

# POPULISM AND THE VIRTUES OF ARGUMENT

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ABSTRACT. This chapter argues that a virtue-theoretic account of argumentation can enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of populism and offer some lines of response. Virtue theories of argumentation emphasize the role of arguers in the conduct and evaluation of arguments, and lay particular stress on arguers' acquired dispositions of character, otherwise known as intellectual virtues and vices. Several factors to which the rise of populism has been attributed may be understood as arising from vices of argumentation, including arrogance, emulousness, and insouciance. Conversely, virtues of argument such as humility and good listening offer some prospect of a constructive response to populism.

## 1. POPULISM AND ARGUMENT

In the last few years there has been a surge of academic interest in populism. Several different definitions have been proposed by political scientists and philosophers, but one of the most influential is the “ideational” definition: that populist political movements are best distinguished by their characteristic ideas, specifically a Manichean worldview of the people (good) versus the elite (bad) and a resultant emphasis on the necessity of popular sovereignty (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, 514; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, 1669). A distinctive, but often implicit, feature of the ideational account of populism is the central role played by argument: if populism is defined by the ideas of its proponents, then we should expect these ideas to attract arguments, for and against (even if they are often presented without argument). In a report for the left-leaning U.K. think tank Policy Network, Anthony Painter expands on this perspective:

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Populism is a democratic argument that seeks to change the way democracy functions. . . . In other words, right wing populism does not seek to replace democracy; it seeks to change it into a populist, direct, expressive form of democracy instead of an institutionally bounded liberal democracy (Painter, 2013, 9).

As William Brett summarizes, “Populism, then, is essentially a rhetorical posture. At the root of this posture is a distinction between the good and morally pure ‘people’ and a corrupt, self-serving ‘elite’” (Brett, 2013, 410). Crucially, this rhetorical posture is available to parties of both left and right: populist arguments are not the exclusive preserve of any single political movement. Some of the different political complexions that populism can adopt may be distinguished by the ways the central concept of *the people* is cashed out. An appeal to the people can be “an appeal to the *united people*, the nation or country, as against the parties and factions that divide it . . . [an] appeal to *our people*, often in the sense of our ethnic kith and kin . . . [or an appeal to] ‘*ordinary people*’ against the privileged, highly educated, cosmopolitan elite” (Canovan, 1999, 5, emphasis original). While many populist movements adopt more than one of these readings—or are strategically ambiguous in their messaging—each might be thought of as characteristic of distinct flavours of populism.

The ideational account of populism can be presented with greater detail. For example, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin distinguish four central factors behind the rise of populism:

people’s *distrust* of the increasingly elitist nature of liberal democracy, which has fuelled a feeling among many that they no longer have a voice in the conversation, and which is likely to spur their support for a more ‘direct’ model of democracy; ongoing anxieties about the *destruction* of the nation that have been sharpened by rapid immigration and a new era of hyper ethnic change, which raise legitimate questions as well as xenophobic fears; strong concerns about relative *deprivation* resulting from the shift towards an increasingly unequal economic settlement, which has stoked the

correct belief that some groups are being unfairly left behind relative to others, and fears about the future, and the rise of *de-alignment* from the traditional parties, which has rendered our political systems more volatile and larger numbers of people ‘available’ to listen to new promises, while others have retreated into apathy (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, 271 f., emphasis original).

Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser also seek to ground populism in “four central topics: (a) economic anxiety, (b) cultural backlash, (c) the tension between responsiveness and responsibility, and (d) (negative) partisanship and polarization” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, 1686). These two sets of factors align quite closely: deprivation is a cause of economic anxiety; cultural backlash may be understood as a reaction to perceived destruction; distrust can be provoked by governments that chose responsiveness to supranational pressures over responsibility to their electorates; and the rise in negative partisanship, voting against a party rather than for, plausibly leads to de-alignment. In their relationship to populist arguments, the four factors fall somewhat naturally into two pairs. Deprivation and cultural destruction are descriptions, accurate or not, of the material circumstances of (some part of) the electorate. Distrust and de-alignment are characterizations, accurate or not, of the affective state of the electorate, or that part of it susceptible to populism. Thus, while deprivation and destruction may be premisses in populist arguments, or perhaps conclusions, distrust and de-alignment come closer to characterizing the state of mind receptive to such arguments. For that reason, in what follows, I shall pay greater attention to distrust and de-alignment.

Although there is a growing body of empirical work on populism, little of this work engages directly with its argumentative aspects. One exception is a recent study by Sina Blassnig and colleagues. They conducted a quantitative content analysis of press releases by two right-wing populist parties, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), and print media coverage of those parties during general elections held in the U.K. and Switzerland in 2015. They conclude that “fallacies are more likely to occur in texts in which populist key messages occur” (Blassnig et al., 2019, 128). However, there are methodological weaknesses to their approach. They quite properly define informal

fallacies as “caused by an incorrect use of the underlying argumentation scheme in the specific context” (Blassnig et al., 2019, 111). Argumentation schemes are stereotypical patterns of reasoning and defeasible schemes, at least, may be used correctly or incorrectly (see, for example Walton et al., 2008). Many well-known fallacies may be understood in these terms—the fallacy *argumentum ad verecundiam*, for example, may be seen as a failure mode of the scheme for appeal to expert opinion. Nonetheless, Blassnig et al.’s analysis is restricted to fallacies rather than covering both fallacies and schemes. This risks conflating the descriptive and the evaluative. Had their enumeration counted schemes as well as fallacies, they could have investigated whether populist argumentation has a distinctive style independently of whether it is unusually bad. They also neglect to sample the press releases and media coverage of mainstream parties from the elections they study, so they cannot rule out the hypothesis that similarly bad arguments arise across the political spectrum.

Rather than pursue an empirical investigation of populist argumentation, in this chapter I propose to employ a theoretical framework drawn from virtue theories of argument (VTA). VTA bring the apparatus of virtue ethics, virtue epistemology, and virtue jurisprudence to bear on the understanding and appraisal of arguments (for an overview, see Aberdein and Cohen, 2016). In particular, VTA emphasize the role of arguers in the conduct and evaluation of arguments, and lay particular stress on arguers’ acquired dispositions of character, otherwise known as intellectual virtues and vices. Daniel Cohen, one of the chief proponents of VTA, distinguishes four principal virtues of argument: willingness to listen to others, willingness to modify your own position, willingness to question the obvious, and willingness to engage in serious argument (Cohen, 2005, 64). Elsewhere, I have defended a more complicated typology of virtues and vices of argument that expands upon Cohen’s account (Aberdein, 2016). Many of the virtues and vices I include are familiar from other contexts, but exactly which of them are most relevant to argumentation, and whether they should be understood as distinct from their counterparts in ethics, epistemology, or jurisprudence, goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

What would an application of VTA to populist argumentation look like? A first observation is that a populist argument, like any other argument, must have an

arguer or proponent, perhaps a co-arguer or respondent, and an audience. The arguer and the audience loosely correspond to what has come to be known as the supply side and the demand side of populism (see, for example, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, 1671). For populist arguments to succeed, they must be advanced in a sufficiently persuasive manner and they must also find a sufficiently receptive audience. The argument may be addressed directly to the audience or be one position within a debate with a co-arguer.<sup>1</sup> The co-arguer corresponds to the critics of populism (and thereby, from the populist perspective, to the “elite”). So a satisfactory account of populist arguments should have something to say about arguers, co-arguers, and audience. In the next three sections I will address each of these in turn, indicating some characteristic argumentational vices that they may be expected to exemplify. In the final section, I will address some of the argumentational virtues that might be hoped to ameliorate these issues.

## 2. POPULIST ARGUERS

Vice epistemology may be understood as a subset or counterpart of virtue epistemology concerned with aspects of character that are obstacles to knowledge. Much of the recent interest in the field is inspired by the work of Quassim Cassam. One epistemic vice to which he pays particular attention is epistemic insouciance: “a casual lack of concern about whether one’s beliefs have any basis in reality or are adequately supported by the best available evidence” (Cassam, 2018, 1). It is easy to see how this can be an argumentational, as well as an epistemic, vice: insouciant arguers would carelessly reason from dubiously supported premisses or with insufficient regard to the cogency of their arguments; insouciant co-arguers and audiences would be similarly irresponsible in assessing or accepting the arguments of others. Cassam links insouciance directly to populism by illustrating his account with a familiar quotation from the British politician Michael Gove, a quotation which is often interpreted as an overt appeal to populism.

Gove famously remarked that, “I think the people in this country have had enough of experts . . . from organizations with acronyms saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong” (Islam, 2016, 1’3”–1’14”). Or

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<sup>1</sup>Argumentation theorists sometimes distinguish these two senses of argument as  $\text{argument}_1$  and  $\text{argument}_2$ , respectively (O’Keefe, 1977, 121).

rather the first half of the sentence is famous; the second half of Gove’s sentence (which he repeats after the interviewer talks over him, hence the ellipsis) is routinely omitted—so routinely most people who have heard of his remark likely assume it was an unqualified denunciation of expertise, rather than a specific complaint about some experts “getting it consistently wrong”. Ironically, Cassam is no exception—he quotes only the first part of Gove’s remark, crediting an article in the *Financial Times*, which also omits the crucial qualifier (Mance, 2016). Nor is he alone in his apparent epistemic insouciance: Tom Nichols concludes his book-length defence of expertise with the same inexpert misrepresentation of Gove (Nichols, 2017, 209). Nichols sources the incomplete quotation to an article in *Foreign Policy*, which in turn cites *The New York Times*, itself citing the same *Financial Times* article as Cassam. It would appear that none of these august publications, nor Oxford University Press, Nichols’ publisher, fact-checked the quotation.

These unfortunate ironies demonstrate one of the potential pitfalls of accusing others of vice—it is all too easy to succumb to apparent hypocrisy. Ian James Kidd provides a useful analysis of the vicissitudes of vice charging. He draws a distinction between rhetorical and robust charges: “A robust charge involves primarily an active and intentional attempt to persuade others for the ultimately ameliorative reason of making things better” whereas a rhetorical charge “might simply let off steam, vent frustration, or register disapproval” (Kidd, 2016a, 183 f.). He also draws a threefold distinction between “critic, target, and audience” closely related to that between arguer, co-arguer, and audience (Kidd, 2016a, 184). Populist arguments are characteristically accusations of vice against the “elite”, especially as represented by mainstream political parties, but they are also the subject of charges of vice by other parties, so the roles of critic and target can be played by either populist arguer or co-arguer.

Calling out others’ epistemic vices can sometimes have an ameliorative effect. But in practice this is very difficult to achieve, and the attempt may backfire. Any such charge must turn, in part, on the ethos of the critic: “A vice-charge that is ill-formed, poorly-reasoned, or evidentially empty not only lacks critical efficacy, but also reflects badly on the critic, especially if they are claiming the moral or

epistemic high ground, as will often be the case” (Kidd, 2016a, 185). Kidd specifically draws attention to what he calls “the problem of consensus” that “the efficacy of a vice-charge is contingent on consensus between critic and target . . . on the definition of the vice being invoked . . . and . . . on whether the target does in fact exemplify that vice” (Kidd, 2016a, 192). Consensus between populists and their critics seems likely to be hard to attain on either of these matters. As Margaret Canovan has pointed out, “Populists see themselves as true democrats, voicing popular grievances and opinions systematically ignored by governments, mainstream parties and the media” (Canovan, 1999, 2). As such, they are at least as likely to raise charges of intellectual vice as their critics and unlikely to accept readily that their own actions may be construed as vicious. Indeed, although Cassam’s own exemplars of political epistemic insouciance are politicians more likely to endorse populist arguments than criticize them, his own characterization could be endorsed by populists criticizing an out of touch establishment: “Being in positions of power and privilege can result in intellectual overconfidence or a cognitive superiority complex, and these flaws might find expression in the nonchalance which is at the heart of epistemic insouciance” (Cassam, 2018, 15).

As a case in point, let us return to the issue of trusting experts. A critical distinction must be drawn here, but is sometimes obfuscated by the ambiguity of the word “opinion” in discussions of expert opinion. When a judge provides an opinion in a court case, that is not merely a point of view, it is dispositive of the outcome of the case. Judicial opinions are expected to be reasoned, and in many cases they are subject to appeal, but they are also intrinsically authoritative. Likewise, medical opinions, although defeasible, are characteristically cautious and grounded in evidence. Expert opinions of this kind correctly state matters of established fact and make credible inferences from them. But opinions can also be more speculative. Here the track record even of established experts is much less impressive (Tetlock, 2005; Mizrahi, 2013). Nichols frames this as a contrast between explanation and prediction. He notes that “laypeople tend to regard failures of prediction as indications of the worthlessness of expertise” (Nichols, 2017, 178). Nonetheless, as the physicist Taner Edis points out, “The populists are correct that the professionals, the experts, are disproportionately responsible for our current state of affairs. We

have been in charge. And yet, we do not seem to be the most competent of elites” (Edis, 2020, 23). Doubling down on deference to expertise does not seem to be a strategy likely to sway populists, and risks exemplifying the same insouciance with which the populists are indicted.

### 3. POPULIST CO-ARGUERS

If populist arguers are accused of insouciance, then the vice that seems most likely to be raised against their interlocutors is arrogance. This is perhaps the defining vice of an elite. As the law professor Brett Scharffs observes “if we lack confidence that the judge or ruler is really the most practically wise among us, then the elitism, inarticulateness, and potential arrogance of those individuals will leave us with a healthy dose of discomfort at the fact that such a person wields such tremendous power over us” (Scharffs, 2004, 769). It is not difficult to find examples of such accusations. The 2019 United Kingdom general election was a landslide victory for the Conservative party, which had governed with no overall majority for the previous two years. The victory was largely attributable to voters switching to the Conservatives from the main opposition Labour party, with many of the latter’s ostensibly safest seats changing hands, sometimes for the first time in decades. The Labour party’s increasing ambivalence towards the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum, despite pledging to implement it at the 2017 general election, was often cited as a factor in the result. Focus group surveys conducted after the election reveal a widespread impression of the Labour party as arrogant among the voters who switched away from them in some of these crucial constituencies. For example: “It wasn’t so much Brexit, it was democracy. It was that they wouldn’t honour the referendum;” “I felt let down. 17.4 million people voted leave, and we’re supposed to be a democracy. They threw spanners in the works and did everything they could to stop it. It was arrogance. They were no longer listening to the people;” “It was a backlash against Labour disregarding Brexit. They were saying ‘it’s the adults talking now, leave the table and we’ll sort it out for you’” (Ashcroft, 2020, 12). “They relied on a heavy-spending manifesto, arrogantly assuming their voters are so uneducated that they won’t ask who’s paying for it” (Ashcroft, 2020, 23). “They need to show a greater level of respect. They treat voters like idiots. The smugness, the virtue-signalling—people don’t want to be told they’re idiots for



considering voting Conservative. There is a big attitude problem” (Ashcroft, 2020, 26). Arrogance has also been indicated as a risk in some of the proposed responses mainstream parties could take to populism, such as refusing to work with populist parties or attempting to explain root causes behind their grievances (Brett, 2013, 411).

I have discussed arrogance as a vice of arguers elsewhere (Aberdein, 2020). Indeed, the association of arrogance and argument is an ancient one: as Paul Weithman observes, “Aquinas numbered the argumentative vices of contention, discord and pertinacity among the daughters of vainglory” (Weithman, 1991, 470 f.). Vainglory is a form of pride consisting in taking pleasure in praise or acknowledgement of superiority, and thereby a close conceptual neighbour of arrogance. Hence, in a recent paper, Grant Rozeboom distinguishes “four basic forms of the vanity-vice”:

- (1) **arrogant conceit:** someone unjustifiably expects high appraisal they do not deserve, and they care about the correctness of their expectation,
- (2) **entitled conceit:** someone unjustifiably expects authority-recognition they do not deserve, and they care about the correctness of their expectation,
- (3) **arrogant smugness:** someone unjustifiably expects high appraisal they do not deserve, and they do not care about the correctness of their expectation, and
- (4) **entitled smugness:** someone unjustifiably expects authority-recognition they do not deserve, and they do not care about the correctness of their expectation (Rozeboom, 2020, 19 f.).

Rozeboom distinguishes smugness from conceit in similar terms to Cassam’s characterization of insouciance: the conceited person cares whether their unjustified expectations are correct; the smug person does not.<sup>2</sup> Of the four vices he distinguishes, Rozeboom maintains “that entitled smugness is uniquely worrisome” and therefore that it presents particular dangers when manifested “by those who hold positions of official power and authority” (Rozeboom, 2020, 29). This is because the smug individual is indifferent to the correctness of his self-appraisal, and thereby

<sup>2</sup>Ultimately, of course, both characterizations derive from Harry Frankfurt’s definition of bullshit (Frankfurt, 1988).

less open to revising his belief, and the unjustified expectations held by the entitled individual have wider implications than those of the merely arrogant.

As Rozeboom acknowledges, the conceptual space he is exploring is somewhat congested, with multiple competing definitions of arrogance and related vices. He does not cite Alessandra Tanesini, although her definitions are quite close to his own. She distinguishes arrogance from haughtiness: where “the haughty think of themselves as authoritative asserters” (Tanesini, 2016, 81), the arrogant are “unaccountable” asserters, “delusively (and usually non-consciously) believ[ing] that one’s asserting that things are so makes them so” (Tanesini, 2016, 85). Confusingly, both arrogance and haughtiness, on Tanesini’s conception, are closer to what Rozeboom terms entitlement than to his version of arrogance. So Tanesini may be seen as subdividing entitlement on an axis orthogonal to that between smugness and conceit, a distinction she does not draw. Nonetheless, arrogance on Tanesini’s conception might be expected to frequently lead to smugness, since they both present a similarly ineradicable sense of authority. In neither case will such an individual perceive much point in listening to what others have to say. As the focus group comments quoted above illustrate, such an attitude is unlikely to be well received by others. Even a misleading perception of such vices is something an arguer should take pains to avoid, as it is likely to alienate any audience.

#### 4. POPULIST AUDIENCES

Audiences present a problem for VTA that is not presented by arguers or co-arguers: they are groups, and ascribing virtues and vices to groups is not a simple task. Of course, political arguers, or co-arguers, might be understood as groups in some situations. Certainly, positions in political arguments are routinely attributed to parties or factions. However, such groups characteristically have identifiable leaders or spokespersons, to whom such arguments, and whatever virtues or vices they may exemplify, might as readily be assigned. The political audience, however, must be understood as a group and an unusually large one at that. Much discussion of group cognition focusses on small groups, such as juries, where deliberation is feasible. The audience for contemporary political arguments is implicitly the whole electorate, characteristically numbered in the millions. Although there have been a few studies of audience in VTA, they do not address audiences of this size

(Al Tamimi, 2017; Drehe, 2017). Similar problems beset many accounts of group virtue and vice in virtue epistemology.

The most influential account of group virtue is that of Miranda Fricker. She notes that groups may be described under “three different aspects”:

- (1) a number of individuals (the group considered as the sum of its component individuals)
- (2) a collective (the group considered as non-reducible to its component individuals)
- (3) an institutional structure (its formal and procedural structure) (Fricker, 2010, 236).

This leads to an important distinction: summative accounts of groups, or their properties, including virtues or vices, focus exclusively on the first aspect; non-summative accounts permit the ascription to groups of such properties so that they are not reducible to properties of their members. Fricker rejects a summative account since groups can act collectively in ways that are at odds with the beliefs of their component individuals. Instead, she proposes a model of “plural virtue”, in which the individual members of a collective jointly commit, qua members of that collective, to some virtuous end (and jointly meet whatever specific success conditions are necessary to have the virtue) (Fricker, 2010, 241). Plural vice is directly analogous, with the end being vicious rather virtuous. Unanimity is not required for either plural virtue or vice; as Fricker observes, “there can be many social contexts of group activity where it is a real ethical achievement to resist colluding with the collective vice that may be a prevalent and powerful force in the environment” (Fricker, 2010, 248). Fricker also proposes an account of institutional virtue and vice, by analogy with the concept of institutional racism (Fricker, 2010, 249).

For present purposes, there are a number of problems with Fricker’s picture. Firstly, as J. Adam Carter and Fernando Broncano-Berrocal point out, “it locates the source of the group (epistemic) vice in a positive orientation towards bad (epistemic) goals” rather than “in terms of group members lacking a joint commitment towards sufficiently epistemically good ends” (Carter and Broncano-Berrocal, 2017,

19). More fundamentally, a joint commitment of any kind is an unreasonable expectation of a group that may number in the millions and is largely lacking in organizational structure. Carter and Broncano-Berrocal’s friendly amendment may seem to offer a way out as far as vice attribution is concerned, since they require only the absence of a commitment. However, that impression is illusory: if it is unreasonable to expect a group to act in a given way, it must also be unreasonable to attribute any particular significance to their failing to act that way. Fricker’s institutional virtues and vices essentially build on her account of plural virtues and vices, so are even less applicable. One possible way out would be to bite a bullet that Fricker declines to bite, and attribute dispositions directly to groups. Ryan and Meghan Byerly defend such a step, proposing the following definition: “A collective C has a virtue V to the extent that C is disposed to behave in ways characteristic of V under appropriate circumstances” (Byerly and Byerly, 2016, 43).<sup>3</sup> The Byerlys do not generalize their account to collective vice, but it would seem trivial to do so.

What argumentational vices might a populist audience be suspected to commit? We saw above that distrust and de-alignment have been identified as key factors in the rise of populism. Other writers agree that “political trust is a necessary precondition of political legitimacy as well as democracy” (Masala, 2020, 187). Willingness to trust has also been identified as an argumentational virtue (Gascón, 2016). Carter, in joint work with Daniella Meehan, proposes three vices, arrogance, closed-mindedness, and emulousness, as “independently sufficient for leading individuals to distrust reliable information” (Carter and Meehan, 2019, 30). Emulousness is the least familiar of the three. They define it as “motivation by a spirit of rivalry” and observe that it is epistemically vicious since it may lead to “unearned distrust” (Carter and Meehan, 2019, 28). In a political context, the obvious manifestation of emulousness is polarization and partisanship, which we have already linked to de-alignment, another key factor in populism. Carter has argued elsewhere that group polarization is a collective epistemic vice (Carter and Broncano-Berrocal, 2017). As Michael Hannon observes, partisanship can magnify the appearance of

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<sup>3</sup>Against Fricker’s concern that collectives “do not have any of the features of the normal subjects of virtue and vice: they are not agents, they have no will, and so they cannot accrue any credit or discredit of the praise and blame variety” (Fricker, 2010, 249), the Byerlys offer a more nuanced definition: “A collective C has a virtue V to the extent that the members of C are disposed, qua members of C, to behave in ways characteristic of V under appropriate circumstances” (Byerly and Byerly, 2016, 43).

polarization: a range of empirical work suggests that when partisan participants report beliefs on contentious issues, they are often merely expressing what they take to be characteristic of their political allegiances (Hannon, 2020). This implies, optimistically, that there are fewer political disagreements than is often supposed (but also, pessimistically, that there are fewer political agreements). However, even a misleading appearance of polarized disagreement is likely to feed back into more distrust and de-alignment.

It is easy to see how emulousness can generalize from an individual to a group level vice, since a spirit of rivalry is something that frequently arises at a group level. Carter and Meehan's other two proposed vices of distrust, closed-mindedness and arrogance, present more of a challenge. Their status as individual-level argumentational vices is not in dispute: I addressed arrogance as a vice of (co-)arguers above and it is well-established that "closed-mindedness is an almost insuperable obstacle to the realization of any of the cognitive benefits of arguments" (Cohen, 2009, 59). But the concerns raised above about the attribution of plural vices to large, uncoordinated groups, such as (sections of) electorates, would seem to apply acutely. There seems little basis on which to ascribe a joint commitment towards cognitive closure or unaccountability to such groups. Nor, as I suggested above, any basis on which to draw inferences from the absence of countervailing joint commitments.

The Byerlys' more permissive conception of collective virtue, and thereby vice, provides a suggestive alternative. It is certainly tempting to conclude that populist audiences, that is sections of the electorate receptive to populist arguments, are disposed to behave in ways characteristic of the vices of closed-mindedness and arrogance. However, we should recall the considerable difficulties accompanying vice charging discussed above. On Kidd's account, for a robust vice charge to succeed, it requires not only a thorough (and shared) grasp of vice charging itself and of the specific vice at issue, but also an "empirically adequate causal and explanatory account of the relationship of the targets' vice(s) and the negative act(s) that provoked the charge" (Kidd, 2016a, 186). This is a hard enough standard for individual vice charging to meet; for collective vice charging it may be unattainable. Furthermore, collective vice charging faces a more fundamental problem: not every individual vice need correspond to a collective vice. For example, the belief which

Tanesini takes to be characteristic of arrogance, believing “that one’s asserting that things are so makes them so”, while indefensible at the individual level, may be eminently defensible when held by a collective—at least if that collective constitutes a majority. Of course, a preference for majoritarian conceptions of democracy over more nuanced interpretations is one of the characteristics of populism. But, by that token, it would beg the question against populism to stipulatively define it into intellectual vice.

### 5. VIRTUOUS REMEDIES?

In the last three sections, we have explored a few of the vices of which populist arguers, co-arguers, and audiences may be accused. We have also seen how difficult it is to make a robust vice charge stick. Little is to be gained in populists and their critics furiously hurling accusations of argumentational vice at each other. Instead I wish to conclude by asking whether modelling argumentational virtue may offer a better way forward. In particular, I will focus on two of the virtues I suggested above are central to VTA: willingness to listen to others and willingness to modify your own position. These two virtues are, of course, intimately related: “The good listener . . . is willing to reassess and revise her opinions or prejudices as a result of taking seriously the other’s meanings and opinions” (Beatty, 1999, 295). They have also both been widely discussed, sometimes under slightly different guises.

Several authors have defended a conception of listening as a virtue. Suzanne Rice notes that what counts as good listening is conditioned by context: “Serving as a juror, attending a campaign speech, and tuning into network news all call for different depths of engagement, depending largely on whether what one hears will eventuate in a decision—and that decision’s significance” (Rice, 2011, 149). As a consequence, she infers that “we have a ‘listening character,’ which is comprised of a wide variety of qualities such as attentiveness (or inattentiveness), curiosity (or incuriosity), patience (or impatience), and so on, all of which are mutually shaping or interpenetrating” (Rice, 2011, 151). Andrew Dobson has argued that the benefits of “listening in politics in general and democracy in particular . . . include increasing legitimacy, dealing with deep disagreements, improving understanding between citizens and elected representatives, and enhancing empowerment” (Dobson, 2012,

857). He notes that “listening plays a central role in truth and reconciliation committees” (Dobson, 2012, 846). However, he also cautions that true listening is a demanding endeavour, and that the half-baked attempts all too often passed off as listening exercises are “usually so poorly conducted that they have the opposite to their intended effect. Citizens often come away from them even more firmly confirmed in their belief that the government is not listening to them” (Dobson, 2012, 844). Rachel Wahl exposes a complementary problem with listening projects: that they are mistrusted by citizens who see them as listening to the wrong people. She investigates the local community’s misgivings about (and sparse attendance at) an event organized by a national non-profit organization, the Listen First Project, “to support the continued healing and reconciliation in Charlottesville” (Wahl, 2019, 457). These problems demonstrate how demanding the effective implementation of good listening is; they also suggest that it needs to be integrated with another virtue, that of humility.

In recent years, perhaps the most influential account of intellectual humility has been the “limitations owning” account, that intellectual humility “consists in proper attentiveness to, and owning of, one’s intellectual limitations” (Whitcomb et al., 2017, 520). A broadly similar approach has been defended by Jonathan Adler as “an appreciation of our fallibility” in terms of “a second-order (or ‘meta’) attitude toward one’s beliefs as believed, and not just toward the specific proposition believed” (Adler, 2004, 130). Paradoxically, Adler terms the virtue so characterized open-mindedness, rather than humility. I agree with James Spiegel that Adler’s account is more plausible as a definition of humility than of open-mindedness (Spiegel, 2012, 34). But this terminological confusion illustrates how critical humility is to open-mindedness and the related argumentational virtue of willingness to modify your own position. Kidd proposes a confidence calibration account of humility that adds an extra element of symmetry: both under- and over-confidence would count as failures to correctly calibrate one’s intellectual confidence, and thereby as corresponding vices of deficiency and excess. His account is also directly linked to argumentation, noting in particular that confidence calibration “is necessarily an intersubjective process that relies crucially upon engagement with other people—critics, peers, interlocutors, and others who may humble or humiliate us” (Kidd,

2016b, 398). Humility is also the virtue characteristically contrasted to the vice of arrogance (and its close neighbours), which we saw implicated in the weaknesses of arguments of populist and anti-populist alike.

As a prospective remedy for the difficulties populism poses for democracy, striving to exemplify the virtues of good listening, willingness to modify one's own position, and humility is by no means an easy option. Moreover, it imposes burdens on all parties. Populist arguers and audiences may often fall short of argumentational virtue, but as we have seen, so do populist co-arguers. If populism is to be contained, then its critics need to engage its arguments in good faith.

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