

## Supplemental Notes to Lecture II and Chapter II

### I. The Demagogue and Populism

In early January of 2017, on the eve of the Donald Trump's inauguration, the *New Yorker* published for its mostly highly educated, financially secure, and Democratic readers the cartoon shown below by Will McPhail:



*"These smug pilots have lost touch with regular passengers like us.  
Who thinks I should fly the plane?"*

The cartoon, which not surprisingly proved to be a big hit with its readership, belongs to a tradition of political satire, dating back in this country to the decade prior to the American Revolution.

Historically, political satires, which are used to ridicule individuals, groups, an institution, or a belief system, are considered Horatian, or Juvenalian, or as a hybrid of these two types.

The Horatian satire presents a form of light-hearted mockery that treats its object with a certain sense of respect.

The Juvenalian Satire, by contrast, issues a searing indictment of a social phenomenon. It expresses moral outrage in a way that is intended to create shock value.

In terms of their effectiveness, satires generally work or fail for reasons that are similar to how internet memes function, in the sense that they often bring together two things that normally are not associated with one another. Such juxtapositions are meant to illuminate something about one thing that is otherwise often not perceived or recognized when just viewed on its own.

This combining of two things not commonly seen as comparable applies to the *New Yorker* cartoon, where an unscrupulous political leader and his gullible supporters are likened to a would-be airline pilot and the passengers aboard a plane.

That is, McPhail portrays the demagogue as an opportunist who plays upon feelings of resentment and manipulates the passengers into giving him the power to unseat the trained pilot, a turn of events that, we are left to understand, will certainly end in disaster.

This critique of the demagogue (and his misguided followers) ironically relies on the sort of scare tactics that demagogues are said to employ to rally the people behind them.

Now, in viewing this *New Yorker* cartoon, we basically are given only two options: either you're irrational and support the demagogue who, with the people's backing, storms the cockpit and grabs the controls (i.e., you vote for Trump); or you're rational and support the continuation of expert rule (as embodied by Hillary Clinton and the officials she would have appointed to her cabinet)

Jonathon Crock, a professor of political science at George Washington University, objects to this either/or, calling it a false choice. He then comes up with what he regards as a revision to and improvement upon the cartoon, which appears below:



"These smug pilots have lost touch with regular passengers like us.  
~~Who thinks I should fly the plane?"~~

These pilots just decided to fly us wherever they feel like it!  
Who thinks we all should decide where the plane goes?"

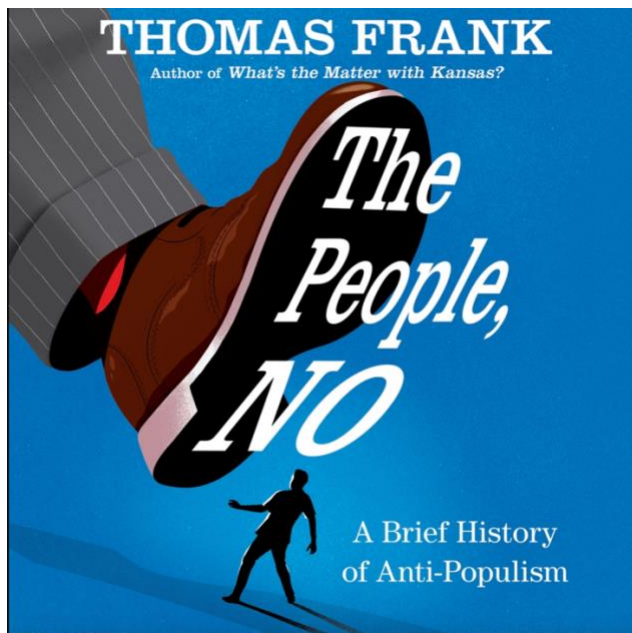
@JonathonCrock

Crock's critique asks us to reflect on the fact that we assume pilots will fly to the city where all the passengers who bought tickets want or need to go. Unless the airliner has been hijacked, the pilot doesn't get to decide to where the plane goes.

So, we can see how, according to Crock, the real question that *should* be at issue here is not who should actually fly the plane. The issue is rather who should decide where we would like to go or what sort of country we would like to live in, a decision based on the sort of knowledge that is accessible to all of us.

We can see then how those appreciative of McPhail's cartoon are highly critical not only of demagogues but also of their followers, associating both with something called Populism, a political movement that arose in the Midwestern United States toward the end of the nineteenth century.

Since then, "populism" has taken on two diametrically opposed meanings, concisely summarized by political analyst Thomas Frank, in his most recent book, *The People, No*.



First, there was Populism as its supporters understood it: a social movement in which small farmers and working people demanded democratic and economic reforms.

And second, there was Populism as the heirs of the Federalists characterized it: a fanatical and violent political movement in which demagogues played upon citizens' misguided feelings of resentment, a view of populism that we see in this late nineteenth century political cartoon, published in a magazine called *Judge*:



## II. From the Critique of Populism to Epistocracy

Historically, those in the US who embrace the second meaning of populism, like the Federalists, have thought that in order to eliminate or greatly reduce the threat posed by demagogues, we need *not less but more elitism*

Along these lines, some supporters have even gone so far as to draw inspiration from John Stuart Mill, a nineteenth-century political theorist who proposed giving *extra votes* to citizens with university degrees or so-called intellectually demanding jobs.

John Stuart Mill based this proposal on the belief that something had to be done to offset the votes of those credulous citizens who could be easily manipulated by demagogues.

Similar arguments have been advanced recently by Georgetown University professor Jason Brennan, in his book *Against Democracy*.

In this book, Brennan argues that *restricting* the number of people who are allowed to vote would *increase* the likelihood that laws would be passed for the benefit of all citizens

According to Brennan, such restrictions could come about through legislation stipulating that, for instance, no one would be allowed to vote without first demonstrating their knowledge of politics by passing a test.

The central concept Brennan uses in his book combines the Greek word for “knowledge” with the Greek word for “rule,” giving us Epistocracy, or “government by the knowledgeable.”

You'll be able to delve deeper into the meaning of Epistocracy by reading one of this week's supplemental materials: an opinion piece Brennan wrote for *The Los Angeles Times* in 2016.

### III. Problems of Political Representation

If we view these two interpretations of political representation in light of the present, we can see that the Federalist-Antifederalist dispute does not fit neatly into familiar partisan categories.

Or, to put it another way, the Federalist-Antifederalist debate puts contemporary ideological positions to the test. For instance: does a liberal think representatives should mirror or refine the views of their constituents?

Perhaps they would take the Federalist view of representatives if they lived in East Tennessee, where they form a minority, and an Antifederalist view of representatives if they lived in liberal strongholds like Burlington, Vermont.

Apart from indicating how someone's view of political representation may be strategic rather than principled, examining how the Federalists and Antifederalists treat this issue raises another question: in the US, what sort of political representation should those who find themselves in the minority expect to have? What practical meaning does political representation have for a conservative Republican who lives in Tennessee's 9<sup>th</sup> District, which is dominated by the Democrats? What meaning does it have for a liberal who lives in Tennessee's 2<sup>nd</sup> District, where a Democrat has not won office since the Civil War? We will explore these questions further when we focus on Chapter 9, which covers political parties.

### IV. Ideology and James Madison's *Federalist* # 10

The ideology of the Federalists manifests itself with particular clarity in *Federalist* # 10, where James Madison argues that the "first object [or purpose] of government" is the "protection" of property rights—specifically, the protection of "different and unequal faculties of acquiring property" (630). Those "faculties" (an antiquated term that today would be referred to as an innate or inherent capacity) for acquiring property are unequal not as the result of public policy choices or on account of the ways in which a political-economic system operates. Rather, these inequalities are the outgrowth, as it were, of what is "sown into the nature of man" (630). Madison's arguments provide us with an example of what is referred to by Thomas Piketty in *Capital and Ideology* as a "commonplace . . . argument that inequality has a basis in 'nature'" (7).

In that [highly influential work](#), whose English translation was published last year, Piketty remarks that "it is hardly surprising that the elites of many societies, in all periods and climes, have sought to 'naturalize' inequality. They argue that existing social disparities benefit . . . society as whole, and that any attempt to alter the existing order of things will cause great pain."

One of the main themes of the *Federalist Papers* is that under the Articles of Confederation, state legislatures have attempted to "alter the existing order of things." Whether initiated by the

well-intentioned or by demagogues, the results have, according to Madison in *Federalist 10*, proven disastrous: “Complaints are everywhere heard from our most considerate and virtuous citizens, equally the friends of public and private faith, and of public and personal liberty, that our governments are too unstable, that the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority” (629).

The “public good” is here equated with both the “rules of justice” and the “rights of the minor party.” That “minor party” refers to the elites, who are of course greatly outnumbered by those much less well off, who are described in threatening terms (“the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority”).

*The central problem for Madison and the Federalists* is how best to serve and protect the socioeconomic interests of the elites while also maintaining a representative democracy based upon the principle of political equality, which of course served as a rallying cry in Jefferson’s Declaration of Independency. As Madison puts it with admirable candor: “To secure the public good and private rights against the danger of . . . a faction [representing the socioeconomic interests of a majority], and at the same time to preserve the spirit and the form of popular government, is then the great object to which our inquiries are directed” (631).

**Quiz Question 5: What are the two diametrically opposed meanings of Populism?**

**Quiz Question 6: According to Jason Brennan, what is one way in which elections could be held in an Epistocracy?**

**Quiz Question 7: Do you think Will McPhail’s portrayal of the demagogue and their followers is a persuasive one? Why or why not?**

