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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Populism: A Berlinian Critique

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Abstract

How would Isaiah Berlin assess the current wave of authoritarian populism? The question is worth asking both for the light it casts on populism and for what it tells us about Berlin. In several respects, his view of populism is ambivalent: he is surprisingly sympathetic to the Russian populists of the nineteenth century, sharing their concern for genuine democracy and their reservations about elite leadership; he is especially troubled by the possibility of rule by scientific experts, although he does not reject elite judgement entirely; and his assessment of successful political judgement is not as clearly opposed to the kind of charismatic leadership favoured by many populists (for example, the leadership of Donald Trump) as one might expect. It is only in his treatment of individual liberty and value pluralism that Berlin provides anti-populists with more emphatic arguments, especially when his value pluralism is developed as "liberal pluralism." Overall, the application of Berlin's ideas to populism highlights some of his familiar themes but also shows how his work can be extended in interesting ways. In particular, his sympathy with the Russian populists suggests that he is more of a democrat than is often assumed, and the application to populism of his famous thesis about the dangers of positive liberty can be extended to negative liberty too.

Keywords Isaiah Berlin · Populism · Leadership · Donald Trump · Liberty · Value pluralism

How would Isaiah Berlin assess the current wave of populism? The question is worth asking both for the light it casts on populism and for what it tells us about Berlin.[1] In the case of populism, Berlin's work is surprisingly sympathetic in certain respects, but it also suggests strong lines of criticism based on individual liberty and value pluralism that deepen standard liberal-democratic objections. These arguments highlight familiar themes in Berlin, but they also show how his work can be extended in interesting ways.

Contemporary populists in the developed world are both enraged by the effective exporting of jobs to developing countries as a result of globalisation and fearful of the cultural changes wrought by this and other factors.[2] Such fears and grievances have led to a series of populist highlights (or lowlights): the election of Donald Trump as US President in 2016; the UK's departure from the European Union in 2020 as a result of the Brexit campaign and referendum; the emergence of populist governments in Hungary, Poland, Brazil, and Turkey; electoral successes for populist parties in France and Germany; and, perhaps most dramatically of all (so far), the attempted US "insurrection" in January 2021, when Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol in Washington to try to overturn the result of the presidential election of 2020. In all these cases, populist politics have been marked by economic and other forms of nationalism, aggressive rhetoric and policies directed against immigrants and other minorities, and authoritarian moves to undermine liberal-democratic institutions.

Berlin died in 1997, so did not witness the current surge of right-wing, authoritarian populism. However, he wrote sympathetically about the Russian populists of the nineteenth century (revealing a stronger attachment to democracy than he is often credited with), and several themes of his general political thought are relevant to the populism of our own times, including his affinity with Herder's understanding of national identity, his reservations about the political role of scientific expertise, and his analysis of political leadership.

[1] On Berlin's thought in general see, e.g., Ignatieff (1998), Crowder (2004), Gray (2013), Cherniss and Smith (2018), Hardy (2018), and Lyons (2020).

[2] The general literature on populism is now very extensive. See, e.g., Ionescu and Gellner (1969), Taggart (2000), Mudde (2004), Canovan (2005), Stanley (2008), Müller (2016), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), Anselmi (2018), Eatwell and Goodwin (2018), Galston (2018), Norris and Inglehart 2019, and Moffitt (2020).

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I argue that in all these respects Berlin provides us with useful insights into the populist mind, but also that, even taken together, they do not enable us to reach a conclusive judgement about the merits, or lack of them, of contemporary authoritarian populism. However, a more forthright position, strongly critical of populism both in its currently dominant form and in its essence, does emerge from other key aspects of his thought. The resulting position is not Berlin's own but builds upon the clues he leaves us.

In this way, lines of argument can be drawn out of Berlin's ideas of individual liberty and value pluralism respectively. In the case of liberty, contemporary populism can be criticised using Berlin's famous "inversion of liberty" argument in which some versions of positive liberty are shown to be oppression in disguise. I argue, however, that contemporary populists invert not only positive but also negative liberty. (That negative liberty can be inverted is a possibility that Berlin mentions himself but does not develop.) Similarly, the implications for populism of Berlin's value pluralism, especially when this is developed into a more substantial "liberal pluralism," are almost wholly damning. Populism, with its addiction to oversimplification of social and political problems, to the image of the "real" people who speak with one voice, and to the charismatic leader who brooks no dissent, is very much an expression of the monist mind. By contrast, liberal pluralism stands for the promotion of a diversity of values, hence for attention to a range of different voices. Although liberal pluralism is not entirely lacking in sympathy for populist themes, these affinities are in the end thoroughly outweighed by the criticisms. Liberal pluralism is deeply opposed to populism.

I begin by briefly setting out my understanding of populism, focusing on four features: oversimplification, anti-elitism, the ideal of "the people," and the attraction to charismatic leadership. In the second and third sections, I recover Berlin's views that bear on populism, including his comments on Herder's notion of national identity, the Russian populists, the role of experts, and the nature of successful political leadership, the last of which I test with the example of Trump. So far, I argue, Berlin still does not give us a conclusive case against populism, but such a case is developed in the next two sections. In the first of these, I argue that Berlin's objection to the inversion of liberty (negative as well as positive) can be applied to the contemporary populists. Finally, I bring in Berlin's idea of value pluralism, interpreted and extended in the form of liberal pluralism. From that perspective, populism in its currently dominant form should be roundly rejected in all its dimensions and populism itself is seriously flawed.

Populism

Defining populism is not entirely a straightforward matter, since there are multiple varieties. In the nineteenth century, forms of populism were influential in Russia and the USA that were broadly left-wing in character, emphasising values of democracy, land reform, and redistribution. The Argentinian populism of the Perons in the 1940s–1950s and the Venezuelan populism of Hugo Chavez had a similar left-wing complexion. The twenty-first century, on the other hand, has seen a blizzard of right-wing populists, including those mentioned at the start of the article. All this variety has led some commentators to describe populism as "thin-centred," or possessing little substance of its own (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: p. 6). Another writer sees populism as having "an essentially chameleonic quality," meaning that it changes its appearance according to the local political context, whatever that may be (Taggart 2000: p. 4).

However, most observers agree that contemporary populism is characterised by a series of salient themes, four of which can be identified as follows. First, the belief is fundamental to populists that, as Yascha Mounk puts it, "politics is simple" (Mounk 2018: pp. 7, 38–40). All populists in developed countries are concerned with recent economic trends, including loss of longstanding sources of employment, stagnant wages, and declining standards of living. They agree with more conventional analysts in tracing the cause to globalisation. However, while globalisation, its effects, and how to respond to it are complex issues involving the intersection of multiple factors and values, populists tend to see the issues in black and white terms. The problems of globalisation can be solved, they assert, by building walls, imposing tariffs on imports, reopening closed factories, withdrawing from international institutions and agreements, and reducing or banning immigration—in short by retreating to the kind of sullen nationalism captured by slogans such as Trump's "Make America Great Again" and "America First," and the Brexiteers' "Take Back Control."

Why are these simple truths not appreciated by conventional political parties and governments? Populists answer by pointing to a second theme: obfuscating complications have been promoted by political and other elites—professional politicians, big business, and experts of various kinds. People like these have betrayed the interests of ordinary people out of self-interest, corruptly feathering their own nests, or by showing greater concern for the interests of foreigners or immigrants. Consequently, "the people are virtuous, the elites are corrupt; we should set aside the subtleties of experts and rely on ordinary citizens' common sense" (Galston 2018: p. 34).

Third, it is the interests and values of "the people" that should prevail. By "the people" is meant the ordinary

people, or the "real" people who are the heart and soul of the country—who inhabit the nation's "heartland." Sometimes the heartland is associated with a geographical area, often rural or regional rather than metropolitan, but at a deeper level it is "a territory of the imagination," standing for all that is best and true in the identity of the nation (Taggart 2000: p. 95). Usually, this is conceived in conservative terms based on traditions grounded in a past, often mythical, in which the nation supposedly prospered. Conversely, the heartland excludes those who do not fit: those seeking to change the nation, especially the corrupt and treacherous elites and those who support them, and the various outsiders, the foreigners and immigrants, whose interests the elites promote. In the USA, for example, Sarah Palin and the Tea Party contrast "the real/common/native people who drink regular coffee, drive American-made cars, and live in Middle America (the heartland)" with "latte drinking and Volvo-driving East Coast liberals" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: p. 16).

How is the will of the people, the heartland, to be expressed? Existing social and political institutions are often suspect because, in the populist narrative, they have been captured by elites and other enemies of the people. Hence, a fourth element of populism is that it typically appeals beyond institutions to "a strong and charismatic figure, who concentrates power and maintains a direct connection with the masses" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: p. 4). "Charisma" is Max Weber's term for leadership or power based on the personal qualities of leaders, in particular their ability to engage the emotions of their followers, rather than on tradition or reason (Weber 1948: pp. 245–252). This fits with the central populist themes already listed. The emotions are engaged when populist leaders cut through the complexity of politics and the reasoned advice of experts, and when they identify a favoured constituency as "the people." The charismatic leader is not constrained or distracted by institutions, especially those of liberal democracy, that might otherwise obstruct the people's will—for example, an independent civil service or judicial system, or the media. Hence, we have seen assaults on the media by Trump, and on the civil service and judiciary by other populist leaders such as Hungary's Viktor Orban.

There are problems with the claim that charismatic leadership is an element of populism. For one thing, not all populist leadership is charismatic (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: p. 42). For another, it is tempting to characterise much populist leadership as not merely charismatic but "demagogic," referring to a form of political leadership in which charisma is used specifically to mobilise the feelings of ordinary people. Several currently prominent populist leaders are undoubtedly demagogues, such as Trump, Bolsonaro, and Orban. However, I shall stick with "charismatic" as a description of the kind of leadership typical of currently prominent populist movements. My reason is that those forms of populism usually feature charismatic leadership. Further, the notion of the demagogue is so negatively loaded, suggesting not only appeal but manipulation, and I do not wish to prejudice (more than is avoidable) my assessment of populist leadership from the outset.

To summarise, populists see politics as a simple matter of overcoming the dominance of corrupt and traitorous elites, in order to express and implement the unitary will of "the real people." The will of the people is usually channelled through a charismatic leader prepared to bypass or suppress liberal-democratic institutions.

"The People" and the Elites

How might Berlin have responded to the recent authoritarian populists? It may seem obvious that he would be a hostile witness, since by populist standards he would himself count as a typical representative of the liberal elite—the knighted Oxford professor of social and political theory preaching liberty, toleration, and cultural diversity from the comfort of Headington House. But while it is safe to say that in general he would indeed have loathed the current populists, there are also aspects of populism considered more broadly with which he would have had a degree of sympathy that may be surprising.

One of these aspects is the populist notion of "the people." Berlin addresses this in the two places where he offers substantial discussions of "populism." First, he uses the term "populism," rather idiosyncratically, to refer to Herder's "idea of what it is to belong to a group" (Berlin 2013c: p. 222). To belong in this sense is to fit into or feel at home in the unique pattern of a particular culture. National culture is especially important, although, according to Berlin, Herder does not conceive this politically but sees it rather as "an innocent attachment to family, language, one's own city, once's own country, its traditions"—these are "natural relations which make men happy" as opposed to the State, which is an artificial construct that leads to conflict and aggressive forms of nationalism (Berlin 2013c: pp. 224–225). Berlin evidently endorses this distinction. It is the state that causes problems; the idea of "the people" is in itself harmless and beneficial. I shall return to this sense of populism later, when I discuss the inversion of liberty.

Second, in "Russian Populism" (1960), Berlin shows a remarkable degree of sympathy for what was essentially a non-liberal and revolutionary movement. The nineteenth-century populist cause in Russia took as its principal goals social justice, equality and democratic self-government, in particular for the peasantry, whose conditions remained dire even after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. The Russian populists shared something of Rousseau's romantic

belief in "the goodness of simple men," seeing "the village commune [as] the ideal embryo of those socialist groups on which the future society was to be based" (Berlin 2008: pp. 244, 250). What was lacking in the peasantry, however, was a progressive or revolutionary consciousness, so it was necessary to "go to the people" with the message that radical change was both desirable and possible.

For Berlin, Russian populism was both flawed and admirable. It was flawed by two major difficulties: first, its utopian assumption that it would take only the defeat of the current despotism to cause the desirable system to emerge automatically; second, the contradiction between its belief in the need for the revolution to be induced by the intervention of the educated classes and its fear that those who intervened might turn into a permanent elite that would reproduce political domination. But Berlin also thinks that Russian populism was an admirable protest against political absolutism and the worst excesses of capitalism, and he sees most of the populists as proposing a moderate alternative to the violent and centralist revolutionary methods of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. It was a road not taken, but one that represented important values, including justice, equality, and the democracy embodied in the self-governing commune.

Mention of democracy here should make us question the anti-democratic reputation Berlin has with some readers.[3] In "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958), for example, he spends a good deal of time emphasising points of conflict between the negative liberty he associates with liberalism and positive liberty when it is conceived as collective sovereignty. Referring to Mill's analysis of the tyranny of the majority, he writes that "democracies can, 'without ceasing to be democratic,' suppress freedom, at least as liberals have used the word" (Berlin 2002: p. 211). But "Russian Populism" shows that he is not deaf to the call of democracy, since he seems to agree with the populists that a revolution is justifiable if it is "truly democratic" (Berlin 2008: p. 249).[4] This democratic side of Berlin is confirmed in "Two Concepts" when, at the end of his discussion in section VII of the tension between negative liberty/liberalism and positive liberty/democracy, he concludes that the two considerations are equally basic: "the satisfaction that each of them seeks is an ultimate value which, both historically and morally, has an equal right to be classed among the deepest interests of mankind" (Berlin 2002: p. 212). Liberal democracy is thus, on Berlin's view, a compromise between two fundamental and incommensurable values, not the domination of one by the other.

So far, Berlin is to some degree sympathetic with at least some versions of the populist notion of "the people." What about the corollary of the populists' faith in the people, their animus towards elites? While many readers would expect Berlin to have little time for this, he actually shares the populists' view to a degree. This comes out, for example, in his sympathetic treatment of the Russian populists' worry that those who tried to guide the peasants might become "an arrogant elite of seekers of power and autocracy" (Berlin 2008: p. 245).

In this connection, Berlin is especially wary of the social and political role of natural and social scientists. In "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century" (1950), one of his most interesting essays, he sees scientific experts as playing a central role in the new tendency to approach social problems not by tackling the problems themselves but by changing people's response to them: "human behaviour can be manipulated with relative ease by technically qualified specialists – adjustors of conflicts and promoters of peace both of body and of mind, engineers and other scientific experts in the service of the ruling group, psychologists, sociologists, economic and social planners and so on" (Berlin 2002: p. 82). The threat to freedom posed in the past by "the avowed enemies of reason and individual freedom" has been superseded by the heirs of the Enlightenment, the scientific experts (Berlin 2002: p. 89). Theirs is the world recommended by scientistic or positivist thinkers such as Saint-Simon and Comte, a nightmare in which there is "persecution … by science" (Berlin 2002: p. 90). Most fully realised in the Soviet Union, this is also latent in Western forms of socialism, social democracy, and welfare-state liberalism (Berlin 2002: p. 91).

Berlin's argument here connects with his broader anti-scientism.[5] Scientific knowledge certainly has its place, he allows, as the principal means by which we understand the natural world. There it is appropriate to seek objective knowledge through observation, measurement and experiment. When it comes to the human world, however, we are dealing not just with observable facts but with purposes and values. In that case, we need to take an "inside view," stepping imaginatively into the lives of other human beings, past and present, to understand what motivates them. We need, as Berlin puts it in "The Sense of Reality" (1953) "that sensitive self-adjustment to what cannot be measured or weighed or fully described at all – that capacity called imaginative insight, at its highest point genius – which historians and novelists and dramatists and ordinary persons endowed with

[3] See, e.g., Tully (2013: pp. 27–28). Compare Myers (2013), who notes antidemocratic and democratic aspects in Berlin's work and refrains from judging whether either is dominant.

[4] Berlin's treatment of the Russian populists is also interpreted as pro-democratic by Walicki (2007).

[5] For Berlin's rejection of scientism, see "The Concept of Scientific History" in Berlin (2013a), and the treatments of Vico and Herder in Berlin (2013c).

understanding of life (at its normal level called common sense) alike display" (Berlin 1996: p. 25).

It follows that political decision-making is properly a realm not of scientific inquiry and calculation—although they can help to establish the facts in a case—but of situated judgement. In "Political Judgement" (1957), Berlin argues that the best political leaders possess a sense of reality finely tuned to political context. "What makes statesmen, like drivers of cars, successful is that they do not think in general terms … Their merit is that they grasp the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this situation – this and no other"; they possess "a semi-instinctive skill," or "antennae, as it were, that communicate to them the specific contours and texture of a particular political or social situation," or "a good political eye, or nose, or ear" (Berlin 1996: p. 45). Such leaders have the ability to size up a situation by seeing in it a pattern which can be understood intuitively and to which they can respond.

Does this mean that Berlin is at one with the populists in rejecting rule by experts? Not quite, because situated judgement requires an expertise of its own. It may be that all normal adults share the capacity for such judgement to some extent, but some have a greater share than others. Those who are especially good at it range from "politically competent" leaders who "know how to get things done" to those possessing "political genius" (Berlin 1996: p. 40). This is not to say that such leaders should rule without any electoral accountability or checks and balances. As argued already, Berlin is enough of a democrat to accept the basic principles of liberal democracy. But he would, equally plainly, not be happy with the populist tendency to denigrate all expertise and to suppose that everyone's judgement, no matter how inexperienced, ignorant or unbalanced, has equal merit. Still, expertise has its limits: scientists, in particular, are not the all-purpose saviours that some suppose them to be.

So, at this point, Berlin has a rather greater affinity with the populists than might be supposed. He has positive things to say about populist notions of "the people," and he shares the anti-elitism of the populists at least when it comes to the pretensions of scientific experts to be able to mould a society using knowledge acquired wholly through the methods of the natural sciences—the world of Saint-Simon and Comte.

Leadership: Visionary and Virtuoso

Populism also contains the idea that the people's will is best expressed through a charismatic leader. There is little doubt that Berlin would be personally repulsed by the current crop of populist politicians, but once again he might not be wholly dismissive of populist forms of leadership in general.

Berlin discusses the general shape of successful political leadership in his two articles on judgement in politics, "The Sense of Reality" and "Political Judgement," where he stresses the centrality in politics of situated judgement in contrast with knowledge on the model of the natural sciences. However, in his essay on Franklin Roosevelt, it turns out that situated judgement is only one side of the story, and that there is an alternative way of being a successful political leader. Joshua Cherniss has neatly labelled these two models, "the visionary and the virtuoso" (Cherniss 2018: p. 62).

The virtuoso, exemplified by FDR, is the master of situated judgement. "Politicians of this … type possess antennae of the greatest possible delicacy, which convey to them, in ways difficult or impossible to analyse, the perpetually changing contours of events and feelings and human activities round them – they are gifted with a peculiar, political sense fed on a capacity to take in minute impressions, to integrate a vast multitude of small evanescent unseizable detail, such as artists possess in relation to their material" (Berlin 2014b: pp. 43–44). In this category, Berlin places Bismarck, Lincoln, Lloyd George, and Masaryk, and he sees Roosevelt as "a magnificent virtuoso of this type" (Berlin 2014b: p. 44).

On the other hand, there is the visionary: "a man of single principle and fanatical vision. Possessed by his own bright, coherent dream, he usually understands neither people nor events. He has no doubts or hesitations and by concentration of willpower, directness and strength he is able to ignore a great deal of what goes on outside him. This very blindness and stubborn self-absorption occasionally, in certain situations, enable him to bend events and men to his own fixed pattern" (Berlin 2014b: p. 43). Berlin's visionaries include Garibaldi, Trotsky, Parnell, and de Gaulle, but his favourite example is Churchill, described as driven by "a desire – and a capacity – to find fixed moral and intellectual bearings" in a sense of historical heritage and mission (Berlin 2014b: p. 6).

One might think that mention of a single-minded historical mission would ring very loud alarm bells for Berlin, indeed that any kind of single-mindedness would at least give him pause in view of his value pluralism—that is, his view that fundamental human values are irreducibly multiple, incommensurable, and often conflicting (Berlin 2002: pp. 212–217; Berlin 2013b: pp. 7–14). Is the visionary leader not the very model of the most dangerous kind of monist, the kind of leader who is prepared to impose on everyone a single, overriding goal regardless of its costs in other values? But that is not Berlin's view in the essays on Roosevelt and Churchill, where the two models are presented as equally viable alternatives, with complementary strengths and weaknesses. True, visionaries oversimplify the complexity of reality, and we are rightly fearful of the damage they can cause. On the other hand, there may be circumstances in which we really need the leadership of the visionary, such as that of Churchill in 1940. Consequently,

there may be times when the virtuoso, although perhaps in most cases offering the safer kind of leadership, responsive rather than dominating, may not be enough.[6]

Might it be possible for a single leader to combine elements of both the virtuoso and the visionary? Such a leader could deploy either tendency, or a mix of both, according to circumstances. Cherniss argues persuasively that this is Berlin's view of Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel, who appears to be the leader Berlin approves of more than any other. On the one hand, "Weizmann was certainly a statesman of the 'virtuoso' type: 'On good terms with reality'" and faithfully channelling the hopes and fears of the Jewish people; on the other hand, "he combined his realism with a visionary power reminiscent of Churchill," making others believe in the idea of Israel before it became a reality (Cherniss 2018: p. 65).

The odd thing is that Weizmann was also apparently less successful than many other leaders, including both Churchill the visionary and Roosevelt the virtuoso. He succeeded in establishing the state of Israel and was elected its first president, but he failed to retain real power in the new government or to secure for Israel the liberal, anglophile culture he favoured. This raises the issue of how far success should be the test of a statesman, together with the prior issue of what counts as "success." In Berlin's view, Weizmann "failed" because he stuck to his moral principles, which became a liability in the post-war manoeuvring out of which Israel finally emerged. Berlin's earlier work on leadership had featured a sharp distinction between political success and moral merit, noting that morally good leaders may possess little political judgement while the morally dubious may be excellent judges of political questions (Berlin 1996: p. 47). But the case of Weizmann makes him see that, in Cherniss's words, "heroic failure may bequeath a better legacy" (Cherniss 2018: p. 67). The great statesman is not necessarily the leader who wins every battle.

To test Berlin's views, let us apply them to populist leadership using the example of Donald Trump.[7] Trump's leadership may be the most grotesque currently imaginable, but there can be no doubt as to its populist nature: it answers to all the analytical elements of populism. First, Trump sees politics as simple, reducing his general stance to the slogan, "Make America Great Again" (or, more concisely still, "MAGA"). The meaning of this is largely opaque, but the rhetoric is broadly nationalist, promising to reverse the effects of globalisation on the economy, to confront China on trade issues, to impose tariffs on cheap imports, and to reopen the factories closed by the effects of international trade. On the cultural side, Trump promises to reassert a supposedly traditional model of American identity. Second, Trump opposes elites, vowing to "drain the swamp" of Washington special interests and alleged corruption, sweep away the conventional party politics symbolised by the Clinton and Bush families, discredit the liberal media, and co-opt the judiciary through political appointments. Third, all this is done in the name of "the people," meaning the real people, not those who do not fit the populist mould. As Trump expressed it at a campaign rally, "the other people don't mean anything" (quoted by Galston 2018: p. 37). Fourth, the very vagueness of Trump's stated goals ensures that his appeal is personal and emotional, hence charismatic. He is happy to see himself in this way and to regard his leadership as essential for the people's salvation. "I am your voice," declared Trump when he accepted the Republican nomination for President in 2016.[8]

How successful or desirable a leader is Trump according to the categories set out by Berlin? Is he a visionary, or a virtuoso, or a Weizmannian hybrid? At first sight, he looks like a visionary. It would be absurd to claim that he is, like Churchill, driven by "fixed moral and intellectual bearings." But he certainly pursues a single goal, albeit a vague one, which oversimplifies the complexities of politics and policy, and which he pursues without concern or respect for alternative views or, in some cases, reality—his mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic is a striking example (Ladkin 2020; Rutledge 2020; Zakheim 2020; James 2021). As already noted, the appeal of this program is personal and emotional rather than rational, making Trump a genuinely charismatic figure, and he has used that appeal to attract and motivate a large and rabidly loyal base of followers.

However, is Trump not also a virtuoso? For one thing, there is his reputation as a champion commercial negotiator, the author (via ghost writer) of *The Art of the Deal* (1987). Negotiation suggests compromise, a key capacity of the virtuoso leader. As a description of Trump the politician, this is not entirely convincing because, however true it may have been of his business career before he reached the White House (which is itself doubtful), once he was in office he showed little inclination to compromise and little patience with negotiation in general. As a result, he had little success in persuading Congress to accept his program—for example, his loudly proclaimed commitment to repeal Obamacare (Edwards 2021).

[6] On this point, Berlin may have a glimmer of sympathy with the populist view that politics is simple, at least to the extent that it can be brutally simple sometimes, as in 1940. But see my discussion of liberal-pluralist considerations below.

[7] For academic analyses of Trump's political leadership, see Aswad (2019), Drezner (2020), Ladkin (2020), Mollan and Geesin (2020), Rucker and Leonnig (2020), Rutledge (2020), Zakheim (2020), Edwards (2021), and James (2021).

[8] For further analysis of the charismatic nature of Trump's leadership, see Aswad (2019).

But there is a virtuosic side to Trump which is demonstrated by his ability to get elected to the presidency, against most predictions, in 2016. Multiple factors may be cited here, no doubt, but at least one important consideration is surely his ability to tune into a popular mood of impatience, grievance, and resentment against the routine politics of both main parties. This is in line with the great talent of the virtuoso, the ability to intuit and integrate broad patterns in a mass of data.

So, is Trump one of those rare figures, like Weizmann, who combines both vision and virtuosity? The very mention of Trump and Weizmann in the same breath will no doubt be causing Berlin to spin in his grave, but there is some truth to it nevertheless: like Weizmann, Trump possesses a visionary side and a virtuoso side. There is also a parallel with Weizmann in that the extent to which Trump can be said to be a successful political leader is highly debatable. On the one hand, he was elected President and, even after he had served a term and it became clear what kind of leader he was, 74 million people voted for his re-election in 2020. At the time of writing, he is by far the leading Republican candidate for the presidential election of 2024. On the other hand, even more people (81 million) voted against his re-election, and many of his policies, including his handling of the COVID-19 crisis, were plainly disastrous.

Then again, if Trump is in certain (most?) respects a failure, that does not necessarily disqualify him from "greatness" according to the Weizmann model, in which not all political failure is wholly undesirable. One might argue that there is a striking difference between the two failures, Weizmann's brought about by moral integrity and Trump's by its absence, but on Berlin's own account the successfulness and the moral merits of a political leader are separate issues.

I conclude that the Berlinian verdict on Trump, and by extension on populist leadership more broadly, is so far inconclusive. It is not even clear which of Berlin's leadership categories he belongs to. As much as one can say using Berlin's criteria is that Trump is part visionary and part virtuoso, part success and part failure.

The Inversion of Liberty

At this point, Berlin's position in relation to populism looks inconclusive. He is sympathetic with some formulations of "the people" and with the democratic thrust of the Russian populists, but he still sees the Russian populists as failures, occupying a historical dead-end. His attitude to elites and experts is ambivalent: highly critical of scientific elites as political guides but implying the need for an elite level of political judgement. His account of leadership casts an interesting light on populist demagogues like Trump but stops short of giving us grounds to condemn or defend them conclusively. All things considered, the Berlinian view of populism hangs in the balance.

That is not the end of the matter, because Berlin's thought also contains some sharper tools. One is his well-known argument against the inversion of positive liberty (Berlin 2002: pp. 178–181). In "Two Concepts of Liberty" Berlin distinguishes between negative liberty, the absence of deliberate interference with the individual, and positive liberty, meaning self-mastery or control over one's life in accordance with the "real" or "ideal" or "true" self (Berlin 2002: p. 179). It is the notion of the true self that makes positive liberty such a dangerous idea in the political sphere, according to Berlin. The contents of the true self can be second-guessed by political, intellectual, and religious leaders who claim to understand the individual's true self better than she does herself, projecting onto her their own program. Oppressive policies can then be dressed up as the demands of the true self, reflecting the will of the state or church or political party, such that people can be, in Rousseau's phrase, "forced to be free." What is presented as liberty is really oppression redefined—a "monstrous impersonation" (Berlin 2002: p. 180). Berlin's historical examples of this kind of thinking include Rousseau's General Will and Fichte's picture of the unique essence of the German nation (Berlin 2014a).

This analysis can be applied to populism. To begin with, the notion of "the people" is the populists' version of the true self, a metaphysical construction like Rousseau's General Will and Fichte's *Volk*. As noted earlier, "the people" celebrated by the populists is not simply the aggregate of members of a given political society, or even the members identified by the general, empirical characteristics of that society, but rather an ideal distilled by purging away the various social elements the populist disapproves of—the elites, immigrants, and experts, together with their values of toleration, diversity, and so on. What is left is the ideal essence of the people: the real people, the exemplary residents of the heartland. This view contrasts with Berlin's understanding of national identity, based on his reading of Herder. Berlin is happy with the idea that a nation has a distinctive identity, but he sees this as having an empirical rather than metaphysical character. "A nation is made what it is by 'climate', education, relations with its neighbours, and other changeable and empirical factors, and not by an impalpable inner essence or an unalterable factor such as race or colour" (Berlin 2013c: p. 231). However, the populists' idealised sense of "the people" summons the true self at the heart of the problematic forms of positive liberty: the real or authentic identity present, in potential, within the actual society. This can be manipulated and then held up as a normative standard by (in the populist case) charismatic leaders and their followers.

Moreover, the process involves the inversion of liberty. Contemporary populists are in general anxious to claim that

they speak for liberty, as in Trump's calls to "liberate" states with lockdown provisions at the height of the pandemic, or the demands of the Brexiteers for a return of sovereignty and control. When the putative will of the people is enforced throughout a society, regardless of the contrary opinions of experts and other dissenters, the result is supposed by the populists to be a general liberation. This means that when those who disagree with the populist program are forced to conform with it, they are also forced to be free, since the program expresses the true collective self of which they are a part. But the reality is the opposite of liberty: the imposition on the whole society of the outlook of part of it, dressed up to represent the essence of the whole. Oppression is presented as liberation, just as in Berlin's account.

There are two versions of this story corresponding to negative and positive notions of liberty. Contemporary populist movements typically have pretensions on both counts. In the UK, Brexit promised both negative liberty through emancipation from the bureaucracy of Brussels and positive liberty as restoration of British sovereignty (Papazoglou 2016). In the USA, Trump's populism draws on the American tradition of libertarianism, preaching the negative liberty symbolised by the "Don't tread on me" placards of his supporters, but the other side of the same coin is a demand for positive self-mastery: the ability to live according to traditional cultural values—freedom of speech and religion (at any rate, for one's own opinions and beliefs), gun ownership and so forth—perceived to be threatened by the politics of the elites.

The inversion of positive liberty by Brexit and Trumpism proceeds much as in Berlin's narrative. The idealised "will of the people" authorises oppressive policies tarted up as providing freedom for the nation. But at best the ignorance and bigotry of some is liberated at cost to those on the receiving end. Ultimately, everyone is likely to suffer when the policies inevitably fail even to achieve their declared ends.[9] The supposed freedom promised by populism turns out to be a shared misery.

However, Berlin explicitly acknowledges that negative liberty can be inverted too. In passages to which attention is seldom drawn, he argues that "This magical transformation … can no doubt be perpetrated just as easily with the 'negative' concept of freedom" (Berlin 2002: p. 181; see also p. 37). We are told that certain policies make us negatively free, but they really do the opposite. This claim may immediately seem mistaken. If negative liberty is the absence of interference with my empirical wishes, then are those wishes not impossible to second-guess in the way that the true self of positive self-mastery can be second-guessed? Surely, although others may set themselves up as authorities on my true self, I am the sole authority on my empirical self. My actual and possible wishes are indisputable. In the currently popular expression, "it is what it is." Berlin accepts this to some extent—that is why he upholds negative liberty as a safer political value than positive liberty—but he also allows that negative liberty is not entirely immune to inversion. How is this possible?

Berlin does not explain adequately or offer any pertinent example, but the following explanation may be offered on his behalf.[10] Negative liberty is the freedom of the empirical self, and we regularly have models of our empirical selves thrust upon us—that is, we are frequently told that we are negatively free because we meet norms embodied in models of what we actually want. A striking example is the notion of "homo economicus," a model in which the empirical self is interpreted (quite unrealistically) as the rational, self-interested chooser (see, e.g., Sen 1977; Stretton and Orchard 1994; Biebricher 2018). That is the way people actually think and behave, we are told by classical economists and public choice theorists. Homo economicus does not purport to represent an ideal, as in the case of "the true self," but empirical reality. But when this is taken as the model for political and policy thinking, the result is just as damaging to freedom as the imposition of a skewed or loaded ideal: a narrow set of values (e.g., self-interest, negative liberty, materialism) is allowed to exclude other important considerations (e.g., equality, social justice, positive liberty in various senses). In terms of liberty, what is supposed to be liberation in the negative-liberty sense is really a form of oppression: rule by the market.

Something similar happens with populism. Here, the empirical self, or what we in fact want, is modelled by the Brexit and Trumpist programs. According to these, we want fewer immigrants, less co-operation with the outside world, more guns, more freedom to discriminate against those who are different, and so forth. But this is in fact what only some people want; for others the program is oppressive. When that oppression is presented as liberation, liberty—this time negative liberty—is inverted. The emancipation promised by contemporary populism is a monstrous impersonation of the kind we are warned about by Berlin.

[9] On the failure of Brexit, see Browning (2019) and O'Toole (2019). For the failure of Trump's handling of the pandemic, see Ladkin (2020), Rutledge (2020), Zakheim (2020), and James (2021).

[10] He does refer in this connection to Jewish, Christian, and modern idealist metaphysicians who "speak of the need to release the 'higher' or 'ideal' self from obstacles in its path, such as interference by, 'slavery to', the 'lower' self" (Berlin 2002: p. 37). But this slips back into the language of positive rather than negative liberty.

Liberal Pluralism vs Populism

The argument is often advanced that populism flies in the face of "pluralism" in the sense of the empirical plurality of belief characteristic of modern societies (Müller 2016; Galston 2018). Here, however, I argue that populism can be criticised from the perspective of Berlin's idea of value pluralism, the philosophical theory that fundamental values are, in their nature, plural and incommensurable.[11] More specifically, I propose that current forms of populism stand condemned when value pluralism is interpreted and developed as "liberal pluralism."[12] In this final section, I briefly outline the core idea of value pluralism in Berlin, advocate its development as liberal pluralism, and review the elements of populism from a liberal-pluralist perspective.

In Berlin's account, value pluralism contrasts with ethical monism, which he presents as a deep foundation of authoritarian and ultimately totalitarian politics. Monism in this sense is the ancient idea that ethical values and norms can be reduced to a single coherent rule or system dominated by a single value or narrow set of values. In principle, such a system yields a uniquely correct answer to all ethical questions, hence to all issues of social and political organisation. According to Berlin, monism is the dominant approach to ethical value in the Western tradition, its representative thinkers including Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, the Enlightenment *philosophes*, the utilitarians, Kant, Hegel, and Marx. Through Marx, it promises utopia but delivers the tyranny of the Soviet Union.

For Berlin, ethical monism is deeply mistaken; human values are ultimately plural. "The world that we encounter in ordinary experience is one in which we are faced with choices between ends equally ultimate, and claims equally absolute, the realisation of some of which must inevitably involve the sacrifice of others" (Berlin 2002: pp. 213–214). Fundamental human values—liberty, equality, justice, security, and so on—are plural and incommensurable. Incommensurability here refers to the lack of a common measure according to which values can be weighed against one another. Rather, each is its own measure, speaking, as it were, in its own unique voice. There is no absolute or comprehensive hierarchy among such values—that is, no ranking that applies in all cases. If that is so, then there is no single monist formula that answers all ethical questions or that indicates the shape of the perfect society. It follows that, on the value-pluralist view, the utopianism that is used by some to justify modern authoritarianism and totalitarianism is not merely optimistic but incoherent.

"The problem of value pluralism"—the problem of how to choose among (or trade off) fundamental values when they conflict—thus derails the kind of authoritarian utopianism that was the intellectual foundation of the Soviet Union. But on reflection, it presents a challenge to all political positions, including liberalism. Berlin defends liberalism by emphasising the merits of negative liberty against positive liberty. But how can this ranking be justified in the face of value pluralism? Why should we not stress the positive liberty, equality and solidarity characteristic of socialism, or conservative traditionalism, or even the ultranationalism and violence of fascism?

Berlin concedes that the problem of value pluralism has no simple answer; he mentions a range of possibilities, none of which he develops in detail (see, e.g., Berlin 2002: pp. 42, 47; Berlin 2013b: pp. 17–19). Two main responses are contained in the value-pluralist literature that has built on his work. The first is attention to context. For many pluralists, we have no good reason to choose between fundamental values when they confront one another in the abstract but we may have good reason to make such a choice in a particular concrete situation (see, e.g., Berlin and Williams, "Pluralism and Liberalism," in Berlin 2013a: p. 326). Berlin's use of the inversion thesis to argue for negative against positive liberty is just such a contextual case. As noted earlier, he sees no hierarchy between negative and positive liberty in the abstract; they are equally fundamental values. But in the context of politics, negative liberty is (according to Berlin) the safer option because positive liberty is easier to manipulate politically, with dire consequences, as history has shown. This argument does not apply in other contexts, such as that of purely personal thought and conduct, where the notion of the true self is less harmful.[13]

[11] Galston (2002, 2005) is a liberal pluralist, but in his book *Antipluralism* (2018), he criticises populism from the perspective of pluralism only in the empirical sense, not of value pluralism.

[12] The account of liberal pluralism given here is a greatly compressed summary of arguments in Crowder 2002, 2004, and 2019. These arguments begin with Berlin's scattered insights but reach conclusions beyond those of Berlin himself, although broadly in line with his liberalism.

[13] Berlin sees the idea of rational self-mastery as less objectionable when it is used as "the creed of the solitary thinker", in which form it "enters into the tradition of liberal individualism at least as deeply as the 'negative' concept of freedom" (Berlin 2002: p. 185). It is another question how convincing Berlin's position is—that is, his preference for negative liberty in politics—in view of his concession that negative liberty can be inverted too. Perhaps the issue is one of degree. The present point is simply that Berlin's claim is an example of the ranking of incommensurables by way of context.

An alternative approach to conflicts among incommensurable values is to reflect on the concept of value pluralism itself. To take value pluralism seriously is to respect the full range of human values. This in turn implies that in a desirable society people have real opportunities to pursue more rather than fewer goods. "If there are many and competing genuine values," writes Bernard Williams, "then the greater the extent to which a society tends to be single-valued, the more genuine values it neglects or suppresses. More, to this extent, must mean better" (Williams, "Introduction" to Berlin 2013a: p. xxxvii). Not all goods can be maximised simultaneously, but we can promote as wide a range as possible. Value pluralism thus gives rise to a norm which may be called "value diversity."[14]

Value diversity has political implications. It implies a case for liberalism because liberal societies are characterised by individual rights and liberties that open paths to the pursuit of many different values—a point consistent with J. S. Mill's celebration of "individuality" and of those "experiments of living" that nourish it (Mill 1974 [1859]: ch. 3). It may fairly be objected that this is a hollow promise in the case of classical or neoliberal versions of liberalism, where people's prospects depend on accidents of market allocation. But the promise is better kept by social or egalitarian forms of liberalism in which the state supplements market methods of economic distribution, so that more people have a genuine opportunity to pursue the values that inspire them. I refer to this position as "liberal pluralism." It goes beyond the arguments explicitly offered by Berlin, although its basics are in keeping with his own view.[15]

How should contemporary populism be evaluated from a liberal-pluralist perspective? Let us begin with the liberal-pluralist response to the first element of populism, the belief in the ultimate simplicity of politics. Liberal pluralists will respond that politics is not so simple. There are multiple competing values in play in the effects of globalisation, for example—it does have its costs but it also generates opportunities. The resulting conflicts invite a balanced solution rather than the simple nostrums of economic nationalism. In order to strike such a balance, liberal pluralists will urge that attention be paid to context. As to what that context is, different judgements are possible but some are likely to be more sensible than others. The reality and perhaps irreversibility of globalisation is itself part of the context that needs to be considered. In all likelihood, attempts to "Make America Great Again" simply by reopening the factories and giving people back the jobs they had in the past are likely to be futile. This may not always be true; each case needs to be decided in context.

The second component of populism is the belief that elites are not to be trusted. They are said to include experts who complicate politics unnecessarily and are too apt to serve their own interests or those of foreigners and immigrants. The reply of liberal pluralists to both these charges builds on their recognition of the complexity of politics. Politics is complex because multiple values are at stake requiring balanced and nuanced judgement in context, and such judgement requires expertise, as Berlin recognised. Most obviously, expertise is necessary to deal with questions involving the best means to agreed ends—technical questions that require expert knowledge of specialist fields such as engineering, economics, medicine, education, and so forth. But experts often decide or advise not only on means but also on ends: which goals should be pursued and with what priority. When it comes to identifying and prioritising ends, experts are needed who can advise not only within specialised disciplines but also across multiple disciplines representing different perspectives and values. What may appear to the populist to be a case of experts favouring interests other than those of the people may be a genuine attempt to reach a balanced decision that encompasses a range of values and interests.

It should be conceded that elite judgements are not always so balanced. They sometimes apply fixed models or formulas which ignore important values and have little regard to context. An example is the neoliberal application of narrow economic models (e.g., homo economicus) to multiple fields of life regardless of their suitability to the field in question. Elite judgement can also go astray when experts, because of their specialist training, see their field of expertise and its values as possessing overriding importance compared with other considerations. In the COVID-19 crisis, for example, public health experts sometimes seemed oblivious to the economic costs of the lockdown measures they often advocated, while economists sometimes demanded that economies be kept open or reopened irrespective of public health risks.

In these respects, the liberal pluralist will sympathise with the populist who complains about elites. Liberal pluralists should reject neoliberalism as a monist system which promotes the values of the market at the expense of other genuine concerns—for example, the values distinctive of health care. They should also agree with populists to the extent that health care, although a vital concern, is not the only concern of public policy; economic interests and values matter too. What is required in these cases is the use of the political and policy process to decide on the appropriate balance between these rival considerations in the circumstances. But of course, that is only to say that liberal pluralism rejects the kind of expertise that gives aid and comfort to monism, not that it rejects all expertise.

[14] This is not wholly a matter of multiplicity, since not all values are compatible with one another. There must also be some minimal degree of coherence among the different values pursued in a society, especially those within its political framework: see Crowder (2019): pp. 117–125.

[15] Berlin argues for a redistributive form of liberalism on the basis of the "conditions" of negative liberty: see Berlin (2002): pp. 45–47, 50.

The third element of populism is its insistence that political decisions must echo the voice of "the people." Liberal pluralists would regard this as a sound principle if the populist notion of "the people" were (1) genuinely democratic, and (2) balanced by constitutionally protected individual rights and liberties. Authoritarian populists plainly have little time for (2), as witnessed by their enthusiasm for charismatic leaders and contempt for liberal-democratic institutions. But how far does that populism even satisfy (1)? Some commentators have argued that populism, whatever its failings, does possess a genuinely democratic aspect.[16] As we saw, Berlin himself thinks this is true of the Russian populists of the nineteenth century. However, the democratic claims of populism—certainly of the authoritarian populism now prominent—are tenuous.[17] As I argued earlier, the populist notion of rule by the people turns out to mean rule by a certain approved class of people, the sterling occupants of the heartland. Those who do not fit the mould are excluded or marginalised. Hence, the liberal-pluralist point here is that populism does not respect the full range of values in play—that is, all the values held by the different groups in a society, not just those of favoured groups.

Note that to "respect" values here does not necessarily mean to endorse them. No society can be governed in such a way that every value held by its members can be endorsed and promoted to the same extent. There will be conflicts necessitating choices, usually compromises. But there is a difference between, on the one hand, declining to endorse and promote a value, or deciding that it must be traded off, and, on the other hand, declining to take the value seriously, rejecting it even as worthy of consideration. Populists, with their crude emphasis on the values of the chosen people and their contempt for other views, tend to belong in the latter camp. Far from endorsing the values of their adversaries, they do not respect them.

In that connection, liberal pluralists should concede a point to populism so far as it recalls politics and policy to the values and interests of groups that have been excluded from political calculations. In the USA, for example, this may include white working-class men without college educations, especially those living in regional rather than metropolitan areas—one of the constituencies perceived to have suffered most from the decline of manufacturing industries under globalisation, hence one of the groups that have supported populist parties and leaders electorally. So far as such groups really have been neglected, pluralists might reasonably see populism as a corrective to elite policies that have been too accepting of neoliberal understandings of globalisation. The problem is that populists go too far in the opposite direction, treating the values of their supporters as if they were the only ones that mattered.

Finally, there is the issue of populist leadership: liberal pluralism is deeply at odds with the charismatic leadership beloved of populists. Such leadership offends against the central liberal-pluralist values of contextualism, diversity (of values and cultures), willingness to compromise, and respect for institutions.

Populist leaders are impatient with the subtleties of context, since their role is typically to force through a popular program without regard to fine-grained judgements, especially those of experts, about which policies are best suited to the circumstances. For the populist, the solution is simple and must be prosecuted regardless of opposition and consequences. For the liberal pluralist, on the other hand, things are never so simple. Berlin is right to celebrate situated judgement and the virtuoso leader; he is mistaken to the extent that he places the monist excesses of the visionary leader on the same level. At most it may make sense to see the visionary as needed in the most exceptional circumstances—Churchill in 1940—and the virtuoso as the norm or the default position.

Diversity, whether of values or ways of life, is similarly not a value typically upheld by populist leaders. It is out of keeping with their emphasis on simplicity in politics and on the single, unified voice of "the people." The populist contempt for diversity typically shows in a hatred of immigrants, dissenters, intellectuals, and in general of any voices out of harmony with the popular program. The liberal pluralist, of course, sees social diversity (within liberal limits) as a desirable expression of the deep plurality of human values.

Similarly, compromise is anathema to the populist program but essential for the liberal pluralist. For the charismatic leader, compromise is part of the problem: it is the compromises of the elites that have landed the country in its present difficulties. The solution is to cut through the compromises with the burning sword of the popular mission. For the liberal pluralist, politics cannot proceed without compromise, since conflicts among fundamental political values are seldom settled in any other way.

One of the most important conduits for compromise is the operation of institutions. In a liberal democracy, constitutional conventions such as the separation of powers and checks and balances are, in different ways, means of resolving conflicts among fundamental values. The same may be said of judicial review and the scrutinising role of the media. Populist leaders are typically at war with such institutions, flouting conventions, interfering with checks and balances, undermining or co-opting the judiciary, and denigrating the media if they raise critical questions. Liberal pluralists will

[16] Writers who see populism as representing a genuine version of democracy include Goodwyn (1976), Canovan (2005), Laclau (2005), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), Urbinati (2019), and Frank (2020).

[17] The undemocratic features of populism are emphasised by Crick (2005), Abts and Rummens (2007), Müller (2016), Grayling (2017), Galston (2018), and Mounk (2018).

condemn these actions as assaults on the best means we have of managing value conflict in politics.[18]

In short, the profile of the populist leader very much fits the profile of the anti-pluralist, upholding a single overriding goal, albeit usually a vague one like Trump's "Make America Great Again," oversimplifying the complexities of politics and policy, and pursuing his goal without concern or respect for alternative views and values. This kind of leadership is affiliated with ethical monism and condemned by liberal pluralism.

Conclusion

I close with two points. First, the Berlinian case against populism that I have set out has a different centre of gravity from Berlin's case against the authoritarianism of his own time. The story Berlin tells about the twentieth century is principally focused on the failures and abuses of rationalist approaches to politics embodied in philosophical systems and ideologies, especially Marxism and its precursors. The trail Berlin follows leads back to monism, then forward to Enlightenment scientism, which finally produces the Marxist quest for a utopia guaranteed by a "scientific" understanding of history. Berlin also recognises the contribution of irrationalism to totalitarianism in its fascist form, especially through the work of Joseph de Maistre.[19] But at the time Berlin is most prolific, in the 1950s and 1960s, fascism has been defeated militarily and the main game is the twisted rationalism of Soviet communism.

That emphasis is reversed by the Berlinian case against populism. Berlin's concern with the excesses of rationalism is still present to the extent that his wariness of scientific experts overlaps populist anti-elitism. But the main story that emerges here is about irrationalism. It is about the inarticulate anger of people left behind by globalisation and its economic and cultural changes, an anger that is harnessed by demagogic leaders for their own undemocratic ends, which are themselves scarcely intelligible apart from servicing the leaders' egos. Berlin captured something of this process and its effects in his analysis of the "bent twig" phenomenon in the growth of aggressive nationalism, where historical resentments build to an explosion of violence, as in the case of Nazi Germany.[20] He would probably have seen contemporary authoritarian populism as a bent-twig development, and he might well have joined those who have seen in that kind of populism the potential to mutate into fascism.[21]

Second, it might be questioned whether the Berlinian view I have set out is opposed to populism as such or only to the particular, egregiously authoritarian versions of it represented by the politics of Trump, Bolsonaro, Orban, et al. Readers might conclude that it is only when populism edges into dictatorship that the real problem arises. This impression is perhaps consistent with my discussions of populist leadership and the inversion of liberty, where the key factor is the willingness of demagogues to use populism to subvert liberal-democratic principles, institutions and polices.

However, in my view, the critique of populism goes deeper when it is reinforced by liberal pluralism, which appeals to the multiplicity and incommensurability of fundamental human values. Here the key issue is not the demagogic leader but the concept of "the people" that underpins all populism, which is strongly monistic. If there is any definitive mark of populism, it is that the people is conceived as occupying an authentic heartland with a single outlook that excludes the values and interests of unfavoured groups. It is this that gives the demagogue his opening, but it is a feature of all populism and an inherent flaw.

To some extent, the problem parallels Berlin's analysis of positive liberty, but only to some extent. Berlin defines positive liberty by its focus on the true or authentic self. It is that conception of the subject of liberty that provides an opening, Berlin argues, for the narrow-minded and unscrupulous to introduce their distortions. However, there is a sharp difference between positive liberty and populism in this respect. The authentic self of positive liberty can be defined in an inclusive way that is not so vulnerable to second-guessing and that is consistent with the pursuit of many different values and ways of life—the personal autonomy of J. S. Mill and other liberal thinkers (Crowder 2004: 83–86). By contrast, "the people" celebrated by populism is defined by its exclusiveness and by its hostility to the significant minorities whose outlook and values it rejects. Populism without anti-elitism or devotion to the heartland would no longer be recognisable as populism. While liberal-democratic politics can safely admit positive liberty as personal autonomy—indeed, cannot do without it—such politics cannot be reconciled to populism.

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[18] On the role of institutions in resolving conflicts among incommensurable values, see Crowder (2019): ch. 8.

[19] "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism," in Berlin (2013b).

[20] "The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism," in Berlin (2013b).

[21] See, e.g., the writers cited by Eatwell and Goodwin (2018): pp. xvi, 43–44.

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