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Populism and its perils: language and politics

ABSTRACT

Populism appeals to the masses, and against elites. To the extent that any successful democracy must respond to popular desires, democracies must incorporate some elements of populism. Nevertheless, for continued success a democratic polity also must ensure widespread education, including a concern for language and the ability to analyze and resist "mind manipulators".

Key words: populism, language, propaganda, education for democracy

DIFFICULTIES IN DEFINITION

"Populism" has different meanings, making it not only difficult to define, but perhaps even impossible to do so elegantly. As Margaret Canovan notes, "the reader who opens a book entitled 'Populism' can have very little idea what to expect. Although frequently used by historians, social scientists, and political commentators, the term is exceptionally vague and refers in different contexts to a bewildering variety of phenomena" [Canovan 1981: 3].

She gives examples, including various techniques of direct democracy (e.g. referendum and initiative), characteristics of certain dictatorships (e.g., Perón's in Argentina), various peasant movements, outbursts of reactionary outrage (e.g., "white backlash", in the USA), etc. She might have added recent "tax revolts", in the US, so forceful that one of its major political parties asserts that taxes can only be decreased, never increased – even going into war.

Adding perhaps even more complexity are strange developments that Hannah Arendt has noted in *On Revolution*. Although she does not cite them as populist, they would seem to be related. She identified "those councils, *soviets*, and *Räte* which were to make their appearance in every genuine revolution throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Each time they appeared", she said, "they sprang up as the spontaneous organs of the people, not only outside of all revolutionary parties but entirely unexpected by them, and their leaders" [Arendt 1965: 252].

Canovan concedes explicitly the futility of seeking a simple understanding: "One thing which the existing literature makes clear", she writes, "is that we cannot hope to reduce all cases of populism to a single definition or find a single essence behind all established uses of the term" [Canovan 1981:7]. She even expressed reservations about using the word at all, saying that because of its ambiguities, no social scientist would deliberately invent it if it did not already exist, but "the term *does* exist: there it is, firmly ensconced in a number of languages, constantly used by scholars and journalists alike. We cannot get rid of it" [Canovan 1981: 301].

Among the huge number of writings on populism, there is a quite brief, but varied and "reasonably representative selection alphabetized by author and ranging roughly over more than three quarters of a century" [Skidmore 2006: 339–346]. A somewhat updated yet still very brief version might include (in addition to Canovan herself, omitted here): Peter Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (1995); Gene Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America* (1991); John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (1931); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (1955); Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion in American History* (1995); Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (2007), and C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South,* (1951).

SIMPLIFYING POPULISM: DISTILLING IT DOWN TO A WORKABLE DEFINITION

Canovan explains that she wrote her book to demonstrate that the term does have some utility. It "need not be hopelessly confusing", and can help identify political phenomena "that are in need of study" if we are sufficiently careful in using it, and if we invest the energy required to sift through its numerous components [Canovan 1981: 301].

However, promising such a systematic approach may be, it does not exhaust the possibilities; there are other modes of study that may be quite useful. Rather than dissecting the term, as Canovan does – in pursuit of "the process of clarification required to turn one of the most confusing words in the vocabulary of political science into a precise and readily applicable concept" – there may also be value in taking a more relaxed and less formal approach. Despite the incompatibility of many of the usages of "populism", at the most fundamental level the usages clearly do share some common elements. These may be sufficient to develop an informal understanding that will be useful, however, lacking it may be in philosophical sophistication.

Thus, we adopt a loose working definition, and deliberately avoid any attempt at precision. We also avoid the value judgments many writers express who assume that "populism" necessarily denotes crypto-fascism or right-wing mass phenomena in general. This article shares Canovan's disquiet with the term, while also being resigned to its use. From there on, however, it digresses from her position not in disagreement, but to pursue a different direction. The goal here is simply a workable usage that discards formality and seeks to develop insights from common understandings.

POPULISM, DEMOCRACY, AND RELIGION

For our purposes, "populism" is value neutral. It must be a component to some degree of democratic polities, but it is not "democracy". Democracy presupposes some element of populism, but democracies can differ from one another. One way in which they may differ is the degree or extent of populism that they involve. The elements of liberalism and constitutionalism that form components of most modern democracies, are not components of populism, which tends to elevate majoritarianism above other elements.

Although populism and democracy are not synonymous, they are simultaneous. They present advantages and disadvantages that are similar, and they require similar conditions to function optimally.

"Populism" as used here refers to policies and rhetoric appealing to "the people", rather than to an elite. It does not presuppose a position on the left-right political spectrum. Although its essence is majoritarian, rather than individualistic, populist appeals can be presented in individualistic terms. Frequently, populism directs opposition toward a specific group as scapegoats, real or imagined, and against intellectuals as contrasted with "common people" – although scapegoating is not a prerequisite. In any case, as Richard Hofstadter asserted, it often does contain strong anti-intellectual elements [Hofstadter 1963; Hofstadter 1964]. At their extreme, these become overtly anti-science.

Populism often includes explicitly religious elements, generally fundamentalist or literalist. Note here that "fundamentalism", is a mindset, not limited to religion; it and its companion "literalism" may be found across the spectrum of thought and human endeavor – consider, for example, constitutional interpretation, economic dogma, and social matters. Wherever it exists its rigidity creates dangers, as Crapanzano demonstrates so brilliantly [Crapanzano 2000].

THE IMPORTANCE OF POPULISM, AND ITS DANGERS

Democratic governments, those based on popular consent, by definition must to some degree be populist; that is, as they formulate public policy they must employ

measures to consult the people. Taking public opinion into consideration requires at least to some extent, appeals to the people.

By listening to public opinion and whenever possible shaping public policies to reflect public desires, such polities have the potential to improve conditions for the public. To improve conditions, though, there must be more than sensitivity to public opinion. Responding to public opinion that is ill-founded, misinformed, misguided, and in error can damage, rather than benefit, the public. Thus, it is important to establish the conditions most conducive to ensuring that the public is accurately informed; that is, that the public possesses a high degree of accurate information, and that the level of misinformation must be held to a minimum.

By definition, the greater the populist appeal (assuming that it is effective), the more numerous the group receiving, and acting upon, the message. Under nearly all existing circumstances, the greater the number of people receiving the message, the greater will be the number of those who have minimal education, or who are likely for many reasons to be unable to receive it thoughtfully. The broader the audience, the more likely it will be that it will contain those who are especially susceptible to demagogic manipulation. Note that this assumption does not question the democratic principle that the people possess, collectively, a wisdom that is the motivating principle of democratic theory. It merely reflects awareness that nothing is perfect, or functions perfectly; that proper conditions are essential for that wisdom to prevail, and for the people to function at their full potential.

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE: ITS USE AND ABUSE

An informed public is essential, but information is insufficient. To operate rationally, populations must be informed, but must also possess the skills to evaluate effectively the information that they have. As both popular literature and scholarly studies demonstrate, rational appeals do not always produce rational results. For example, George Lakoff argues that the "framing" of issues – their shaping, description, and presentation – affects an audience more powerfully than does its logic [Lakoff and Johnson 2003; Lakoff 2004; Lakoff 2009]. Drew Westin suggests similarly that rational presentations have far less success than emotional ones [Westin 2007].

A perfect example comes from Robert Caro's massive work on Lyndon B. Johnson. Caro is no LBJ partisan, and has been accused of "demonizing" Johnson [Woods 2008]. From the third volume forward, though, his treatment is nuanced and thoughtful, and presents some of the most insightful work on LBJ ever written.

Volume Four deals with LBJ's vice presidency and his early months as president. Here, Caro describes a brief speech that Vice President Johnson gave at Gettysburg Battlefield on Memorial Day weekend in 1963, a century after Lincoln's immortal Address there. LBJ had accepted the invitation to speak on his own initiative, sought no approval, and spoke only his own words. The Kennedy administration had shut

him out entirely from policy formation. The “Washington Post” ran his Gettysburg speech as the lead story on page one. Caro said the speech had been so short, “barely two typed pages”, that Johnson had read it in eight minutes. “Lincoln’s speech had been short, too”, Caro said, and, the “Post” said in an editorial, this one, too, had “eloquence (…), political courage (…), vision”. LBJ had said, “One hundred years ago, the slave was freed (…). One hundred years later, the Negro remains in bondage to the color of his skin. The Negro today asks justice. We do not answer him – we do not answer those who lie beneath this soil – when we reply to the Negro by asking, ‘Patience’. (…) To ask for patience from the Negro is to ask him to give more of what he has already given enough (…). The Negro says, ‘Now.’ Others say, ‘Never.’ The voice of responsible Americans – the voice of those who died here and the great man who spoke here – their voices say, ‘Together’. There is no other way” [Caro 2012: 256].

Caro described the persistence and patience with which Johnson had sought an audience alone with President Kennedy on civil rights. “May of 1963 had been the month of Birmingham”. LBJ had said, “They’ve turned the fire hoses on a little black girl (…) They’re rolling that little girl right down the middle of the street”, the month of the fierce dogs “that Bull Connor’s police kept on leashes, but not tightly. And all that month, the President and the attorney general and their aides were discussing what to do in Birmingham, and whether or not to propose new civil rights legislation, and what that legislation should be, but they hadn’t been discussing it with him”. He kept repeating his request for a meeting with Kennedy, and met rebuff after rebuff. Finally, “at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, June 3, Johnson was allowed into the Oval Office”. He was not to meet alone with JFK, but also with aides Ken O’Donnell, Ted Sorensen, and the president’s brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy (RFK hated LBJ – the hatred was mutual – and undercut him constantly). “Since, at last, the President had asked Lyndon Johnson for advice about civil rights, he gave some”. He did not know what was in the administration’s bill, and knew of it only by reading about it in the “New York Times”, he said, nor had he sat in on any meetings, but then the master legislative strategist gave detailed advice on how to proceed – and how not to do so. His advice on strategy went unheeded.

Beyond that, this political genius LBJ who had been purely pragmatic, “who had despised politicians who talked about »principled things«”, began talking about a moral commitment. “»Negroes are tired of this patient stuff and tired of this piecemeal stuff and what they want more than anything else is not an executive order or legislation, they want a moral commitment that he’s behind them.«” Kennedy hadn’t given them that commitment, he said. Legislation – no matter how well written it was – was only part of the answer to the civil rights problem, he said. “The Negroes feel and they’re suspicious that we’re just doing what we got to do [to keep their vote] (…). What Negroes are really seeking is moral force and to be sure that we’re on their side (…) and until they receive that assurance, unless it’s stated dramatically and convincingly, they’re not going to pay much attention to executive orders and legislative recommen-

dations' (…)." And only the President himself can give them that assurance. President Kennedy then directed that LBJ and O'Donnell meet to discuss the issue in more detail. They did so, and O'Donnell reported back to the president.

"The next morning Johnson met with Kennedy again. And that afternoon was the first of a series of meetings that had been scheduled with leaders of various groups – this one was with a hundred executives of America's largest retail chains – to mobilize opinion behind the civil rights effort. Kennedy had invited him at the last minute. And when he spoke, some members of the Kennedy Administration who had never seen Lyndon Johnson 'revved up' saw it now." The Kennedy people had notoriously derided LBJ as "Uncle Cornpone" or "Rufus Cornpone", to the delight of fellow sophisticates at their Georgetown cocktail parties and elsewhere – often within the vice president's hearing. They now had to take notice.

Presidential adviser – and intellectual force – Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., was present. "Schlesinger felt almost as if he were watching 'a Southern preacher'. Kennedy was 'wholly reasonable, appealing to the intellect. Johnson was evangelical. He was eloquent, all-out emotionally'. Whatever doubts Schlesinger had entertained about his sincerity on the issue evaporated that afternoon. He realized now, he was to say, that Johnson was a 'true believer'. And anyone who observed the courtesy with which the President treated him at these meetings might have imagined for a moment that Lyndon Johnson was being given, at last, a significant role in the administration". Kennedy "began to invoke him as an authority". LBJ advised Kennedy to "make the point that while he could order Negroes into a foxhole in a foreign country to fight for the American flag, he couldn't get them into southern restaurants while they were on their way to join their units to go to the war. They couldn't get a cup of coffee while they were on their way to die for the flag, he said, and with his huge hand he grabbed the flagpole of the American flag that stood beside his desk, and shook it in his rage at the injustice" [Caro 2012: 257–262]. Like Lincoln, LBJ knew, and used, the power of language.

Rarely does language receive the attention it deserves, despite the quip that the pen is mightier than the sword. When it is "weaponized", it takes on specific characteristics, and if it goes to the dark side becomes propaganda.

PROPAGANDA

Studies of public opinion go back at least to the early 1920s, when a prominent journalist, Walter Lippmann, brought out his pioneering *Public Opinion*, a study of social psychology, media, and the ways in which attitudes develop [Lippmann 1922]. Shortly thereafter, another journalist, Edward Bernays, an Austrian immigrant, wrote his controversial work, *Propaganda* [Bernays 1928].

Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, called for the "engineering of consent", the deliberate manipulation of public opinion on behalf of both government and

corporate interests using scientifically valid psychological techniques. He saw propaganda as a social good (though he used it to benefit commercial interests, including the American Tobacco Company). One should note that the term "propaganda" at the time had little of the negative connotation that emerged so forcefully in the 1930s, when Stalin's Soviet Union, and various Fascist dictatorships – especially Germany under Hitler's misnamed "National Socialism" – used scientific techniques to warp language and shape public opinion. Manipulation, distortion, and abuse of language led to violence and terror.

The roots, though, reach further back than formal studies. Both Lippmann and Bernays had been key officials during World War One of President Woodrow Wilson's "Committee on Public Information", headed by George Creel; the notorious "Creel Committee". The blurb on the 2005 edition credits Bernays with "eerily prescient vision for regimenting the collective mind", and suggests that his *Propaganda* is "an essential read for all who wish to understand how power is used by the ruling elite of our society".

Propaganda has advanced by orders of magnitude since Bernays, but he set the tone for much advertising in the 1930s and subsequently. Wendy Wall has analyzed brilliantly the use of propaganda techniques directed toward "Inventing the »American Way«" [Wall 2008]. The Advertising Council, the National Association of Manufacturers, and corporate interests in general were concerned with friction between management and labor, and sought national unity during World War II and thereafter. They portrayed a "tripod of freedom", that did incorporate such praiseworthy goals as civil liberties, representative democracy, religious freedom, and opposition to racism while concentrating on political goals such as anticommunism and, above all, "economic freedom".

To do so they drank deeply from the well of American popular culture and in the 1940s and 1950s conscripted even Superman, who became their spokesman for "Truth, Justice, and the American Way", as they attempted to roll back the reforms of the New Deal. This campaign by the business community did not achieve all its goals, but on some levels it was so successful that many Americans and some of their more noisy political leaders now seem to think of the term "free enterprise" as having been a prime factor in the American Revolution, perhaps a key principle of the Constitution, and possibly even having been conferred upon the nation by Christianity itself (or, among the more ecumenical, by the *Judeo-Christian tradition*). Wall, though, demonstrates that the term hardly existed before 1935 when "America's corporate leaders" adopted a specific political strategy [Wall 2008: 48–49].

After World War II, and Nazi Germany's downfall, the noted literary and cultural critic George Steiner, wrote of the corruption of the German language. The Nazis, gleefully manufactured unparalleled linguistic ugliness and imposed it for their own sadistic purposes. They created mass barbarism and delusion among intelligent, and even educated, people – actually controlling a population.

Steiner argued that languages can demonstrate that they have within themselves the germs of their own dissolution. "Actions of the mind that were once spontaneous become mechanical, frozen habits (dead metaphors, stock similes, slogans). Words grow longer and more ambiguous. Instead of style, there is rhetoric. Instead of precise common usage, there is jargon" [Steiner 1972: 27–28]. To be sure, Steiner admits, a Hitler would have found "venom and moral illiteracy" in any language, but German was "ready to give hell a native tongue". He asked how could a word such as *spritzen* "recover a sane meaning after having signified to millions the spurting of Jewish blood from knife points?" [Steiner 1972: 29]. Words, he said, gradually lost their meanings "and acquired nightmarish definitions. *Jude, Pole, Russe* came to mean two-legged lice, putrid vermin which good Aryans must squash, as a party manual said, 'like roaches on a dirty wall'. 'Final solution', *endgültige Lösung*, came to signify the death of six million human beings in gas ovens". Beyond the bestialities, the language was called upon "to enforce numerous falsehoods", to say "light" when there was darkness, "victory", when there was defeat" [Steiner 1972: 30]. This happened to a language, even though it is language "that has been the vessel of human grace and the prime carrier of civilization" [Steiner 1972: 38]. Fortunately, the German language demonstrated resilience, and did recover.

German was not unique, except possibly in the extremes to which it went. George Orwell has pointed to similar, if less dramatic, tendencies in English [Orwell 1946], and modern political discourse in America and elsewhere is hardly reassuring.

There were efforts to counter the assaults upon language. The most prominent of these was the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. The New York Public Library has the Institute's records, two linear feet (two boxes), in the Manuscripts and Archives Division [Institute]. The Library indicates that a group of social science scholars founded the Institute in New York City in 1937, in order to enable the public to "detect and analyze propaganda". The IPA conducted research into the methods developed to influence public opinion, it published analyses of current problems, and it promoted the establishment of study groups in public schools for detecting propaganda. It published a monthly bulletin, *Propaganda Analysis* from 1937 to 1941. Additionally, the Institute produced a number of books, the most prominent of which was *The Fine Art of Propaganda*, by Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee [Lee and Lee 1939], which analyzed radio speeches of the populist and anti-Semitic demagogue, Father Charles Coughlin. There also were *Propaganda Analysis*, the *Group Leader's Guide to Propaganda Analysis,* and *Propaganda: How to Recognize It and Deal with It.*

The New York Public Library's IPA website mentions these, and the IPA's "seven common propaganda devices", "The ABCs of Propaganda Analysis". These formed the basis for flyers and other materials supplied to schools, colleges, and "adult civic groups". Americans of a certain age are likely to remember classroom materials from their school days that built around these seven techniques from IPA's publication, *Propaganda Analysis*:

Name Calling – the propagandist uses false, or misleading, labels to create an unfavorable opinion of an opponent. Examples would be "he's a Fascist," or, "he's unpatriotic". In the United States, propagandists have used "un-American", or (in the case of someone who will not agree to outlawing abortion), he or she is a "babykiller".

Glittering Generalities – the propagandist uses them to create a favorable reaction to whatever is desired. A notable recent example is "family values".

Transfer – this device uses the authority and prestige of something hearers respect or revere to associate it with something he or she is trying to get hearers to accept.

Testimonial – originally, this meant the obvious: associating something the propagandist wants accepted with a figure whom the hearer respects. Now, it often includes entertainers, sports figures, or other celebrities often without regard to expertise.

Plain Folks – the use of an obviously populist technique to assert humble background, implying that it is superior to one of privilege.

Card Stacking – in this technique, half-truth masquerades as truth. A mediocre candidate becomes an "intellectual titan". Extremist elements become "freedom fighters".

Bandwagon – this technique "employs symbols, colors, music, movement, and all the dramatic arts" to convince the populace that "everyone agrees" that thus and so should be done, and that anyone who disagrees is out of step.

The Institute for Propaganda Analysis had a few quite active years, but "was dormant during World War II and in 1950 all operations ceased" [Institute].

Upon reflection, it would seem inevitable that the IPA would be controversial. Critics argued that it was too negative, that its efforts were simplistic, or that analyzing advertising would damage capitalism or the economy. An obvious objection would be that the habit of examining news for enemy propaganda would include building a resistance to America's own wartime propaganda and thus undermine national solidarity. According to the New York Public Library's materials, though, the IPA "maintains the reason it suspended its operations in 1942 was due to lack of sufficient funds and not the war".

Undoubtedly, the techniques the IPA identified remain with us today, all over the world, throughout all political parties, and from candidates on all points along the political spectrum. They have been revised and expanded.

THE THREAT FROM FUNDAMENTALISM AND LITERALISM

There is yet another force that may be potentially even more important than propaganda techniques. It certainly is related to language, but is a force that works overtly against language itself, and even the foundation of much of rational thought, logic.

Earlier, this article criticized fundamentalism, defined as literalism. Especially in the United States, there is a strong movement that emerged from fundamentalist

religion, but which has strongly influenced politics, economics, and other realms of human endeavor. It appears to be creating vast numbers of voters – and officeholders as well – who are mentally armed against science, against logical argument, and against the very elements of rational thought.

It is called "harmonization", and springs from the need to protect the idea of biblical inerrancy; the belief that every word in the Bible is literally true. There are numerous inconsistencies in scripture, and instances of clear contradiction as well. The technique at work is easy to overlook or to dismiss, but a cultural anthropologist, Susan Friend Harding, examined it in a remarkable study, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* [Harding 2000]. She describes the process at length. As I put it in a review, "to the outsider, the most startling and ominous of Harding's findings is the manner in which – in a defiance of reason – contradiction actually strengthens faith. The Bible is literally true in every respect. Identifying inconsistencies simply tests faith and (postmodernists take note) forces an acceptance of the inconsistent whole". Believers are forced to harmonize "contradictions and infelicities according to interpretive conventions that presume, and thus reveal, God's design". In this sense, adherents of biblical literalism are "largely – if not completely – shielded against any challenge to their belief; shielded against inroads from the very bases of modern thought: logic and reason" [Skidmore, "Review" 2002]

Many Bible colleges that train fundamentalist ministers have specific courses in "harmonization", courses that deal with biblical inconsistencies and contradictions. The courses indoctrinate until students can accept impossible propositions as true, eliminating awareness that if one thing is true, the other cannot be. This does not mean that fundamentalists are unaware of biblical inconsistencies – they tend to be too well versed in scripture to argue that. Vincent Crapanzano, also an anthropologist, immersed himself in the world of fundamentalism, as did Harding. He says that most of the fundamentalists he interviewed are not bothered by biblical inconsistencies, and often ignore them. "There simply was one meaning, God's meaning – the plain, ordinary meaning, and one intention, God's intention, that was manifested through the divinely inspired authors of Scripture". Fundamentalists, he argues, "adhere to what is popularly called a 'domino approach' to the Bible. For them to admit even one error in Scripture would be to destroy their faith in the whole". This, he says, illustrates the "all-or-nothing" quality of fundamentalism [Crapanzano 2000: 60–63]. When asked about biblical contradictions, many he interviewed dismissed them by saying such things "only appear as contradictions because we cannot understand God's words fully" [Crapanzano 2000: 79].

The argument here is not to attack the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, or any theological principle, nor to judge what is appropriate for a religion; it is absolutely to say that such thought is dangerous outside the theological realm. If large numbers of people are trained to dismiss logical contradiction within their religion as though it is unimportant, they may think similarly when dealing with economics, politics, or other phenomena in the secular world. This is especially true in the United States,

in which the power of fundamentalists has become a major force in one of its two major political parties.

Is it unreasonable to think that dismissal of evolution in religion, for example, may be related to rejection of scientific arguments outside of churches? Brendan Nyhan, who teaches government at Dartmouth College, recently published an op-ed piece in “The New York Times” that may be relevant here. He pointed to a study by Yale Law School professor, Dan Kahan, demonstrating that those who dismiss evolution and human-influenced climate change may be well informed, “they knew the science; they just weren’t willing to say that they believed in it”. In other words, if scientific consensus “contradicts their political or religious views,” they refuse to let that consensus affect their opinion. Nyhan says that his own research and that of his colleagues supports Kahan’s findings, and that “factual and scientific evidence is often ineffective at reducing misperceptions and can even backfire on issues like weapons of mass destruction, health care reform and vaccines. With science, as with politics, identity often trumps the facts” [Nyhan 2014: 3].

The next day, economist Paul Krugman in his own column cited Nyhan’s essay and demonstrated that the same phenomenon affects many of even the most distinguished professional economists – especially with regard to monetary matters. Issues that should be strictly factual and based entirely on evidence, instead were overridden by “faith”. The problem was not ignorance, it was wishful thinking, he concluded. The late economic disaster was caused by a housing bubble, but mainstream economists (while initially shocked at the developments) “quickly rallied”. Somehow, they concluded that the financial crisis had been the “fault of liberals”. The great danger then facing the economy came, not from the crisis itself, “but from the efforts of policy makers to limit the damage”. Both economists and politicians such as Paul Ryan began to issue “dire warnings”, about “printing money”, warning “currency debasement and inflation” would ensue. That this has not happened, nor appears at all likely, in no way has affected their arguments. Krugman noted that it is hardly the first time that “a politically appealing economic doctrine has been proved wrong by events”, but that most of the analysts have followed the same flawed approach of climate-change deniers. They “have gone down the conspiracy-theory rabbit hole,” and claim that, despite the evidence, “we really do have soaring inflation, but the government is lying about the numbers”.

He asked why monetary theory is being treated like evolution or climate-change, rather than simply responding to the numbers, and concludes that “money is indeed a kind of theological issue”. Precisely in line with the argument of this article, Krugman says that “when faith – including faith-based economics – meets evidence, evidence doesn’t have a chance” [Krugman 2014: A17].

Crapanzano does not allege that literalism in the law is rooted in American evangelicalism. He does not look to their religion to discern the roots of the interpretations of the legal literalists. “My aim is to delineate a mode of interpretation, whatever its source”, he says [Crapanzano 2000: xviii].

This, I agree, is what is important. Nevertheless, I argue that it would be unwise not to recognize the potential effect of fundamentalist thought – and literalist thought in general – on policy. Because of America's overwhelming world influence, for example, fundamentalist thought on American policy is almost always pernicious. In years past the US has banned "needle-exchange programs (thus contributing to the spread of AIDS), and family-planning programs, (thus contributing to poverty, starvation, and the subjugation of women)" [Skidmore, "Review" 2002: 89]. Moreover, religious extremism has effects even beyond US policy. Uganda's 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Law provides life sentences for homosexuals. Uganda had laws against homosexuality as legacies of British colonialism, but the impetus for the recent cruelty came from American evangelists, active in Uganda conducting seminars, speaking publically, and working closely with government officials there.

EDUCATION FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT

Populism, itself, is not where the danger lies; it lies in insufficient preparation of the populace to meet the demands of self-government. However utopian it may now seem, an education for democracy is a possibility. It will never be perfect, and nothing can ensure that public choices will always be wise ones, but it would seem that societies can achieve a workable balance between critical awareness, on the one hand, and an acceptance of sufficient civic cohesion to encourage a functioning society, on the other; not easy, but possible.

One of the more prescient social critics and advocates of an education for democracy was the prominent literary figure from the middle twentieth century, Aldous Huxley. He observed totalitarian states, and examined tendencies elsewhere, going beyond literary satire to offer alternatives. He recognized that the mid-century evils were not confined to the obvious examples such as Nazi Germany and the Stalinist USSR.

In 1958, he published an extended essay, *Brave New World Revisited,* evaluating changes since his 1932 *Brave New World.* Many of the evils he warned would come in 500 years were already in place.

Unfortunately, his fiction received more attention than did his prescriptions. Perhaps his influence was brought to a halt by the timing of his death which ensured that it would receive no attention whatever: he died on 22 November 1963, the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Despite the lack of attention it has received, time has not lessened the force of Huxley's thought [Huxley 2004].

"An ethical system that is based upon a fairly realistic appraisal of the data of experience", Huxley wrote, "is likely to do more good than harm". Sadly, though, many systems have been based on a view of the nature of things "that is hopelessly unrealistic", and certainly an ethic of this sort "is likely to do more harm than good". Until rather recently, he said, bad weather and numerous misfortunes were assumed to be the result of malevolent magicians – it was a duty to search them out. That

duty was "divinely ordained in the second Book of Moses: 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'. The systems of ethics and law that were based upon this erroneous view of the nature of things were the cause (during the centuries when they were taken most seriously by men in authority) of the most appalling evil". Such an "orgy of spying lynching and judicial murder", based on the erroneous view of magic, he said, had not since been duplicated until the time of the Nazis and Stalinists, "when the Communist ethic, based on erroneous views about economics, and the Nazi ethic, based upon erroneous views about race commanded and justified atrocities on an even greater scale".

Even in western democracies, he argued, governments and business had, or soon would have, the abilities of what he called "mind-manipulation" that he had portrayed in *Brave New World.* Unless prevented, societies will make use of all the techniques available. "If this kind of tyranny is to be avoided", he said, "we must begin without delay to educate ourselves and our children for freedom and self-government" [Huxley 2004: 325–327]. Within three years, President Eisenhower in his Farewell Address on 17 January 1961 gave a similar warning against the power and actions of the "military, industrial, complex":

"This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together" [Eisenhower 1961].

As Huxley envisioned it, an education for freedom, for self-government, should be an education "first of all in facts and values – the fact of individual diversity and genetic uniqueness and the value of freedom, tolerance and mutual charity which are the ethical corollaries of these facts". Most important: "correct knowledge and sound principles are not enough. An unexciting truth may be eclipsed by a thrilling falsehood. A skillful appeal to passion is often too strong for the best of good resolutions". He anticipated Drew Westin's findings mentioned above, and also was correct that counteracting "false and pernicious propaganda" is a huge task. The only way to neutralize it, he said, is "by a thorough training in the art of analyzing its techniques and seeing through its sophistries. Language," he said, has made it possible for humanity to achieve civilization, but "language has also inspired that

sustained folly and that systematic, that genuinely diabolic wickedness which are no less characteristic of human behavior than are the language-inspired virtues", including sustained forethought and benevolence [Huxley 2004: 327–328].

There may be time still to heed his powerful admonition. "In their anti-rational propaganda" he said, "the enemies of freedom systematically pervert the resources of language in order to wheedle or stampede their victims into thinking, feeling and acting as they, the mind-manipulators, want them to think, feel and act. An education for freedom (and for the love and intelligence which are at once the conditions and the results of freedom) must be, among other things an education in the proper uses of language". All the information for such an education is now available, he says, noting that philosophers have long studied meaning, have analyzed symbols, and have developed the intellectual materials required for "an education in the art of distinguishing between the proper and improper use of symbols" at every level from kindergarten to the doctorate. "Yet", he complains, "children are nowhere taught, in any systematic way, to distinguish true from false, or meaningful from meaningless statements". Answering his own question, "why is this so?" he says that even in democratic countries their elders "do not want them to be given this kind of education".

This led him to the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. "With all the Allied governments engaging in 'psychological warfare', an insistence upon the desirability of analyzing propaganda", he said wryly, "seemed a bit tactless". Even before IPA closed, he said, there were many who found its activities to be "profoundly objectionable". Certain educators feared that propaganda analysis would make adolescents "unduly cynical". Military authorities condemned it, and were fearful that it could lead recruits to "analyze the utterances of drill sergeants". Then came advertisers and the clergy. Advertisers objected because they feared that propaganda analysis might "undermine brand loyalty and reduce sales", while from the clergy came the charge that propaganda analysis might "undermine belief and diminish churchgoing" [Huxley 2004: 329–330].

All these concerns, he said, were well-founded. "Too searching a scrutiny by too many of the common folk of what is said by their pastors and masters might prove to be profoundly subversive". He saw the problem as one of balance between tradition and civic cohesion, on the one hand, and rational analysis, on the other. He believed a middle ground between gullibility on the one extreme and being "helplessly under the spell of professional mind-manipulators", on the other, would be possible. Education should arm the public against "an uncritical belief in sheer nonsense", without making the people reject every well-meant utterance that is not explicitly rational. There may be times when symbolism and tradition have their own values apart from the strictly rational.

He concedes that analysis alone is not the answer, implicitly recognizing that a completely intellectual approach, analysis without regard for feeling, emotion, and for relevant but non-rational factors is not enough. There must also be a positive approach, "the enunciation of a set of generally acceptable values based upon a solid

foundation of facts. The value, first of all, of individual freedom, based upon the facts of human diversity and genetic uniqueness; the value of charity and compassion, based upon the old familiar fact that, whatever their mental and physical diversity, love is as necessary to human beings as food and shelter; and finally, the value of intelligence, without which love is impotent and freedom unattainable". This, he asserted, is the "set of values" that will provide the "criterion by which propaganda may be judged" [Huxley 2004: 330–331].

CONCLUSIONS

The title *Populism and its perils*, is accurate only in that populist appeals may lead both to beneficial or detrimental action. The peril is less from populism, as such, than from those who would use public appeals for something other than for the public good. We need not fear "populism", only to recognize and guard against irrationality, misuse of language, and appeals that would do harm whether or not they are well-intentioned.

Nyhan suggests that we seek to disconnect "the association between identity and factual beliefs on high-profile issues". One can believe in human-induced climate change and still be a conservative Republican, for instance, such as former US Representative Bob Inglis. Similarly one can be a climate scientist and still be an evangelical Christian such as Katherine Hayhoe.

Language is the key. It is vital that appeals be crafted carefully, with attention to clarity, and that they be crafted to appeal to the imagination as well as to the intellect. It is equally essential that the audience be able to exercise skill in analyzing the language it hears, and that the public be able to recognize the extent to which "the public good" would be the true effect of whatever policies are being advocated. The public good must be judged on the basis of what is best for all, not merely the greatest number.

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