizens, and their public policy outputs can transform entire neighborhoods. Participants and mayoral administration can also manipulate PB’s rules, producing outcomes significantly different from PB’s founding ideals, (namely, social justice and deliberation.)” Brian Wampler, \textit{Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation and Accountability}. USA, Pennsylvania State University, 2007, p. 9

focused and achieved their goals, but in others, they devolved into a public airing of grievances and did not reach their goal. Baiocchi states that there are two factors that explain the different outcomes, one external and one internal. The first is a certain type of social context, the second one is the presence of effective leadership:

In the Por-do-Sol district [the district with the most successful forums], however, experienced activists and well-developed civic networks prevented these open-ended discussions from becoming too disruptive or too personal. In the Nazare district, which lacked significant civic networks, instances of open-ended discussion more often led to disruptive breakdowns.

Besides needing strong leaders, deliberations work better when they take place in communities that have dense societal networks because then people who participate in deliberations can profit from their participatory experience. Context, that is, time and place, matters for deliberations: more specifically, the political context in which they take place is a crucial element for their success.

Regarding the internal conditions for deliberation, his conclusion is that subjectivity is important, that leadership matters, and that the experience of the participants in the deliberation is also a crucial element in explaining outcomes. Far from being subjectless, the real, embodied processes of deliberation show that effective leadership—and by “effective” I mean leaders who have the capacity to enforce rules and punish those that do not behave constructively—is a requisite for success.

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Let us contrast Baiocchi’s description of an actual deliberative process with Seyla Benhabib’s description of and ideal speech situation:

All have the right to question the assigned topics of the conversation; and (…) all have the right to initiate reflexive arguments about the very rule of the discourse procedure and the way in which they are applied and carried out.\textsuperscript{261}

The disconnection between Baiocchi’s empirical account and the Benhabib’s blueprint is obvious, as anybody who has had to conduct any decision-making-oriented deliberation can surely attest to. An assembly in which all the participants have the right to challenge the topics \textit{and} the procedural norms at any given time might be in fact a normative ideal, yet it is a nightmare for any moderator who has the intention of actually accomplishing something.

Experience shows that deliberations are not subjectless processes that coordinate themselves. Deliberation’s benefits are not automatic, as I have noted (and) they depend on many contingent circumstances. Deliberation is time-consuming\textsuperscript{262}, and it usually is an expensive process, requiring planning and organization. Among other things, these events need somebody who can enforce procedures, minimize disruptions, maintain a certain pace and keep disruptive speakers under check.\textsuperscript{263} Effective facilitation of


\textsuperscript{262} Certainly there are situations in which we would not want to engage in deliberation, be it for need of expediency, for lack of time, or because the matter at hand is too complex or technical.

\textsuperscript{263} Both functions can be fulfilled by the same person or persons, of course, but it is useful to keep them analytically separated.
deliberation requires centralization of power in the hands of a moderator because making sure that all affected groups are included and that the deliberative procedures are not tampered with is not an easy task. Among the tasks that organizers typically have are using incentives or even coaxing of people to participate, encouraging shy participants and managing disruptive ones, detecting when a speaker has a hidden agendas, training people in public speaking, preparing the daily schedule, and organizing logistics. (Little things like having an air-conditioned room or not, or having coffee and food or not, have a tremendous impact on deliberations.) If these tasks are left to chance, often deliberations just dissolve into thin air.  

But if leadership and rules are one important internal condition, there are also external ones, and to those I will turn my attention now. With a group of colleagues, we conducted research on community-based participatory processes in one poor neighborhood in the outskirts of the city of Buenos Aires in Argentina. With a group of researchers from Universidad Nacional de San Martin (Argentina) and Maryland

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264 To gain a sense on how often deliberations actually are, one needs only to look at our two main deliberative institutions: parliamentary bodies and juries. They are our most important deliberative bodies: they are serious business, were people have to deliberate to make life and death decisions or write norms that affect the whole community. They are completely binding, and their legitimacy needs to be undoubted, for they make, and apply, the law. And yet juries and parliamentary bodies are nothing like the ideal speech situation. They are not voluntary. In a jury is but constructed as a civic duty that obliges all, rich and poor alike. In a legislative body, participation depends on electoral success. And each one, there are complex and constraining set of norms and practices that are actively enforced by public officers whose sole job is to make sure that deliberations are fair and balanced. In each case, there is a powerful moderator—the judge or the speaker—whose job is to make sure that the rules are respected and that the flow of arguments is unimpeded.

University (USA), we followed for almost five years participatory processes in the county of Cuartel V, a low-income neighborhood in the outskirts of the city. This neighborhood has a history of very strong social activism and politicization. We decided to track the process by which a network of non-governmental and grass-roots organizations in the neighborhood decided to do public investment work on their own and with their own resources. After protracted deliberations, including assemblies and ballot votes, they decided to build a natural gas-pipe system for the whole neighborhood. This was and probably continues to be the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken by NGOs in the country. The whole process—design, implementation, and evaluation—was done in a participatory manner.

One of our key findings was that the high degree of politicization in the community was a crucial factor in the success of the deliberations. Because the neighborhood had a history of robust political participation and was crisscrossed by political and civic networks, connecting churches, unions, political parties, parents associations, neighborhood associations, unemployed workers’ movements, etc., there was a degree of attention to public matters and organization that supported the deliberations. It would have been much more difficult if all that energy and organization had to be created from scratch.

But the politicization of the community was crucial in another respect: it helped provide leaders for the deliberative process. This is the exact point at which external conditions and subjective elements intersect. Experience in the field has shown me that
people who come to the debates with a personal history of political or social participation tend to become self-appointed leaders or moderators very rapidly because they tend to participate more, and to be better at it. There is a “compulsive participant” profile: people who participate in politics tend to also participate in neighborhood meetings, local churches, union chapters, in their school PTA, etc. Because they are willing to take on responsibilities and are effective at it, other people tend to look up to them, informally or formally, as their leaders.

This in turn has two consequences. On the one hand, such people play a key role in helping the deliberations advance—so much so that they become almost indispensable. They can do much good by helping deliberations along and keeping the process on track by the sheer force of their formal or informal authority. On the other hand, their leadership gives them a disproportionate amount of control over pace of the deliberations. They, in short, accumulate power. This can lead to situations in which resentment arises, and in which other people come to regard them as entitled or even authoritarian.

The idea that deliberations happen outside of, or over against, power, is misleading. Successful deliberations require power and they create power: they create the power of shared commitments. But to do so deliberations need to be empowered by the communities in which they take place, and they need powerful leaders as well. Good deliberations do not take place in a vacuum of powerlessness; they can exist under very specific, carefully crafted conditions where power is exercised effectively. Externally,
deliberations work best when they are situated in the context of an empowered, strong and politicized civil society. Internally, someone must have the power to bring (sometimes force) people to the table, take questions, create a speakers’ list, cut a long-winded speaker short, ban disruptive speakers from attending, etc.

When deliberations take place in a social context that is dense with societal networks and political activism they tend to be better because there are more people present with a history of civic and political involvement, wider networks are in place to share resources and pass information on, and people have a better sense of what they want to achieve. And, most important for the argument advanced in this dissertation, the politicization and organization of the poor creates the conditions for their effective representation and participation in deliberation.

It is not only the case that deliberations are better in communities that have dense political and social networks. The political organization of the most vulnerable among those communities, especially the poor, is a key factor in explaining their success. On the one hand, the point of view of the poor is not often defended by other participants; and on the other, in my experience, the participation of the poor is not only often not promoted, but quite often resisted. Most of the time, organizations that represent the poor—for instance, the unemployed workers’ organizations—have to use confrontational tactics to achieve participation in the debates.

Deliberative democracy literature often presents a very abstract, de-historicized portrait of the deliberating subject. My own research, and that of other's, has alerted me
to the fact that time and place, history and culture, matter a great deal. More specifically, it has shown me that the politicization of society is a positive element in deliberative democracy because the active, engaged participation that deliberative democracy requires can only happen in an actively politicized society. As Margaret Canovan argues in her discussion of direct democracy and referendums,

To sum up, whatever the merits of direct democracy as a set of convenient decision-making procedures, there are many reasons for caution in treating its outcomes as decisions by the sovereign people. (...) The very fact that we have grounds for ruling out that interpretation of referendums in many cases shows that we can discern between more and less plausible cases: in other words, we seem to know what an authentic verdict of the people would look like. (...) ...the voice of the sovereign people have maximum plausibility in the following circumstances: where an electorate with a strong sense of forming a political community takes part in a free and uncorrupt vote on a topic that is widely understood and has high salience for the general public. The wording of the proposition is clear and free of bias, the turnout is high and the majority is overwhelming. These conditions cannot be met without an unusual degree of public discussion and political mobilization. (...) When this happens, however, it is due not so much to the referendum procedure as to the popular mobilization that has taken form around it.\(^{266}\)

Deliberative democracy requires concerned and engaged citizens to be realized. This is even more true from the point of view of the excluded and the poor. Viewed from the point of view of protecting the vulnerable, deliberative democracy not only allows for but even requires populist mobilization as a corrective to the limitations it otherwise has.

\(^{266}\) Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 114, emphasis added.
More specifically, populist mobilization rooted in subaltern politics is a key condition for bringing excluded groups to the table.

I have said at the beginning of this chapter that the actual presence of all the groups that are affected by the measures being discussed is one of the crucial conditions for the success of deliberations. I have also outlined two different ways to approach the issue of representation: to treat it as a theoretical problem and trust that communicative reason will carry voluntary deliberations towards a just outcome; or, alternatively, the use of monetary incentives to get people to participate. The first solution is, I believe, too risky both in theoretical and empirical terms: it can lead to the legitimation and universalization of contingent and biased decisions. The second alternative is impractical since it implies waiting until the benevolence of those that and control the political process moves them to expand the number of seats at the table and share power—something that has hardly ever happened. But I would like to advance a third solution to this problem, which is populist mobilization. This is a view that links deliberation and mobilization, in keeping with an argument advanced by Mark Warren, who says that “what is needed is some degree of conflict under conditions that enable conflict to be resolved by deliberative means.”

Populist mobilization is a key element in winning a seat at the political table for excluded groups, especially the poor; for to do so requires the autonomous politicization

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267 Mark E. Warren, Democracy and Association, p. 75.
and mobilization of social groups.

Politics is, in the end, about accumulating enough power to gain seats at the table; the alternative to politics is to wait until somebody takes notice of you. Subaltern politics and populist mobilization are, or at least can be, useful strategies for groups that usually view politics from outside (the urban poor, ethnic minorities, peasants) to push for a place in the deliberations.\textsuperscript{268} Without a high degree of politicization and mobilization—which are usually accompanied by a high level of conflict—excluded groups are left with only one choice: to wait until they are invited to participate in the deliberations by some of the parties that are already involved in them.

\section*{Conclusion}

In this chapter I have sought to prove that populist mobilization can be a corrective for class biases in deliberative democracy, as well as the best way to ensure that all social groups are properly represented in the deliberations. I also presented some empirical evidence that points to the fact that an organized and politicized civil society is conducive to better and more representative deliberations, and it is not a impediment for them. I believe that such an understanding of the relation between deliberation and

\textsuperscript{268}“Associations that lack recognition typically cannot change debate through dialogue, but must do so through (...) demonstrations, protests, civil disobedience, theater, literature, etc. these groups might be called, following Nancy Fraser’s Gramscian term, \textit{subaltern politics}.” Mark E. Warren, \textit{Democracy and Association}, p. 81, emphasis in the original.
Populist mobilization would open up a new way of viewing the relation between deliberative politics and antagonistic politics, and that it would allow for deliberative democrats to tap a source of democratic power that might be already present in the contemporary societies.

Yet I do not want to present populist mobilization as a political panacea that will cure all that ail contemporary politics. Populist mobilization can take many forms, and it is an unpredictable force that might lead to very varied, and sometimes illiberal and antidemocratic, outcomes. In the next Chapter I will attempt to reassess populist mobilization; I will weight its positive and negative features, and I will try to offer some correctives to the later, whenever that is possible.
CHAPTER SEVEN:

REASSESSING POPULIST MOBILIZATION

The Shortcomings of Populism

In the previous chapter, I discussed three empirical conditions for the success of deliberative democracy: effective representation of the excluded, and especially of the poor; the political and associative activation of the social context in which the deliberations take place (which is in turn a *sine qua non* condition for an adequate representation of the poor) and active and strong leadership in the deliberations themselves. I advanced the notion that a high level of politicization and an equally high level of political conflict are in fact *facilitators* of the citizen's participation in the deliberative institutions; and I argued that the alternatives to populist mobilization are either individual voluntary participation, or some form of technocratic bureaucracy that benevolently decide who participates and who does not.

I argued that populist mobilization can be a valuable democratic resource; I echoed a claim that has been advanced by Margaret Canovan in a discussion of Benjamin Barber's theories of deliberative democracy:
Unlike the abstract discussion offered by many deliberative democrats, (Barber's) concrete proposals (which include neighborhood assemblies meeting once a week) allow us to see quite clearly why deliberative democracy is no more reliable than referendum democracy as a way of making the sovereign people present. The reason is obvious: offering individuals the opportunity to become part of a deliberative community cannot in itself induce them to attend weekly meetings and participate in the right spirit, nor to feel themselves part of a common endeavor. The missing link, in deliberative as in ‘direct’ democracy, is the collective mobilization that alone can make people present, but that happens rarely.\(^{269}\)

Yet I do not want to give the impression that populist politics are any kind of political panacea. Political theory has long been weary of populist politics: the politicized demos as been portrayed as a “many-headed monster” whose unruly greediness not will ruin the public sphere. Plato recoiled in horror when he saw the wisest man in Athens walk to death amidst popular cheers, and Aristotle viewed democracy as the corrupt degradation of a better regime. In our contemporary times, populism is usually a synonym for demagoguery, pandering, and authoritarianism. In the following section, I intend to do a critical reassessment of the democratic potentials, and threats, of populist mobilization.

I will now follow a route that is similar to the one followed in last chapter. First, I will revise the democratic promise of populist politics, as it has been presented by Ernesto Laclau. Then, I will attempt a critical assessment of the promise of populism, and I will concentrate on the two main shortcomings of populist mobilization: the danger of totalization and the rise of authoritarian leadership.

\(^{269}\) Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 118.
The Populist Promise

Ernesto Laclau is probably the most enthusiastic proponent of populism today. He argues that populist mobilization has the greatest democratic potential and that it should be embraced unequivocally. In his view, there can be no politics without populism; the alternative to it is a form of administrative rationality that he calls “the police.”

In his book, *On Populist Reason*, he accomplishes several important theoretical tasks. First of all, he proposes to replace the sociological notions of *group* or class with the more properly political concept of *political demand*. This language aims at greater terminological precision: terms like “social groups” or “classes” seem objective and scientific, but they are really very hazy: the existence of a given sociological group is often predicated on some external analysis based on a catalogue of objective “features” (income, ethnicity, place in the productive chain), but even the best and more objective list of features is not able to predict whether anybody feels and acts according to such categories (for example, in different times and places, groups that should be part of the working class behave politically as if they were part of the middle classes, and vice

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270 Laclau says that, without populism, “politics would have been entirely replaced by administration.” Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 18.

271 “A first theoretical decision is to conceive of the ‘people’ as a *political* category, not as a *datum* of the social structure. This designates not a *given* group, but an act of institution that creates new agency out of a plurality of heterogeneous elements. For this reason, I have insisted from the very beginning that my minimal unit of analysis would be the *group*, as a referent, but the socio-political *demand*.” Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 274, emphasis in the original.
versa.) The term “demand,” however, refers to a factual occurrence: a demand is a political utterance, a demand is created any time *somebody* demands *something* of *somebody* else. As such, the concept of demands situates the analysis of populism squarely in the field of political discourse.

For Laclau, what defines a populist movement is the way in which a leader brings together and unifies in a single chain of meaning the demands of seemingly disparate groups of people.

At the beginning of the dissertation I said that politics as such, and more so democratic politics, is a response to conflict. For this very reason, political institutions are *demand-processing mechanisms*: institutions like a parliament or the popular vote are needed in democratic politics because different, controversial demands appear constantly. By their very nature, however, political institutions function as filters: some demands are recognized and processed right away, some are denied or repressed, and some remain invisible. The primary way the political system processes the demands is by breaking them down into smaller “pieces” and translating them from the political arena to legal-rational administrative institutions. Political institutions process demands *differentially*, chopping them into sub-demands, meshing them together, or channeling them through different problem-solving mechanisms. The objective is to *particularize demands*, so they can be dealt with one at a time, in a particularized manner.

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272 A problem that is the root of Marx distinction between a class *in itself* and *for itself*. 

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When the demands that are fed into the political system are relatively few, or very specific and easy to solve, political institutions function as they are supposed to: they isolate one demand, deal with it, and move on, so the cycle starts again. Under these conditions, the demands can and should be dealt institutionally. Many times, deliberative settings are the best option to solve particular demands.

But under certain conditions (rapid social change with rapid upwards or downwards social mobility is one of them; social and political crises and external threats might be another, and an overly repressive political regime that concentrates all power in the hands of an unresponsive elite another) demands accumulate and the capacity of the institutional system to deal with them differentially can break down. If this happens, then a plurality of unmet demands can begin to morph into a unified populist claim.²⁷³

Many have noted that populist movements are adversarial in logic and discourse, and there is a good reason for this: they are born out of the exclusion of popular demands; and because of this, they define themselves by drawing a line in the sand between an “us” (those whose demands are ignored) and a “them” (those who are doing the ignoring.) Populist discourse has also been noted to be vague and based on emotional appeals rather than in a “rational” set of preferences. Yet this is also natural: populist mobilization originates in a sense of being wronged, of being left out. It does not express a preference for this or that policy—it is, if you will, a condition that exists before

²⁷³ Ernesto Laclau, On Populist Reason, p. 97 and following.
preferences are created. (There is another a reason for the vagueness as well: populist leaders typically mobilize the public by using attractive words that are vague enough that they can mean different things for different people.)

But the first demand of a populist movement is always recognition: its members want to be recognized as political subjects with a right to sit at the political table.

The argument here is that the form in which populist discourse is organized is not irrational, but rather that it expresses a particular form of political reason. The character of populist reason have remained misunderstood for quite some time. Because often there are no discreet “preferences” prior to mobilization itself, populist movements are not oriented towards bargaining or resource allocation—although populist discourse can emphasize particular injustices in the distribution of derivable resources, such as land, or work, or water. The primary goal of populist mobilization is recognition and identity formation. To achieve these two things—recognition and identity—a populist movement must divide the political field into two camps, “us” and “them,” standing in an adversarial yet co-constitutive relation.²⁷⁴

If the demands are not met, repressed politics occur. That is, there are a plurality of social groups whose very existence is not recognized by the institutions of the regime. But this in itself does not guarantee that a populist movement will be formed. The existence of repressed demands, while a necessary condition, is not enough to create a

²⁷⁴ “We know, so far, that populism requires the dichotomic division of society into two camps—one presenting itself as a part which claims to be the whole.” Ernesto Laclau, On Populist Reason, p. 83.
populist movement. Some other things must be present as well. The presence of a leader is crucial in the aggregation of demands into a single unit of meaning. A charismatic leader must appear who takes upon himself the role of embodying the voices of the excluded groups. Then, he or she must create a coherent and plausible narrative in which the repressed demands are connected in a single unit of meaning. And, finally, the movement must be organized in such a way that it can be recognized as a viable political force.

Laclau presents the most sympathetic account of populist mobilization, and I share some of his key methodological decisions, such as to replace the concept of social class or group with the more empirically precise concept of political demand. He also offers a nuanced account of the role that leadership plays in a populist movement.

However, I identify two main shortcomings in his theory. First, he expands the concept of populism so much that it becomes equivalent to politics in toto. If all politics are populist, then it makes no sense to talk about populism at all. Second, he does not discuss in any depth the shortcomings in populism; he mentions them in passing but populism is treated largely as a positive phenomenon.

I believe, however, that the shortcomings of populist mobilization are real and should be discussed accordingly. I will focus on two of them: the danger of totalization

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275 “My attempt (has been) …to show that populism has no referential unity because it is ascribed not to a delimitable phenomenon but to a social logic whose effects cut across many phenomena. Populism is, quite simply a way of constructing the political.” Ernesto Laclau, On Populist Reason, p. xi.

276 “The people is, for (Rancière) and me, the central protagonist of politics, and politics is what prevents the social from crystallizing…” Ernesto Laclau, On Populist Reason, p. 249.
and the rise of authoritarian personalism.

**Populist Movements vs. Populist Regimes**

An important note: the dangerous tendencies of populist movements can become actualized in a *populist regime*. In chapter two I quoted Margaret Canovan's definition of a people (or, in my language, populist mobilization) as “a mobilized public in which individuals have become engaged;” I refined this definition, however, in the following fashion: a populist mobilization is a mobilized public in which individuals have become actively engaged; such mobilization is centered around a charismatic leader; it deploys an antagonistic rhetoric against a political “other;” and the movement expresses itself in forms that bypass the mediatory political institutions, (these forms of direct expression might include direct action and protests, or can take place primarily through plebiscites, intensive media-campaigns, and other non-mobilizatory forms of action.)

But a *populist movement* needs to be distinguished from a *populist regime*, that is,

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278 “If they are to make effective use of whatever institutional channels may be available, confrontational populists need to play on popular concerns that are not being addressed by the people's existing representatives. The salience of particular grievances varies from one country to another, but common themes include high taxes, unemployment, strains on the welfare state crime and (increasingly) immigration and its consequences. As a spur to populist antagonism, these have been sharpened by constraints on elected governments' responses to popular pressure, constraints imposed (particularly in the European Union) by a combination of constitutional commitments and liberal ideology.” Margaret Canovan, *The People*, p. 82.
a fully institutionalized political regime.\textsuperscript{279} A fully institutionalized populist regime is an impossibility (as is a \textit{revolutionary regime}). A political regime, which is by definition a set of norms and institutions, cannot be mobilizatory and stable \textit{at the same time} (much like a movement cannot be charismatic and legal-bureaucratic at the same time). A populist regime will want to be the two things at the same time, nonetheless; and herein precisely lies its fragility.

In Weber’s terms, once a populist \textit{movement} obtains power—as they will often do, since a populist movement with a charismatic leader is a very powerful thing—it has but two choices: to transform itself into a legal-bureaucratic regime or to devolve and disappear, to become integrated back into society. (The later occurrence is for Weber the most likely outcome, given the nontransferable nature of the leader's charisma and the anti-institutional drive of the charismatic mobilization.)

There have been a good number of populist movements that devolved back into society—the Russian populist movement and the American agrarian populism of late 19\textsuperscript{th} century come to mind.\textsuperscript{280} But there are very few examples of a successful populist \textit{party}, that is, one that was able to obtain power and then complete the transition to a stable and

\textsuperscript{279} I understand a political regime as a stable institutional arrangement for collective conflict-resolution and resource allocation, including a body of explicit norms, a state apparatus, and a set of political institutions. (According the Arend Lijphart, a political regime is a set of political institutions by which a government of a state is organized in order to exert its powers over a body politic. Arend Lijphart, \textit{Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration}, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977.)

lasting regime. Most populist regimes are turbulent entities that fail in their attempts to create a new and lasting political order.

Populist regimes tend to be of a hybrid nature: they are part mobilizatory, part personalistic, part democratic; part liberal and part communitarian; part democratic and part autocratic. The reasons for the hybridity and for the turbulences that it creates are caused by the regime’s attempts to be legal and rational while at the same time regaining the mobilizatory spirit of its beginnings. In the end, the populist style of mobilization that is so useful to accumulate power undermines the political stability that is its ultimate goal. 

The transition from a populist movement to a populist regime often amplifies and highlights the most negative aspects of populist mobilization; the tendencies of populist movements can be very oppressive to democracy once they are institutionalized in a regime. I will focus on two negative tendencies: the tendency towards social totalization and erosion of the rule of law and the tendency towards authoritarian personalism.

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281 A number of examples of successful populist movements that were able to transition into fully-fledged regimes, as shown by the governments of Getulio Vargas in Brazil (1939-45 and 1951-54); Juan Doming Perón (1945-1955 and 1973-74); Velasco Alvarado in Perú (1968-1975), Nasser in Egypt (1956-70). Today, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (1999-now), Evo Morales in Bolivia (2005-now) and Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2007-now) are trying to complete this transition, with relative success. There are also numerous cases of populist movements that did not get to power and then dissolved back into society: the Prairy Populism of the US, the Russian populists of 19th century Russia, and, contemporarily, the right-wing populism of Jörg Harder in Austria.
The First Danger of Populism: The danger of totalization:

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that the politicization of the excluded, the vulnerable and the poor is a prerequisite for the expansion of deliberative democracy. But this claim must be refined with the addition of substantive caveats.

Populist mobilization generates the over-politicization of social relations; that is, it infuses politics into all the aspects and dimensions of social life, and it subsumes every social interaction into the logic of power. As I have said before, this unleashing of political energy can be beneficial to democracy if it is funneled into the proper channels, of which deliberative democracy is one. But this energy can also be detrimental to democracy if it is put to other uses.

Deliberative democratic theory and the theories of populist democracy share one key aspiration: to resist the colonization of the life-world by the forces of commodification and bureaucratization that originate in the autonomous sphere of the market by expanding the scope and power of the political sphere. But such re-politicization presents the possibility of a re-colonization of the life-world by relentless politicization. Because of this danger of totalization, liberal democratic political theory rejects populism completely. While populism promises the universal politicization of the social body, and its unification into a monadic *demos*, deliberative democracy's sovereign subject is disembodied; it must be dispersed “...through the complex public institutions, procedures, practices and discourses that contribute to the working of a modern
For deliberative democrats, social differentiation rendered populist mobilization at the same time implausible and undesirable. Modern societies are complex, multi-layered systems, with a variety of specialized subsystems that have taken decades, sometimes centuries, to develop. In the last three centuries, the arts, the sciences and religion became separated from political and moral life, and the complexities of large-scale societies have required the institutionalization of agencies and subsystems that regulate and coordinate the daily comings and goings of thousands of millions of human beings.

Social, cultural, economic and political differentiation is the most basic guarantee for pluralism, liberalism, and diversity. Jürgen Habermas sees it as the one feature that makes possible the transformation of “traditional” societies into “post-traditional ones” because it makes possible the replacement of reified, unreflective forms of authority with others based on rationality, autonomy and free communication. See for example Cohen and Arato again:

For Habermas, it is this modernization of the cultural spheres of the lifeworld that makes possible (but not necessary) the development of post-traditional communicatively coordinated, and reflexive forms of association, publicity, solidarity, and identity. This cultural modernization, as its results feed back from specialized institutions into everyday communication, powerfully fosters the transformation of the cultural-linguistic assumptions of the lifeworld and their mode of operation in relation to action. A

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282 Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 117.
modernized, rationalized lifeworld involves a communicative opening-up of the sacred core of traditions, norms, and authority to processes of questioning and the replacement of a conventionally based normative consensus by one that is “communicatively” grounded.\(^{283}\)

In this vein, Jürgen Habermas very carefully disentangles his notion of a sovereign deliberative public from any semblance of populist monism: “The people from whom all governmental authority is supposed to derive does not comprise a subject with will and consciousness. It only appears in the plural, and as a people it is capable of neither decisions nor action as a whole;”\(^{284}\) while Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato warn against the attempt to implement a “council model” of political governance in our modern, complex pluralities.

\[T]\]he democratization of existing pluralities is more compatible with the preservation of modern structures than their “totalization” by some kind of council model. The latter would imply the re-embedding of steering mechanisms (administrations, markets) in directly social relations, and this would conflict with the presupposition of a modern civil society, namely, differentiation.\(^{285}\)

Habermasian deliberative democrats theorists see a communicative reason, generated by civil society and deliberative politics, as the counterbalancing force, that can push against the commodification and bureaucratization of the life-world and of the political

\(^{283}\) Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory, p. 435, (emphasis added).

\(^{284}\) Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 469.

\(^{285}\) Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory, p. 418, emphasis added.
institutions. In Cohen and Arato's terms: “the project of a democratic civil society, its model of differentiation, is obviously the decolonizing of the lifeworld.”

“While the central political public sphere, constituted by parliaments and the major media, remains rather (but not everywhere equally!) closed and inaccessible, a plurality of alternative publics, differentiated but interrelated, time and again revives the processes and the quality of political communication.”

The concept of civil society we defend differs from Hegel’s model in three essential aspects. First, it presupposes a more differentiated social structure. Taking our cue from Gramsci and Parsons, we postulate the differentiation of civil society not only from the state but also from economy. Our concept is neither state-centered, as was Hegel’s... not economy-centered, as was Marx’s. Ours is a society-based model. Secondly following Tocqueville and the early Habermas, we make the public spheres of societal communication and voluntary association the central institutions of civil society.

In modern, rationalized societies, there are several types of social relations, each one of them regulated by its own medium of exchange. The main three types of social relations are those that take place within the spheres of the state, the market and civil society. The medium of exchange of state relations is authority; the medium of exchange of economic relations is money, and the medium of exchange of civil society is solidarity. I would add to these three a fourth type, which would be the properly political relations that take

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286 Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory, p. 455, emphasis added.

287 Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory, p. 460.

288 Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory, p. 410-411, emphasis.
place in the political society; their medium of exchange is power.

Populist movements often are motivated by an aspiration to roll back the power of money and the autonomy of the markets and to subordinate them to the political will of the demos; to replace money or solidarity with political power as the primary medium of exchange. (It is not by chance that the most frequent foes of populist discourse are the “oligarchs” and the “plutocrats” that prey on the wealth created by the toiling of the “little men”.) In this respect, there are democratic potentials in populist mobilization that must not be denied: populists mobilizations are (not always, but often) one of the ways in which social actors can act against the de-humanizing, commodifying force of market relations and affirm the relevance to their aspirations of justice and equality. But the affirmation of the primacy of politics over economy is fraught with dangers as well.

The institutionalization of the populist affirmation of politics over economics has taken the form, historically, of state-centered regimes, that is, regimes in which a strong and often personalistic executive, with a leader who wields the authority of the office with the power of the head of a party, seeks to directly regulate every aspect of the economic sphere, including the fixing of prices, wages, rates of investment, and so on. This

289 Seen in this light, populist mobilization can be understood as one of the ways in the “self-preserving force of society,” in Karl Polanyi’s term, presents itself. Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation. Beacon Press, 2001

290 The state-centered matrix can be characterized as follows: “…a type of state that could collect and mobilize substantive economic resources, influence the implementation of development policies, and incorporate, shape, and create social actors in the political arena who were able to centralize and control social and political conflicts in diverse ways. Thus, the dominant economic, political, and social actors in such countries are closely associated with the state apparatus. This particular kind of institutional configuration can be characterized as a state-centered matrix. This concept emphasizes the relative
institutional design has often created an overextended and hypertrophied executive branch that sought to implement a set of unrealistic and ultimately inefficient economic policies, and that eventually defeated itself through the loss of economic sustainability. Populist regimes, which were the political expression of social relations of deep inequality, engaged in very rapid and dramatic redistribution of wealth—material as well as symbolic. The measures for achieving such redistribution, however, were often contradictory, incomplete, and self-defeating.  

A populist regime will often seek to bring the sphere of civil society under state control through measures such as direct or indirect control of the press and civil society organizations, state control of education, and so on. It might happen that, to continue “winning,” populist governments will threaten to take away, not metaphorically but all too really, the political rights of their adversaries, and even their lives.

Populism is mobilizatory and antagonistic in spirit; it values direct mobilization over representative and institutional politics and creates mobilizatory power by rallying against a chosen adversary. Once in power, populist regimes might let go of this antagonistic spirit and slowly recede into politics-as-usual; or they might want to

recapture the original spirit by going into full-fledged “permanent mobilization”-style politics. They might transform themselves them into authoritarian, Cesaristic an often coercive regimes that see adversaries as enemies and use political violence against them.

Even so, not all populist regimes have completely erased the rule of law once they got in power. The final outcome depends on many contingent factors, among them being the organization and activism of civil society, the strength of the party system, the degree and speed of the institutionalization of the new regime, and the international context. In some cases, regimes that began with a populist mobilization transformed into fascist or quasi-fascist regimes, while in others they remained much more moderate.\textsuperscript{292}

Moreover, as Kurt Weyland, Giovanni Arditti and Carlos de la Torre argue, a populist “style” of leaderhisn and domination is a part of “normal” politics all around the globe. Neo-populist leaders such as Carlos Menem in Argentina, Alberto Fujimori in Perú and Silvio Berlusconi in Italy have utilized a variety of populist strategies, without a definite erosion of the democratic system.

\textsuperscript{292} The movement that brought Mussolini to power had populist characteristics. Interestingly, this most extreme case took place in the core of the Western world and not in Latin America or other newly-modernized areas of the world. None of the classical Latin-American populisms transitioned into fascist regimes so fully.
The Second Threat of Populism: Authoritarian Leadership

Common sense, as well as most political theory, often equates populism with strong leaders who put in place illiberal, authoritarian, personalistic and economically irresponsible regimes in top-down fashion. Populism is colloquially used a short-hand for any given combination of demagoguery with easy but short-sighted redistribution, personalistic politics and authoritarian mobilization. However impressionistic and imprecise the use of the term is, there is no denying that populist mobilization and personalistic politics are indeed related.

Populist leadership is built on strong personal affection and it is not by chance that populist leaders are strong, personalistic, even autocratic figures. It is also not by chance that most populist movements are not able to survive the death of their leader, or the loss of their leader's charisma. (A few of them did, however, and I will discuss them later.)

Charismatic authority and populist mobilization are closely related, and populist movements almost always coalesce around a strongly charismatic figure. Populist mobilization brings coherence to a variety of social groups by mobilizing them around a few potent but polysemic ideas such as “social justice,” “the common man,” or “civil rights.” Charismatic leaders are crucial to populist mobilization precisely because their discourse and presence operate as embodiments of those vague but potent ideas in a way that is at the same time physically evident and semantically vague. The charismatic politician can conjure up through words and deeds, affections and passions such as hope, loyalty, resentment and fervor, in a way that no technocrat can hope to do. (This is not to
say that the leader can always control those passions: sometimes the leader can be overridden by the tide that he himself helped create.)

A populist movement is, by definition, not a political party. A modern political party is a stable entity, structured around a common identity, with a well-defined ideology, and a set of norms and procedures of internal organization (be they written down or simply given as a set of guiding principles organically developed through history). A populist movement, on the contrary, is a much more amorphous entity, in which a disparate set of social groups that have diverse, even contradictory, claims are united, and that lack a well-defined identity and ideology.\(^{293}\) The leaders of a modern party, strong though they might be, know that they will be replaced and that the party will remain, because of the bureaucratic aspects of the party's organization. In a populist movement, however, the leader is the embodiment and sole operator of the movement's unity. In a modern party, the affection of the partisans is—ideally at least—directed towards the ideology and history of that particular party, but the populist partisans lack such shared history, and thus their affections—their aspirations and hopes—are directed towards the person of the leader, who symbolizes them.

\(^{293}\) “Study of populism has been hampered by the difficulty of finding clear connecting links between the different senses in which the term is used. While some analysts have offered definitions or listed essential characteristics of populism, others have found only more tenuous connections and loose family resemblances between the different populisms; in all cases, attempts at a general characterization have been contentious. (...) The term's form suggests affinities with ideological movements like socialism or nationalism. But although all these other 'isms' range over widely different phenomena, each gains a degree of coherence from a continuous history, willingness on the part of most adherents to identify themselves by the name, distinctive principles and policies. Populism does not fit the pattern.” Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 79.
The followers of a populist leader do not have any of that: they lack a cogent shared ideology, they do not have a shared history, they do not possess a stock of shared symbols in which they can anchor their passions and affections. All they have in common is their shared loyalty and political affection towards the leader. The figure of the leader becomes, in itself, a symbol.

The strong emotional appeal of populist mobilization gives populism much of its potency and its flexibility: the common reference to the person of the leader makes it possible for the followers to concentrate on that which they have in common, and this creates a sense of common purpose and shared identity. The leader is able to bring together many dissimilar groups into one unified movement. And while an ideology or a party platform can be something remote, abstract, and difficult to explain or to feel affection for, the person of the leader is something concrete, visible; it is something that is comprehensible in its humanity.

But there are dangers in the personalization of the movement in the figure of the leader. To begin with, the shared populist identity is thin, and the differences that the common affection to the leader papers over can worsen with time. If the leader dies, is replaced, or just loses her charisma, severe factional struggles can happen.294

Second, it is easy to see that the combination of a personalistic leader with a body of partisans with strong personal affections and an organization with very low internal

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294 This happened with Peronism in the 1970s. Perón’s sudden death in 1973 caused violent clashes between the right wing and leftist factions, and this brought about the implosion of the movement and was one of the causes of the military coup of 1976.
organization will very probably be translated into personalistic and autocratic regimes. The precise nature of populist authoritarianism, however, remains unexplained; the term populism is often treated as a theoretical “black box” into which every authoritarian or personalistic political leader is thrown. But authoritarian leadership must be distinguished from populist leadership, since it is clear than a political leader might be authoritarian in ways that are not populist.\textsuperscript{295}

The one common characteristic of populist forms of authoritarian rule is the use of plebiscitory measures on the part of the leader. Populist leaders do not want to be constrained by party mediations, so they constantly bypass political mediations and seek to tap directly into ‘the will of the people.’ One preferred way to do so is to utilize plebiscites and other forms of direct democracy; currently, however, populist leaders often use polls and other measures of public opinion as proxies for the popular will.

There are but a handful of studies into the micro-mechanics of populist leadership. Silvia Sigal and Eliseo Verón offer an interesting opening into the study of the micro-functioning of populist discourse. In their seminal study on the discursive performativity of Peronism, Sigal and Verón developed a model of populist leadership that they call the “\textit{model of distance}.”\textsuperscript{296} I will discuss the “model of distance” at some length because it

\textsuperscript{295} Gregory Luebbert, for example, has presented and excellent discussion of the differences between traditional authoritarianism and modern fascism. Gregory Luebbert, \textit{Liberalism, Fascism and Social Democracy}.

can be extrapolated to other, if not all, populist movements.

Sigal and Verón review the writings and speeches of Juan Domingo Perón—an exceptionally durable populist leader, whose influence shaped Argentine politics for three decades—and find that the Peronist movement's mode of political articulation had the following four characteristics: the populist leader creates a frontier between “us” and “them”; he presents himself as somebody who “comes from outside”; the relation between the leader and the people is organized as a quid pro quo; and the leader tells a story in which he is the redeemer of the people.

i. The leader creates, with his discourse and actions, a division between an “us” and a “them”; this division, however, is presented in moral, not political, terms.

I have quoted Chantal Mouffe's argument that democratic politics is based on the distinction between adversaries and enemies. The difference between seeing somebody as an adversary and seeing her as an enemy is the difference between politics and morality. A political adversary is somebody whose political stance I choose to fight but whose inherent morality I do not judge. My opposition to him is aimed at his behavior, not his inner being. But a moral enemy is somebody whose being, by his very nature, constitutes a threat to my sense of self.

The problem is that very often populist discourse presents the “other” is presented as immoral or evil. The operation by which political opposition is transformed into a moral one is fraught with anti-liberal tendencies. When moral discourse overcomes
politics, judgments are passed not upon other people's actions but upon their very being, and this can create the conditions for the violent intrusion of politics into the non-political sphere.

Democratic politics are based on the assumption that a political adversary is somebody that might always be persuaded using rhetoric and argument. (In fact, democracy is based on rhetoric, which is the most generous of all kinds of discourse, since it must be written from the point of view of the adversary.) The politics of morality, on the other hand, are Manichean; they treat politics as a struggle between good and evil: from this point of view, rhetoric is capitulation and compromise is treason.

But populist discourse, by its very nature, tends to portray adversaries in a moral and prepolitical light. A populist leader will speak of his adversaries not as mistaken individuals but as fundamentally immoral people; they are not presented as people with diverging interests but as traitors to the people, as willful participants in conspiracies that have the sole purpose of robbing the people of its chosen destiny. The reason for such stark rhetoric is that to passage away from the language of morality to the language of interests and compromise would signal passage from the politics of exception and mobilization to the politics of institutionalization.

It is quite easy to see the dangerous effects that such a Manichean world view can have if it is embedded in the institutions of the state. In the most extreme cases, a strongly antagonistic populist regime will regard all political activity happening outside of the privileged relation between the leader and the partisans as illegitimate, immoral,
and dangerous: it will forbid political parties, intervene the press, and stifle public discourse. Anybody who speaks against the regime, or its leader, will be treated as a “traitor to the people,” and probably persecuted or put in jail. Furthermore, a populist regime will probably try to recuperate its original mobilizatory energy—which is based on mobilization against a chosen antagonist—by attempting to find new and changing adversaries: they can be the opposition party at one point, the press at another, financial interests later, and so on.

ii. The populist leader presents himself in discourse as somebody that “comes from outside”

It is crucial that a populist leader presents himself (or herself) as somebody who comes from the extrapoliical realm. A populist leader cannot be, under any circumstance, “a politician:” he must be an outsider, somebody quien is untouched by the vices of politics-as-usual.

The factual accuracy of the leader's self-presentation is secondary; populist leaders can come from “outside” or not; what matters is how the trajectory is constructed in discourse and how potent the narrative of the leader's “journey” is. The construction of such a narrative is easier when the populist leader is truly a newcomer: a leader like Evo Morales, the recently elected president of Bolivia, has the perfect life-story upon which to build a populist narrative. In a country like Bolivia, in which a tiny, wealthy white minority has ruled over the poor and dispossessed indigenous majority since the times of
the Spanish empire, truly nobody is more an “outsider” than an ethnic Aymara Indian, born to peasant parents who did not learn to talk, read and write in Spanish until he was ten years old, and who became politically activated in the cocaleros movement. But a populist life-story can be constructed even with less exceptional life-stories. The Argentine populist leader Juan Domingo Perón was, previous to his coming to power in 1945, a colonel in the already very politicized Argentine army and the secretary of labor in the de-facto government established in 1943. He was not an outsider. The discursive strategies of Perón and Morales, however, display a similar strategy for self-presentation, emphasizing their provenance from the non-political realm of a higher ethical calling: in one case, it is the self-effacing, service-oriented life of the soldier; in the other, it is the community-oriented, anti-materialistic life of the peasant.

A populist leader always comes “from afar” and the tale of his ascent is the tale of a “journey” from ignorance to political awareness. These narratives are moving and politically powerful. They also tend to convey a sense that the political leader does not owe anything to anybody except himself and his people, in contrast to the politicians of the institutionalized parties of the right and the left. An institutional politician has to rise through the ranks and remains to a large degree dependent and accountable to his party, while a populist leader is going to emphasize his independence from party organization.

297 The cocaleros movement organized Bolivian peasants communities whose income and way of life was threatened by the policies of forced coca eradication.

298 He had ties with a political committee of young officers and a very salient group of nationalistic public intellectuals (known as GOUP and FORJA, respectively). Ricardo Sidicaro, Los Tres Peronismos.
The “outsider” placement, however, is untenable in the long run, and there precisely lies the risk. A politician can come to power from “outside,” actually or figuratively, but he cannot claim to be an outsider once he is inside, or at the very top, of the regime. The danger is that the populist leader wants to recreate the “outsider” feeling, and that she will do so that by going against an ever-enlarging number of adversaries. A populist leader will lash at the land-owing oligarchy, or the transnational financial interests, or the immigrants, or the US, or any number of internal and external threatening powers. On the one hand, such a Manichean form of politics might lead to the persecution of those that are singled out as the threatening group. In the other, this perpetual quest for adversaries is a cause for the structural instability of the regime and might lead to its demise.

Ideally, a populist leader would start the movement and then she will fade away, giving way to the day-to-day mechanics of institutional politics. From the point of view of the leadership, however, the danger is that the participants will become disenchanted once the mystique and sense of breakthrough of their original coming to power have disappeared. In itself, this might not be a definitive blow—the literature on social movements has theorized about the so-called “life cycle” of social movements, in which contentious movements slowly devolve into bureaucratic organizations. Or it might have dire consequences, if the movement devolves into a regime based on coercion or

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299 A point already covered when discussed Weber, in Chapter 5.
clientelism.

iii. The relation between the leader and the people is organized as a quid pro quo: the people gives the leader its trust, and the leader reciprocates with service.

The “model of the gaze” that Verón and Sigal describe is very similar to Max Weber's argument about charismatic authority. For Weber, the legitimacy of charismatic authority is predicated on the notion that the leader is not like his partisans: like the artistic genius to which it is closely related, the charismatic leader is different in nature from his partisans, and because of this he obeys a different set of principles and has a different sense of responsibility. The relation between leader and partisans depends on this radical difference, and the charismatic movement will be shaped by it.

A populist leader and his partisans are connected by the gaze with which the latter look at the former. With this phrase, Verón and Sigal seek to capture the unidirectional nature of the populist relation: the leader acts and speaks, and the people look and support. They are his audience, his constituency and his congregation, all in one, and as such they are indispensable to the leader; they are not, however, the ones with whom the action originates. The leader is above the rules, and above institutions.300

For Weber, there is certainly a positive element to charismatic authority, since it is

300 Machiavelli also regarded the political leader as somebody that is different in nature to the people and, therefore, entitled to be above the law. The political leader, for Machiavelli, is the giver or founder or peoples, laws, and mores, and religion, and, while he must enforce them, is not bound by them, as shown in his praise of Numa, who created a religion for the people that suited his purposed.
the only force that can puncture the pull of rationalization. Ernesto Laclau argues that the charismatic elements in the populist movement make them very powerful: in a context of low politicization and high discontent, the figure of the charismatic leader becomes the symbol around which partisans can rally.

The leader promises to fulfill the partisan's needs, but he requires large freedom to do so. The distance between the leader and his partisans, and the large degree of autonomy invested in the leader generates a lack of accountability, however, and this is a very serious problem. It can, for one thing, lead to delegative democracy.

Guillermo O'Donnell has written extensively about delegative democracy, and he sees in it the main threat of contemporary populism. Delegative democracy (which is a type of democracy that is “neither consolidated nor institutionalized,” but nonetheless enduring) are,

grounded on one basic premise: he (or eventually she, i.e., Indira Gandhi, Corazón Aquino, and Isabel Perón) who wins a presidential election is enabled to govern the country as he sees fit, and to the extent that existing power relations allow, for the term to which he has been elected. The President is the embodiment of the nation and the main custodian of the national interest, which it is incumbent upon him to define. What he does

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301 It is important to remember that Max Weber regarded charismatic authority in a mixed, if not positive, light. Max Weber viewed rationalization and differentiation as the worst features of industrial modernity, and wrote repeatedly about the dangers of what Mark Warren calls “bureaucratic nihilism”: “The logic of Weber’s argument suggests that the bureaucratic organization of everyday life destroys what he takes to be the secular basis of meaning in activities that are consciously chosen and guided. The cost of bureaucratic efficiency is life in a world with reduced scope for individual autonomy, responsibility, spontaneity, and initiative.” Mark Warren, “Max Weber’s Liberalism for a Nietzschean World,” p. 34.

in government does not need to bear any resemblance to what he said or promised during the electoral campaign—he has been authorized to govern as he sees fit. Since this paternal figure has to take care of the whole nation, it is almost obvious that his support cannot come from a party; his political basis has to be a movement, the supposedly vibrant overcoming of the factionalism and conflicts that parties bring about. Typically, and consistently, winning presidential candidates in DDs present themselves as above all parties; i.e., both political parties and organized interests. How could it be otherwise for somebody who claims to embody the whole of the nation?303

The dangers of delegative democracies are directly linked to the lack of accountability, both vertical and horizontal.304

Delegative democracy begins with very low institutionalization and, at best, it is indifferent toward strengthening it. DD gives the President the apparent advantage of practically no horizontal accountability. DD has the additional apparent advantage of allowing swift policy-making, but at the expense of a high likelihood of gross mistakes, of hazardous implementation, and of concentrating responsibility for the outcomes on the President. Not surprisingly, these Presidents suffer the wildest swings in popularity: today they are acclaimed saviors, tomorrow they are cursed as only fallen gods can be.305

Delegative government seems especially appealing in times of crisis or economic and social uncertainty.


304 “In consolidated democracies, accountability operates not only, nor so much, “vertically” in relation to those who elected the officer (except, retrospectively, at times of elections), but “horizontally” in relation to a network of relatively autonomous powers (i.e., other institutions) that have the capacity of calling into question and eventually punishing “improper” ways of discharging the responsibilities of the given officer. Representation and accountability, in turn, entail what in previous work I have called the republican dimension of democracy: a careful distinction between the spheres of public and private interests of office holders.” Guillermo O'Donnell, “Delegative Democracy?,” Kellog Institute Working Paper nº 172, p. 9.

iv. The leader presents himself, and is perceived as, a redeemer of the people.

Every populist leader must be a story-teller, crafting and telling a story of loss and redemption, in which his people are the main character. There is but one basic populist narrative matrix, which is the formal structure that underlies all populist discourse: there is one basic populist myth.

Every lasting political identity (be it populist or not) has as one of its key features a “narration” or myth about itself (a myth is, by definition, a story that is collectively shared to explain the origin and uniqueness of something). A political myth “...has dramatic form; it concerns a political collectivity of some kind, and it has a practical political point. (...) In particular, it allows individuals to identify themselves with ‘our’ collective story and provide them with patterns of behavior.”306 The myth is a narrative form (in the sense with which the Russian formalists used the term), and myths are structured following the most basic narrative template: there is a hero, there is something which the hero must attain, and there is an evil character that seeks to prevent the hero from succeeding.307

In the 20th century, a number of political myths competed for preeminence, and they continue to do so today. There is a liberal myth (“In the beginning, were an

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306 Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 124
individuals with inalienable rights); there is a Marxist myth (“In the beginning, there was the historical evolution of production forces...”), and so on and so forth. The populist myth, of which little has been written, concerns a very specific hero, the people; it has three basic narrative moments: there is a people, the people is robbed of its destiny, and the people comes back to regain its rightful place. (As Canovan says: “this basic theme – the story of how the People have been robbed of their rightful sovereignty, but will rise up and regain it – has (...) been a staple of populist politics for the past two centuries...”)

308 To be effective, the leader generates a discourse that inserts the movement into a “long” myth, a narration with historical resonances. Evo Morales' rise to power has been accompanied by a the construction of a nuanced narrative about the historical plight and the unique promise of indigenous peoples of Bolivia. The example of Evo Morales is useful, however, to show that contemporary Bolivian populism is not postmodern or traditionalist: in this respect, this movement's goal is not to reinstate a distant Andean past but to try to create a unique mixture of modernity and tradition—what Morales has called the model of “unity in diversity.” Populist myths are also laden with emotional appeals—a feature that for some theorists, such as Margaret Canovan and Giovanni Arditti, is the key characteristic of populism.

309 Yet these emotional appeals are fraught with danger, because emotions can become so intense that they are difficult to control.

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308 Margaret Canovan, The people, 127.
So, to summarize this section: the emotional closeness between the leader and the followers, as well as the mythical underpinning of the movement’s narrative, make populism a very powerful political entity. When such a movement appears, it has a very good chance of trumping other more traditional or rationalistic political parties. However, in this heightened emotional state the dangers lie. First, because high emotions are difficult to tone down, when the circumstances require a more cerebral approach. Second, because if these emotions are based on resentment and anger, they can call for some form of ritual “punishment” for those who are perceived to be the cause of such anger. So, the leader might use these feelings as a justification for political violence.

The Correctives of Populism

In the previous chapter I advanced the idea that populist mobilization could act as a corrective for the class biases of deliberative democracy—in this view, deliberation and populist mobilization are two moments of a wider democratic cycle. Yet in this chapter I presented several ways in which populist mobilization can also erode liberal liberties and the rule of law; when such a thing happen, democracy itself is damaged at the end. The question which remains, then, is what are the correctives to the most dangerous tendencies of populist mobilization.

Although the democratic or antidemocratic nature of the leader is of course an
important element in the final behavior of the movement, it is not the only variable. The relation between populist mobilization and institutionalization is the key to understand the relation between populist mobilization and liberal democracy: to judge the democratic or undemocratic effects of a populist movement, one needs to look not at its origins but at its institutionalization.

There is a degree of unpredictability in the institutionalization of populist movements that cannot be eradicated. But some institutional protections can be put in place to protect the liberal aspects of democracy.

The first one is to try to lure a populist movement into institutional, day-to-day politics, in such a way that it slowly transforms itself into political party.

As Kurt Wayland says,

> Yet to stabilize their rule many populist leaders eventually seek to “routinize their charisma” and solidify their mass following by introducing elements of party organization or clientelism. The relationship remains populist as long as the party has low levels of institutionalization and leaves the leader wide latitude in shaping and dominating its organization and as long as clientelistic patronage serves the leader in demonstrating personal concern for the followers and a supernatural capacity for problem solving. But where party organization congeals and constrains the leader's latitude, turning him into a party functionary, or where proliferating clientelism transforms the relationship of leader and follower into a purely pragmatic exchange, political rule based on command over large number of followers eventually loses its populist character. \(^\text{310}\) Populist leadership therefore tends to be transitory. It either fails, or, if successful, transcends itself.”

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There are some examples of strong populist movements that have successfully transitioned into “normal” political parties. (For instance, Peronismo in Argentina and APRA in Perú.)\textsuperscript{311} Their transitions, however, could only be completed after the other political parties, who rejected the legitimacy of the populist movements for a long time, finally accepted their right to participate in electoral democracy.\textsuperscript{312} In order to give populist movements an incentive to complete the transformation into institutional parties, it is useful to keep the criteria for participating in elections as inclusive and flexible as possible. In the Argentine case, the proscription of Peronism only served to make its appeal stronger; paradoxically, once the non-Peronist political parties agreed to participate in free and open elections with it, it was quickly revealed that Peronism could lose elections just like every other political organization.\textsuperscript{313}

The second corrective is deliberative democracy. Often times, when populist leaders participate in deliberative institutions and when they have to defend their positions in a reasoned manner—such as when they get elected to Congress, for instance—their


\textsuperscript{312} The Peronist party was outlawed during eighteen years in Argentina, from 1955 to 1972. Peronist affiliation was forbidden, as was the public use of Peronist symbols. The other political parties participated in elections even though Peronism was proscribed. This situation lasted until 1972, when the leaders of the Peronist Party and the Radical party signed a pact in which they both recognized each other’s legitimacy.

\textsuperscript{313} In the first democratic elections in which Peronism was allowed to participate after the transition to democracy in 1983, it lost to the Radical party.
discourse becomes much more moderate.\textsuperscript{314} But, again, as the example of the Porto Alegre deliberations discussed earlier showed, it is important that people who come from populist movements and/or parties are included in the deliberations, and not be left out by design. Paradoxically, this means that special efforts must be made to include in the deliberations those who seem to be less inclined to deliberate. (But these two conditions require strong social and political pluralism to begin with. The political, social and organizational density of a political community is a crucial condition for the prevention of the rise of totalizing political movements.)

There are no guarantees, however, and there is not a single obligatory trajectory of institutionalization. There is not one predetermined path towards the rationalization of charisma: after the demise of the leader or the “evaporation” of this charisma, the movement can move back towards more “traditional” or authoritarian forms of rule.\textsuperscript{315} Whether the charismatic movement will go one way or the other cannot be determined by the leader’s will or by the follower’s intentions but by conditions in the internal organization of the movement and the structural conditions of the environment, by the

\textsuperscript{314} Fernando Mayorga has correctly identified the disconnection between radical rhetoric and moderate politics of contemporary populist regimes in his article “El Gobierno de Evo Morales: entre Nacionalismo e Indigenismo.” Fernando Mayorga, “El Gobierno de Evo Morales: entre nacionalismo e indigenismo,” in Revista Nueva Sociedad, Npr. 206, november-december 2006, ISSN: 0251-3552, pp. 4-13.

\textsuperscript{315} “By contrast to the strong organization provided by an institutionalized party and the stable connection established by patron-client ties, the relationship between populist leaders and their mass constituency is uninstitutionalized and fluid. The followers’ loyalty can evaporate quickly if the leader fails to fulfill popular expectations. (…) To compensate for the fragility of the mass support, populist leaders seek to create a particularity intense connection to their followers. Such intensity requires charisma.” Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism and the Study of Latin American Politics,” p. 13.
relationship between leadership and followers, by the way in which the external actors
react to the “heretical” claims of the populist movement—either by negotiating with it,
deny ing it or repressing it. The multiplicity of variables make the final “outcome” of the
mobilization indeterminate.

In this chapter, I have deliberately kept this discussion at a more abstract level. In
next chapter I will move onto a discussion of some institutional arrangements in greater
detail.
Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy.

Thucydides, Pericles' Funeral Oration.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

THE TWO LOGICS OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Animated by the project of thinking through the possibilities for expanding democracy in ways that allow it to meet the challenges of our contemporary times, I have sought to build a theoretical case as to why deliberative reason and populist reason, and the tension that connects them, are equally important for the vitality and sustainability of any democratic regime. In this final chapter I want to present the empirical implications of the argument.

This final chapter has three sections. In the first one, I will revise some historical evidence to sustain the claim that, contrary to the liberal-progressive democratic narrative, populist mobilization has been a positive force in the history of democratization. This will constitute the historical argument of the chapter.

In the second section, I will compare and contrast the two logics of democratic politics; i.e., deliberative reason and populist reason, and then explore how these two logics might be accommodated in a contemporary version of a mixed regime. This
section will mostly be theoretical and normative. I want to know what, exactly, each one of these logics does for democracy, and how they can be aligned in such a way that they reinforce each other instead of destroying each other. I will propose that, far from requiring the elimination of populist politics, a dose of populist mobilization might do our contemporary democracies some good, if it is channeled correctly. This discussion is presented in a section about “a new mixed regime.”

In the final section of the chapter I will discuss the claim that, while it might have been positive in other times, populist mobilization is a thing of the past due to the unique nature of our historical moment. Contrary to this claim, I will argue that populism is not dead today, although it assumes a particular and peculiar form; and that, with that in mind, the best way to approach the study of populism today is not to ask whether it is dead or not, but what kind of populist politics exists now.

In the closing part of the chapter, I will advance an argument claiming that there are two zones of populist politics in the world today: a zone characterized by a de-mobilizing, exclusive form of populism and a zone characterized by a mobilizing and inclusive form of populism. The first zone comprises the core countries, the second

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316 In World Systems Theory, the core countries are industrialized capitalist countries, on which periphery countries and semi-periphery countries depend. Semi-periphery countries are mostly capitalist countries with some degree of industrialization. “The core-periphery distinction, widely observed in recent writings, differentiates these zones in which are concentrated high-profit, high technology, high wage diversified production (the core countries) from those in which are concentrated low-profit, low technology, low-wage, less diversified production (the peripheral countries). But there has always been a series of countries which fall in between in a very concrete way, and play a different role. (…) In part they act as a peripheral zone for core countries and in part they act as a core country for zone peripheral areas. Both their internal politics and their social structure are distinctive…” Immanuel Wallerstein, The Capitalist World Economy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 97.
one encompasses mainly semi-peripheral countries.

Finally, I will advance some ideas about how a proper balance between deliberation and populist mobilization can be achieved in each of these zones.

The Liberal-Progressive and Populist Democratic Metanarratives

One of the main arguments advanced in this dissertation is that popular mobilization, far from being a modern phenomenon, is as old democracy itself. But the longevity of populism is often forgotten by historians of democracy. The hegemonic narrative about the development of democratic politics tends to emphasize the realization of higher degrees of rationality, peace, and institutionality, to the detriment of the more contentious, mobilizatory and antagonistic democratic themes.

The democratic historiography tends to follow a very specific narrative arch, or what I will call the “liberal-progressive metanarrative.” The origins of this metanarrative can probably be traced back to Immanuel Kant's seminal essays “Idea for a Universal

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317 The term “metanarrative” was coined by Francois Lyotard to denote the generic, formal templates that underpin and shape the particular historical narratives produced in each historical era. Classic antiquity, for instance, favored the kind of meta-narrative that we call “myth.” Myths are oriented to the past, and they are concerned with explaining the origins of a community or regime; quite commonly, ancient myths operate within a template in which the common origin is followed by a Golden Age and then by decay and mediocrity. The rise of Modernity, Lyotard argued, changed the direction of the hegemonic narrative templates: Modernity ceased to be concerned with the past and became obsessed with the future. Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1979.

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History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” and “Perpetual Peace”. In these essays, Kant persuasively linked the philosophical project of Enlightenment with political liberalism and historical progressivism, and he plausibly claimed that it was reasonable to assume that history moved towards the achievement of higher degrees of peace and rationality. It is hard to overstate how much these two essays influence political theory even today. The fusion of liberalism, progressivism and Enlightenment rationalism gave rise to a tradition whose offspring include Hegel, Habermas, Rawls, and indeed most of contemporary political science.

Political science in general—and more specifically its subfield of comparative democratic studies—operates with a number of key assumptions that are often kept implicit: that history progresses towards democratic governance; that such governance is defined in terms of rationality, order, and peace; that the democratic process entails the


319 “Although, for instance, our world rulers at present have no money left over for public education and for anything that concerns what is best in the world, since all they have is already committed to future wars, they will still find it to their own interest at least not to hinder the weak and slow, independent efforts of their peoples in this work. In the end, war itself will be seen as not only so artificial, in outcome so uncertain for both sides, in after-effects so painful in the form of an ever-growing war debt (a new invention) that cannot be met, that it will be regarded as a most dubious undertaking. The impact of any revolution on all states on our continent, so closely knit together through commerce, will be so obvious that the other states, driven by their own danger but without any legal basis, will offer themselves as arbiters, and thus they will prepare the way for a distant international government for which there is no precedent in world history. Although this government at present exists only as a rough outline, nevertheless in all the members there is rising a feeling which each has for the preservation of the whole. This gives hope finally that after many reformatory revolutions, a universal cosmopolitan condition, which Nature has as her ultimate purpose, will come into being as the womb wherein all the original capacities of the human race can develop.” Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” in Immanuel Kant, Political Writings, p. 51.
replacement of violent, contentious and antagonistic forms of political action by more rational, consensual and institutional ones; that such progress is linear; and that, thus, all the countries of the world can be neatly organized along a linear continuum that measures how close they are to the democratic golden standard.

This historical narrative is modern, liberal, and progressive. It is modern, in that presupposes that history is linear, that it advances towards a fixed point in the future, that human reason can know or deduce both the trajectory of advancement and the point of destination, and that the final destination of the movement of history is a state of freedom, realization and liberation that modernists called emancipation.  

The liberal-progressive metanarrative is liberal because it views the movement towards democracy as a movement away from conflict, passions and violence and an advance towards rationality, peace and order. And it is progressive in the sense that it views the history of modern democracy as a historical process by which pre-modern, irrational, coercive and atavistic political traditions are progressively replaced with

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320 As Lyotard points outs, modernity gave birth to at least three competing meta-narratives: the liberal meta-narrative, the Hegelian meta-narrative and the Marxist meta-narrative; each one of them has its own set of causal mechanisms for the movement of history—the awakening of individual reason; the realization of the rational Spirit; class struggle –, its own preferred historical subject—the thinking individual; the state bureaucrat and the proletariat—, and its own vision of the emancipated state—a free and civil society; the legal-bureaucratic state, the communist order. They all shared, however, the same underlying spirit: they were all progressive. There is one Modern school of thinking that did not think in terms of meta-narratives and, in fact, rejected them. Modern conservatives saw great dangers in their contemporaries' obsession with the future and sense of historical optimism. Edmund Burke argued that freedom and well-being were only possible within the frames of cultural traditions that had organically developed through centuries. Alexis De Tocqueville, though mainly a democrat, was also concerned with the abstraction and up-rootedness of modern optimist narratives. There have also been prominent conservative thinkers in the twentieth century, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Eric Voegelin, but conservatism has never been culturally hegemonic in the way that progressivism has.
modern, rational, peaceful and civilized forms of democratic self-government. Countries and regions might move at a different pace, and there might be, here and there, countries that stubbornly refuse to take the next step and enter into the democratic era. These empirical discontinuities are an accident, but what is really important, however, is that humanity can know where democratic history is going, and that countries can be neatly organized on a linear scale according to how close they are to the democratic point of destination.321

I do not want to contest the notion that peace and rationality are goals that should be shared and cherished: the vision of a progressive realization of rationality and peace is, of course, a central aspect of the democratic project. But I want to make the case that the history of democracy shows that contention, antagonism, mobilization and even violence and irrationality not only have played an important part in the advancement of the democratic ideal, but that they still do so today.

After all, even Immanuel Kant claims in “Ideal of Universal History” that the motor of historical progress is not consensus but conflict. In Kant's view, peace can only be reached through conflict, because the motor for progress is not the peace-loving side of our nature, but our common impulse towards antagonism that he called “un-social

321 The most extreme example of this way of looking at democracy are the so-called “democracy indexes,” which organize all of world democracies on one linear scale. See for example G. Munck and J. Verkuilen, “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy,” in Comparative Social Studies. Vol. 35, No. 1, February, 2001, pp. 5-34.
For Kant, the key to making history move towards peace is not to eliminate conflict altogether, but to draw conflict away from the battlefield and the political field and into the kind of public, discursive arenas that he was the first to label “civil society”.

Even Kant would agree that, besides rationality, order and deliberation, the historical advancement of democracy requires rather large doses of irrationality and conflict, and that the success of democratic governance still requires them today. For one could argue that with just a small change of emphasis a different democratic metanarrative might be construed; one that is not liberal but antagonistic and whose driving force is not universal reason but conflict and resistance in the face of concentrated power.

In the third chapter I advanced the notion that, far from being a contemporary, or

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322 “By “antagonism” I mean the unsocial sociability of men, i.e., their propensity to enter into society, bound together with a mutual opposition which constantly threatens to break up the society. Man has an inclination to associate with others, because in society he feels himself to be more than man, i.e., as more than the developed form of his natural capacities. But he also has a strong propensity to isolate himself from others, because he finds in himself at the same time the unsocial characteristic of wishing to have everything go according to his own wish. Thus he expects opposition on all sides because, in knowing himself, he knows that he, on his own part, is inclined to oppose others. This opposition it is which awakens all his powers, brings him to conquer his inclination to laziness and, propelled by vainglory, lust for power, and avarice, to achieve a rank among his fellows whom he cannot tolerate but from whom he cannot withdraw. Thus are taken the first true steps from barbarism to culture, which consists in the social worth of man; thence gradually develop all talents, and taste is refined; through continued enlightenment the beginnings are laid for a way of thought which can in time convert the coarse, natural disposition for moral discrimination into definite practical principles, and thereby change a society of men driven together by their natural feelings into a moral whole. Without those in themselves unamiable characteristics of unsociability from whence opposition springs-characteristics each man must find in his own selfish pretensions-all talents would remain hidden, unborn in an Arcadian shepherd’s life, with all its concord, contentment, and mutual affection.” Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” p. 45.
even a modern phenomenon, populist mobilization is an essential dimension of populist politics. Now I want to draw upon a body of literature that sheds light on the often-forgotten underside of the history of democracy and that illustrates the role that conflict, antagonism and even irrationality have had in the advancement of democratic ideals.

This argument has been made by sociologists and social theorists more often than by political theorists. Charles Tilly, a sociologist, has argued that there are more than one possible democratic trajectory and that the liberal-progressive path has coexisted with others throughout modern history. Different European countries have arrived at the same status of “advanced democracies” by different paths: one path stressed the creation of strong governmental institutions in a “top-down” fashion; the other path was marked by the presence and activism of strong and contentious movements that pushed for democratization in a “bottom-up” way. Historically, those states that significantly enhanced governmental capacity without increasing protected consultation followed a more authoritarian path in their transition to democracy, while the rise of protected consultation without an increase in governmental capacity was a hallmark of a more “weak-state” path to the transition to democracy. ³²³ The final destination, or what we might call a mature representative democracy, was sometimes approached along an

authoritarian path characterized by a strong state, sometimes along a path of high mobilization and weak state capacity. But, in Tilly’s view, contentious politics has been more important in the advancement towards protected consultation and democracy than governmental capacities.\textsuperscript{324}

Tilly identifies two variables (akin to “logics” in my language) that explain the occurrence of one path or the other: development of government capacities for non-contentious politics in one case, and the extent of protected consultation (including contentious forms of political action) in the other. There are two extreme cases: Great Britain is the polar case for a government-capacities led process of democratization, while France is the case in which democratization was advanced by a rather large space for protected consultation.\textsuperscript{325}

So, Tilly's argument is as follows: while a number of nation-states achieved democracy following a path with minimum conflict, there is another set of cases in which such development was only possible after protracted struggle. In fact, Tilly claims that

\textsuperscript{324} “In the long run, increases in governmental capacity and protected consultation reinforce each other, as government expansion generates resistance, bargaining and provisional settlements, on one side, while on the other side protected consultation encourages demands for expansion of government intervention, which promotes increases in capacity. (…) At the extreme, where capacity develops farther and faster than consultation, the path to democracy (if any) passes through authoritarianism.” Charles Tilly, \textit{Contention and Democracy in Europe 1650-2000}, p. 198, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{325} “Public politics include all externally visible interactions among constituted political actors (those having a name and standing within a given regime), including agents of government. Within public politics, contentious politics include all discontinuous, collective making of claims among constituted political actors. Non-contentious politics still makes up the bulk of all political interaction (…) Although the conduct of such relatively noncontentious political activities incrementally affects democratization and de-democratization, \textit{I argue that contentious politics figures more directly and immediately in whose changes.}” Charles Tilly, \textit{Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650-2000}, p. 15, emphasis added.
the best path followed a median trajectory, with relatively high degrees of both state activism and mobilizatory energy, and that the transformation into a “mature” democracy needed to move towards this point of equilibrium: in some cases, by becoming more institutional (like France), and in other by becoming less authoritarian and more open to contestation (like Great Britain.) To a degree, all countries that achieved “mature” democratic status did so by achieving a balance, with both high state capacities and high contestation.

Margaret Canovan makes a similar, although though not identical, argument. She argues that, if one employs a “long” view of democratization, the occurrence of periodic outbursts of populist vindication of the people's power have not been always detrimental to democratization but rather the opposite. She claims that such popular revolts had pushed liberal ideas forward:

To many observers, it seems axiomatic that populism and liberalism are natural enemies. (Taggart 2000, Mény and Surel 2000). (...) (I)t is true that contemporary appeals for the return of power to the people are frequently linked with exclusive communal visions of the people that clash with liberal principles of human rights. In the longer view, however, the case is rather different. (...) the liberal side of modern democracy is deeply indebted to that multifaceted radicalism, which regularly mobilized the excluded behind liberal and progressive causes. Both the British Liberal Party and French Republican Radicalism were populist in a sense, while representatives of the tradition in American politics were legion.326

It is not only popular revolts, widely defined, that have advanced democracy. Many of

326 Margaret Canovan, The People, p. 86, emphasis added.
these revolts were often of a populist, anti-elite nature, relied on charismatic leaders, and were mocked and resisted by the liberal elites of the time. 327 For instance, agrarian populism in the US was one of the causes that made progressive reforms possible. The government of Franklin Delano Roosevelt had distinctive populist overtones, including the use of a contentious and antagonistic discourse against concentrated capital. In Latin America, the populist regimes of the thirties, forties and fifties expanded the democratic franchise substantially.

The well-behaved liberal democracies that we know today were not created through a deliberative conflict-free process, in which democratic institutions were adopted because at one given point in time people agreed on their rationality, justice, and practicality. More often than not, democratic advancement had to be obtained and secured after a long, protracted, and even bloody, fight. All throughout history, the classes and groups that concentrate power in non-democratic regimes have never been happy with, or even understanding of, popular demands for democratization and power sharing; they have always dug in their heels in an effort to retain their privileges. It took a lot of courage, fighting spirit and the kind of crazy idealism that might be called “irrational” to make even the most incremental gains in the history of democracy.

327 They involve some kind of revolt against the established structure of power in the name of the people. Within democratic systems that often means an attack on the established parties. But anti-system mobilization is not enough by itself to identify populist politics, for that description would also take in the ‘new social movements’, generally acknowledged to be something else. The crucial difference is that while both are anti-system, populism challenges not only the established power-holders but also elite values. Margaret Canovan, The People, p.3.
Even in Great Britain, Charles Tilly's example for top-down, state-led democratization, the advancement of inclusion was not consensual. The trajectory of advancement of democracy in the British Empire, though it might look smooth for us, was actually turbulent. The political and economic elites—which indeed were one and the same—fought with all their might against demands for the universal franchise, unionization, and the expansion of political rights. The political activism of the British working classes was intense during the nineteenth century, and the struggle for democratization was hard, no matter how adept the political system was in stymieing the workers’ revolt. It should not be forgotten than Karl Marx died convinced that the revolution would happen first in Great Britain, and that labor unions and the women's suffrage movement were also British inventions. In fact, the top-bottom nature of the British path to democratization does not show a complete lack of activism, but rather that an oligarchic and exclusive political system made it easier to suppress it. In Great Britain, like in everywhere else, not one single democratic advance was won without struggle and conflict, with workers' revolts, followed by repression and, finally, accommodation.

Even the American revolution, which was heralded by Hannah Arendt as being much more rational and peaceful than its French counterpart, only succeeded after an
American revolutionary army fought and won a war of independence. Even after the success of the American democratic experiments, democracy was fiercely resisted by the European monarchies throughout the nineteenth century. Then, and now, to be a democrat was to be a revolutionary—as attested by the waves of revolutionary unrest that shook Western Europe for the better part of a century. Until well into the twentieth century, democracy was in itself a revolutionary ideology. The revolts that took place in the Austrian Empire in 1848, and the wars of independence that took place in all of Latin America between 1808 and 1910 were not inspired by socialism, but but a liberal-democratic ideology. Democracy, not socialism, was the ideology of those revolutionaries, who fought hard for a regime that many would never live to see.

Michael Oakeshott, who was as far from being an idealist radical as it is possible, formulated this idea brilliantly: democracy is about the politics of skepticism, but also about the politics of faith. Systematic skepticism—the kind of purposeful self-reflection that deliberative democracy advocates—is very much a democratic task; and yet, to be a democrat is also to take leap of faith. A leap of faith, since it implies believing that things as they are not enough, and they can always be improved, even when all odds point to the impossibility, or even the inadvisability, of such a change. It is this faith—a small but resilient faith—which keeps so may women and men going under sometimes dire circumstances, fighting to create a democracy or to make one better. As Oakeshott said, "without the pull exerted by faith (...) government in the skeptical style is liable to be
"... overtaken by a nemesis of political quietism."³³⁰ Without such faith, there are only the politics of cynical conservatism. The challenge for our time is not to eliminate this faith, or the fighting spirit that comes with it, but to encourage and channel it:

Following that line of thought we can realize that what is really at stake in the allegiance to democratic institutions is the constitution of an ensemble of practices that make the constitution of democratic citizens possible. This is not a matter of rational justification but of availability of democratic forms of individuality and subjectivity. By privileging rationality, both the deliberative and the aggregative perspectives leave aside a central element, which is the crucial role, played by passions and emotions in securing allegiance to democratic values.³³¹

To be fair, some theorists of deliberative democracy are open to the notion that mobilizatory politics might have some democratic potential. Second-wave, neo-Habermasians deliberative democrats such as Jean Cohen, Andrew Arato and Iris Marion Young recognize that contentious, even muscular social movements—some of them possessing a strong populist flavor—were part of all the effective expansions of democratization in the past century.³³² The cause of Indian independence, the struggle for African-American civil rights, the decolonization and democratization of most of Africa and Asia, the democratization of Latin America and the fall of Communism would

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³³² Such as the Polish “Solidarity” movement, with its leader, Lech Walesa, or the Partido Trabalhista of Brazil, with its leader, Luis “Lula” Da Silva, who is often accused of being a populist.
have been unthinkable without the kind of “multifaceted radicalism” that Margaret Canovan talks about. They recognize that every historical expansion of the borders of democratic inclusion was preceded of years, decades, or even centuries of active, contentious, and sometimes even subversive, political activism by the part of the excluded. Marginalized and oppressed people continue to mobilize for effective inclusion, and they continue to do so in vocal ways. Democracy, in short, is still a revolutionary ideology, fighting against very long odds, in most of the globe. In many regions of the globe the fight for democratization is resisted, tooth and nail, by the ruling elites. As Iris Marion Young says,

> The normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the decision-making processes and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes. Calls for inclusion arise from experience of exclusion—from basic political rights, from opportunities to participate, from the hegemonic terms of the debate. Some of the most powerful and successful social movements of this century have mobilized around demands for oppressed and marginalized people to be included as full and equal citizens in their polities.

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333 In Bolivia, for example, Evo Morales, an ethnic Aymara, won in 2005 clean and fair national elections with a platform of democratic reform that would be called moderated by most observers, but which is very resisted by the upper classes of his country. (In fact, he is only the third president of Bolivia to have been elected with a clear majority and not a plurality of votes.) But this breakthrough victory, achieved by completely peaceful and democratic means, has been followed by personal threats, militia activities and attempts of sedition on the part of the regions with a more concentrated white population. In 2008, in the Amazonian province of Pando paramilitary forces paid for the upper-class white elites, murdered almost indigenous supporters of President Morales, while acts of intimidation are common throughout the country. Even today, in much of Latin America, Africa and Asia democratic gains are never won without struggle.

The theoretical question is what is to be done with the coexistence of mobilization and deliberation. There are two basic theoretical answers to that question. The first one focuses on the need to contain the mobilizatory thrust of populist reason and to eliminate it from the political institutions of the regime. The second one claims that populism can be a force for the good health of contemporary democracies.

**The Mixed Regime in Contemporary Democracies:**

Even though the final destination—the mixed regime—is somewhat similar for Aristotle and Machiavelli (a regime that is neither a pure democracy nor an oligarchy, and in which no class dominates over the others) the means by which this final destination is achieved are completely different. While Aristotle is proposing to empower the middle class and use its cultural hegemony to push public culture towards moderation, Machiavelli argues for the empowerment of the people so as to use them as a watchdog against the power-grabbing elites. While Aristotle seems to prefer a more de-

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335 “Thus it is that MacPherson’s populist voting unites self-mastery and coercion. All one has to do is to find that a majority (...) has willed some version of self-mastery. It then becomes both reasonable and necessary to impose that version of liberty by coercion. It is reasonable the majority that produced the particular version of self-mastery is, in Kendall’s words, “rational and just”. And it is necessary because the particular self-mastery is the embodiment of that majority’s liberty, and its liberty would vanish were it not translated into a coerced version”. William H. Ricker, Liberalism Against Populism. A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice. Prospect Heights, Ill., Waveland Press, 1988, p. 13, emphasis in original.
politized public life, Machiavelli opts for a climate of discord. In concrete terms, for Aristotle this meant empowering the middle class against the people, while Machiavelli wanted to empower the people against the middle class. These principles, however, are not absolute to either one of them, and they must be carefully adapted to each particular circumstance.

A variety of institutional measures could be employed in each case to obtain the desired outcome. For instance, Aristotle proposed measures to empower the middle class, such as to put in place property requirements for voting, but to keep them low. But, Aristotle argues, if it is necessary to empower the popular class, then it would be wise to take opposite measures, such as to eliminate property requirements, or even to pay poor people to participate.

Similarly, Machiavelli shows admiration for the Roman constitution. In Rome, the balance between the classes was achieved by pitting the aristocratic Senate against the institutions that were especially designed to protect popular interests, like the Tribune of the plebs.

Of course neither of these solutions can be directly extrapolated into present-day politics. The question is which kind of balance is the most adequate for our times. The quick and easy historicist answer to the differences between these two approaches would

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336 “The active civil life enjoyed by Machiavelli’s (perhaps romanticized) popularly based Rome is not—contemporary neorepublicans and communitarians take note)—a peaceful, bucolic, or tranquil arrangement of social interaction. Although Machiavelli never makes the distinction, discord seems to be good for two reasons—as preferred way of conducting public life and as a means to better policy and military success.” John McCormick, “Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism,” p. 302.
be to say that Aristotle’s solution was better suited to the circumstances of his era and
Machiavelli’s proposal was more attuned to his times, and just leave this matter at that.
But this dissertation’s main concern is the contemporary state of democratic affairs, and
so the purpose of revisiting these ideas is to ascertain which is the most proper way to put
them to use in our times.

A revision of the historical roots of the concept of mixed regime renders some
important conclusions that might be extrapolated into the study of our democratic
regimes. First, that democratic regimes are highly dynamic and potentially unstable
political arrangements, tensioned from within by powerful opposing forces (such as the
pull towards political routinization, the redemptive promise of democratic politics, the
aspiration to universal inclusion and the bounded nature of citizenship). Second, that
democratic regimes can move into two potentially fatal extremes: mob rule, on the one
hand, and oligarchic concentration of power, on the other. And, finally, that there is no
one-size-fits-all model, because democratic institutions are shaped by an almost infinite
number of cultural, economic, geographical and historical conditions. The role of the
political legislator, then, it not to take some infallible blueprint and apply it, but to strive
to carefully put in place the institutions that are necessary in each case, in a process that
necessitates a dose of luck to accompany almost superhuman wisdom. A suitable balance
has to be constructed to fit each particular case.

I will deal with the normative thrust of the argument in two ways. First, I will treat
the problem analytically, trying to present a description of the functions of populist
reason and deliberative reason in a purely theoretical way. Then, I will try to imagine in what kind of institutions could these logics be embodied.

**Deliberative Reason and Populist Reason**

I want to move now to a synthetic formulation of a possible comparison between deliberative reason and populist reason. I will try to understand each one in its own terms, and to remain neutral as to which one of the two is the true or authentic democratic reason.

I have summarized some features of the two democratic reasons in the figure that follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deliberative Reason</th>
<th>Populist Reason</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of democracy</td>
<td>Free participation</td>
<td>Avoiding domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred means of action</td>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of political power</td>
<td>Communicative reason</td>
<td>Negative freedom of the <em>demos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>Oriented towards</td>
<td>Antagonistic</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Demos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived obstacle to common good</td>
<td><strong>Power (epistemological clutter)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Power (social and political exclusion)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deliberative reason is oriented by a definition of the democratic good that equals it with free participation, while populist reason views democracy as oriented towards avoiding domination. The preferred means to achieving that final good is deliberation in one case and mobilization, in the other. Each one of these reasons is aimed towards generating democratic power: in one case power is generated communicatively, and in the other it is generated through mobilization.

In one of the main differences between the two reasons, deliberative democracy presupposes an individual deliberating subject, while populist reason can only be embodied in the collective subject, or *demos*. Even though the deliberations are collective, their participants always remain distinct individuals; deliberations affect individuals positively, but as distinct particular persons. But the *demos* is a collective, in the imaginarian and physical sense. While it is true that a people is nothing more than a
collection of individuals, a *demos* is an “imagined collective,”\(^\text{337}\) in that it presupposes that it is one political body, with a unity of purpose and one voice. Crucial to this self-imagination is the physical copresence of the mobilized public, because only in this physical co-presence can the unity of the *demos* (and of the *demos* and the leader) be performed; because of this, rallies, marches, public protests and other forms of public mobilization are a structural necessity for populist movements.\(^\text{338}\)

The source of deliberative authority is the power of the best argument, while the source of mobilizatory authority is the power of the multitude. Deliberative discourse is informative and oriented towards persuasion through argument and evidence-presentation; populist discourse, on the contrary, is antagonistic and rhetorical.

However, and despite all of these differences, there is one key coincidence between deliberative and populist reason: they are both oriented towards reducing the effects of reified power over democratic politics. They define power differently, since deliberative democracy views power as an epistemological obstacle an populist democracy defines it an economic and social obstacle. But their similarity of purpose makes possible to imagine complementarities between the two.

The institutional design of contemporary democracies should take advantage of the strengths of each one of these political logics; and their co-presence might offset each

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\(^{338}\) While classic Marxism also posited a collective subject in the figure of the global proletariat, it was never assumed that the proletariat had to be or could be physically unified. It was a theoretical collective, not a physical one.
other's shortcomings. This combination is what I called a mixed regime.

**Imagining a New Mixed Regime**

In this section I try to offer a few normative suggestions organized around the idea of a new mixed regime. But it is important, however, to refrain from even imagining that something like a menu of ready-made, one-size-fits-all panaceas is the final destination of this project. This dissertation would betray its own premises if it tried to offer those one-size-fits-all panaceas. It is a temptation to try to come up with one unified solution, because the mind wants to believe that all problems have a clear solution, and that political problems can be reduced to technical problems. But prudence, the crucial if often forgotten virtue of which Aristotle and Machiavelli were so fond, advises against such grandiose schemes.

Political arrangements have to be tailored to the political community upon which be applied. If the political community has a strong economic elite, measures of economic democratization will be necessary; if the city is too close to mob rule, then the strengthening of the rule of law and public security will be necessary, and so on, and so forth. It is just impossible to know in advance what is the kind of balance that each community has to strive for. Politics, not theory, is to be the judge of that.

One can argue that theorists of deliberative, agonistic and populist democracy are
not so far from each other in respect to their diagnosis of the ailment of contemporary democracy. They all agree, more or less, that the colonization of the life world by the forces of bureaucratization and rationalization are greatly diminishing the potentials of the democratic regimes for meeting the challenges of the times. They all agree, more or less, that, absent a threat of violent authoritarian domination (which both agree that is unlikely in most democracies nowadays) the biggest challenge for contemporary democratic regimes is a form of democratic politics that goes through the motions but that does not have the power to create the meaningful political changes that are needed. They also, more or less, believe that the concentration of power in the hands of a small elite is an unwelcome development that must be voided. And these points in common makes possible to think complementarities between the two.

Regimes must be adapted to the social, economic and cultural conditions, and, since each political community is unique, the particular characteristics of the regime will be unique as well. However, it is possible to think in a few general principles that one could take away from the discussion of the mixed regime. Basically, measures must be imagined to gently steer the regime away from the two polar situations, populist delegative democracy and oligarchic concentration of power.

So, in situations in which there is a democratic deficit due to overly-concentrated economic and political power, populist mobilization should not be repressed and even might be encouraged. To achieve this, the battery of measures might include:
- **A higher toleration of antagonistic, mobilizatory politics.** Contemporary liberal democracies are wary of mobilizatory politics, and they tend to associate them with disorder, and chaos. But antagonistic politics is part and parcel of democracy and, as long as they do not employ systematic political violence, they have positive effects. When the political system has fallen prey of oligarchic concentration, antagonistic politics might be the only way to generate greater responsiveness to popular interests and to achieve a greater politicization of the popular classes.

- **Deliberation must be designed with a view to inclusive representation.** It is important to strengthen deliberative politics, if and when institutional measures have been taken to ensure that deliberations are inclusive. The preoccupation for the fairness of the procedures for deliberation must be secondary to the concern of insuring access to those who are the most vulnerable; put it differently, under conditions of high inequalities in political capacity for voicing demands, the focus should be changed from the internal procedures of the deliberations to their external context. Extra measures must be taken to try to get excluded, poor, and culturally diverse people to deliberate, including—where necessary—the distribution of material or symbolic incentives.

- **Deliberations should be designed with a view of strengthening the position of those who are more vulnerable and less likely to participate.** The socio-economic standing must be contemplated. In practical terms this means that expansive socio-economic measures are necessary to create a minimum of social and economic equality between social groups and classes, otherwise, deliberations will not act as a countering
force to exclusion but they will reinforce it.

- **Investment in social capital creation should be accompanied by investment in political organization:** *i.e., unions, unemployed workers organizations, etc.* In the last two decades there has been a big global push for an expansive investment in social capital creation in poor communities.\(^{339}\) The argument is that strengthening their social capital would strengthen their resources for collective, though private, action. All this is well and good, but it is important to keep in mind that it is crucial to strengthen their capacities for collective public action. To bridge the gap between private capacities and public voice requires the formation of political organizations that speak from and about the poor and the excluded. In large parts of the world, poor communities do have social capital—in fact, they are surviving solely on it—but what they lack is the capacity to effect political change in their communities. Political organizing should be a top priority in poor communities.

- **Measures to make political and economic elites accountable to the majorities:** while deliberative democracy has gained some ground in the political sphere—thanks to things like social accountability—but the sphere of market transactions remains opaque. Large corporations are virtually the only big power that remains unaccountable to the citizenry. Some firms are more important than most world-states in economic terms; they

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are able to bypass or just ignore the rules and regulations of the nation states; and their
decisions affect jobs, wages, and the environment globally. Yet their executives are
largely unaccountable. The people who run them concentrate a inordinate amount of the
world wealth and the worlds power, but, while a second-level undersecretary or a small
town council woman is accountable to a variety of agencies, a Fortune 500 CEO is
virtually untouchable. Democratic theory is just starting to theorize the relation between
democracy and the market sphere, and there is much more work to be done in this
matter.

Conversely, in situations in which there is an overly-politicized public life: ,
deliberative politics should be strengthened, through measures such as:

- Strengthening of parliamentary institutions and of participative forms of
governance. Experience shows that in a politicized environment deliberative solutions
offer a way for legitimate problem solving, in that a decision made deliberatively does
not belong to any sector in particular and must be accepted by all. In such a context, the
fact that a solution was found deliberatively means that everybody is responsible for it.
In such cases, what is important is not the rationality of the decision made but simply
that more people are talking to each other and taking each other for a legitimate
opponent.

- Strong incentives for party politics. Populist movements should be encouraged
to engage in electoral politics, no matter how anti-systemic and antagonistic their rhetoric might be. History shows that, if the lure of electoral politics is strong enough, they might become institutionalized and thus integrated into day-to-day politics. Of course, much depends on how the party system is structured in each case; while it is better to have a plural system, it is of course impossible to create a multi-party political system out of nothing.

Populist movements should be allowed to participate in elections freely, and they should be viewed as legitimate power-holders should they win. Then, they must be treated as any other regular political party.

**Two Zones of Populist Politics**

The precedent normative discussion must be translated into more empirical terms. Or, more precisely, given that I have posited that a mixed regime should be tailored to each particular situation, it is important to assess in which one of the situations can present-day democracies be. Only after doing this will it be possible to know whether our democracies need to move in the direction of an Aristotelian or a Machiavellian type of mixed regime; and whether the deliberative side or the populist side of our contemporary democracies should be strengthened.

Most of contemporary democratic theory would answer this question thusly: it is
only necessary to strengthen deliberative democracy because, while mobilizatory radicalism was a necessary component of the earlier democratic phase, the advance from “incipient” to “advanced” democratic status means that such multiform radicalism needs not be a part of democratic politics any longer. Ronald Inglehart, Jürgen Habermas, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato seem to think that, while we might not be a classless society, we are certainly moving in that direction, or, as Jürgen Habermas put it, we are at the cusp off being able to throw off the “millenia-old shackles of social stratification and exploitation.”

Indeed this argument is one of the articles of faith for contemporary political science. It views the transition from modernity to post-modernity as more than a change in socioeconomic conditions; for Ronald Inglehart, post-modernity entails a whole different cultural era, marked by an orientation to values centered in peace, comfort, and solidarity. According to this school of thought, our late-modern or post-

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340 “The opinion-formation [public opinion] uncoupled from decisions is effected in an open and inclusive network of overlapping, subcultural publics having fluid temporal, social, and substantive boundaries. (...) Only in an egalitarian public of citizens that has emerged from the confines of class and thrown off the millennia-old shackles of social stratification and exploitation can the potential of an unleashed cultural pluralism fully develop– (...) But in a secularized society that has learned to deal with its complexity consciously and deliberately, the communicative mastery of these conflicts constitutes the sole source of solidarity among strangers.” Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p.307.

341 Ronald Inglehart, Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: the human development sequence. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005. I discussed this issue extensively in Chapter one, when I reviewed Jürgen Habermas views on “post-traditional” societies, as well as John Rawls' words on “liberal” societies, but it is probably due to say a bit more here. The most radical version of this argument was advanced by Francis Fukuyama in his widely-read book The End of history and the Last Man, (Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, New York, Avon Books, 1992.) He revised his positions later in his article “Reflections on the End of History, Five Years Later.”(Francis Fukuyama, “Reflections on the End of History, Five Years Later” in History and Theory, Vol. 34, No. 2, Theme Issue 34: World Historians and Their Critics, May, 1995, pp. 27-43.)
modern era is unique because in it a substantive consensus have been achieved on a basic
definition of a good and just political order; this consensus has made possible that for the
first time in human history, political disagreement can be restricted to institutional means
and not ethical-political ends.

The answer to the question of whether we live in a class society or not is extremely
complex. On the one hand, and contrarily to previous expectations on the matter, social
and economic inequality is not diminishing, neither within countries nor between
countries. Hard data does not back the claim that class differences have disappeared.
Also, there are signs that the concentration of power remains strong, although it happens
at such a high transnational level now that is less easy to perceive.

On the other hand, our societies are defined by fluid and ambiguous forms of social
stratification; while some objective criteria for class-differences still exists, people tend
not to identify themselves in terms of class. The globalized and spectral nature of today’s
relations of production, plus the impact of new technologies and the rise of the so-called
“service economy” make class differences less clear. The spirit of the times is less of
resentment—which is bread by clearly perceived social inequalities—that widespread
anxiety, because, even though large populations are living with the constant threat of a
sudden change in their life conditions, it is not clear which is the cause of these changes,
or who is to blame for them.

So, while I agree with John McCormick that,

Contemporary liberal democracies exhibit a more differentiated socioeconomic circumstance in which political elites are functionally and often socially distinct from economic ones. Theoretically, those political elites, seeking votes, may serve the poorer or, more likely, middle classes against the wealthy ones. Yet, one need not invoke Marx to observe that socioeconomic elites very often still are the political elites, or, in any case, control the latter (...) Machiavelli would have considered the institutions of contemporary liberal democracy elective oligarchy and would have found its social bases insufficiently antagonistic along class lines to make up for these institutional deficiencies.  

However, the problem is that it is not clear to me that the social and cultural bases for such productive animosity exists. Socially, the diffusion of class differences—which have not disappeared but rather have become more difficult to perceive—and a state of perpetual economic anxiety and fluidity make very difficult for people and leaders alike, to come up with cogent, plausible and potent narratives that organize the world around them in terms of an “us” vs a “them.”

However, even with these theoretical caveats, populism cannot be said to be dead in the world today. But neither is it at all similar to the classic versions that were prevalent in the middle of the twentieth century. Today we find this puzzling scenario: populism seems to have been revived in semi-peripheral countries, especially in Latin America, where leaders such as Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Evo Morales of Bolivia,


Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Luis “Lula” Da Silva in Brazil and Néstor Kirchner of Argentina are commonly labeled so. These regimes are mobilizatory, tend to be inclusive (meaning that they tend to generate the conditions for the political participation of groups who had been previously excluded, like indigenous people or urban squatters), want to enhance the participation of the state in public affairs and expand welfare distribution. In Europe and the US we find that populist mobilization is, not only weaker, but also takes an opposite ideological sign: Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, the Kaczynki brothers in Poland and Republican figures such as Sarah Palin in the US have a discourse that is less mobilizatory, more exclusionary (in that it concentrates on the need to guarantee that some groups, mainly immigrant, do not participate politically), and more heavily invested of religious and traditional values.\(^\text{345}\)

There seems to be two zones of populist politics, and it is necessary to discuss them in more detail to understand the grounds and meaning of their difference.

\textbf{a) Populism in Rich and Old Democracies}

When one is studying American politics, the question that comes to the mind of a scholar of populism who is not an American is, how is it possible that we are not seen \textbf{more} populist politics in the US? For one thing, if Margaret Canovan is right, the sheer

\(^{345}\) Or media figures that are taking the place of political leaders, such as Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh.
complexity of advanced, liberal democracies is an invitation for populist movements, both from the right and the left.\textsuperscript{346} The exhaustion of the institutional capacities of the welfare state is another element that might create an opening for populist politics.\textsuperscript{347}

In the older, richer democracies, there are still big deficits in some core areas: multiculturalism, the environment, energy, immigration, in the advancement towards a more just and egalitarian relation with peripheral and semi-peripheral countries. In the last three decades, notable victories have been achieved in the cultural front—especially in regards to women's standing and in gay rights—in the social and economic from radically democratic sectors (what in other times we might have called the left) has been incapable of truly gaining ground and have been reduced to play defense.

This is most striking in the United Sates, but it is true to a certain degree even in Western European countries. In the US, the worker's share of the GDP has steadily fallen in the last decades. Rises in productivity, which have been continuous throughout the last

\textsuperscript{346} “Modern democracy is an exceedingly complex set of political practices, institutions and ideas. It includes constitutional limitations of the exercise of power in order to protect rights, including the rights of unpopular minorities. It also implies government conducted in accordance with liberal principles, sometimes contrary to popular opinion. Its sheer complexity offers a standing invitation to populists to insist on returning power to the people, while denouncing as undemocratic all complicating institutional and legal structures.” Margaret Canovan, \textit{The People}, p. 85.

\textsuperscript{347} “Over the last three decades liberal-democratic societies have been beset by a combination of increasing expectations and exhausted institutional capacities. While the causes are complex, they have much to do with contemporary social developments that have tended to outstrip the conceptual resources of received democratic theories. These include the fact that today’s societies are increasingly post-conventional in their culture; pluralized among life-style, religious, and ethnic groups, differentiated between state, markets, and civil society in their structure; subject to globalizing forces that reduce the significance of the state as locus of democratic collective action; and increasingly complex in ways that then to undermine the capacities of the state to plan.” Mark W. Warren, \textit{Deliberative Democracy}, chapter 8.

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two decades, have largely been appropriated by the economic elite in the form of corporative profits, with the stagnation, or even diminution, of the wages of middle and working class families. In Europe, the welfare system that was put in place in the forties and fifties is still very much in place, but in the last decades there has been more effort dedicated to uphold it against the forces that want to eliminate it than to expand it in the direction of new rights.

Immigration continues to be a taboo for the liberal-democratic sectors of the continent, who have not been able to develop a political discourse with the potential to go head to head with the right-wind, immigration-is-the-source-of-all-our-problems, expel-them-all, cliches.

But one of the most interesting things about core-countries politics is that populism seems to be almost exclusively a right-wing phenomenon.

Even after a long history of progressive-liberal-democratic populism that included figures such as F. D. Roosevelt, we are not seeing almost any anti-elitist, pro-popular classes populism. Populist mobilization of the antagonistic, emotional kind that I described in this dissertation seems to be and exclusive style of leaders that belong to what might have been called, in the previous, ideological era, “the right.” Figures such as Silvio Berlusconi in Italy the Kaczynki brothers in Poland the or the more populist wing of the Republican Party have deployed an antagonistic us-vs-them discourse that do not go against economic elites but, on the contrary, helps sustaining them in the midst of the worst crisis in eighty years.
Their type of populism is **past-oriented**, in that they are defensive of traditional (especially religious) values, **nationalistic** and **xenophobic**. It is also a form of **cultural** populism, because its target is the cultural elite, and not the economic one. (Their main foes are academics, artists and entertainment figures.)

One first key to understand this matter is the reactive nature of populist mobilization, a fact that I discussed in chapter five. In this respect, it is useful to keep in mind Margaret Canovan's argument that, while populism is not completely contentless, it certainly can take a variety of contents, depending on the political structure that it is reacting against. As Canovan says, in a political community that is marked by widespread and blatant exclusion, the first anti-systemic demand is inclusion, while in a political community that is much more inclusive, the first anti-systemic demand might be exclusion: the exclusion of the Other, for example, of immigrants.³⁴⁸

Another key feature has to do with the cultural and social conditions of these countries. The social base of support for these movements is not working class or the urban poor, but the lower middle-class that is suffering the most the state of anxiety that I described earlier. They are seeking for a target, an easy explanation as to who is to blame

³⁴⁸ “If they are to make effective use of whatever institutional channels may be available, confrontational populists need to play on popular concerns that are not being addressed by the people's existing representatives. The salience of particular grievances varies from one country to another, but common themes include high taxes, unemployment, strains on the welfare state crime and (increasingly) immigration and its consequences. As a spur to populist antagonism, these have been sharpened by constraints on elected governments' responses to popular pressure, constraints imposed (particularly in the European Union) by a combination of constitutional commitments and liberal ideology.” Margaret Canovan, *The People*, p. 82.
for their changing lives.

Kurt Wayland also emphasizes the role of the mass media in the creation of this new type of populism: in a context of low politicization and weakened political parties, the mass media become the central arena where world-views are contested and political leaders are created.349 It is not accident, he notes, that Silvio Berlusconi’s path into Italian politics was media ownership, and we should not be surprised that media figures such as Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh have become so important political figures.

These movement seem to be more reactive in nature, and their capacities for extensive political transformation is limited. They react in outrage and mobilize behind popular media figures, but theirs is a vaguely shaped rage that does not seem to be coalescing (yet) in a viable political alternative.

b. Populism in Younger, Poorer Democracies

At the same time, there is a wave of almost unprecedented political creativity taking place in semi-peripheral countries, where the meaning of the very word “democracy” is

349 “Yet the advance of opinion polling has devalued mass rallies and made them less useful for demonstrating popular backing. (…) Surveys measure the general interest, whereas demonstrations have turned into instruments of special interests. (…) The tremendous spread of television has also diminished the need for organization. Through television populist leaders reach their followers directly and establish quasi-personal contact with millions simultaneously. Whole radio played a similar role for classical populist, television is more powerful in projecting charismatic leadership. Thus, modern mass media have further diminished populists’ interest in organized intermediation. Thus, neopopulism is even less institutionalized than classical populism.” Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism and the Study of Latin American Politics,” p. 16.

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being contested. Rather than adapting to a single definition of democracy, many countries are choosing among many versions of the term are competing worldwide. In Lebanon, in Iran, in Ecuador, in Brazil, in China, in India, in Iran, in Bolivia, in Venezuela, in South Africa, even in Cuba and China there are now vibrant discussion about what it means to be a democracy. Rather than simply adopting a predetermined democratic model, different countries are struggling to develop their democratic visions, adapting democratic aspirations to different ethnic, social, economic, religious backgrounds.

In Latin America the “lost decade” of the eighties gave way to an unprecedented time of political creativity in the early 2000s: democratic experiments are being done in Brazil, in Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile and Venezuela. In Brazil the Partido Trabalhista (or Labor Party) won the elections in 2002, and Lula Da Silva, a former factory worker and union leader with only a couple of years of formal education, rose to power. The rise of PT broke the oligarchic regime that had ruled Brazil for a century, in which the presidents, governors and senators had all come from a handful of families that represented the land-owning and industrial elites of the country. The PT government has expanded dramatically the borders of political representation, bringing into citizenship over 100 million Brazilians that were devoid of political and social rights before.\textsuperscript{350} And the effects of this process of inclusion have not only been political: Brazil has made

\textsuperscript{350} It must be said that the social and economic elites of Brazil have not been happy with the success of the PT government. More expansive social policies and efforts towards a better political inclusions have been met with cries of “clientelism” and “demagoguery.”
substantial gains in the fight against social inequality as well.

The government of Evo Morales in Bolivia wrote a new constitution that combines in radically new ways liberal constitutional principles with indigenous ethical traditions; and the same process is taking place in Ecuador. The new constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador have been ratified electorally, with wide support from the indigenous and urban poor populations. In these two cases, these constitutions make and effort towards retaining all the liberal apparatus of rights and guaranties, while making room for novel combinations with ethical and cultural elements that are present in indigenous cultures.

In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez has also radically expanded democratic representation, and expanded social policies democracy, although the personalistic and authoritarian aspects of his regimes have largely eroded his support in the recent years. In the first years of Chavez government, he was electorally rewarded by the poor by distributing wealth in the form of health, education and infrastructure, in a country which, though rich with oil, was among the least egaliitarian of the region. Yet in the last years the personalistic and authoritarian aspects of his government have eroded his support. 351

All these processes—which are being uniformly labeled as “populist” by the press in all these countries—are experimental and surely some of them are going to fail. The main dangers are two. First, it is possible that, by trying to do too much—by trying to

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351 An important exception to the “populist wave” of Latin America is Colombia, where president Alvaro Uribe is commonly referred to as a “right wing” populist. Chile was also considered an exception, and the Chilean Concertación was often praised for not following the populist road. In the last years, however, a young left-wing populist, Marco Enriquez-Ominami, has appeared, effectively endangering the prospects of the Chilean center-left Concertación in the upcoming elections.
bring social services to all the populations, rise revenue and expand the democratic franchise at the same time—some of these government will create such a chaotic situation that the elites will be able to recuperate power (such an scenario almost did take place in Bolivia last year.) Second, it is also possible that these processes will become too dependent on one all-powerful leader and will thus devolve into authoritarian regimes, as might indeed be the case with Venezuela. From a theoretical point of view, however, what matters is that there is hope and excitement about the prospects for a radical expansion of the democratic inclusion, accompanied with fears that such rapid change can lead to a state of chaos, anarchy, and later repression.

These regimes have some things in common with the more “classic” populist regimes of the mid-twentieth century, they diverge in some central features. For one thing, they are much more respectful of liberal democracy that their previous counterparts (with the possible exception of Hugo Chávez, whose regime is the most “classic” of them all).352 Neither Morales in Bolivia, Correa in Ecuador or Kirchner in Argentina has closed the Congress or impeded party politics in any way.

The final fates of these regimes remain to be seen, and the danger of de-institutionalization is realThere is real danger that, by trying to do too much in too little time (or “privileging short term politics over long-term stability,” as their critics say)

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they might loose support and eventually be replaced in power. However, each of these regimes achieved a substantial expansion of democratic participation and also accomplished some measure of wealth re-distribution. However, these populist movements seem to be much more mobilizatory, inclusive and distributive that their core-countries counterparts.

**Conclusion**

The state of democratic affairs look very differently from above and below. In some semi-peripheral countries, there are new and exiting democratic innovations, whose final outcome is still unclear. In the core countries, we a state of certain impotence and anxiety, that causes the existence of a radically different type of populist movement. I have summarized the differences between the two in the following figure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Europe and the US</th>
<th>LatinAmerican countries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite values: inclusive</td>
<td>Elite values: restrictive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past-oriented</td>
<td>Future oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat: outsiders</td>
<td>Threat: economic elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand: protection of status quo</td>
<td>Demand: rejection of status quo</td>
</tr>
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353 Peronism lost the elections in 2009, and it does not seem likely that the Peronist candidates will win a third term. Some polls show a declining rate of support for Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.
I would like to advance the notion that in the most mobilizatory cases more deliberative politics are needed, to achieve greater stability and moderation within the regimes. Yet, in the other, the real need is for some serious democratic invigoration. In one case, populist politics must give way to forms of new institutionalization, in the other, populist politics might do some good. Of course, the real feasibility of each outcome depends of so many variables that it would be beyond the scope of this dissertation to say much more than that in terms of normative prescriptions.

There is only so much that theory can do, the rest is up to politics, that wonderful and infuriating human endeavor.
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have advanced a vision of democracy that sometimes compared it to a coin with two sides, with populist reason on one side and deliberative reason on the other. But this analogy has to be abandoned at this point, because that image can be misleading. To say that democracy resembles a coin brings to the mind an image of a round, flat shiny object with two perfectly symmetrical and interchangeable sides. But deliberative reason and populist reason are not symmetrical and interchangeable, and they do not exist in separation from one another. They co-constitute one another, in a relation that is shaped by tension and opposition.

A better metaphor might be construed if one compares democratic politics with a large work of architecture; it might be something like a Medieval cathedral, whose mighty interior space is constituted by the sum of the tensional forces created by the interlocking walls, arches and rafters. Like the stones of a Gothic arch, the two logics of democratic politics support, shape and oppose each other. Each one of them is a separate and self-sustaining entity, with its own forms of internal strength.

The image of a democracy with “sides” is also used by Margaret Canovan: “… we can, I believe, understand modern democracy (idea and phenomenon) as a point of intersection between redemptive and pragmatic styles of politics. In this section I shall argue that democracy presents two faces, one redemptive, the other pragmatic; that although these are opposed, they are also interdependent; and that between them lies a gap in which populism is liable to appear. Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy” in Political Studies” XLVII, 1999. pp. 2-16, p. 9, emphasis added.
And yet, this image is misleading as well, because it gives the impression that
democratic politics is a static entity, something mighty and unmovable, and this image is
also untrue. Populist reason and deliberative reason co-constitute one another, but they
do so by being in perpetual tension, by reacting to one another, in a process that can
never come to a full stop.\footnote{Margaret Canovan speaks of democracy as “a pair of Siamese twins”: “(l)ater I shall argue that the two faces of democracy are a pair of squabbling Siamese twins, inescapably linked, so that it is an illusion to suppose that we can have one without the other. But the tensions between them are very great, and it is these tensions (I shall suggest) which provide the stimulus to the populist mobilization that follows democracy like a shadow.” Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy” in Political Studies” XLVII, 1999. pp. 2-16, p. 10.} Democracy is, in itself, a dynamic thing, with an astonishing
capacity for adaptation and alteration. Tyrannies look all similar; but the variety of
democratic sub-types is astonishing.\footnote{With the possible exception of totalitarianism, the properly modern form of tyranny. View Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism.} There is, however, a sense of unity to this variety, since the same democratic ideals are embodied in these very different regimes. (And it is
a testament to this sense of unity that, two thousand and five hundred years later, one can
still today read Thucydides’ eulogy of Pericles and be thoroughly moved.) But this sense
of unity lies in the aspirations and ideals and not in the institutions in which those ideals
try to become realized and, while it is possible to assume that democracy as it is today is
a complete project and that it cannot be improved further, to do so certainly feels like
diminishing the radical nature of the democratic dream. To echo Thucydides words, each
democratic community must be a pattern-setter, and never an imitator. Each democratic
regime is an experiment, and each democratic regime is incomplete.
My overall argument is that a better image of democracy is formed when one keeps in mind that democratization is a continuous but not linear process, and that deliberation and mobilization are two moments of the larger democratization process. In my view, they are two distinct, and equally important, dimensions that inform the answer to the question of what is the meaning of democracy.\footnote{When political power is democratically legitimated, what often happens at [...] moments of crisis is that the champions of the establishment denounce the politics of the street as anti-democratic, and the signs is street demonstrations denounce the current rules of the game as anti-democratic. As outsiders try to push their way in, insiders attempt to assure their own position. So democracy is being continually redefined, in conflict, globally and locally. There will never be a consolidated democracy but there will often be democratizations. John Markoff, “Really Existing Democracy: Latin America in the 1990s,” in New Left Review 223, 1997, pp.48-68, p. 58.}

And I have only one final word. I consider myself to be a liberal democrat; and to claim that populism is a perfect political panacea is not the goal of this dissertation. I am aware of the most dangerous aspects of populist mobilization, as well as of its ambiguous history, just as I am aware of the voting paradoxes and yet I do not want to argue against voting. Yet I tried to show that it is part and parcel of democratic politics since its very inception and that should be dealt with accordingly.

Populism, like charisma, is a source of energy, the unexpected that rises up time to time in the middle of bureaucratized politics. This energy can be put to destructive uses, and it can be channeled into more productive ends. But it will not go away, no matter how hysterical the denunciations against them might be.

But there is more than that. I believe that the liberal-democratic sectors (of which I think myself as a part of) will cause themselves great harm if they refuse to tap into this
source of political energy when it is wise to do so. If liberal democrats suppose that they can change the world by reason alone they are bound to run into a big disappointment.

An outright rejection of populist mobilization is a mistake for two reasons. First, because it is a necessary complement for the more rationalist, cerebral approaches to democracy, such as deliberative democratic theory. In this trying times, it is very hard to mobilize people for democratic battles behind overly abstract slogans: it is necessary to put a face to them, and to show them in more stark, black-and-white, emotional terms. This is not a bad thing to do, and it does not diminish the democratic ideal to use these strategies.

On the contrary, the most successful democratic leaders of the twentieth century have been those who understood the appeal of political rhetoric and who brought together rational thinking and emotions in ways that were both deliberative and populist, as people as diverse as Mahatma Ghandi to F.D. Roosevelt to Martin Luther King and Lech Walesa did. And conversely: when used right, populist and charismatic mobilization can be good for democracy. It is not by accident that the liberal-democratic cause in the US was so powerfully invigorated by Barack Obama, a charismatic figure who represented a formerly excluded minority, who did not hesitate to employ large doses of heated, emotional and vague rhetoric in the campaign trail, who claimed to be founding a movement, and who brought large swaths of previously disaffected voters (especially youth and minorities) into political participation for the first time.

But not only that. By rejecting populist mobilization outright, and by refusing to
utilize populist tactics in their day-to-day political fights, liberal democrats are leaving
the way open for rise of right-wing populism of the kind embodied in figures like Silvio
Berlusconi or Sarah Palin. Denouncing populism in toto will not make it disappear, it
will only make it more palatable for those to those who will not hesitate to use populist
tactics to advance non-democratic agendas.

In short, the one argument that this dissertation wants to make is this: populism is a
powerful democratic tool, maybe too powerful to be left only to such kind of unsavory
politicians.
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