

William Riker's
"Liberalism Against Populism"

CMSS seminar, Tuesday 15 October

Liberalism Against Populism

What role does voting play in democracy?

social choice theory \implies the liberal view is correct
the populist view is incorrect

Motivation

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3. Suppose a non-academic asks
what do I need to know about social choice theory?
why do I need to know about social choice theory?

William Riker

- ▶ PhD Harvard 1948
- ▶ 1949–1962 Lawrence College, Wisconsin
- ▶ 1963–1993 University of Rochester, New York
- ▶ founded positive political theory
- ▶ by 2003 his work had been cited over 3700 times by over 2000 scholars in over 500 different journals
- ▶ author of Liberalism Against Populism (1982)

Democracy, voting

Democracy:

- ▶ popular participation in government
- ▶ equality (at the ballot box, before the law, etc)
- ▶ liberty

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“What does voting establish?”

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“What does voting establish?”

There are two views: liberalism and populism.

Liberalism

We vote only to control elected officials.

Riker: "Voting generates liberty by restraining officials."

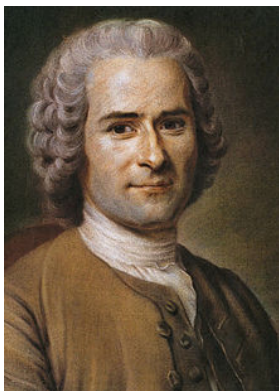


James Madison
(1751–1836)

Populism

We vote to establish the will of the electorate.

We embody the will of the electorate in the actions of elected officials.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(1712–1778)

Social choice theory

- ▶ cycles
- ▶ Arrow's Theorem
- ▶ we can get different outcomes from different 'good' voting procedures
- ▶ agenda manipulation
- ▶ manipulative voting

Riker has plenty of examples.

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Voting is inaccurate and meaningless.

The populist view cannot be correct.

Liberalism Against Populism

Suppose we hold an election for some office.

A is the incumbent.

Liberalism Against Populism

Suppose we hold an election for some office.

A is the incumbent.

	<i>A</i> is good	<i>A</i> is bad
<i>A</i> is not rejected		
<i>A</i> is rejected		

Liberalism Against Populism

the people cannot rule as a corporate body

officials rule, and they do not represent some indefinable popular will

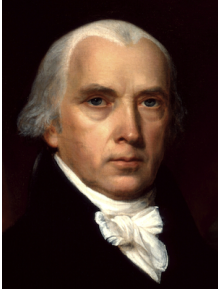
It would help to have a citizenry aware of the emptiness of the populist interpretation

Gerry Mackie

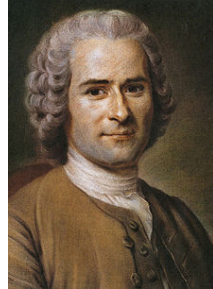
- ▶ worked in the forestry industry
- ▶ PhD Chicago 2000
- ▶ since 2005, Professor at UCSD
- ▶ author of Democracy Defended (2003)

Democracy Defended

Liberalism: voting generates liberty by restraining officials.

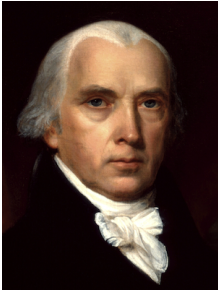


Populism: we vote to establish the will of the electorate.

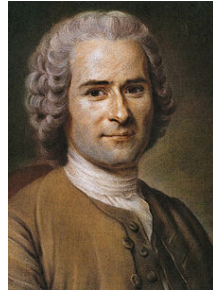


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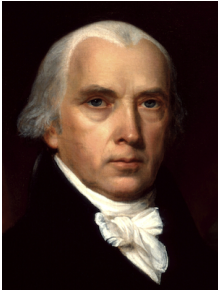
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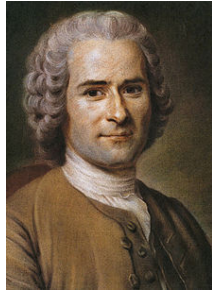
Madison: restraining officials is necessary for democracy.

Democracy Defended

Liberalism: voting generates liberty by restraining officials.



Populism: we vote to establish the will of the electorate.



Madison: restraining officials is necessary for democracy.

Rousseau: there is a difference between 'the general will' and 'the will of all'.

Democracy Defended

Suppose an electorate rejects a bad incumbent.

Could this rejection be 'the will' of the electorate?

Democracy Defended

Suppose an electorate rejects a bad incumbent.

Could this rejection be 'the will' of the electorate?

Riker

- ▶ rejects populism if it might ever fail
- ▶ accepts liberalism if it might ever work

Is this reasonable?

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- ▶ agenda manipulation
 - is rare

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 - is sometimes beneficial
 - genuine preferences emerge over time

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Riker has plenty of examples, and Mackie rejects all of them.

Democracy Defended

Riker:

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Mackie:

voting can be accurate and meaningful

social choice theory $\not\Rightarrow$ the liberal view is correct
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a powerful belief that [what Riker calls populism] is impossible and fraudulent creates the situation it defines

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