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Between Populism and Technocracy.
The Impoverishment of the Individual's Political Role
and the Vulnerability of Liberal Democracy

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows how populism and technocracy weaken liberal democracy by impoverishing individuals' political role: while populism impoverishes this role by involving individuals in massifying processes, technocracy reduces it by detaching them from their active political sphere. Which consequences for the liberal script can we draw from this? As the political role of the individuals fades, so do representativity and responsibility. And if representativity and responsibility deteriorate, the vulnerability of liberal democracies increases dramatically. With a political-philosophical analysis of the roots and problematic issues of technocracy and populism, the paper unearths not only their differences but also, and above all, their common features and shared starting and ending points. Furthermore, addressing the connection between (the crisis of) representativity and the individual makes it possible to conceptually refuse populism and technocracy's pretence to be a better alternative to or at least an improvement of the liberal scripts.

1   INTRODUCTION

In recent years, liberal, representative democratic systems seem to be not only increasingly under attack but also increasingly vulnerable and in danger of breaking down. Looking for the reasons behind these vulnerabilities of the liberal script (cf. Zürn/Gerschewski 2021), a process of impoverishing the political role of individuals came to light as one of its most relevant weak points. This kind of (process of) impoverishment can be observed in both populistic and technocratic approaches to politics. These phenomena, commonly considered opposites, are also both considered dangerous to the democratic system. Furthermore, both phenomena, in their specific different ways, present themselves as a better alternative to the liberal, representative democratic system. Thus, some questions arise: Is there a connection between individuals' impoverished political role as a weakness of liberal, representative democracies and (the rise of) technocratic and populist phenomena? Which consequences for our political system could we draw from a connection like this?

By approaching issues of political theory from the perspective of political philosophy, I develop an analysis of populism and technocracy to discover their philosophical roots as well as problematic issues and bring to light their effects on individuals' political role. This approach enables us to underline not only the differences between populism and technocracy but, above all, their common features. Furthermore – by addressing the connection between (the crisis of) representativity and the individuals – the results of this paper make it possible to conceptually refuse populism and technocracy's pretence to be a better alternative to or at least an improvement of the liberal democratic system.

We can define technocracy as a (possibly) authoritarian, anti-pluralistic phenomenon in which (the members of) an allegedly neutral and rational administrative leading elite tackle moral and social problems as technical ones. On the other hand, we can define populism as a (possibly) authoritarian,

narrow form of collectivist political theology that, despite its exclusive and anti-institutionalist, illiberal attributes, is embedded in a liberal democratic framework with which it entertains a very controversial relationship. In the following sections, we address the specific components of these definitions.

2 TECHNOCRACY – CLASSIFICATION

"Technocracy" can indicate different phenomena (i.a. Meynaud 1964: 73). In general, "technocracy" can refer to "a decision-making method", "a type of government", or "a type of regime" (Tortola 2020: 72), but also to "a form of power, legitimacy, representation" (Bertsou/Caramani 2020: 93). All these different meanings go back to specific ways of tackling both technical and social problems (Bertsou/Caramani 2020: 93; Centeno 1993: 312) based on both a deep distrust in politics "as inefficient and possibly corruptive" and a "superiority of professional and technical methodologies and paradigms" (Centeno 1993: 313). According to this meaning, technocracy profits from the crises of representative democracy (Caramani 2017: 57–59; Centeno 1993: 324; Fisher 2009: 49) and takes pride in being rational, ideologically neutral, and apolitical. However, all different meanings of "technocracy" also go back to the more general phenomenon of elitism (Caramani 2020: 4; Centeno 1993: 309) – the rise of a class of rulers or leaders who fulfil their role due to some of their peculiar characteristics.

As a very broad definition, thus, technocracy is a particular case of elitism and includes a specific class of rulers or leaders, defined through some inborn features as well as their technical capacity (Meynaud 1964: 27). However, having technical capacity is necessary but not sufficient to be a technocrat. Even if the definition of a technocrat is rooted in the definition of "technician" (Meynaud 1964: 25) as someone (thought to be) without ideologies, (thought to be) specialised in a particular matter and (thought to be) capable of finding straightforward solutions (Ellul 1954: 353; Meynaud 1964: 23), the technician becomes a technocrat when they are selected or appointed rather than elected (Caramani 2020: 4; Sanchez-Cuenca 2020: 55) and assume autonomous (Centeno 1993: 321), social all-embracing political decision-making functions (Centeno 1993: 309–10; Marcuse 1967: 18; McDonnel/Valbruzzi 2014: 657; Meynaud 1964: 23, 258).

In general, we can speak of (1) utopian (Bickerton/Invernizzi Accetti 2020: 32) and (2) realist[1] interpretations of "technocracy"[2].

2.1 UTOPIAN TECHNOCRACY

Supporters of utopian technocracies do not (directly) combine their advocacy for a technocratic elite of rulers with a specific, already existing political landscape. Their conception of the ideal state shapes the „good ruler" features. This interpretation has philosophical roots above all in three models, namely Plato's (2013), Tommaso Campanella's (1983), and Francis Bacon's (1983).

In his masterpiece "Republic", Plato (2013) describes a utopian state structured as an expertocracy (Lenk 1973: 12), that is, a state based on the role that experts play in it. The platonic experts owe their position to their inborn, personal

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1   A realist point of view emphasises the descriptive over the normative aspect. It is often inspired by or refers to Niccolò Machiavelli (1995: 3–5), according to whom the political sphere should be described as it is and not how it should be.

2   A position between utopian and realist theories of technocracy is held by Henri de Saint-Simon, which concentrates on the role of the scientists who can enlighten all humanity with the results of their inquiries. In this theory, each social relation is a physical phenomenon, and society is an organised body in which sovereignty should be distributed proportionally to competencies. Saint-Simon is convinced that his conception overcomes social and political inequalities that could (and do) follow from this distribution. Despite his inclusive efforts, he cannot offer a valid solution for the major problem of an exclusive selection of political representatives.

attributes that influence the actions of the individuals and enable them to gain particular practical skills. The fact that the acquisition of practical skills is bound to inborn attributes shows the (almost) impossibility for anyone to really change their status and thus the general static nature of the class system of the Platonic state. This state is a peculiar expertocracy that assumes it is the experts' nature to fulfil their duties in the proper – and best – way. However, it does not suffice that the (expert) rulers have specific inborn features or even practical capacity to speak of a technocracy – they have to act and make political decisions. Even though these experts – philosophers from the platonic perspective – would have preferred to only follow their natural disposition oriented toward (the contemplation and knowledge of) the Good and avoid any involvement with the political world, it is this same natural disposition – philosophers' reason – that forces them to rule their state to avoid obeying someone worse than themselves (Plato 2013: 347c-d11, 520d1–521b10, 516c2–517c8). This model is an "expertocratic" state with strong aristocratic, elitist features. It is important to underline that the platonic rulers are not pure technocrats: they do not replace ethics with technology as the guide for their political decisions – which, as we see in Section 3, General Premises and Essential Problems, is a fundamental characteristic of (at least a certain kind of) technocracy. Rather, it is their knowledge of the Good that not only guides them in these decisions but also justifies their rise to the role of ruler.

The aristocratic character and, above all, the philosopher's tendency to avoid the practical, political life assume a negative connotation in Campanella's "City of the Sun" (1983). Unlike Plato's philosophers, Campanella's rulers are capable and willing to take over not only theoretical but also practical tasks, confident that they will fulfil them in the best possible way (Campanella 1983: 125–126). In this sense, Campanella's expert rulers fit the definition mentioned previously of technocrats much more directly than the platonic philosophers. Campanella (1983) also approaches the topic of how easy it might be for the experts or technocrats to be instrumentalised by a current power, whichever it is – an issue that is still highly topical.

Up to this point, the expansion of the human dominion – or, better said, the expert dominion – over the natural world through knowledge and the understanding of the laws of this world (Bacon 1983: 205) aimed to achieve a better organisation of the state. In Bacon's "The New Atlantis" (1983), however, this expansion begins to strive for its own self-enlargement. It allows a first connection to a "scientification" of the world – seeking to empower and expand human dominion over nature through the knowledge of its laws for the sheer sake of this empowerment and expansion itself. The transition to this scientied world (cf. Habermas 1968: 105, 118) raises the question of whether this dominion is directed only at the natural world or towards fellow humans, who decide what is useful and what is not and where human limits lie.

2.2   REALIST TECHNOCRACY

Unlike the supporters of utopian technocracies, the supporters of realist technocracies refer to a specific sociopolitical system that defines the features of the ruling elite. Realist theories can assume

1. a conservative-functionalist.
2. a progressive(-democratic).
3. a revolutionary approach.

We can refer to at least three theories to illustrate the specific traits of these approaches, namely Vilfredo Pareto's (1916), John Kenneth Galbraith's (1967), and Thorstein Veblen's (2001).

2.2.1 CONSERVATIVE-FUNCTIONALIST

A conservative-functionalist approach deals with the sociopolitical system "as is" and wants to implement its functionality. In a conservative-functionalist approach like the one presented by Pareto (1916), realism replaces the utopian factor. From a realist perspective, the idea of a perpetual exchange of ruling elites at the top of society becomes explicit. Pareto's theory of the *circulation of the elites* (1916) describes an automatic praxis according to which, in each social group, each ruling class or elite will always be followed by another, *different* ruling elite (Pareto 1916: §2026–2059). This approach implies that individuals who possess qualities through which they can rise to power can (at least theoretically) change their position in society. However, the real possibilities for this change are limited. In a realist theory of technocracy, the inborn personal features (which have such a fundamental role in the exclusionary selective process of the ruling class in a utopian expertocracy) are replaced by external but still pre-existent socio-economic conditions (like family, wealth, or social connections) (Fisher 2009: 58–60) that are just as immutable and exclusionary as the inborn features.

From a realist perspective, the possibility of rising to a ruling function and, thereby, the possibility of a non-exclusive composition of ruling elites seems even smaller than in the case of utopian theories. In addition to personal attitudes, in a realist theory, external factors must also be considered, whose necessary modification requires a change[3] in the entire social structure.[4]

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3   The success of this change presupposes a lack of interest of the elite in its structural perpetual existence.

4   An even more conservative approach is Robert Michels' iron law of oligarchies (1989: 371). Michels (1989: 383–384) refers to the circulation of elites as an unavoidable, endogenous element of all social organisations and accompanies it with a strong criticism of the democratic party system.

2.2.2 PROGRESSIVE(-DEMOCRATIC)

A progressive(-democratic) approach aims to change the sociopolitical system from the inside. Galbraith's theory (1967) can be considered an instance of this kind of approach to technocracy. His theory has two major pillars.

– In a modern society built upon the subdivision of labour, the exercise of power is in the hands of different groups ("artificial group personalities") so that more individuals from different social backgrounds have access to authority positions.
– The exercised power is based on information or knowledge (Galbraith 1967: 69) in the sense that a group's responsibility in the decision-making process should be based on the truthfulness of this information or knowledge. Participants in the decision-making process should be active in these processes to gain access to the necessary information. However, even these active participants risk exclusion from the decision-making process because the few who currently exercise authority tend to keep the necessary knowledge for themselves, making their authority a mere exercise of power (Galbraith 1967: 86–87). A strong and independent education system becomes indispensable to avoid or at least limit this mutation.

To undermine the idea of an infallible elite of experts from the inside, knowledge, and information, both individual and shared, should be as true as possible (accessible, verifiable, modifiable, disputable, improvable), and the exercise of critical thinking and pluralism should be encouraged within the education system (Galbraith 1967: 370f). All individuals should at least have the possibility not only to acquire the same knowledge but also to criticise and develop it. This eventuality would assure the interchangeability of the members of the ruling elites and orient the decision-making process towards the actual interests of society.

However, it also raises the question of who should govern and organise this kind of educational system. A further relevant question is how to handle a situation where the interests of a social group that has risen to the ruling elite status through a fair acquisition of knowledge are clearly meant to damage other groups or the foundations of the democratic system itself.[5]

2.2.3 REVOLUTIONARY

A revolutionary approach aims to make such fundamental changes in the system as to revolutionise it. The revolution of the capital system theorised by Veblen is based on a sort of soviet of expert technicians and the "impersonal and dispassionate" character of technology (Veblen 2001: 66, 81). Veblen's approach (2001) is problematic for several reasons.[6] For the aim of this paper, it is particularly interesting how he seems to ignore that technology is not only an instrument to complete otherwise limited humanity (cf. Gehlen 1958) but also a social factor that deeply modifies our physical and psychical world. Ignoring this aspect means avoiding the complexity of social relations. This oversimplified approach to the social world and the role that technology plays in it is important in defining the *problem of homogenisation,* as discussed in Section 3.2.3.

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5   The well-known question of whether and how a state can really guarantee the prerequisites of its existence fits this background (Böckenförde 1976: 42–64).

6   Veblen ascribes superior moral features to technicians, thus finding no justification in their professional qualifications, for these qualifications do not imply per se that their bearers are less prone to pursuing personal advantages in public offices than others. The technicians' primacy finds its only justification in comparing it with a very negative picture of managers and politicians. It is also unclear what role the other members of a society ruled through the soviets of technicians have.

3   TECHNOCRACY – GENERAL PREMISES AND ESSENTIAL PROBLEMS

After this brief historical and theoretical overview, it is now possible to address two general premises and at least three essential problems of technocracy. The first general premise is the existence of an industrial superstructure made up of a combination of natural science, technical, and industrial systems (Gould 1968: 15; Schubert 1981: 21). The second general premise is the scientification of the human world (see Section 2.1). From this premise follows an instrumentalisation of politics (Schubert 1981: 219), which becomes the response to practical constraints, a mere instrument for resolving factual problems. The primacy and even normativity of practical constraints (Ellul 1954: 301; Marcuse 1967: 31) depends upon a mutation of the concept of authority (Schubert 1981: 27–28): „authority" turns into the authority of natural laws or „administration of things" (Centeno 1993: 309) that only a technocratic elite or oligarchy can manage. Consequently, even if technocratic societies are individualistically shaped (Frisch 1971: 107) by focusing on the (more or less) extraordinary capacities of a specific individual, neither responsibility nor decision-making can be assigned to a single person but only to the expert elite (Fischer 2009: 28) as a social system or social group. This effect is the starting point of a process of depersonalisation (Berkemann 1973: 194; Lenk 1973: 164) that opposes representativity, parliamentarianism, and, thus, liberal democracy.

A twofold consequence is discussed in the next sections: 3.1 a new anthropological status for the individuals (Schelsky 1961: 5–6) and 3.2 both a socialisation of the technical and a mechanisation of the state (Rohpol 1973: 62).

3.1   NEW ANTHROPOLOGICAL STATUS

The new anthropological status shows how, in a scientied world, (most) individuals are only

relevant insofar as they "work" as gearwheels in a larger apparatus (Mannheim 1940: 240–244; von Hayek 1959: 1–30). This circumstance implies an alienation process (Schubert 1981: 23) that compromises the autonomy of the individuals. Individuals regress into a sort of underage or unaware status (Dahl 1989: 52ff.; Haring 2010: 249) that also influences their political role. Individuals become passive components of a (political) mechanism on whose "motion" they do not decide (Ellul 1954: 123). The transformation of individuals into passive elements (Fischer 2009: 3ff.) of the *jeu politique* and their exclusion from the public discussion of socio-political, practical issues imply their depoliticisation (Habermas 1968: 132) and, at the same time, their massification (Ellul 1954: 300, 335–338). The dissolution of individualities into passive gearwheels excluded from the "deliberation in the public decision-making" (Fischer 2009: 137) is an important, weakening factor of the script of the current liberal, representative democracies (Fischer 2009: 49–52).

3.2 SOCIALISATION OF THE TECHNIQUE AND MECHANISATION OF THE STATE

"Socialisation of the technique" is the process through which technology or technological approaches and methods rise to the status of the best possible solution, even in fields in which other methods or approaches could also be applied (Larochelle 1993: 129; Morandi 1997: 122), like the political field. In fact, it is important to consider that in the "domain of public policy", not (only) technical but (also) normative issues are at stake (Fischer 2009: 145–146). This process fits with the transformation of technicians into technocrats (see Section 2.1) and marks the passage from expert contributions to public political deliberation to their exclusive, decisive role in it, that is, the passage to technocracy (Centeno 1993: 318).

The "mechanisation of the state" – the mutation of the living, political body of the state into a perfectly calibrated gigantic machine, the components of whose only function is to perpetuate the existence of the whole – refers to a depoliticised society (Tortola 2020: 63) for which the state is a universal technical body or social machinery (Niederwemmer 1973: 38). In this mechanised state, politics functions only as an auxiliary expedient to the extent of the efficiency (Centeno 1993: 312; Fischer 2009: 26; Gebauer 1973: 83) pursued by a prevalent ideology of achievement and success (Lenk 1973: 112). The impact that this mechanisation has on social, political, and economic decisions is so strong that it changes all decisions, even moral decisions, into deductions based on technically processed data (Gebauer 1973: 78; Lenk 1973: 12, 112; Schelsky 1961: 9). All this results in a new kind of (technical) morality (Ellul 1954: 353) and/or in a crisis of previous value systems (Habermas 1968: 54, 123; Rohpol 1973: 76).

It has already become clear that technocracy presents some problems. To an alleged "immanent necessity of technical progress" and a just as alleged undisputable rationality in tackling technical and practical issues (Habermas 1968: 120; Marcuse 1967: 29), we also add three further problems.

1. Its authoritarian nature.
2. The selection of the ruling class.
3. Homogenisation.

3.2.1 AUTHORITARIAN NATURE

One of the most critical aspects of technocracy is its anti-democratic (i.a. Haring 2010: 249), authoritarian (Armytage 1965: 70; Centeno 1993: 326), or even totalitarian (Ellul 1954: 23) nature. We have defined elitism as the rise to power positions of a small group of individuals due to some of their specific traits. However, the inborn character of most of these traits' limits or even excludes the possibility for "outsiders" to become part of this elite. Thus, the "inborn" members of the group

are the only ones who can and should rule. Furthermore, since nobody else has the "right" to replace them, their decisions cannot be criticised. This situation is particularly clear in the case of a *scientified* world led by a technocratic elite: who decides what is useful? Who decides where the human limits are? From a technocratic perspective, these questions do not need any answer other than the fact that the experts are the only ones capable of making all the relevant decisions. In this sense, technocracy is also anti-pluralistic: it refuses to consider political conflicts as something more or different than an obstacle to the technocrats' goal of reaching (what they consider) the public good (Bertsou/Caramani 2020: 94).

3.2.2 SELECTION OF THE RULING CLASS

Like the problem of the authoritarian nature, the problem of the (exclusive) selection of the ruling class is based on and already explained by Plato's (2013), Campanella's (1983), and even Saint-Simon's theory of technocracy (see Section 2.1). According to Plato (2013), reason propels philosophers to participate in public life, while, according to Campanella (1983), only a few have the inborn capacity to master all subjects needed to rule the city. Neither of these selection processes of the ruling class assures non-exclusivity. Saint-Simon's solution, based on co-option, is also unlikely to overcome political inequalities. Overcoming these inequalities could only be possible if the whole population were eligible. However, if the leaders choose within their class, then the class of the rulers would still be exclusionary. If they do choose outside their class, they are not choosing those thought to be the "better ones" and would thereby betray their role. Changing social status is not dependent on one's efforts, a change in the social system, or a combination of these two aspects but it seems to be solely a matter of natural disposition that cannot be controlled. This situation strengthens the impossibility of overcoming exclusivity.

3.2.3 HOMOGENISATION

Homogenisation is one of the most specific and philosophically problematic issues of technocracy. Because of its close dependence on the *scientification* of the world (Schelsky 1961: 5–6), Helmut Schelsky's extreme picture of this phenomenon helps in understanding which kind of influence homogenisation can have on social life in general and on politics in particular.

"Homogenisation" means that all decisions, even moral decisions, turn into deductions based on technically processed data and thus represent a specific socio-anthropological condition (Schelsky 1961: 6, 9). By reducing all kinds of problems and all kinds of solutions to the same common denominator of "technical" deductions, homogenisation suppresses the difference between technical and moral problems. Homogenisation gives the impression that the whole world is a human artefact that humans can manipulate as they wish (Schelsky 1961: 14–15). However, this artificial, always modifiable, no-longer natural environment implies a likewise artificial and always modifiable social and psychological environment. This environment can, in return, modify and subdue the social and intellectual human existence (Schelsky 1961: 16–18). As a consequence, individuals end up not only not being the real masters of the world they believe to fully control, but also – by trying to subjugate it under their technical capacities – they end up subjugating themselves.

In a scientified world, homogenisation changes both the role of individuals and the role of politics. On the one hand, individuals should only choose the best way of reaching greater efficiency – the goal that precedes all possible alternative purposes or ideals. Politics, on the other hand, enables the combined functioning of all branches of applied science, with efficiency as its most important standard.

As the necessity and the will to develop alternative purposes and ideals fail, a central point of the democratic system also fails, namely the possibility that it offers a choice between different ways of life. This failure marks the gap between democracy and technocracy (Caramani 2020: 21; Centeno 1993: 327). In a democracy, alternative purposes beyond the efficiency of technique and for which it should also be possible to ascribe or claim individual moral responsibility can and should be openly discussed.

4   TECHNOCRACY – BROAD DESCRIPTION

To summarise, we can say that within a technological society undergoing a crisis of representative democracy and the liberal system in general, there is growing pretension from an alleged apolitical, neutral, and above all rational subset of experts that they alone are best suited to handle all kinds of issues. This pretension becomes stronger and stronger to the point of elevating these experts to leading roles that are not to be politically questioned. To determine the relationship between the crisis of the liberal system and the rise of technocracy and whether technocracy is a threat to, a symptom of, or a solution to this crisis (Bertsou/Caramani 2020: 247–270), we should thus concentrate on a new concept of authority that implies and rests on practical constraints turned normative. This "factual" normativity depersonalises politics, and either confirms – if the rise of technocracy is considered a symptom of the crisis of the liberal system – or sets off – if the rise of technocracy precedes and threatens it – a deep conflict with liberal democracy. By bringing these elements together, we can describe *technocracy as a primarily anti-pluralistic, authoritarian administrative system in which moral and social problems are and must be handled as technical problems.*

5   POPULISM – GENERAL PREMISES AND ESSENTIAL PROBLEMS

It is nothing new to say that populism is a problematic phenomenon, difficult to describe (Arditi 2007: 54–60; Canovan 1981: 3–5; Ionescu/Gellner 1969: 3; Müller 2016: 6–8; Priester 2007: 12–14; Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 1–5; Taggart 2000: 10–22; Urbinati 2019: 1–3). The difficulty concerns not only its definition or the definition of its essential features, but also its connections with "thick-centered" or "full" (Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 6) ideologies like liberalism (Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 116; Priester 2007: 48–50; Urbinati 2019: 129–129, 150) socialism (Arato 2019; Olson 2017; Schamis 2006) or fascism (Finchelstein 2017; Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 33).

To say that these ideologies are full or "thick-centred" implies a description of populism as something else, such as a "thin ideology". Thin ideologies have a minimal programmatic core and are parasitic to full ideologies in the sense that the former rest upon the latter to fulfil their purpose. Populism, however, has proper features, whether deemed essential or not for its definition, along with specific contents that make it recognisable as a specific phenomenon.[7] Otherwise, we would only address the "host ideologies" (Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 40) and try to understand *their* populistic traits. Instead, we address populism as a separate entity because populism appears as a phenomenon per se, which does not *need* other ideologies to survive. On the other hand, the minimal programmatic core of populism as a thin ideology makes it easier to *use* other ideologies to reach its goals. It is the so-called "Cinderella complex" of populism (Berlin 1967) that makes it easier for it to adjust to other ideologies. Populism exists and survives for itself, but

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7   I deliberately use "phenomenon" and "ideology" to mark the difference between the phenomenon of populism and ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, and fascism.

it flourishes by finding support for its features in other ideologies.

Among the possible features of populism, we can enumerate the opposition of the "people" to a ruling elite, the presence of a "general will" (Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 9) as the core of some kind of "identity politics" (Müller 2016: 2–4), and a charismatic leader (Finchelstein 2017: 20). And this list is far from complete. Furthermore, the choice of these features is not univocal, and the choice to define populism through its features is not undisputed. The possibility of defining populism as an ideology is also problematic per se. A key question (Ionescu/Gellner 1969: 3) has always been whether populism should be treated as an ideology (Albertazzi/McDowell 2008: 4; MacRae 1969: 153–166), as a movement (Minogue 1969: 197–211), as "ruling power" (Urbinati 2017: 527), as a syndrome or "dimension of political culture" (Laclau 2018: 18; Priester 2007: 19), and this list could go further, too.

6   POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY

Possibilities of defining populism other than through its essential features (Finchelstein 2017: 20; Wiles 1969: 166–169) depend upon its purposes, strategies, causes (Schäfer/Zürn 2021: 73–88), and supporters (Canovan 1981: 13; Stewart 1969: 180), or alternatively, upon different ways to tackle it as an object of study (Arditi 2007: 54–87; Hawkins et al. 2019: 1–24; Skenderovic 2021: 41–54). The former attempts address mostly specific cases. A sound example of this kind of attempt is the notorious distinction between the agrarian populism in the US and Russian populism (narodnichestvo), a distinction that aims to go back to its historical, political, economic, and intellectual roots (Hofstadter 1969; Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 2–5; Priester 2007: 78–91; Taggart 2000: 27–37, 46–58; Walicki 1969). As for the latter line of thought, concerning the intellectual roots of populism, we can

refer to Laclau's standpoint with respect to Margaret Canovan or Peter Wiles (Laclau 2018: 3–10), or to Cas Mudde's and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser's ideational approach to populism as an alternative to, for instance, a political-strategic or a socio-cultural approach (Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017: 27–100), or to Canovan's theory (1992; 2004). Scholars' opinions diverge, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to solve these controversies, and instead to sketch a broad picture of populism that is still strong enough to answer the research questions and be acceptable within different lines of thought.

Since the relationship between populism and democracy is of particular importance for the aim of this paper (Abts/Rummens 2007; Arditi 2007: 41–53; Canovan 1999: 2–16, 2005: 65–90; Jörke/Nachtwey 2017; Rovira Kaltwasser 2012: 184–208, 2017: Part I; Stavrakakis 2018a, 2018b; Urbinati 2014: 128–170), we locate populism within the context of liberal representative democracy (cf. Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 1; Urbinati 2014). Even if populism is considered a threat to democracy or a "dimension" of different political views that is "neither democratic nor anti-democratic" (Worsley 1969: 247), representative democracy nourishes it and makes it possible for populism to put its politics on stage (Taggart 2000: 6), even if these politics prove to be illiberal (Mudde 2004: 561). The wording of the previous sentence is not accidental. A great number of scholars describe the specific way that populism has of dealing with and profiting from being seen, heard, and staged by and through the media[8] as an "audience democracy" (Gallstone 2018: 9–13; Manin 1997: 218–234; Manucci 2017). Later, we briefly see this meaning and how an audience democracy differs from a liberal democracy. However, even if we think populism aims to redefine (its own form of) democracy, how this democracy – intended as "government by the

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8   Both the traditional media and the internet, which represents an extension of the media issue that is impossible to tackle here.

people" (Canovan 1981: 172–224; Taggart 2000: 6) – should be pursued reveals a profound difference between a populist and liberal democracy (Pasquino 2008: 20). In this sense, the context of liberal, representative democracy serves as a framework that populism bitterly criticises, tries to drastically reshape (Mastropaolo 2008; Urbinati 2014) or even tends to subvert or destroy. This controversial relationship between populism and liberal representative democracy concentrates above all on the liberal and/or procedural, constitutional traits of the latter instead of its democratic (or more republican) traits (Abts/Rummens 2007: 409–415; Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 80–86; Müller 2017: 590; Rummens 2017; Urbinati 1988: 116). Two dimensions of "illiberal attributes" (Finchelstein 2017: 2) that relativise the liberal, democratic aspects of populism – its exclusive character and its anti-institutionalist traits – are discussed in the next sections.

6.1 ILLIBERAL ATTRIBUTES – EXCLUSIVE CHARACTER

The first dimension concerns populism's exclusive character (Abts/Rummens 2007: 422; Finchelstein 2017: 92; Urbinati 2014: 147). Due to its claim to be the only, true, and unifying expression of both the voice and the power of the people, that is, to be the expression of the general will of the "morally pure" middlemen (Diehl 2019: 135; Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2012: 8, 2017: 14; Müller 2016: 20; Urbinati 2019a: 49–51, 2019b), with whom the "evil" elite failed to communicate, populism demonises this elite (its opponents) in the name of its homogeneity, cutting them off as enemies. This first dimension leads to at least five further observations:

6.1.1 ETHICAL DIVIDE

The moral claim of populism holds together all the components of the first dimension of its illiberal attributes. Populism divides the people into

the „real people" and their enemies according to various criteria, the most important of which is the constant assertion of the higher moral status of the real people. The real people are also, above all, the „good people". The „others" are the „evil" others. Because of this superior moral status, the populist leader can strive for homogeneity and consequently exclude those who do not fit with the moral idea behind (what they consider) the general will. This moral claim applies not only to people but also to time and space.

Concerning time, the moral claim applies to the dichotomy of the „good old past" vs the failing or flawed present. Populists want to go back to a simpler life in a perceived past golden era where the good people could just live their lives without being forced to cope with a (in their eyes) morally decaying present.

Concerning space, the moral claim can be referred to as the dichotomy of rural vs urban or suburbs vs cities. The meaning of the moral claim is the same as the analogy with time. The simple life of real people in rural areas or suburbs is falling apart due to the degenerate life led by the city-dwelling, urban (intellectual) elite. However, besides all the differences, the moral claim, also used as a political topic and propaganda instrument, produces a fracture between good and evil that populism not only does not want to rectify but aims to deepen to reinforce itself.

6.1.2 INCLUSIVITY

It is worth noting that populism is not necessarily exclusive. It can also show a more inclusive, participatory dimension (Finchelstein 2017: 133). The most obvious instances of inclusive populism are the so-called left populism and the South American ethno-populism (Filc 2015; Madrid 2019; Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 2017: 32; Roberts 2019). This kind of populism addresses disadvantaged, excluded, or discriminated minorities and

eventually brings them onto the political scene (Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 32). On the contrary, the so-called European right populism has roots in and prospers thanks to ethnic, nationalistic, or religious features which make it *per definitionem* exclusive. This exclusive feature also assumes racist traits, usually not part of the left populism(-s).

6.1.3   GENERAL WILL

To understand the concept of general will, we first refer to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract (1986). Although this connection can be controversial (Priester 2016), the following brief remarks about his idea of general will present some of its most important and, for our understanding of populism, problematic features.

In Rousseau's work, individual interests, bound together and tending to equality and public wealth, form the infallible *volonté générale* (Rousseau 1986: II, 1, 3). It is not unanimity that makes the will general but the sum of all voices that make up this will. In the case where sufficiently informed citizens engage in public deliberation without prior contact, despite the many different possible results, the outcomes of their votes would inevitably follow the expression of the general will. Apart from this kind of ideal situation, however, the greater the unanimity in a decision, the clearer the expression of the general will and the healthier the political body. As Rousseau (1986) says, "the long debates, the dissensions, the tumult, announce the ascendancy of particular interests and the decline of the State".[9] In this sense, unanimity as „homogeneity of the people" becomes a pillar of populism, the first condition under which the populist idea of „a real people" can be thought. Homogeneity has at least two consequences. First, since the populist

general will has become the only expression of the people – the exclusion (or „enemification") of minorities and, second, the disqualification of an open, public political debate. This last consequence connects the first dimension of the illiberal features of populism – exclusive character – with the second – anti-institutionalist traits, addressed shortly in Section 6.2.

6.1.4   ELITE-POPULIST NEXUS

It is also worth noting that there are cases in which the populist leader certainly cannot be said to be part of the "people" but belongs to those elites to which populism opposes. These leaders are themselves part of an elite (Urbinati 2019: 40–77) but blend in with the „people" by publicly showing traits that normally would not be considered suitable for the public political scene. This case does not mean there is no such thing as the anti-elitist feature of populism. What is central is that populist leaders who are indeed part of the (mostly economic) elite do not act like it would be expected from people belonging to this elite (cf. Bourdieu 1979). Populist elite leaders underline their presence among „normal people" by reflecting the „normal people's" social habits or, at least, what might be thought to be their social habits (Diehl 2011: 286). Through this attitude, they make themselves approachable: the „good" people can relate to them more easily than they relate to the political elite. To put it in Mudde's words, „what [populists] oppose is being represented by an ‚alien' elite" (Mudde 2004: 560). This case also exposes the empathic side of populism and its appeal to the people's emotions (Demertzis 2020: 150–169; Mouffe 2018: 50; Mudde 2004: 541; Nietzsche 2020: I, 8, §460).

6.1.5   LEADER-CENTRICITY

The leader unifies people (Schmitt 2014: 54) and gives the impression of homogeneous followers

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9   Translation of *"les longs débats, les dissentions, le tumulte, annoncent l'ascendent des intérêts particuliers et de le déclin de l'Etat"* (Rousseau 1986: IV, 2).

by articulating their general will through their[10] voice. Caesarism and plebiscitarianism are also often invoked in connection with the populist leader's role (Urbinati 2014: 174). The relevance of the leader as a centralising and homogenising factor binds the populist phenomena with their authoritarian drift (Finchelstein 2017: 98; Schäfer/ Zürn 2021: 14; Weyland 2019: 319–333) and thus with the illiberal attributes of the second dimension.

6.2 ILLIBERAL ATTRIBUTES – ANTI-INSTITUTIONALIST TRAITS

The second dimension of the illiberal attributes of populism concerns its anti-institutionalist traits (Finchelstein 2017: 176). The focal point of this second dimension is the aversion to populism for those political or social structures that normally mediate between leaders and governed citizens – between representatives and the represented – for example, political parties (Mudde 2004: 546; Urbinati 2013: 147). This second dimension gives rise to at least three further observations:

6.2.1 AN ALTERNATIVE TO DIRECT DEMOCRACY

It could be argued that populism does not aim for less but more direct democracy. Nonetheless, it seems more promising and more correct to concentrate on audience democracy instead of direct democracy as the alternative to the liberal, representative democracy that populism pursues. On the one hand, we have already seen that populism does not refuse to participate in the system of representative democracy (Urbinati 2017: 577): Populist leaders want to be elected as representatives of "their" people. What they want to change by using the resemblance and the

continuity between leader and people is how this representation works or how they can be elected (Urbinati 2019a: 42, 90, 118). Direct democracy is based on a very active participation of citizens in the construction of the public political discourse, which would conflict with the need of homogenisation (mentioned in 3.2.3) or "unification" and acclamation (Urbinati 2019a: 9, 160–162). On the other hand, the relevant and specific role that the mass media have in the populist discourse can also be interpreted as a peculiar form of intermediation. For (at least) these two reasons, it seems more convincing to connect populism with audience democracy rather than direct democracy.

6.2.2 AUDIENCE DEMOCRACY

Audience democracy implies, as its most typical features, a strong personalisation of politics and the idea of the public audience as a sort of open tribunal (Urbinati 2019a: 60). However, the role of the public in audience democracy is different from the role of the public in a liberal democracy. According to the idea of liberal democracy, the public is an entity made up of rational individuals that exercises the function of constructing shared political opinions and controlling how these opinions are handled by the leaders. In an audience democracy, on the contrary, citizens, as members of the public forum, are more loose elements of an indistinct mass than rational and active participants in the construction of those opinions (Urbinati 2014: 213–217; Urbinati 2019: 175–177). This context offers the perfect stage for the appearance and acclamation of a caesarian leader. Intermediation between "the people" and the leader disappears: the populist leader derives their role from their immediate connection to the people whose voices they embody. The less mediated the relationship between the leader and the people, the stronger the acclaim for the leader by the populace. This immediate connection is cemented through the populist appeal to people's emotions. People are more ready to sustain their

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10   Concerning gender issues, Brigitte Bargetz and Nina Elena Eggers (2021), Gabriele Dietze (2021), Sarah C. Dingler, Zoe Lefkofridi, and Vanessa Marent (2021) and Vincent Streichhahn (2021) are noteworthy.

leaders if they "feel" a close connection to their leader, and people feel their leader closer when they show features that can be more easily traced back to the "simple, pure" people as a homogeneous entity rather than the elite.

6.2.3 SIMPLIFICATION

The direct connection between the people and their leader is enhanced by the populist plea and preference for "simple and direct" (Canovan 1999: 5–6), black-or-white answers and "sound-bite" solutions (Canovan 1999: 15; Mény/Surel 2002: 12–13; Moffitt/Tormey 2014: 381–397), which cannot follow from a long, open political debate (Canovan 1999: 6). Because of the role (theoretically) played by politicians and political parties but also by civil society in the public discussion, the (need of) oversimplification of political issues and the discussions about them plays a crucial role among the anti-institutionalist, illiberal traits of populism. On the one hand, this (need of) oversimplification attacks the intermediary structures of the political scene and, on the other hand, treats as enemies those members of both the political scene and civil society who take part in the definition of and discussion about the problem that should be addressed.

In this regard, oversimplification is also connected to the previously mentioned moral claim of populism and specifically to its aspect related to intellectual elites. Moreover, oversimplification connects to the empathic side of populism. This connection corresponds to a growing sense of being excluded or forgotten by the liberal "tribe" who are more occupied in "playing" with topics like gender and ecology than with problems of everyday life (Urbinati 2013: 141) that "real people", according to the populist point of view, consider the real problems. Oversimplification is an illiberal attribute of populism. The refusal to be confronted with the lack or insufficiency of rights of other human beings or with topics that do not

concern the populists directly implies the refusal to seriously consider (a lack or insufficiency of) individual rights and minority rights like these issues are (or should be) considered by liberal perspectives (Canovan 1999: 7; Schäfer/Zürn 2021: 69).

7   POPULISM – BROAD DESCRIPTION

The exclusive and anti-institutionalist dimensions of populism converge in a sort of political theology (Kelly 2017: 528; Zúquete 2017: 448) strongly dependent upon the leader's role. Populism is thus an authoritarian phenomenon that, despite its anti-liberal features, finds a place in a liberal, democratic framework, earning from it part of its legitimacy by means of the electoral consensus. This consensus focuses on the leader and gains strength through their acclamation. This way to reach or at least strengthen consensus through acclamation supports and, at the same time, is supported by the need for an oversimplified worldview (*Weltanschauung*).

On the one hand, we have a Manichean division between "we, the (real, good) people" and "they, the (evil, corrupted) others". This division reflects Carl Schmitt's famous "friend-foe" interpretation of politics (2015: 25–26) and leads to a severely divided society. Due to the aforementioned moral grounds of this division, the gap between "us" and "them" between the people and the elite, the friends and the foes, is impossible to fill. This impossibility to come close(-r) to the opponents and the tendency to see political opponents as enemies inhibits an open political discussion and, thus, the liberal democratic process itself. On the other hand – and due to the necessity to reach consensus through acclamation – populism addresses social issues by oversimplifying them or looking for oversimplified solutions. Populism not only divides society into friends and foes, but also wants a world with no compromises and simple,

black-or-white solutions to (usually complex) social problems.

Although leaning on Karin Priester's description of populism as oscillating between "unbounded individualism" and "bounding collectivism" (Priester 2007: 48)[11], we emphasise instead how the individuals associated with the populist nostalgia for an imagined ideal past – where few individuals came together to live a simpler life, far away from the "over-intellectualised", decadent, pluralistic modern, liberal society – are not isolated from each other. They are united as "the (real, true) people" whose homogeneous voice comes out of the leader's mouth and whose body the leader personifies. This picture reflects the idea of heartland described by Paul Taggart (2000: 95–98). In this picture, the individuals, whose direct interests – at least theoretically – form the core of the populists' concerns, trust and empower a leader who promises to take care of them.

We can interpret the political theology of populism as a specific, very narrow kind of authoritarian collectivism, eager to defend the needs, interests, and (sometimes) the rights of a specific group of people. Unlike other forms of collectivism, however, populism tends to present these needs, interests, and rights as the only ones to be taken into consideration, thus, in an exclusive form. Furthermore, populists rarely have sound reasons to define the borders of their community – they arbitrarily define who "the real people" are (cf. Agamben 1995).

In sum, and to respond to the objective of defining populism broadly and strongly enough to be compatible with most of its interpretations and to respond to the general questions of this inquiry, we understand **populism** *as an authoritarian, narrow form of collectivist political theology that,*

despite its exclusive and anti-institutionalist illiberal attributes, is nonetheless embedded within a liberal democratic framework, albeit with a highly controversial relationship.

8 TECHNOCRACY, POPULISM, AND THE INDIVIDUAL'S POLITICAL ROLE

After briefly analysing populism and technocracy, we can now go further and highlight their influence on the individual's political role. To find this influence, we focus on the contraposition between individuals and citizens in the wider frame of the relationship between individuals and society and, above all, on those aspects of populism and technocracy that affect it.

The impoverishment of the individual's political role has been seen as a fragility of liberal, representative democracy capable of undermining its legitimacy and inviting contestation from alternative systems, such as technocracy or populism. However, neither technocracy nor populism offer a solution that improves the role of the individual. On the contrary, both technocracy and populism harbour the seeds of the same fragility. Furthermore, while liberal, representative democracy seems to suffer under this impoverishment, for technocracy and populism, it represents a constitutive part of their existence.

8.1 INDIVIDUAL: A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The history of the concept of "individual" goes back to Ancient Greece, where it was connected with the meaning of "person" as the role that an actor plays on stage (πρόσωπον).[12] Later, with and after the Reformation (van Dülmen 1997: 19–20),

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11 According to Priester (2007), the populist phenomenon can be located between a society that only concentrates on the individual and a society where the individuals do not have any relevance.

12 Hereafter, I will use "individual" and "person" without considering their deep conceptual differences, which unfortunately cannot be elaborated on in this paper, and consider the definition of individual given at the end of Section 8.2 instead.

the construction of the individual as a self-controlled and self-analytical being was placed under the control of institutions, a form of control that we can find both in the early modern and the modern state (van Dülmen 1997: 39–40).

Beyond these brief historical-philosophical hints, the theoretical field of the inquiry can be divided into four following areas.

- The person in general.
- Its creative power (Schabert 1989).
- The person as a social being.
- The person as a natural being (van Dülmen 1997: 67).

For this paper, it is useful to concentrate on the person as a social being, a definition which clearly refers to the well-known Aristotelian definition of the "political animal" (*zoon politikon or ζῷον πολιτικόν*) (Aristotle 1957: 4.1296a). Furthermore, with a focus on liberal democracy, we should also consider and refer to different persons as they are shaped through their differences, which contribute to their autonomous capacities of changing themselves and creating their own laws (Koivukovski 2013: 56). In this sense, by analysing how populism and technocracy affect the individuals and their relationship with their society, we can also glimpse individual's political creativity and thereby the future of democracy (Koivukovski 2013: 59).

As important as the (controversial) concept of the "individual" could have been in the liberal tradition,[13] it also experienced and still experiences some weakening processes. On the one hand, liberalism did not fully consider the measure in which collective subjects – including privileged elites (Koivukoski 2013: 62) – have replaced individuals and their proactivity. On the other hand,

the neoliberal concept of the individual represents an economisation and automatisation of the social sphere that ties individuals to a logic of (market) efficiency (Michalitisch 2006: 97). Further factors that should not be overlooked in addressing these processes are the kind of estrangement that affects the relationship between citizens and government in the modern liberal state and the developed necessity of supranational governance (Koivukoski 2013: 50).

8.2 A GENERAL APPROACH: TECHNOCRACY, POPULISM, AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The effects of technocracy and populism on individuals and their political role can be approached by remembering other processes that weaken them within today's liberal democracies. Immanuel Kant's definition of Enlightenment (1996) is useful, and particularly the refusal of its values, which represents a first alignment between populism and technocracy.

> *Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority* is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude*! Have courage to make use of your *own* understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment.[14] (Kant 1996: 8:35)

At least two consequences follow from Kant's definition:

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13   In this respect, in this paper I assume the position on liberalism taken by John Christman (2009: 6).

14   Originaltext in German: „Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Muthes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu bedienen. sapere aude! habe Muth dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! Ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung." (17/AA VIII: 35)

8.2.1 REJECTION OF AUTONOMOUS THINKING

The first consequence refers to the Kantian conception of Enlightenment as a claim for autonomous thinking that ascribes a particular relevance to the individual and underlines their role as active participants in the formation of civil society, as it is implicit in the modern conception of individuals – or, at least, of the individuals as members of the bourgeoisie.

Both technocracy and populism tend to reject this idea of society as the result of the active and reasonable participation of *all* individuals. Populist and technocratic attempts to define one specific group of individuals to represent, respectively, either the "real" people or the only individuals capable of understanding the world explain this rejection.

– According to the populist approach, the core of society is represented by the "real people" subjugated by a minoritarian but more powerful elite. The "real people" should take back the power and regain their just position at the expense of the current "oppressing" leading minority.
– According to the technocratic approach, on the other hand, there is a narrow, "prominent" minority, which, thanks to its supposed – cultural, technical, or economic – superiority and better understanding of the world, should control the development of the society in all its aspects.

As a result, both approaches oppose the idea of the autonomous and active participation of *all* individuals as equal members of the same society.

8.2.2 REJECTION OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND UNIVERSALITY

The second consequence refers to the centrality of autonomous thinking and self-development.

Under the assumption that individual development or even "self-constitution" (Korsgaard 2009: 214) is strictly connected with social development, the former is also fundamental for constructing a social group. The social group, resulting from the self-development of single individuals as autonomous and rational actors, has hegemonic educational claims that reflect the universality quests of Enlightenment. Neither technocracy nor populism recognise two important aspects of this concept: the self-developing character of the individual and the claim for universality.

– Individuals' self-developing character collides with the cultural, ethnic, or even racial roots of the populist idea of a homogeneous majority. Moreover, populism mistrusts official knowledge by accusing it of being manipulated by the "enemy" minority. Furthermore, regarding the possibility of self-development in the sense of a theory of knowledge, populism opposes a historical continuity according to which it should be possible to determine who the "real people" are. As we see soon, technocracy does not recognise this self-developing character either.
– Assuming the existence of "we, the real people" against "the others", populism also cannot accept the universality claim of Enlightenment. However, technocracy – with its often paternalistic (cf. von der Pfordten 2010: ch. 11) point of view – cannot accept this claim either. The modern universality claim has nothing in common with the "mund" or "tutelage" or "concession theory" proper of the medieval tradition. The "universal" sense of this last kind of politics rests in the "concessions" that a sovereign makes to their subjects, in the belief that the sovereign knows the subjects' needs (better) and chooses to meet (some of) them. If we look at these approaches as a continuation of the platonic (technocratic) idea of the state as an organism, every part of which has to work the way it is supposed to, in that

everybody has to respect their role – whatever it is – accepting only a few possibilities to change the current social position, it becomes understandable why the technocratic approach rejects both the modern universality claim and the self-developing character of all individuals. The difference is in the contraposition between the interpretation of the individual's role as a subject.

On the one hand, individuals are subjects in the sense of being subjected to external forces. On the other hand, however, individuals are subjects in an active sense, capable of actively participating in both their personal development and the corresponding development of their social life. This second meaning also describes the individuals as citizens. Society as the state is now conceived as the ensemble of *all* citizens, each with their individual capabilities and responsibilities, but also with individual interests and rights, which *should* be considered. The state – a product of human reason – as presented and justified in its political and legal form through various theories of the social contract, becomes capable of considering both common and individual interests.[15] The concept of the individual that both populism and technocracy compromise is a socio-politically active, rational, independent self-developing subject whose essential features claim universality and are essential for the (development of) liberal democracy.

8.3 A MORE SPECIFIC APPROACH: TECHNOCRACY, POPULISM, AND THE MODERN INDIVIDUAL

The concept of individuals as autonomous, self-thinking, self-developing, and (socially) responsible with a strong connection to their society is essential for liberal democracy, and populism

and technocracy affect this concept. The modern concept of "individual" relates to its social dimension. In this connection, individuals are rational and self-directing entities that, as such, should be considered accountable for what they can determine in the world. It has already been observed that both populism and technocracy criticise what we call the liberal script. It has also already been observed how liberalism underestimated the process of dissolution that affected the rational, autonomous, self-developing individuals (see above 3.1).

In this regard and due to their universality claim, if the importance of some social institutions – like schools or universities and also the legal system – initially grew according to the possibilities they gave in developing individuality, they ended up being structures aiming to institutionalise the concept of "universality" itself (cf. Foucault 1975). This implies a disjunction between individuals and society that offers both populism and technocracy a starting point for their common opposition to the principles of liberal democracy. The massification, industrialisation, and technification of modern and post-modern society have exposed the liberal script's inadequacy in representing its populace. The liberal script failed to really recognise the importance of an individual's identification within a social group, which is necessary for them to be an active part of it. However, neither populist nor technocratic approaches to politics offer a reliable solution for this lack of identification and, thus, representativity. On the contrary, both populism and technocracy perpetuate the same deficiency.

8.3.1 LACK OF IDENTIFICATION

Considering the general premises of the technocratic approach, like the new anthropological status (in a *scientified* world) and both a socialisation of the technique and mechanisation of the state, we can see two aspects.

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15 In this combination, it is also possible to read the distinction pointed out by Rousseau (1986) between "the will of all" and "general will" (*volonté de tous* and *volonté* Générale).

- On the one hand, this new anthropological status leads to an alienation process that compromises the autonomy of individuals by making them a sort of "underage or unaware" interchangeable functional unit.
- On the other hand, the socialisation of the technique and the mechanisation of the state lead to a depoliticised society that sees the state as a universal technical body or social machinery where politics only functions as an auxiliary expedient to the extent needed for efficiency by a prevalent ideology of achievement and success.

These two aspects converge in the primacy and even normativity of practical constraints that depend upon a mutation of the concept of authority in the sense of "authority of natural laws", which only a technocratic elite can manage. Thus, even if a technocratic society has a certain focus on individuals, no responsibility or decision-making activity can be referred to a single person but only to a whole social system. It follows that technocracy does not close the gap between individuals and society but throws them back into their status of nonage – the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance.

8.3.2   LACK OF REPRESENTATIVITY

Even if we consider populism in the context of representative democracy (intended, however, as a framework to be bitterly criticised or even to be drastically reshaped), populism is characterised by illiberal attributes, exemplified by its exclusive dimension and anti-institutionalist sentiments.

- Due to its claim to be the only, truly, and unifying expression of both the voice and the power of the people, that is, to be the expression of the general will of the pure, real people with whom the "evil" elite fails to communicate, populism – in the name of an alleged homogeneity – cuts off its opponents as enemies.

- The anti-institutionalist sentiments express opposition to the general form of the modern state and its balance of powers.

These aspects converge in the populist reaction to a supposed enlightened paternalism of the intellectual elite. This reaction forgets, however, that, as shown in Section 8.2, one of the original aims of Enlightenment consists exactly in the refusal of paternalistic concessions. Moreover, the populistic assumption that only a part of the society – the "pure" one – is entitled to represent it implies that the detachment between individuals and society remains once again unsolved. There will always be someone who should be excluded from active participation in political life.

9   CONCLUSIONS

Populism and technocracy are both linked to the concept of the individual through their criticism of the lack of representativity, for which they also blame the liberal script. Nonetheless, populism and technocracy do not resolve this issue either. Their own essential features lead them to approach the individual as subject to external forces – to the "real/pure people" or "the better elite" – and to deprive them of their autonomous rational capacity for self-development. This conclusion depends on the more general aspects of an individual's political role and self-developing character, as well as on the problematic lack of representativity.

Even if we had to overlook some further aspects of populistic and technocratic approaches which also have an impact on the individuals' role – like their chauvinist and ageist attitudes, their (mis-)use of language, and their symbolic character – through the focus on the lack of representativity we were able to show how, at least referring to one of its major frailties, neither populism nor technocracy offers a better alternative to the liberal script.

Individuals are impacted by populism and technocracy as long as they intend themselves (and are intended) as the product and the source of the universal reason that allows them to continuously improve themselves as they simultaneously play an active role in their socio-political environment. Populism and Technocracy reject this kind of individual, for this individual opposes some of their essential features, like authoritarianism (in various and different forms), elitism, and exclusivity.

Instead of this kind of individual whose definition goes back to the Enlightenment, both populism and technocracy refer to a kind of individual whose role in politics is strongly reduced (more *homme*, less *citoyen*). While populism reduces the individual's role in politics through the involvement of individuals in massifying processes, technocracy reduces this role by detaching them from their active political opportunities and responsibilities. Populist and technocratic approaches refer to a definition of individuals that detaches them from their rational and active political powers.

By reducing the individual to nonage components of the "people" responding to some sort of (populist or elitist) leadership, both populism and technocracy reserve the faculty to act politically only to a specific group of individuals and deprive the rest of those essential features that would make them autonomous and rational members of the political sphere. Both populism and technocracy impact the individual's political role in a way that strongly impoverishes it, thus depriving the social environment of its essential chance to improve itself autonomously and rationally.

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