Climate Politics, Populism, and the Role of Knowledge and Expertise

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While a great deal of ink – or bytes – has been spilled over the meaning and significance of populism in our contemporary political imaginary, far less attention has been devoted to the implications of this phenomenon for the politics of climate change. And yet, a consideration of the intersections between the two raises a number of core themes central to each. These include the challenges of "politicization," which often appears to be a double-edged sword in climate politics, and has been central to many accounts of populism. The role of pluralism – understood as the inclusion of diverse perspectives, values, and identities – has also been contested in both climate and populist politics. Cosmopolitanism – as an affective orientation *and* a commitment to global governance and decision-making – has often been integral to climate advocacy, but targeted by populists. While attention to all of these is necessary for a robust appreciation of climate politics in an age of populism, here I focus on an additional (yet overlapping) intersection and challenge: that posed by the role played by experts and expert knowledge – especially that generated by members of the scientific community – in the politics of climate change.[1]

In both the US and around the globe, our times have often been defined as a "populist moment" (Cervera-Marzal 2020; Gebhardt 2019; Mouffe 2018, 9–24; Galston 2018). While the very meaning of this moment has been interpreted in dramatically different ways, and while the term populism itself is deeply contested, virtually all theorists and commentators have recognized that populism is centered upon a conflict between those deemed "the people" and others identified as "elites." Indeed, Jane Mansbridge and Stephen Macedo's survey of the extensive literature on populism leads them to conclude that its *only* core elements – in both theory and practice – are entailed by "pitting the people in moral battle against elites" (2019, 60). Like many theorists studying populism, Mansbridge and Macedo worry about additional elements – especially a predilection toward a homogeneous and exclusionary conception of 'the people' – that has been associated with populism. But they argue convincingly that this is a contingent feature rather than part of the core (prominent scholars who do center this exclusionary element in their definition of populism include: Müller 2016; Urbinati 2019; Galston 2018; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Rosanvallon 2008, 265–73). Limiting our definition of populism to these core elements has important consequences; it avoids prematurely assuming that populism is inherently pathological and it allows us to recognize that populism also taps into democratic politics' "normative roots in the wants and needs of ordinary citizens… challenging, on egalitarian and justice grounds, elite political, economic, and cultural domination" (Mansbridge and Macedo 2019, 60). Beginning with this more capacious understanding of populism, we can remain open to its possibilities as well as its dangers (cf., Tormey 2018).

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[1] This paper is part of a larger project exploring the intersections of populism and climate politics; I aim to explore these other themes in separate papers.

With an interest in the intersection of climate politics and populism, then, a key question emerges: what happens if and when scientists and other experts with important knowledge needed to adequately comprehend the magnitude and impacts of climate change are cast (justifiably or not) as elites in a populist morality play? In one of the relatively small number of studies of the linkages between populists and climate change politics, Matthew Lockwood has argued that reaction to climate change policy has become integral to the ideology of *right-wing* populism in many countries, precisely because it has become symbolic of the central populist antagonism between "the people" and an "elite" (Lockwood 2018). Moreover, as Will Davies convincingly observes, "Expertise *does* possess cultural and political privileges in society, that protect centres of knowledge from democratic interference or moral judgement" (Davies 2020, 658).

Thus, the association of climate experts and expertise with a distant, rootless, technocratic elite is a politically potent one. As a result, there can be grave dangers to the familiar defense of climate action as a rejection of "ignorance" and an unqualified endorsement of established understandings of science and expert knowledge. Or so I will argue. But what's the alternative? Can populism's relation to climate politics be understood in ways other than the one Lockwood describes? Can it expand what counts as relevant knowledge, without rejecting the insights of science? If so what might that look like? Can and should the role of experts be decentered without being dismissed? And what are both the dangers and possibilities of a climate populism that might do so? I aim to explore these questions here.

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The sense in which I aim to understand the present as a populist moment is that questions, perceptions, and choices central to climate politics are today often framed by the populism's contrast between the people and the elite and by an incredulity toward and suspicion of the motivations of the latter. If this sense of the present is accepted, then it would seem that climate advocates are forced to choose: either to position themselves as straightforward proponents of scientific objectivity and technocratic politics in the face of the threat of climate change – defenders in this sense of a status quo ante – or instead to understand and advance climate politics through the embrace of at least some sort of alternative representations of the role of science, knowledge, and their relation to political advocacy and change.

In the remainder of this paper, I proceed as follows. First, I draw from a recent article by Niels Mede and Mike Schäfer to delineate what they term "science-related populism," which provides a set of useful categories for examining this phenomenon (Mede and Schäfer 2020). In particular, these authors draw a useful distinction between a populist critique of *power claims* by scientists and other experts – they term this "decision-making sovereignty" – and a populist critique of *truth claims* that they term "truth-speaking sovereignty" (2020). Unpacking and utilizing these categories in a manner somewhat different than Mede and Schäfer, I then sketch four ideal-typical responses to the challenges of climate advocacy in a populist moment. The first, noted already, is the most defensive – doubling down on claims of scientific objectivity and technocratic politics and thereby rejecting all manifestations of the populist critique. A second response opens up the process of expert autonomy over what Mede and Schäfer term power claims, but aims to retain expert authority over truth claims. Here I use a chapter by Mark Brown that seems to capture this response well, in order to unpack and critically engage with it (2014). A third sort of response allows for at least certain types of democratization and pluralization of *both* power claims and truth claims, thus challenging perceptions of scientific autonomy over both. The argument in a recent article by Will Davies seems to capture this response well and so again I unpack

and critically engage it (2020). A fourth response is the (only) one that Mede and Schäfer actually label "science-related populism," and entails unified control over both power claims and truth claims by a homogeneous "people," to the exclusion of scientists or others represented as claiming expertise. Presented as such, this final response reflects an understanding of populism as pathological, rooted in anti-pluralism, and rejecting expertise in any form as a manifestation of elitism. Interpreting this as the only manifestation of populism, I argue, is ill-founded: both the second and (especially) third responses address (elements of) the populist challenge as well. Moreover, failing to recognize these other responses *as* populist positions climate advocates poorly for politics in a populist moment.[2]

SCIENCE-RELATED POPULISM

Mede and Schäfer characterize "science-related populism" (S-RP) in a way that it appears as a particular application of Mansbridge and Macedo's core elements. It is, they argue, "a set of ideas which suggests that there is a morally charged antagonism between an (allegedly) virtuous ordinary people and an (allegedly) unvirtuous academic elite" (2020, 473).[3] What distinguishes S-RP, they argue, is that participatory demands are extended beyond the state and official governance institutions to the realm of knowledge production itself, challenging scientific authority and epistemology (Mede and Schäfer 2020, 480). As noted above, they argue that it does so in two analytically distinct ways.

The first way is to challenge what they term science's "decision-making sovereignty." Here the focus is upon the scientific community's control over resources, process, and agenda-setting priorities. What is researched, how is funding obtained and allocated, and other questions of decision-making power are central here. The claim is that "academic elites … hold such sovereignty illegitimately," and use this power to advance ideological agendas or even personal gain rather than the proclaimed "objective scientific norms" (Mede and Schäfer 2020, 482). From this populist perspective, it is the people who should have the power to make decisions about what science is funded or supported, rooted in common sense notions of practical relevance or significance (Mede and Schäfer 2020, 483).

The second way challenges science's "truth-speaking sovereignty." This cuts even deeper into the self-understanding and epistemology of scientific inquiry, by challenging science's autonomous authority to produce knowledge defined as "true." Mede and Schäfer argue that S-RP "perceives this as illegitimate, because scientific approaches to knowledge production do not prioritize the everyday experience and opinions of ordinary people, but [are formulated in]…the proverbial ivory tower" (2020, 483).

In sum, while the first populist challenge to scientific expertise focuses on power claims, the second focuses on truth claims. But while Mede and Schäfer use these categories simply to identify the dimensions of scientific autonomy or sovereignty that S-RP opposes, I argue that they allow us to

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[2] By examining strategies for change in the context of a present populist moment, this paper can be read as pursuing what Robyn Eckersley has recently described (building upon Stuart Hall's work) as "conjunctural analysis." She argues that "the aim of conjunctural analysis here is to identify the political opportunities (and dangers) that are presented for ecological transition, including sites within the state and civil society or intermediaries (parties, social networks etc,) that hold the most potential for new transition initiatives" (2021, 255).

[3] This characterization of an "academic elite" as equivalent to a "scientific" one may ring oddly in our ears and is never really justified in the article. I suspect it's in part a reflection of the broader connotation of "scientific" inquiry in Germanic-speaking contexts (the authors are based in Zurich) and in part a reflection of populist tropes themselves. In any case, with attention focused on climate change, it is largely climate science, though also social science fields like economics, that play a central role.

generate four distinct sorts of conceptions of how "the people" relate to scientific expertise. The first might best be captured in the slogan 'follow the science.' The second and third take seriously popular claims to power or truth, respectively, while the fourth embraces both seemingly uncritically. In the sections that follow, I consider each of these sorts of claims in turn.

FOUR CONCEPTIONS OF THE RELATION OF 'THE PEOPLE' TO SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE

1. 'Follow the Science'

This first ideal-typical response represents a wholesale rejection of the populist challenge to scientific autonomy. It aims to double down on claims of scientific objectivity as simply a description of "reality" (M. B. Brown 2014, 136), which is starkly contrasted with "politics." It is often infused with what Roger Pielke describes as the "linear model" of decision-making based on scientific findings (Pielke 2011; M. Brown 2016). In this model, objective findings of an autonomous scientific community shape public opinion, which in turn directs the formulation and implementation of public policy by technocratic experts. Dryzek, Norgaard, and Schlosberg term this a "rational world" model and argue that this imaginary "underlies current global efforts to respond to climate change" (2013, 9).

Of course, none of these authors – who delineate this model in order to criticize it – nor those who I am suggesting accept or embrace such a model are naïve enough to believe that it corresponds to the manner in which scientific findings are actually received in important instances. It is nonetheless a powerful normative model that shapes expectations of the proper, independent, role for scientific (and social science and managerial) expertise and is often found in the background assumptions of those that insist we must 'listen to' or 'follow' the science, who complain that climate science has become 'politicized,' or that experts must be returned to their proper decision-making roles. Yet a generation of scholarship in both Science and Technology Studies and also Environmental Political Theory has highlighted the ways in which distance from this model cannot be explained simply by error, nor by economic self-interest or corruption alone. Instead, this scholarship has argued that the rationalist assumptions at the core of such imaginaries are *inherently* flawed and therefore misleading (I develop this point further in: Meyer 2018). Nonetheless, in the face of populist challenges to science and expertise, this linear, rationalist imaginary can motivate supporters to "March for Science" and to look back nostalgically to a pre-populist status quo ante where expertise was seemingly granted greater deference or respect.[4]

2. Power Claims

In his essay "Climate Science, Populism, and the Democracy of Rejection," Mark Brown examines popular mistrust of climate science, reading it as a reflection of longstanding "popular suspicion of organized power;" in this case the power of the scientific community. His focus is on those often labeled climate denialists – or as he aims to describe them more precisely, "climate science rejectionists." While not minimizing the factual inaccuracy of many of their scientific (truth) claims, he argues that they nonetheless draw important attention to "the economic and political dimensions of climate science and its role in public policy," which is often downplayed by climate advocates themselves (M. B. Brown 2014, 129).

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[4] This is not to claim that all those who participated in, or organized, events including the 2017 "March for Science" were proponents of this simplistic model.

Brown follows Pierre Rosanvallon in highlighting the significance of what the latter terms "counter-democracy" – efforts to oversee, block, or evaluate governmental decisions or actions. While Rosanvallon's label may misleadingly suggest that he views such efforts as anti-democratic, in fact he argues that counter-democracy can be an integral manifestation of democracy itself. It displaces the centrality of the figure of "the people as voters" with long-established figures of "the people as watchdogs, the people as veto-wielders, and the people as judges" (Rosanvallon 2008, 16–17). In a parallel manner, Brown argues that climate science rejectionists can properly be understood counter-democratic (hence, democratic!) actors in this sense (M. B. Brown 2014, 134).

As (counter-)democratic actors, climate science rejectionists draw attention to normative questions about conflicts of interest among scientists, how to act in the face of uncertainty and risk, and about the social and economic consequences of proposed policies. These are vitally important questions, even if the rejectionists' answers are implausible or unconvincing. As such, Brown argues that they "rightly portray climate change as a distinctly political problem" in contrast to the linear, rationalist imaginary of science advice (2014, 136). The sort of questions raised here focus on what Mede and Schäfer describe as "power claims," which challenge the "decision-making sovereignty" of the scientific community. By recognizing the legitimacy of counter-democratic actors (not just climate science rejectionists) in addressing these normative questions, Brown is arguing for democratizing the decision-making process around climate science itself.

Yet while Brown sees counter-democracy as valuable in confronting these power claims, he – again following Rosanvallon – draws a firm line when it comes to populism: "as a form of counter-democracy, climate rejection threatens democratic institutions when it becomes infused with populism" (2014, 136). At this point, he argues, "counter-democracy's various modes of distrust become pathological" (2014, 137). What is this line between constructive, counter-democratic challenges to climate science decision-making and the pathological, populist rejection of such science? It appears to be based on the status of scientific truth claims, or what Mede and Schäfer also refer to as "truth-speaking sovereignty." Brown notes that the pathological populist rejects climate science truth by appealing to "everyday common sense," such as "when they insist that a cold winter means that global warming cannot be happening" (2014, 137). The questioning of truth claims – in this example, by positing "common sense" as an alternative but legitimate form of knowledge about global warming – crosses the line into populism for Brown and Rosanvallon, which they then characterize as pathological.

Brown illustrates his analysis with a discussion of the so-called "climategate" release of hacked or leaked emails from climate scientists at the University of East Anglia back in 2009. While climate science rejectionists and right-wing commentators sought to generate a scandal out of these emails, Brown notes that they do reveal an underlying acceptance of the rationalist, linear model among the scientists. That is, they discussed ways to finesse the presentation of their data for fear that indications of uncertainty would otherwise weaken support for climate action (2014, 139). His point is that both sides viewed a debate over the science as a proxy war for their real concern: a debate over policy. In this sense the rejectionists' tactics and focus was "a political reaction against those who would use truth to eliminate politics" (2014, 141).

He thus concludes by arguing for shifting the spotlight away from the role of science in climate policy. It appears that this move addresses both sorts of claims explored here. First, it could center a political debate where it 'belongs,' on democratic decisions about policy outcomes (cf., Blakely 2020). Second, by

relieving the attention and pressure on scientific truth claims, it could protect the autonomy of science to make such truth claims. The alternative is the devolution of democracy to what Brown calls "a populist democracy of rejection," which is cast as a fundamental threat to climate change action (2014, 142).

Is populism necessarily pathological in the sense that Brown (and Rosanvallon) imagine? Relatedly, is an opening up of truth claims beyond the "sovereignty" of the scientific community as inherently problematic as this analysis argue? I explore these questions in the next section.

3. Truth Claims

Those who challenge the sovereignty of scientific "truth-speaking" extend the democratizing process advocated by Brown into territory he deems populist and pathological. That is, while one can, with Brown, seek to open up power claims without crossing over into truth claims, the reverse does not appear feasible. To question the authority and autonomy of scientific truth claims is to also already question their power over decision-making in science. While Brown's labeling of such a position as populist seems to me apt, here I wish to push back on the characterization of this position as inherently pathological. S-RP *can*, I suggest, be constructive and democratic. There is reason to worry about such a claim, especially as we live through a pandemic that may well be worsened or extended by those who reject scientific truth claims about vaccines, masking, or other public health measures. Nonetheless, I argue that pathologizing it is the more dangerous possibility and that it is important to press forward and consider this claim with our eyes open.

To explore this possibility, I take up a recent article by William Davies published in *Environmental Values*, entitled "Green Populism? Action and Mortality in the Anthropocene." Davies begins by arguing that while many worry about the politicization of science, including climate science, by populists, "*some* form of politicisation of science… is not only inevitable but arguably welcome." He links this claim to discourse on the Anthropocene, which is premised upon a breaking down of the barrier between human and natural history. He argues that "science must abandon its claim to be politically autonomous, without this generating a wholesale legitimacy crisis for scientific expertise…" (2020, 648). While so far this may read like a parallel to Brown's focus on decision-making power in the scientific community, Davies goes further. He describes a "blurred and shifting boundary between matters of fact and those of deliberative value judgment" (2020, 654) in the relationship between science and politics, with the consequence that this blurring and shifting has a comparable effect upon efforts like Brown's to endorse the democratization of power claims while simultaneously maintaining a well-defined realm in which claims of truth are protected. To advance his argument, Davies draws heavily upon Arendt's exploration of a fundamental tension between science and politics.

For Arendt, Davies observes, politics is an inherently "worldly" activity, rooted in a recognition of (and quest to transcend) human mortality. Modern science, by contrast, builds upon and radicalizes a Platonic account, which "renounces the flux of politics in favour of the certainty of truth" (2020, 652). In exchange for the offer of such certainty, science is said to turn away from worldly activity and meaning; an abstinence that follows as a consequence from a Weberian commitment to value neutrality, which requires a studied "obliviousness to the consequences of their actions" (Davies 2020, 653).

Davies observes that one clear consequence of the rise of both social media and populism is the breaking of control by accredited gatekeepers (editors, broadcasters, etc.) over the circulation of public

information. In this context, affect is a particularly powerful means of mobilization and Davies quotes Arendt as arguing that it is hypocrisy not injustice that is most "likely to transform *engages* into *enrages*" (2020, 656). To make sense of populist rage, Davies argues, it's necessary to see that "what is morally abhorrent about elites is not that they are flawed or self-interested as such, but that they purport to transcend personal interests or taste, because they purport to be acting in a representational capacity" (2020, 656). It is this "phoney claim" to be acting on behalf of the public interest, he argues, that is loathsome to many, whereas those who make no such pretense to objectivity do not generate the same anger. He argues that populist criticism of scientific experts as elites can be cast in Arendtian terms as the claim that "those individuals who deal in facts and figures are exempting themselves from the common world of politics, in favor of attention to universal and eternal methods and rules" (Davies 2020, 658).

Here we must pause to reflect upon the bases of such skeptical views about expert claims to "facts and figures." For if it is limited to those whom many academics might dismiss as anti-vaxxers, climate denialists, and so forth, then the temptation to pathologize these views can be powerful. But of course, hierarchies of expertise rooted in claims of objective knowledge, which thereby marginalize the experience and knowledge of others as merely subjective, have been the subject of powerful critiques by scholars of feminism, indigeneity, race, and anti-colonialism [many source citations and explication needed here]. Local knowledge, embodied knowledge, citizen science, traditional ecological knowledge, and Indigenous knowledge are of course some of the more familiar names for diverse ways of knowing that have often been marginalized by the "phoney claims" to objectivity and to standing above the common world, which populists also criticize.

An appeal to such ways of knowing is emphatically not the same as rejecting expertise in favor of "common sense." It is not a "post-truth" claim, but entails a pluralization of the sorts of expertise from which truth might be recognized as emerging. This is true in the bodies of critical scholarship noted above and also among many so-called populists [I need to explicate this point and cite it in relation to scholarship on feminism, indigeneity, anti-colonialism, critical policy studies, etc. But since I suspect this is more familiar to the conference audience for this paper, and since I'm short of time, I will focus on the 'harder' case of right-wing populism, for now]. Tuukka Ylä-Anttila conducted a careful study of Finnish media sources that have fed the rise of right-wing populism in that country. He argues that contrary to the expectations of many, these sources are distinct from so-called "post-truth" politics, in that it is not based upon a rejection of the possibility of inquiry to arrive at truth claims, but instead a reliance upon alternative sources of authority rather than the mainstream scientific community. They turn to "counterknowledge" rather than mainstream experts as sources of truth claims (Ylä-Anttila 2018).

While we may understandably react with exasperation or anger at the accounts offered by alternative sources who claim climate change is caused by sunspots or that covid vaccines implant Microsoft chips, it is nonetheless important to recognize that those relying upon such sources represent a distinct epistemic and affective response from one that rejects expertise as such, or claims that mere personal observation should trump scientific truth claims. Ylä-Anttila found that activists "claim to hold knowledge, truth, and evidence in high esteem, even professing strictly positivist views, and strongly opposing ambivalent or relativist truth orientations"(2018, 357). The key is that expertise, here, is seen as separate from elites.

Uncomfortable though it can be, I wish to suggest that the epistemic and affective bases for this turn to so-called populist counterknowledge have much in common with turns to other forms of popular knowledge and ways of knowing deemed local knowledge, TEK, subaltern knowledge, and so forth, that (appropriately) hold wider currency on the left. Thus, in examining anti-pipeline protests including Keystone XL and the Dakota Access Pipeline , Kai Bosworth has applied the very similar term "counterexpertise" to a process by which "populist discourse emerged from struggles over expertise" during environmental reviews of pipeline impacts (Bosworth 2019, 586). He concludes that through these struggles, "pipeline opponents came to understand a fundamental split – not between elite knowledge and local or lay experience but between a science in the interests of the state and capital and… what we might call a science for the people" (Bosworth 2019, 588).

Ways of knowing and forms of expertise are thus not singular. Some expertise is abstract – for example climate science that detects patterns that would otherwise be hidden from view or causes for change that would otherwise be impossible to detect. Other forms of expertise are grounded and informed by forms of knowledge that are generated in contexts that lack remoteness. The former positions itself as superior, based upon claims of objectivity and neutrality, even when – as in the pipeline struggles – it appeared evident that it fell far short of any such standards. The latter forms of expertise are not justified upon the basis of their objectivity or neutrality; not upon their separation from the common world, but by their immersion in it. It can also be justified by its lack of pretense, its engagement, and caring relation to the subjects of its knowledge and action.

Key, here, is to recognize that both the more abstract forms of expertise and the more grounded ones can be used for divergent social and normative ends. Advocates of climate action today emphasize the widespread agreement among mainstream climate scientists regarding the causes of climate change. But of course, mainstream science has also been used to facilitate and justify widespread ecological destruction and community harm. Indeed, Davies draws again upon Arendt who makes just this point:

> The simple fact that physicists split the atom without any hesitations the very moment they knew how to do it, although they realized full well the enormous destructive potentialities of their operation, demonstrates that the scientist qua scientist does not even care about the survival of the human race on earth or, for that matter, about the survival of the planet itself (Arendt quoted in: Davies 2020, 653)

Conversely, local knowledge and its correlates can cultivate a deeper understanding of both effects upon communities and effective strategies for change [the examples and cases here are endless, but one that might be illustrative is the destructive consequences of multi-generational suppression of wildland fires, justified as based on the best available science, in the face of knowledge embedded in Indigenous controlled-burning practices]. It can also be selectively employed to claim justification for so-called 'red-pilling' and conspiracy theories.

In this sense, the point is that a challenge to the sovereignty of the scientific community over truth claims is itself neither an inherently positive or negative development. To suggest that such a challenge is a slippery slope to climate denialism and unfounded conspiracy theories, for example, is no more compelling than to suggest such a challenge will inevitably lead to recognition for indigenous knowledge or the remoteness reduction that Val Plumwood calls for in her critique of the scientific rationality many appeal for in order to address ecological crises (1998). To the extent that S-RP is defined by a challenge of this sort, however, it is vital to recognize that the latter is at least as much a manifestation of the

democratization of truth claims as the former. The commonality here is that populism appears "to dwell in the common world of action – where humans are born and die – rather than in a world of timeless, universal laws and immutable facts" (Davies 2020, 658).

There are many sorts of examples of expertise that appears to dwell in the common world, but key is that these can enable experts to disassociate from elites and thereby minimize the perceptions of hypocrisy that can enrage. For Davies, medicine might represent an engaged form of expertise in this sense; it is quite literally focused on the common world where humans are born and die. More than mere engagement is relevant here; care can also be central. Thus, the surgeon or medical researcher appears less adequate as a model than the nurse. He proposes "a possible populism, in which expertise becomes modelled around the ideal type of the nurse rather than of the classically modern scientist." Here, "epistemic and political authority is therefore rooted in ideas of care and rescue" (Davies 2020, 661).

There has been a growing body of work that connects environmental crisis to a crisis of care, a line of thinking deeply imbued with insights from ecofeminism and environmental justice, while feeding into initiatives like the Green New Deal (Battistoni 2020; Klein 2020; "The Leap Manifesto" 2015). Yet explicating this as a manifestation of populism remains less familiar, perhaps because of a fourth type of response to science-related populism that I will explore in the next section.

4. Science rejectionism

In delineating four ideal-typical conceptions of popular-expert relations, I have drawn my categories of analysis explicitly from Mede and Schäfer's article on science-related populism. Yet their own work does not conceptualize four such responses. Only this final conception that I have labeled 'science rejectionism' seems to fit their account of S-RP, implicitly suggesting that non-populists aim to 'follow the science,' as in the first conception, above.

Although they draw an analytic distinction between power claims and truth claims, they reunite such claims when concluding that S-RP is centered on "the elite illegitimately claiming and the people legitimately demanding *both* science-related decision-making sovereignty and truth-speaking sovereignty" (Mede and Schäfer 2020, 473 emphasis added). By linking the two claims, they are consistent with my third ideal-type above, where I argued that a critique of scientific autonomy over truth claims is also premised on a critique of power claims.

Yet for Mede and Schäfer, S-RP is not reliant on counterknowledge or counterexpertise, but seemingly only on "common sense, everyday experience, or even gut feeling" (2020, 480–81; 483).[5] Along the way, this orientation is also used to reject the scientific establishment's decision-making power as corrupt and driven by careerist and personal interest rather than the common good (Mede and Schäfer 2020, 482). For these reasons, it seems appropriate to label this conception – unlike either of the two preceding it – as science *rejectionism*. By associating only this absolutist position with populism, however, Mede and Schäfer ultimately caricature the latter. Mansbridge and Macedo are right to identify a moral battle between the people and the elite as the core of populism. But this only requires an absolutist science rejectionism *if* expertise is represented as irredeemably and irrevocably elitist. No

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[5] Although these authors reference Ylä-Anttila's article, they don't acknowledge the central epistemic distinction made in his work between counterknowledge and common sense.

doubt some believe that it is. But nothing about the concept of populism itself requires that all expertise be represented as elitist and the empirical evidence from both populists and other popular movements suggests that it often is not.

In that case, science-related populism might offer possibilities for critique that are both different than, and potentially more insightful than, absolute science rejection. It might allow for the democratization of scientific decisionmaking while drawing upon a growing recognition of plural forms of knowledge and expertise itself. It is these possibilities that I have aimed to sketch in this paper. If we are, indeed, living in a populist moment, then it is these possibilities that seem to offer at least slivers of a more hopeful and constructive direction for the pursuit of populist climate action.

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