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POPULISM AND PUBLICITY: THE PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVE

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It is common to ask whether populism is a threat or a corrective to democracy. In the empirical literature, the conclusion tends to be that it is both. Some normative accounts, most notably those of Laclau and Mouffe, promote populism because of its alleged ability to deepen and recover democracy. Both of these strands of the literature are inhibited by an observer perspective, which means that they evaluate populism as a phenomenon that affects democracy from the outside rather than as an alternative set of ideas about democracy. This paper proposes an alternative approach to populism, which uses the publicity condition first suggested by Kant and later expounded by Rawls. The publicity condition entails taking a participant perspective, where you regard yourself as involved with plural others in a common enterprise of deliberation, choice, and action. While the observer considers the causes and effects of different doctrines in order to observe, explain, manipulate and/or exploit political practice, the participant asks whether we could make a doctrine our own, as something we would want to promote for others and ourselves, as well as use to assess the health of our democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, populism, publicity, participant perspective, Kant, Laclau, Mouffe, Rawls

I. Introduction

Being concerned with populism and democracy, it is tempting to ask, “Is populism democratic?” However, formulating the issue this way is ambiguous and may be misleading. Indeed, we may be asking two very different questions. (1) Does populism have democratizing effects? (2) Is populism inherently democratic? Conflating these questions leads not only to bad theory but is also politically dangerous. This is the case, because the conflation potentially entails two fallacies. The first fallacy is the proposition that if populism can have democratizing effects, then populism is democratic. The second fallacy is the proposition that because populism can have democratizing effects, then democrats ought to promote populism. Both of these notions are *non-sequiturs*; the latter parts of the two propositions do not follow from the former parts. The danger of failing to understand the difference between the contingent democratizing effects of some forms of populist

movements and populism's inherent features lies in that you may promote a form of politics, which you do not endorse on its own terms. What you praises for its contingent effects may, if it succeeds on its own terms, have the long term effect of undermining the primacy of what I call the participant perspective, which is essential for democracy.

In the empirically oriented and historical literature, it is common to ask whether populism is good or bad for democracy. The answer is often that it can be both (Kazin 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; 2017, 79-96; Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). Some normative accounts, most notably those of Ernesto Laclau (2005) and Chantal Mouffe (2018), promote populism because of its alleged ability to deepen and recover democracy. Both of these strands of the literature take what I call an observer perspective on the relationship between populism and democracy. This means that they evaluate populism as a phenomenon that affects democracy from the outside rather than as an alternative set of ideas about democracy. The consequence is that populism is assessed with standards that are external to populism itself, such as inclusion and pluralism. The main downside of this approach is that it fails seriously to interrogate and evaluate the ideas and norms promoted by populism itself. Moreover, it creates ambivalence regarding the question of how populism is assessed and valued – as a means or because of its inherent features.

This paper proposes an alternative approach to the assessment of populism and its relationship to democracy, which builds on the publicity condition first suggested by Immanuel Kant and later expounded by John Rawls. The publicity condition holds, roughly, that doctrines promoted in politics should have the capacity of being communicated to, known by, and followed by everyone in society. This means, first, that the doctrine we promote in public and the doctrine we use to assess the effects of the former must be the same. Second, the public recognition of a doctrine must not frustrate its end.

The publicity condition, I emphasize, attains its importance from the kind of relationship we establish to others by promoting our doctrine. Publicity is necessary (if not sufficient) to respect those persons the doctrine affects. In its ideal form, it entails taking a participant perspective and regarding ourselves as involved in relations with others who in good faith and reasonably may hold different political views than we do. It asks us to consider not how a detached observer might look at the causes and effects of different doctrines in order to observe, explain, manipulate and/or exploit political practice, but, rather, whether we could make a doctrine our own, as something we would want to promote for others and ourselves, as well as use to assess the health of our democracy.

II. Populism as a “corrective”

This section demonstrates how two different strands in the literature on populism – a more empirical and a more normative strand – create a similar confusion regarding how to evaluate populism in relation to democracy. Both strands suggest that populism can have democratizing effects and therefore may be positive and even necessary. The confusion is created by an ambivalence, first, as to which perspective we should take in analyzing

populism, and second regarding which principles we should use in evaluating populism. Should we evaluate populist ideas as participants who consider the inherent merits of competing ideologies? Or do we take an observer perspective utilizing a given set of standards in relation to which we can assess populism's effects? One may think that the normative strand falls into the first alternative and the empirical strand into the second. However, part of my argument is that this is not the case. One should also note that the second alternative includes normative evaluation as well (Ochoa Espejo 2015, 60). Thus, the question is not whether one uses norms but which norms one uses, where they come from, whether they can be justified, how, and to whom.

"Threat or corrective for democracy?", ask Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2012). In political science as well as in historical studies the answer tends to be that populism can have both democratizing and anti-democratic effects. As the historian Michael Kazin (2017, xv) puts it, "While populism can be dangerous, it may also be necessary." He thinks populism has been necessary in order for United States, the country he studies, to live up to its democratic ideals. Thus, populists have "often performed a service to the nation" (Kazin 2017, xv). While this strand of the literature sees populism as capable of democratizing society and giving a voice to the otherwise excluded, it also notes that this positive effect is realized only under certain conditions. Thus, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012: 209) end an anthology of studies of populism in Europe and the Americas with the conclusion that populism mainly has democratizing effects when in opposition. When populists attain governmental power and are unchecked by strong (non-populist) institutions, they become a threat to democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 212).

One problem for the empirical and historical literature is that it is unclear which standards should be used in the assessment of populism. In other words, to which conception of democracy is populism a threat or a corrective? Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012, 217-18) acknowledge that this is a problem, especially because populism changes the meaning of democracy. However, they offer no solution to the problem and continue to list positive and negative effects of populism on democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 79-96). The solution here is not simply to choose a conception of democracy to assess populism in relation to, such as liberal democracy (as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017 do). Nor is the solution to assess populism in relation to a chosen nation's democratic ideals (as Kazin does). The deeper problem lies in treating populism as an independent and external cause, which may have either positive or negative effects on a given dependent variable, the health of democracy.¹ Taking an observer perspective, this approach places the intrinsic nature and value of both populism and liberal democracy

¹ Benjamin Moffitt (2016, 133, 139-41, 149-50) also criticizes the approach that sees populism as an external cause affecting democracy positively or negatively, but his own suggestion of examining "the democratic and antidemocratic tendencies *within* populism" suffers from the same problem of unclarity regarding which standards are used to deem something democratic and antidemocratic.

outside discussion. This is not only normatively problematic; it also impedes understanding. The shortcoming in saying that populism corrects liberal democracy is that it is not something that the populist can recognize as her own goal *as a populist*. To be precise, one cannot be said to speak in favor of populism by praising its positive effects on *liberal* democracy, insofar as populism entails and promotes a competing conception of democracy (Mounk 2018; Müller 2016; Rummens 2017; Urbinati 2019). If we are truly to take populism seriously, we should discuss the inherent merits of its interpretation and transformation of democracy and not only judge its effects on a given, non-populistic conception of democracy.

On this issue, we might expect to obtain help in political theoretical treatments of populism. We find an influential affirmative approach to populism in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. It is not always clear when their work is ontological and when it is normative. Thus, Laclau (2005, 67) claims that populism is part of “the ontological constitution of the political as such” and that all politics is populist. However, both Laclau and Mouffe promote politicization, which for them entails *advocating* populism. In her recent book, Mouffe argues *For a Left Populism* (2018). In the following, I focus on Mouffe’s recent work, but occasionally also include references to Laclau when pertinent.² Laclau and Mouffe are of relevance also because of their influence on and cooperation with (left) populist politicians, such as Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón from *Podemos* in Spain and Jean-Luc Mélonchon from *La France insoumise* and presidential candidate in 2017. Mouffe’s cooperation with these parties makes her a participant and, as she says, a “partisan” (2018, 9). However, this does not mean that she takes the type of participant perspective, which I argue is required by the publicity condition.

According to Mouffe, populism is a discursive strategy, which can take different ideological forms. She promotes a form of *left* populism, which she argues is needed to shatter the “consensus in the centre” and the “post-politics” of neoliberalism (Mouffe 2018, 12-24). Through the populist strategy of constructing a frontier between “the people” and “the oligarchy,” she holds that it is possible to “recover and deepen democracy” (Mouffe 2018, 5, 24). Mouffe, then, writes in favor of populism because she wants a deepening and radicalization of democracy. But what exactly does that mean? Can left populism help us understand the meaning of this end, or is it merely an external means to an independently given end?

In her recent book, Mouffe emphasizes that she is not in favor of a revolutionary break with liberal democracy. The radicalization of democracy that she favors, and which left populism should deliver, is a radicalization of the principles of a liberal democratic regime, “liberty and equality for all” (Mouffe 2018, 36-40, 48-49). Thus, “the objective of a left populist strategy is not the establishment of a ‘populist regime’ but the construction of

² Laclau and Mouffe have co-authored *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) but written separately on populism (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018).

a collective subject apt to launch a political offensive in order to establish a new hegemonic formation within the liberal democratic framework,” and to “foster the recovery and deepening of democracy” (Mouffe 2018, 80, 51). This position requires that populism brings no distinctive ideas and values with it but is solely an immanent attempt to bring liberal democracy back to its own commitments (recovery) or to more fully realize its principles (radicalization and deepening). However, I shall suggest that populism both in actual politics and in Mouffe’s formulation actually does bring with it a set of ideas and values, which cannot be combined with a liberal democratic framework. The issue of populism is *about* liberal democracy and cannot be contained *within* its framework.

Mouffe accepts Laclau’s idea that populism entails dividing society into two camps, “the underdog” and “those in power,” or “the people” and “the oligarchy” (Mouffe 2018, 10-11, 5; Laclau 2005, chap. 4). This fits with the common understanding of populism in the literature, which is that the core feature of populism is that it regards society as divided into two qualitatively different and antagonistic camps, the people and the elite.³ When populists speak of “the people,” they do not speak of all the members of a polity, as liberal democrats do, but use a *pars pro toto* logic, where a part stands for the whole (Arato 2013, 156-66; Müller 2014, 485, 490; 2016, 25-32, 98). Laclau (2005, 81) is blatant about this: “The ‘people’ ... is something less than the totality of the members of the community: it is a partial component which nevertheless aspires to be conceived as the only legitimate totality.” This construction is by no means innocent, empty, or formal but carries with it substantive normative content. In particular, it carries with it the idea that the views of the opponent cannot be legitimate. In populism, those who differ from “the people” must be corrupt and self-serving and “cannot be a legitimate part of the community” (Laclau 2005, 86). Thus, it is difficult to see how the populist strategy can recognize and combine with the fundamental liberal democratic norm of respect for disagreement (Rostbøll 2018).

As with the empirical and historical studies of populism, in Mouffe, we are left with the question of the relationship between the standards promoted by populism and the standards of liberal democracy. This problem connects to the fallacy of assuming that just because populism can have democratizing effects, it is itself democratic. At least, there is a dangerous ambivalence regarding the sense in which Mouffe sees (left) populism as democratic. One pitfall is that by treating populism merely as a strategy and a means, Mouffe fails to interrogate its inherent qualities. That is, she is insufficiently attentive to populism as a doctrine, which carries with it specific ideas and norms, especially ideas regarding who belongs to the people and what citizens owe disagreeing others. Another shortcoming is that there is no consideration of what happens if the populist strategy succeeds. By treating populism as a strategy that can break up an existing consensus, Mouffe only considers its

³ Brubaker 2017, 362; Canovan 2002, 25; Moffitt 2016, 3; Mudde 2017, 29; Laclau 2005, 74-77, 87; McCormick 2011, viii, 12, 179, 181. But the antagonistic relationship between people and elite is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition, of populism (Ochoa Espejo 2015; Urbinati 2019).

effects in the process of challenging the existing order. It is in this process that populism creates conflict, politicizes, and includes new voices, and, thus, democratizes in one sense of the term. But what happens if a populist movement succeeds? To answer this question, we must analyze populism's inherent ideas about democracy.

The shared limit of the two strands of writings on populism considered in this section is that they treat populism as something that has an external effect on democracy and thus ignores populism's competing ideas about what democracy is and should be. I do not mean to say that there can be no value in considering the effects of actually existing populist parties in relation to a given conception of democracy. Rather, the point is that researchers must be more careful in describing their aims and understanding of democracy when they study this relationship. In particular, they should avoid the conceptual fallacy of confusing a (contingent) democratizing effect of populism with the question of its democratic nature. Here, they should in addition be careful to clarify whether the democratic standards that they apply come from a populist or another conception of democracy. Moreover, they should avoid the normative and prescriptive fallacy of promoting populism as democratic because it has democratic effects (in particular circumstances). In the next section, I propose that we can better understand these issues by explicating and applying a publicity condition to and a participant perspective on populism.

III. The publicity condition

The publicity condition was first proposed by Kant and later elaborated by Rawls. This section shows how it is relevant for the assessment of populism. It might seem misplaced to apply a notion most often used to assess theories of justice to a political phenomenon such as populism but I believe my analysis will show that the application is pertinent.

Kant introduces the publicity condition in the second appendix to "Toward Perpetual Peace" (Kant 1996, 347-351). Its object is "every claim to a right," which Kant says must have the "capacity for publicity" (Kant 1996, 347). Hence, "All actions relating to the rights of others are wrong if their maxim is incompatible with publicity" (Kant 1996, 347). Rawls (1999, 115) presents publicity as one of the formal constraints of right.⁴ The publicity condition holds that the principles and rules one promotes for common affairs should be capable of being publically recognized and accepted. The ideas behind the principles and the demands that they impose on us should be capable of being known and applied by everyone. As Rawls (1999, 158) puts it, a conception of justice must be capable of being "publically accepted and followed as the fundamental charter of society."

The publicity condition is not merely an universalizability test; that is, it is not only a matter of a doctrine being capable of being followed by everyone. The publicity condition adds the idea that it must be possible for it to be common knowledge that the doctrine in

⁴ I refer to the publicity condition as presented in *A Theory of Justice* and do not consider or include the restrictions on public reason suggested by Rawls in *Political Liberalism*.

question is universally followed. Political doctrines must be publically proclaimable and communicable. Hence, publicity of public rules entails that citizens know their rights and duties, the principles that support them, the ideas behind them, and the arguments for them.

Part of the argument for the publicity condition is that insofar as a political doctrine aims to be the basis of state power and coercion, it should be able to be publically scrutinized. That is, it should offer itself to public discussion and justification. Political power should not be based on delusions or deceptions (Rawls 1996, 68).⁵ The moral basis of this argument is the idea that citizens should respect one another as belonging to the same public and as capable of understanding and responding to reasons. Only political doctrines that are made public and can be publically discussed treats everyone as free, equal, and reason-responsive persons. Thus, publicity has *the social function* of making possible mutually respectful public discussion (Freeman 2007, 6, 12, 16). Moreover, only if the doctrine that governs society is publically known can citizens learn from the ideal it promotes and be motivated by it (Rawls 1996, 71). If we cannot want everyone in society to learn from and be motivated by our doctrine, it fails in terms of publicity.

The Kantian publicity principle is closely related to the notion of “the public.” A doctrine aiming for political power and thus affecting the rights of others should be communicable to and known by the public. The public in Kant is composed of everyone capable of reason (García-Marzá 2012, 103-4; O’Neill 1989, 33, 35). By making one’s intentions and principles public and by communicating them to everyone, one shows respect for others as engaged in a shared enterprise. The publicity condition, therefore, excludes esoteric doctrines, which are doctrines that are (1) communicable only to part of the public, and which (2) can only achieve their aims by not being publically communicated. In contrast to esotericism, the publicity condition is based on respect for and trust in the understanding of ordinary people for political affairs (Luban 1996: 154-56).

The preceding points should make it clear that lack of publicity is more a moral than an epistemic shortcoming. In Kant and Rawls, a doctrine should not only be judged in terms of its epistemic content but also in terms of the relationship between people that it creates by being made public. Ambivalence, obscurity, and self-contradiction of doctrines are objectionable because of the relationship these features create to those subjected to them. Especially if the ambivalence is used for strategic purposes and is required for the success of the doctrine, this undermines relations of equal and mutual respect. It does so because it fails to treat others as free, equal, and reason responsive agents engaged in a shared public enterprise.

⁵ There is an issue of hypothetical versus actual publicity here, which I cannot go into. While Kant’s main formulations entail capacity for publicity, Rawls’ argument also often requires actual publicity. Note here that the fact that a doctrine is made public is not sufficient to show that it has the capacity for publicity, which is the issue I focus on in relation to populism.

It is instructive for the application to populism to see how Rawls uses the publicity condition in his criticism of utilitarianism. Rawls (1999, 157) argues that adopting the principle of utility as a public conception of justice would undermine some citizens' self-respect, because this principle "requires some who are less fortunate to accept even lower life prospects for the sake of others." If a citizen knows that she is worse off for the sake of others and if she knows that everyone knows this, this will harm her self-respect. She will, rightly, feel that she is being used as a means to the end of others, and this feeling will be even worse because she knows that everyone knows this. Moreover, when one's self-respect is undermined, this also undermines one's respect for the interests of others (Luban 1996: 167). Rawls therefore considers the strategy of increasing average utility by choosing another set of principles, such as Rawls' two principles of justice, as the public principles. But in that case, what is being chosen are Rawls' principles and not the principle of utility. "If ... the public recognition of utilitarianism entails some loss of self-esteem, there is no way around this drawback" (Rawls 1999, 158). Thus, the publicity condition forbids that one chooses one set of principles (e.g. Rawls' two principles of justice) and then uses *another* principle (here the principle of utility) to assess justice in society.

The core of Rawls' publicity argument against utilitarianism is that we cannot share one set of principles as the public charter of society and then have another set of principles as the standards we use to assess whether our society is just or not. We cannot proclaim that we have chosen to have our society regulated by conception A and then use conception B to assess whether our society is just. For then we have actually chosen B to regulate our society. If we believe B to be the right doctrine, then B must be both the public charter of society and the theory used to assess the justice of society. If choosing B as the public conception of justice undermines B's end, then B has failed the publicity condition and therefore should not be chosen. The publically proclaimed doctrine and the actually applied doctrine must be the same.

The publicity condition, then, requires two things of us. First, it requires us to ensure that the doctrine we promote and the principles we use to assess the effects of the former are the same. If the principles we use to assess the effects of the doctrine we promote are opposed to the principles of the doctrine itself, it means that the latter has failed the publicity condition. Second, the publicity condition asks us to ensure that public recognition of the doctrine we promote does not frustrate its end. If a doctrine cannot be publically recognized without effacing its value, it has failed the publicity condition.

So how does populism fare if subjected to the publicity condition? Can it be made the publically communicated, accepted, and generally followed doctrine for society and still achieve its end? Subjecting populism to the publicity condition is not as straightforward as Rawls' subjection of utilitarianism to the same. This is the case because populism is not an elaborate and clear moral theory in the way utilitarianism is. It might for this reason be thought that it is a category mistake to subject populism to the publicity condition. However, what I subject to the publicity condition are not populist movements or parties

but theoretical defenses of populism. More specifically, my object of analysis are theories of populism that seek to establish a positive connection between populism and democracy. Such theories can be seen as political doctrines, because they promote a set of ideas about how society ought to be organized. By praising populism, they endorse alternative interpretations of key aspects of democracy, such as the meaning of popular sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and how to relate to political opponents. Thus, when I ask whether populism has the capacity to be publically recognized, I speak of whether these theories of populism and democracy are some that can be publically communicate *in conjunction with* populist ideas of democracy and how to engage with political opponents. We can ask this question both with regard to empirical and historical theories that speak of populism as a corrective for democracy and normative theories that see populism as necessary for revitalizing, deepening, and radicalizing democracy.

In the empirical literature, some commentators praise populism for its ability to give voice and influence to otherwise marginalized groups (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 196-99). Thus, this literature posits inclusiveness as a central normative principle. Applying the publicity condition to this theory, we must ask whether a populist can make inclusiveness a public rule. This would require that the populist speak out in favor of inclusion of all marginalized groups in the political process. It is not sufficient to say that your own group has been marginalized and should now be included, which populist leaders often do. The populist must make it a public principle that marginalized groups should be heard and their concerns included. However, this opens up for the possibility of other groups claiming to be marginalized and speaking out against the populist leader. Indeed, it entails that disagreements are articulated and should be respected. The question is whether one can allow for this *while remaining a committed populist*. The fact is that populists not only do not promote inclusion as a general and public principle, they also cannot do so. Populism only work as a public strategy by excluding some views as illegitimate. Thus, the problem is that the theorist of populism promotes a principle (inclusiveness), which is not – and which *cannot* be – the publically proclaimed end of populism itself.

Empirical theorists can reply that they are not promoting populism but only showing a causal relationship, that is, that their aim is not normative but explanatory. My point is that this is not sufficient. Also in explanatory political science and history, one must be clear on the norms one invokes. By speaking of populism as “a corrective for democracy,” one assumes a norm of democracy to which the correction must conform. The problem that becomes apparent when applying the publicity condition to populism is that the norm – the correct end – that the theorist of populism and democracy applies a norm that a populist cannot publically endorse and still remain populist.

Let us turn to Mouffe’s unequivocally normative and prescriptive theory of populism and democracy. As mentioned, Mouffe is in favor of (left) populism because it creates conflict, politicization, and breaks up “the consensus of the center.” Thus, Mouffe’s theory of populism posits a conflictual understanding of democracy as the end to be realized. This

conflict should be of a specific kind, which Mouffe calls “agonistic pluralism.” This is a form of conflict where one does not treat the opponent as an enemy to be eradicated, as in antagonistic conflict, but rather as a legitimate adversary who has a right to defend her opinions (Mouffe 2009, 101-105; 2018, 90-93). The question raised with the publicity condition is whether one publically can proclaim populist ideas *and* a commitment to the end of agonistic pluralism. The publicity condition requires that one make one’s end public; thus, Mouffe must when promoting populism make public that her end is agonistic pluralism. This end, however, is in tension with two aspects of populism, as we see it in practice and as it is understood by Laclau, who Mouffe claims to be following, namely antagonism and the aim of establishing a new consensus. As a strategy, populism works by creating antagonism, by describing the opponent as an enemy to be eradicated and not as a legitimate adversary. And the end of populism is creating a new consensus – a new hegemony in their Gramscian parlance. Populists use antagonism to mobilize the people and claim their end is creating a new unity based on the will of the authentic people. The strategy of antagonism and the promise of rule by the unitary people go hand in hand in populism, and they would both be frustrated by the public proclamation of the idea that the actual aim is establishing a democracy characterized by agonistic pluralism.

Consider next Laclau’s defense of populism. According to him, the populist division between the people and the elite is not something given or natural but a political construction. “The people” is constituted by the logic of populism itself (Laclau 2005, 72-3, 74-7, 90, 99). Laclau justifies populist movements and leaders as necessary for creating a potent force, which can establish a new hegemony. Moreover, a populist movement achieves unity on Laclau’s account not by agreeing on a substantive just cause but by uniting around a discursively produced empty signifier; at the limit, “by a pure name: the name of the leader” (Laclau 2015: 157). Can this theory be made public without self-frustration?

For *followers of populism*, the legitimacy of populist demands rests on the belief that society actually is divided into two camps, and that the populist leader has discovered and expresses the just demands of the people. The notions that there really is no people and that there is no substantive just cause that unites them are hardly part of the self-understanding of the followers – or of populism as an ideology (Canovan 2002; Mudde 2017) – and thus not a position that a populist leader can communicate publically without frustrating his or her own end. If this is true and Laclau’s theory is made public and the people are told that they are a political construction and their cause is a pure name, then their potency will fail and they will not become a strong people. In other words, if the people believe their leader does not express their authentic will but artificially creates it, then they

will not follow the leader, and the populist movement will break down.⁶ Thus, if made public, Laclau's theory of populism frustrates its own end. It fails the publicity condition.

The populist theories of Laclau and Mouffe cannot be addressed to *all of us*, or the public in the Kantian sense of all persons capable of reason. They can be addressed only to populist leaders and strategists. Clearly, they cannot be addressed to the opponent or the elite, who is regarded as illegitimate and outside the people of concern (Laclau 2005, 86). But, as we have just seen, they also cannot be addressed to the followers.

A core idea behind the publicity condition is the idea that the principles that one professes should be the same principles, which one uses to evaluate the effects of the former. Otherwise, one separates oneself from the public. Thus, if one publically promotes populism and thereby its understanding of democracy, one should also evaluate the effects of promoting populism with populist standards. It contradicts the publicity condition to evaluate the effects of promoting populism with liberal democratic standards or with reference to the value of inclusiveness or pluralism. Most commentators agree that populists do not regard the latter as fundamental values (Arato and Cohen 2017, 285-87; Mudde 2017; Müller 2016; Rummens 2017; Urbinati 2019). Indeed, populism promotes homogeneity and unity, not difference and pluralism. Thus, this praise of populism uses standards that are not only foreign to but also directly opposed to populism.

Laclau and Mouffe might insist that *their* populism is committed to pluralism (Mouffe 2018, 62-3). But consider two questions. First, if their populism *as a set of ideas and normative commitments* is so different from what everyone else calls "populism," why call it "populism" at all?⁷ Second, is populism *as a logic of articulation* compatible with pluralism? Laclau argues that because a populist movement is unified around an empty signifier – that is, because it has no substantive content – it is compatible with a plurality of demands (Laclau 2015, 263). In practice, however, every populist movement or party will at some point need to take sides on some substantive issues and, if it gains power, to implement some policies rather than others. Mouffe and Laclau fail to explain how such decisions are to be made in a way that respects disagreement within and beyond the party. They and the populist leader have nothing to say to those people who do not see themselves as reflected in the populist party and disagree with its policies (Ochoa Espejo 2015, 74). The populist logic of articulation, its way of creating a people, is exactly one that works by – and only works by – not revealing, communicating, or, indeed, making public disagreements among the people.⁸

⁶ In this formulation, I borrow from Luban's (1996: 160) application of the publicity condition. It might be objected that people can follow a leader for purely strategic reasons without believing his messages. This is true, but then they are no longer committed populists.

⁷ Mouffe (2018, 81-2) attempts an answer.

⁸ In a detailed discussion of Laclau's theory of populism, Benjamin L. McKean (2016) shows how Laclau implies that the idea of the unifying empty signifier of populism is neutral and something everyone can equally submit to. McKean convincingly argues both that populist notions of the

In sum, the discussed theories of populism fail the two requirements of the publicity condition. First, the praised doctrine (populism) is not the same as the doctrine used to assess its affects (liberal democracy and agonistic pluralism). Second, the theories are publically self-frustrating: they cannot be publically proclaimed without thwarting their ends. Populism is praised for its inclusiveness or ability to politicize and bring in dissenting voices. But populism only works as a public strategy by not mentioning actual disagreements and dissent among the groups it seeks to unite.

IV. The observer and the participant perspective

This section suggests that the shortcomings of the discussed theories have their roots in their taking an observer perspective on the relationship between populism and democracy. The observer takes a detached perspective on politics and discusses populism as a phenomenon that affects democracy from the outside rather than as a competing set of ideas about democracy. She regards populism as a form of treatment that have certain effects on the people and democracy. And she asks if this treatment is good or bad, a necessary corrective or a dangerous threat, a way to motivate radical change or not.

The main drawback of taking the observer perspective in political theory is that it entails a failure actually to discuss political principles or conceptions of democracy on their merits. By treating populism as a treatment or a means, we fail to interrogate its conception of democracy. If we evaluate populism only as an external instrument, which affects democracy from the outside and as a phenomenon that appears within the liberal democracy framework, we fail to understand that the issue of populism is *about* liberal democracy.⁹

I want to propose that a central idea behind the publicity condition is that we should take a *participant perspective* with regard to the ideas and principles we promote.¹⁰ That is, the publicity condition entails that when we propose and promote some ideas and principles, we do so as participants involved in relationships with other human beings to whom these principles should apply. We see the principles as principles we think it right to communicate to others and for our society to be regulated by. Promoting a political doctrine entails establishing a certain relationship to both our followers and our political opponents. The publicity condition concerns the character of these relationships and is based on the norm that such relationships should exhibit respect for everyone as engaged in a common practice. Publicity matters because of its potential of making all affected into participants in a joint enterprise in a way that expresses mutual respect.

people are never actually neutral, most often they are racialized, and that internal differences in Laclau's populism must be seen as threat to unity rather than a resource.

⁹ "Populism has a somewhat different status from other ideologies, being derived from its reaction to the institutions themselves rather than to the debate within those institutions." (Taggart 2002, 79).

¹⁰ The notion of the participant perspective and the contrast to the observer perspective is inspired by Peter Strawson's (1982) distinction between the participant attitude and the objective attitude.

The participant perspective entailed by the publicity condition differs from an observer perspective where one asks how some ideas and principles can be used to explain or predict behavior. The publicity condition requires that we see proposed principles as principles *for us* to make our own and act on, rather than as principles that *affect us* as external causes.¹¹ From the detached perspective of the observer, there is nothing wrong in giving people one set of principles or society one public charter as external stimuli and then consider the effects of this treatment according to some other conception of the right. It is the participant who cannot accept this division. The participant cannot see a set of principles as *her* principles, as principles she has reason to accept, and at the same time regard them as a treatment the effects of which should be assessed with some other set of principles. First, participants do not see their principles as treatments. Second, if they did, they would not have the intended effect. Third, if a participant endorses a set of principles, for her, these principles should be used to assess their own effects. Otherwise, she could not say that the former are principles that she has endorsed.

Note that the participant perspective is not merely the perspective of someone who participates in an activity, for example, politics, but the perspective of someone who participates *as a participant*. It is the perspective of someone who is fully committed to being involved in a public – open and shared – activity, who does so while acknowledging being one of multiple partakers, and who does not detach herself from the activity to observe, explain, manipulate and/or exploit it. Hence, non-detachment and the acknowledgement of being a part of an activity you share with others as fellow participants are two core aspects of the participant perspective.

The involvement of the participant entails a double commitment. On the one hand, it entails a first-order commitment to your own particular opinions. The participant is an engaged actor who seeks to further her own ideas and principles. On the other hand, the participant perspective entails a second-order commitment to being only a part of a larger enterprise, to acting with others as one participant among many. Thus, as a participant you acknowledge what Hannah Arendt (1989: 8, 175-76) calls “plurality,” that is, you acknowledge being engaged in a shared practice with others, who are both identical to you, participants, and distinct from you, because you are different parts with different positions.

Moreover, the participant views herself as an actor in the active and reflective sense of someone who deliberates about what to do, rather than a part that simply follows the flow. Thus, the participant perspective is a *practical perspective* in the Kantian sense of a standpoint from which you deliberate about what to do. Taking this together with the earlier two aspects – non-detachment and the acknowledgement of being a part of an activity you share with others as fellow participants – we can say that you take the participant perspective

¹¹ The idea that moral arguments are addresses *to us* as deliberating agents rather than arguments *about us* is a key idea in Kant’s practical philosophy (Korsgaard 1996, xii; Rostbøll 2011, 388-89).

when you regard yourself as involved with others in a common enterprise of deliberation, choice, and action.

There are some important presuppositions and implications involved in taking the participant perspective. First, as a participant you regard yourself as a deliberating, choosing, and acting being. Hence, the participant perspective presupposes that you regard yourself as capable of deliberation and free to act on the basis of reasons. In addition, as a participant in an activity with other participants, you regard not only yourself but also the other participants as responsive to reasons, free, and autonomous.

Second, as involved with others in a practical enterprise where everyone views one another as free and responsive to reasons, participants will consider each other's ideas and principles as something they have reason to hold and promote. Political doctrines, thus, will be considered as something the participants advance in good faith and for good reasons. We can only regard people's views as product of self-interest and corruption (as populists do) from an observer perspective. When disagreement arises, from the participant perspective this will be considered as reasonable disagreement, in the sense of a disagreement that can arise even when people in good faith apply their reason to complex practical issues.¹² Yet, as an engaged actor with first-order commitments, the participant will not merely observe the fact of disagreement, but will promote and struggle for her own opinions. To remain a participant, however, this promotion or struggle must happen in a way that regards others as participants who also reasonably and in good faith promote their ideas.

This entails, third, that the participants assess ideas, opinions, and ideologies on their merits. Participants consider their own and others' doctrines as something they believe in and have good reasons to find true and right. When you begin to consider others' and your own ideas either as caused by external factors or as treatments that affect people from the outside (as populists do), you have left the participant perspective and become an observer.

Accordingly, the participant *as a participant* is primarily concerned with the conditions of remaining a participant, which requires upholding the participant perspective and including others as participants, because *one cannot be a participant without having co-participants*.

Normative evaluation from the participant perspective should not be confused with internal critique, that is, critique that accepts and applies the norms of the ideology under evaluation. Thus, taking the participant perspective regarding the issue of democracy and populism does not mean that any assessment of populism must be internal or any critique of populism must be an internal critique, in the sense of applying populist norms and standards to the evaluation of the problem of populism and democracy.

From the participant perspective, the convictions of the one making the evaluation matters, that is, it matters whether you are convinced by populist ideas or not. The publicity condition of the participant perspective requires *of the populist* that *she* applies populist norms

¹² Cf. Rawls (1996: 54-8) on the burdens of judgment.

or a populist understanding of democracy to the assessment of the relationship between populism and democracy. It is entailed by the participant perspective that the non-populist, as a participant, will assume that the populist as a fellow participant is committed to populism and a populist understanding of democracy. But the non-populist is of course free to assess and criticize populism with her own, non-populist principles, standards, and conception of democracy.

The participant perspective requires that populists and non-populists discuss populism and other doctrines on their merits, as competing conceptions of democracy. This is possible only if populists and non-populists alike make public and communicates the principles to which they are committed.

The question raised by the publicity condition, then, is whether the reason why we promote a doctrine can be made public and be accepted from within the participant perspective. This requires that populist theorists can and do make public why they think it is valuable to promote populism in a way that can be recognized and accepted by followers of populism. Followers of populism are from the participant perspective people who believe in the rightness of populist ideas and principles. Thus, when I engage with a populist as a participant, I take her on her word as someone who believes that society is divided into two antagonistic camps and that the people is a unity whose will should be expressed immediately and directly in political decisions. Laclau and Mouffe accept that populists speak in this way but do not engage with the validity of these ideas in themselves but rather, in their defense of populism, make us look at how these ideas motivate people and the consequences the ideas have in terms of politicization, conflict, and change. In this way, they create a sharp division between their own defense of populism and the reasons people *as participants* believe to have for supporting populism. Consequently, followers of populism cannot see themselves in the praise of populism that we find in these theories.

It is by creating divergence between the ideas that are proclaimed (e.g. that the people is a unity and morally right) and the reasons for doing so (its motivational and politicizing effects), that theories of populism such as those of Laclau and Mouffe's fail the publicity condition. The cost is that it undercuts the participant perspective from which citizens can engage and discuss their different conceptions of democracy on their merits. When ideas and principles such as those defining populism are reduced to means with certain effects, we have taken them out of the common public sphere where citizens can discuss them as ideas and principles about how to understand democracy.

It may be objected that I have not discussed populism on its own terms. But my point is exactly that this is not possible, because you cannot participate with someone who rejects to participate as a fellow participant. Populists complain that their opponent – non-populists or “the elite” – do not listen to their concerns but by failing to adhere to the publicity condition and taking a participant perspective, they deny their adversaries the opportunity of doing so. Indeed, the latter might exactly be their strategy. On the one hand, populists demand respect for the concerns of “the people,” and on the other hand, they do

so in a way that undercuts the common standpoint from which alone citizens can engage in mutually respectful interaction. This might be a strategically clever move if your aim is winning a battle but it fails to express – embody, communicate, make public – the kind of democratic process that it aims to establish. Or, it fails to express which kind of democratic relations, it aims to establish. In short, the populist strategy instantiates another kind of interpersonal relations than those its defenders claim to be fighting for, or it becomes unclear what it aims for.

V. Populism as democratic ideology

It might be objected that the preceding argument misunderstands the nature of populism and that populism does not have the content necessary to treat it as a doctrine that can be subjected to the publicity condition. Thus, some scholars argue that populism is not an ideology or a fixed constellation of ideas. Rather, they say, populism is a logic, a mutable set of discursive or rhetorical resources, or a political style that can be put to different uses (Brubaker 2017; Kazin 2017, 1-5; Laclau 2005, 176; Moffitt 2016; Mouffe 2018, 10-11). While many other writers on populism and I agree that populism is not a thick ideology such as liberalism or socialism, we also contend that populism contains some ideas and principles of its own and that it is these ideas that constitute populism. Populism has for this reason been described as a thin ideology (Abts and Rummens 2007, 407-9; Canovan 2002, 32; Mudde 2017, 30). Whereas a thick ideology speaks to a broad menu of socio-political issue, the thin ideology of populism includes a narrower and more restricted set of core ideas and concepts.

The thin ideology of populism is primarily a set of ideas about politics and democracy. Populism presents itself as the ideology of democracy and provides its own interpretation of the meaning and practice of democracy (Canovan 2002, 30-33; Urbinati 2014, 128-70; 2019). We can understand populism in terms of its understanding of three elements. (1) *The circumstances of politics*: society is divided into two qualitatively different and antagonistic camps, the people and the elite. (2) *Logic of politics*: democratic politics is about winning power back to the people from an untrustworthy elite. (3) *Notion of democratic legitimacy*: political power should be an expression of the united will of the authentic people (Rostbøll 2018). This set of ideas and principles is not empty, formal, or innocent. It carries with it substantial normative content and promotes a specific view of how we ought to understand and engage in democratic politics. In particular, it supplies and promotes an understanding of society, politics, and democracy, which stands in opposition to and competes with liberal democracy (Rummens 2017; Urbinati 2019). It is for this reason that I think populism has the content that makes it incumbent on us to submit it to the publicity condition.

You might object that apologists and promoters of populism only praise or want to employ the energies of populism, because these correct or deepen democracy. The former do not want to establish a populist regime. Thus, we saw that empirical political scientists

and historians commend populism for its positive effects mainly when populists are in opposition, or they praise populist movements that do not want to occupy state power as opposed to populist *parties* that do want to occupy state power (Gratan 2016; Kazin 2017). Mouffe promotes populism because of its affective and motivating dimension, while she maintains that the aim is not to establish a populist regime (Mouffe 2018, 38, 50-51, 71-78, 80). However, there is something strange in being “for populism” while not being for its victory. This is especially a problem in a normative account such as Mouffe’s. She might reply that one cannot be for a populist regime because populism has no “programmatic content” (Mouffe 2018, 11). But what then, exactly, is she for? The effects of populism, it seems. If that is the case, she and those who share her project have to be much more careful in showing when and where populism has the desired effects. In particular, they should consider whether they could achieve the same effects with other means and, thus, without the dangers of populism (Arato and Cohen 2017, 287). Moreover, Mouffe’s support for populist parties and leaders places her not merely as a supporter of a social movement that criticizes political power from without but makes her promote populist leadership that aims to conquer political power.¹³

The publicity condition applies to any doctrine that is defended and promoted in politics. The ideas and principles that a political party use and act on should be capable of being publically recognized (White and Ypi 2016, chaps. 1 and 3). In a democracy, an ideological project should both be able to explain and defend its substantive policy proposals and the relations it creates to followers and opponents by advancing them. Populism does not have its own substantive policy proposals but depends on a “host ideology” for these (Mudde 2017, 30-31, 36-38). But populists have ideas about how they themselves – or “the people” – should relate to their adversaries, make decision against them, and advance their substantive policies, whatever they might be (Rostbøll 2018). It is the latter that makes populism special and gives it problems in terms of fulfilling the publicity condition. The unique problem of populism arises because of its ambivalent relationship to democracy. On the one hand, populism wears the democratic mantle and, on the other hand, it promotes ideas and principles that if they became publically recognized would subvert democratic practice.

VI. Publicity, politicization, and conflict

In the first chapter of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls cites a number of reasons why it is valuable with a public conception of justice: It (1) creates a common frame of discussion, (2) it establishes bonds of civic friendship, (3) it helps avoid that people pursue unjust ends, (4) it tends to eliminate distrust, hostility and resentment, and (5) it reduces disagreement (Rawls 1999, 4-6, 46). Some readers worry that the aim of establishing a common and shared

¹³ For the distinction between populism as social movement and as a government form, see Urbinati 2014, 129-31; 2019, 6.8.

conception of justice for society can have depoliticizing effects. In particular, they object that reducing disagreement amounts to suppressing dissent and avoiding necessary political conflict and change. Some even argue that mutual trust and lack of resentment can contribute to a status quo bias and the perpetuation of unjust institutions (McCormick 2011). One of the arguments in favor of populism is that it is democratizing because it introduces conflict, mobilizes otherwise excluded groups of society, and challenges the status quo. Populism breaks the existing consensus, opposes technocracy, and “there is no alternative” politics. It effects a necessary politicization of issues that have been suppressed or ignored and brings the concerns of “the people” to the agenda (Canovan 2002; Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018; Stavrakakis 2015). In response, I argue that not all forms of politicization and conflict are equally conducive for democracy and I defend the publicity condition in relation to this point.

Rawls’ list of goods connected to a shared and public conception of justice are some of those goods that many commentators agree are lacking in contemporary politics. Take the issue of common discussion. Proponents and defenders of populism praise it for bringing in new voices and concerns. However, populism itself prevents society from having a productive discussion of the issues it brings up. The fundamental reason for this is that populists do not bring issues to the political agenda as substantive issues about which there can be reasonable disagreement. They bring them forth as the concerns of the people, which for them excludes the need for policy argument and justification (Weale 2018, 114). The problem is a fundamental one, namely that populism promotes an understanding of politics, in which politics is not about debating or reconciling differences of opinion but of antagonism between different identity groups. If you disagree with populist demands, you cannot respond by way of policy argument, for the political logic introduced by populism has transformed the conflict into something different. The conflict now concerns whether or not you are for or against the people, or which group you belong to, the people or the elite (Moffitt 2016, 148). Populism creates conflict and a type of politicization, but it does not generate productive policy discussion. Thus, if the antagonism introduced by populists leads to change, there is no way of assessing whether it has been for the better, since the conflict has included no deliberation on substantive matters. For example, some praise right-wing populists for having brought immigration to the agenda in Europe, but they fail to note how the populist logic has silenced those who oppose stricter immigration laws. Pro-immigration is seen as an elite position and this in the populist logic is sufficient to discredit it.

We can connect this point to the publicity condition. The populist at best promotes a form of private or partial reason, as understood by Kant (O’Neill 1989). The latter is a form of reason that appeals to an unquestioned authority, in this case “the people.” It is not a full or public use of reason, because the authority of the people is given. Populism bars us from questioning the moral authority and rightness of the will of the people – as the latter is interpreted by the populist leader. You might ask, if it isn’t a principle of democracy

that the people should have ultimate authority. But the principle of democracy is that “the people” or the majority has the right to decide, not that everyone should accept that those who win the vote are morally correct (Estlund 2008, 104; Rostbøll 2008, 195). In populist politics, those who disagree with the populist demands are simply told that the latter express the will of the people.

Laclau and Mouffe may respond that the existing “consensus of the center” has also not been justified to everyone. This may be true. However, it is something to be determined by empirical investigation guided by norms of proper justification. To assess Laclau and Mouffe’s claim, we must analyze the type of agreement that exist in society and how it has been reached. It is difficult to understand why consensus should be bad in and of itself. Consensus becomes objectionable only if it is not a genuine consensus, that is, if it is reached by suppressing certain views and alternatives and is not the result of a genuine debate (Rostbøll 2008, 23-27, 148-49). Laclau and Mouffe do seem to think suppression of conflict is bad – at least when done by their opponent. What is unclear is what they would regard as a legitimate way of reaching agreement, if anything. They provide no way of normatively distinguishing between different populist projects, except for rhetorical and emotional success (Arato 2013, 165; Ochoa Espejo 2015, 72-74; Urbinati 2019, 6.8; Valdivielso 2017, 304, 307).

Mouffe rightly notes that political conflict and adversarialism are essential for giving citizens the opportunity to choose between different political projects. But in defending populism, she fails to acknowledge that only types of partisanship that are committed to public justification allow different political projects to be scrutinized, compared, and subjected to trial by discussion (White and Ypi 2016, 22n55, 55, 64, 76-77).

Consider next Rawls’ point that it speaks in favor of a public and shared conception of justice that it reduces disagreement. Here I propose that we distinguish between disagreement and polarization, and that only the latter is a problem for a well-functioning democracy. Disagreement concerns substantive issues of policy and is simply a difference of opinion among people about which public policies our society should pursue. Polarization does not primarily concern substantive issue of policy but rather to which camp you belong. A society characterized by disagreement is a society in which people regard themselves as having different opinions. This may make them divide into different groups, for example, political parties, interest groups, or social movements. A society characterized by polarization, by contrast, is one in which people see themselves as belonging to different and antagonistic groups. In the latter case, the group identification is prior to and more important than substantial disagreement. You belong to group A and *therefore* you disagree with the views of group B.

It is polarization and not disagreement that is detrimental to democracy. Disagreement and dissent are necessary for productive discussion and necessary change. Polarization obstructs discussion and hinders change (Hopkins and Sides 2015; Persily 2015). Polarization as defined here is not extreme disagreement. When citizens and/or

politicians become polarized, they no longer view one another merely as disagreeing others with whom one must deliberate, negotiate, and make compromises. The other becomes an enemy who must be defeated, silenced, and eliminated. The polarization logic is one that disconnects us from the participant perspective entailed by the publicity condition. From the latter perspective, we view others and ourselves as moved by reasons that can be made public and are sharable (not necessarily shared). We try to influence others through reasons that can be made public. In this way, the publicity condition entails that we view one another as engaged in a cooperative enterprise. Disagreement on policy is fully compatible with this engagement, while polarization is not. The issue, then, is whether the parties regard themselves as engaged in a shared enterprise. If they do not, conflict loses its democratic value.

My argument does entail the value of reducing disagreement on one level. The publicity condition, as presented here, entails agreement on the value of being engaged in a joint political enterprise. Moreover, it implies a norm of mutual respect for persons as capable of forming their own opinions and being responsive to reasons. This commitment should not be seen as limiting first-order disagreement but rather as an explanation for why the latter should be respected. We should distinguish between second-order commitments to toleration, deliberation, and compromise and first-order policy commitments. We can have strong disagreements on the first-order level of policy and still be committed to shared norms for how one ought to relate to disagreeing others and how one ought to make decisions with them (Rostbøll 2018). To be sure, second-order commitments to toleration, deliberation, and compromise do set limits to acceptable first-order commitments. Some first-order policy views entail rejection of norms that also set them at odds with the second-order commitments entailed by the Kantian publicity condition, most clearly views that reject a fundamental commitment to respect human equality. In this way, the publicity condition does and should reduce disagreement.

Incidentally, Mouffe's own distinction between antagonism and agonism actually accepts the need for avoiding some types of disagreement and polarization. According to Mouffe, the aim of democratic politics is to transform antagonistic relations between enemies into agonistic pluralism. The latter requires that one treat one's opponent as a legitimate adversary rather than an enemy (Mouffe 2009, 101-105; 2018, 90-93). This position depends on consensus about liberal democratic values of freedom, equality, and mutual toleration, which Mouffe partly recognizes (Mouffe 2009, 103-4; 1998, 93). What I do not see is how this defense of agonistic pluralism as opposed to antagonistic politics is compatible with Mouffe's promotion of populism. Not only actual populist parties but also Laclau's theory of populism, which Mouffe endorses, have as their very core the idea of the existence or creation of an antagonistic relationship where the opponent is regarded as an enemy who has no legitimate place in the political community (Abts and Rummens 2007, 419; Laclau 2005, 86; Müller 2016, 20; Rummens 2017, 562; Urbinati 2019, 6.10).

Moreover, while populism thrives on and may introduce conflict into the political system, the latter only happens as long as populism remains in opposition or operate as a grassroots movement contesting and criticizing political power. Populists in power tend to harm and suppress political opposition and contestation (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 196-99). The latter should come as no surprise because it follows directly from the populist understanding of what democracy is, allows, and even demands: that the people as a unity has its will implemented with no accommodation of opponents and with no constraints (Müller 2014, 489).

VII. Conclusion

This article maintains that the publicity condition entails taking a participant perspective, and argues for some advantages of this perspective for assessing the issue of populism and democracy. However, my point is not that we as theorists or as citizens engaged in politics always and under all conditions should think as participants. My aim has been to show what is involved in taking the participant perspective and what is lost when we depart from this perspective, as I suggest theorists of populism often do.

Under some conditions, it may be necessary to depart from the publicity requirement and the participant perspective for pragmatic reasons of political strategy. However, it is imperative that suspension of the participant attitude be done with great hesitation and is seen as a regrettable and temporary means with a clear purpose. A strategy of suspension of publicity and the participant perspective can only be justified if the aim is to make such suspension unnecessary or less necessary in the future.¹⁴ In other words, it is crucial that a strategy should be clearly demarcated *as a strategy* and not be confused with and promoted as an end. The problem with the discussed defenses of populism is either that they fail to clarify that populism is valued only as a strategy and not as an end, or that they fail to explain and justify what exactly populism is a strategy *for*. Moreover, if your defense of populism is only pragmatic, you need to be much more careful in explaining the conditions under which it will work. Otherwise, you end up with an indiscriminate praise of populism with no clear distinctions between means and ends, contingent effects and inherent value.

In fact, I do not think populism is a strategy that can be defended as part of liberal democratic politics. The populist strategy entails such a fundamental break with the relations of publicity and justification that characterize a well-functioning liberal democracy that it would destroy it. Moreover, one cannot actually proclaim that one's populism is only a strategy without it losing its force. A thoroughly populist strategy, which has no concern for publicity, justification, or accommodation of opponents, is if anything a revolutionary strategy (Rummens 2017, 562-63). Under some conditions, revolution might be necessary

¹⁴ In a different context, Strawson (1982, 75) writes, "suspension of ordinary moral reactive attitudes ... is profoundly mitigated [when] the aim of the enterprise is to make the suspension unnecessary or less necessary."

but it is naïve and irresponsible to believe that populism is an innocent strategy that is compatible with and can work “within the liberal democratic framework” (Mouffe 2018, 80). Of course, not every populist party undermines the liberal democratic framework, but that is simply because not every populist party succeeds. However, if you really are a populist, we must as participants assume that you want to succeed with your populism. That is, that you are a populist like one is a revolutionary, as a means to the destruction of the existing regime.

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