

1 'POPULARES' AND 'OPTIMATES': MODERN MIRAGES?

'Populares' and 'optimates' are central concepts in most modern models of late Republican political life. These models fall into two main groups: those which interpret the conflict between 'populares' and 'optimates' in ideological terms and those which do not. Some models do not even use the terms at all. In general, they have tended to build on each other, responding to and incorporating elements from earlier proposals. Nevertheless, fundamental problems remain. The fact that the reforms of the 'populares' did not include dismantling the aristocratic constitution but actually tended to stabilise the government sits at odds with the ideologically-based interpretations.¹ Just as significantly, those explanations which concentrate on the methods used by senators to achieve their political ambitions, altruistic or self-serving, note that the same methods are sometimes adopted by their opponents.²

The example of C. Sempronius Gracchus is a good illustration of this variety in interpretation.³ His laws dealt with many subjects including grain and land distribution, the creation of colonies, the right of appeal and the extension of the Roman franchise as well as reforms to the judicial system and senatorial procedure. Those who see his programme as a set of reforms conceived to limit the power and partiality of the senate and to benefit the poorer classes, often consider him the 'ideal type' of a 'popularis'. Nevertheless, some scholars have regarded him as an exception to the general typology. Taylor distinguished both Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus from other 'populares' on the basis of their intentions to establish the *iura populi*. Meier remarked that his democratic purposes marked C. Gracchus out as an exception. Brunt stressed the view that it was his legislation, put forward in opposition to the senate, which earned him his identification as a 'popularis'.⁴ C. Gracchus thus seems to be both the oddity and the archetype at one and the same time.

The current chapter reviews the historical tradition of these modern models to highlight how varied and inconclusive they are. It also draws attention to the important point that the only clear and unambiguous characteristic these views of late Republican political action agree upon is the existence of conflict between the senatorial majority and those other members of the political class who, for whatever reasons, chose to oppose it.

In the 19th century, Mommsen identified 'populares' and 'optimates' as parliamentary-style political parties, using the word 'party' in the full modern sense. He suggested that the 'Struggle of the Orders' resulted in the formation of aristocratic

1 Noted by e.g. Strasburger 1939, Meier 1965.

2 Two major examples of this are the proposals of the elder M. Livius Drusus (*RE* 17) and the grain law of M. Porcius Cato Uticensis (*RE* 16). On Drusus' laws see Chapter 6 section 6.2.4. On Cato's, see Chapter 3 n. 19.

3 *RE* 47. For more on C. Gracchus and his legislation see Appendix B.

4 Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus (*RE* 54). Taylor 1949: 21, Meier 1965: 557, Brunt 1988: 33.

and democratic parties. The rise of the aristocracy resulted in the rise of a democratic nemesis. In Gracchan times, this metamorphosed into a 'democratico-monarchical revolution'. He suggested that the labels *populares* and *optimates* started to be used in Gracchan times.⁵ The latter referred to those who wanted to give effect to the will of the best while the former identified those who represented the community.⁶ These categorisations are squarely based on the definitions put forward in the *Pro Sestio*.⁷ Mommsen injected a certain cynicism to his views, however, when he added that 'a change of party was more a change of political tactics than of political sentiments'.⁸

In *Die Nobilität der Römischen Republik*, Gelzer put forward a different kind of model in which the balance of power was controlled by relationships of *fides*, patronage, *amicitia* and *obligatio*. He suggested that political power was concentrated among *nobiles* who competed between themselves for personal power, the most politically powerful man being the one who could muster the largest number of votes. Fledgling politicians needed the protection of powerful men in order to progress and political power, based on membership of the senate, was bestowed by popular election.⁹

This model did not make use of the terms *populares* and *optimates*. Instead, it relied on information about electoral support found in the *Commentariolum petitionis* and Cicero's speeches on behalf of Murena and Plancius.¹⁰ The *Commentariolum* advises the candidate to seek support in many areas: men of noble and consular rank by persuading them of his 'optimiate' views, Pompey, young noblemen, friends and *publicani*. The urban multitude and those who control *contiones* can be attracted by praising Pompey and supporting Manilius and Cornelius.¹¹ Fur-

- 5 Lapyrionok 2005, on the other hand, proposes that 'optimates' can be defined as a political coalition opposed to 'populares' only in the period 64–54.
- 6 On Mommsen's presentation of the people's assembly in his *Römisches Staatsrecht* see Jehne 2005.
- 7 Th. Mommsen, *History of Rome* (trans. W.P. Dickson, Everyman's Library London [1911]), vol. 1: 304–5 on the 'new' party which opposed the aristocratic government, vol. 2: 295 on the rise of new aristocratic and opposition parties after the 'abolition of the patriciate', 339 on the beginnings of the 'democratico-monarchical revolution', vol. 3: 71–3 on the use of party names for the 'degenerate oligarchy' and an undeveloped but already corrupted democracy. Mommsen's interpretation owes much to nineteenth century German liberal thought.
- 8 Mommsen, *ibid.* vol. 3: 72.
- 9 Gelzer 1912. For suggestions of the influences behind this work see Bleicken, Meier & Strasburger 1977, Ridley 1986 and Simon 1988. On patronage see Rouland 1979, Wallace-Hadrill 1990, David 1992. On *clientela* see Deniaux 1993 and Brunt 1988: 382–442.
- 10 L. Licinius Murena (*RE* 123), Cn. Plancius (*RE* 4). The *Commentariolum* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 section 5.6 below.
- 11 *Comm. Pet.* 4, 5, 50, 51. Cn. Pompeius Magnus (*RE* 31), C. Manilius (*RE* 10), C. Cornelius (*RE* 18). In the prefatory note to his 2002 Loeb translation of this work, Shackleton Bailey notes that there still seems to be no consensus on the question of authorship. Contributors to the debate include Henderson 1950, Nisbet 1961, Till 1962, Balsdon 1963, Nardo 1970, Richardson 1971, Nicolet 1972, David *et al.* 1973. Morstein-Marx 1998 comments that whether it is authentic or not, it nevertheless provides much useful source material on late Republican politics.

ther, the candidate is advised not to take a stand on policy.¹² Gelzer compared this information with the details in the two defence speeches. Cicero claims that Murena was successfully elected due to his wide circle of supporters including senators, *publicani*, clients, neighbours, members of his tribe and the soldiers of Lucullus.¹³ Similarly, Plancius apparently owed his position to his cultivation of friendships, his generosity, public presence and volunteering nature as well as the efforts he made to avoid arousing envy.¹⁴ Gelzer concluded that an electoral candidate could not rely on the support of an organised party but had instead to cultivate a wide range of personal relationships extending both upwards and downwards in society.¹⁵ Personal relationships were more important than particular policies.

In his later work on Caesar, Gelzer restated his initial theories about the importance of patronage and *amicitia* in the oligarchic system, observing that political struggles took place within the oligarchy and were due, as often as not, to personal differences. He also made note of the tendency of the senatorial oligarchy to obstruct the rise of powerful individuals.¹⁶ However, in contrast with his earlier work, Gelzer now added concepts of ideological conflict between political parties to his model. He described Ti. Gracchus as a man of high principles who perished for his 'revolutionary' attempt to improve the lot of the *assidui* by distributing public land. He proposed that Gracchus was the first of a new type of politician, the 'populares', who wanted to serve the interests of the people, challenging the rule of a senate which was failing in its responsibilities. The opponents of these 'populares' defended the traditional rule of the nobility and the security of property. They used the words *boni* or *optimates* to refer to themselves.¹⁷ He suggested that the divisive issue was whether political decisions should remain in the hands of the senate or be transferred to the popular assembly. Nevertheless, Gelzer observed that claims made by the 'populares' about governing from the Forum were unrealistic due to the small number of citizens who actually participated in the political process. Concluding, therefore, that the 'populares' were more concerned about gaining the authority of the people for their plans than implementing the will of the people, he suggested that an appropriate translation of the term *popularis* was 'demagogue'.¹⁸

12 *Comm. Pet.* 53.

13 *Mur.* 69. L. Licinius Lucullus (*RE* 104).

14 *Planc.* 67.

15 See the summary in Gelzer 1912: 115–6. Note, however, that Cicero, Murena and Plancius are all *novi homines*.

16 Gelzer 1921: 9–14.

17 Hellegouarc'h 1963: 489 cites *ORF*³: 178, Cic. *De orat.* 2.170, *Har. Resp.* 41 & *Brut.* 103 as evidence that the word *boni* was applied both to the supporters of the Gracchi and to their political opponents.

18 Although this suggestion for translating the word *popularis* appears in the editions published in 1960 (p. 12) and later as well as Needham's 1968 English translation (p. 13), it is not found in the original 1921 edition. See also Vanderbroeck 1987: 174–92 on the translation of *popularis* as demagogue. He highlights the positive images of demagogues in 5th and 4th century Athens, equating this meaning with the positive/neutral usage of the word *popularis* to describe Roman politicians. Contra Bottéri & Raskolnikoff 1983: 81 who conclude that the word *popularis* is not equivalent to *δημαγόγος*.

Gelzer presented the conflict as one between creative politicians who sought to implement innovative solutions by attracting support from the people in the face of opposition from a traditional and hide-bound senate.¹⁹

A different sort of evidence formed the basis of Münzer's model. He studied the names in the consular *fasti* and proposed a theory based on relationships rather than policies. The recurring family names suggested to him that Roman politics was controlled by groups or parties of aristocratic *gentes*. He proposed that alliances between the dominant families were based on commitments to the various *gentes* as well as marriage and kinship ties. The *gentes* acted as stable political identities with common purposes and leaders.²⁰ The earliest family-based 'parties' were the patricians and the plebeians.²¹ Gradually these metamorphosed into groups such as the Scipionic circle and the cluster of families, led by Cato from the late 60s, which included the Metelli, Claudii, Servilii Caepiones and Porcii.

For Münzer, Cicero's description of the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus in *De republica* 1.31, with its details of the relationships between Ap. Claudius Pulcher, P. Crassus and P. Mucius, and the Gracchi, as well as the group's opposition to Scipio Aemilianus, was important evidence for the control of particular policies by family groups rather than political parties.²² He saw the Gracchan measures as representative of a democratic movement which aimed to tear away the privileges of birth and class.²³ Like Gelzer's initial model, that of Münzer made no overt use of a political division between 'populares' and 'optimates'. By basing their explanations on personal relationships such as patronage and ties of kinship, the models of Gelzer and Münzer introduced a more flexible and complex view of late Republican politics than the ideological one typified by Mommsen.

Syme expanded on Münzer's theories, using them to attribute motives to the actions of power-seeking individuals who were supported by *factiones* in a feudal society.²⁴ He summed up his views as follows,

'The political life of the Roman Republic was stamped and swayed, not by parties and programmes of a modern and parliamentary character, not by the ostensible opposition between Senate and People, *Optimates* and *Populares*, *nobiles* and *novi homines*, but by the strife for power, wealth and glory. The contestants were the *nobiles* among themselves, as individuals or in groups, open in the elections and in the courts of law, or masked by secret intrigue.'²⁵

19 Gelzer 1921: 9–22.

20 At least in the middle Republic.

21 On patricians and plebeians see Smith 2006: 168–76, 235–6, 251–278.

22 Münzer 1920: 257–81. P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus (*RE* 335), Ap. Claudius Pulcher (*RE* 295), P. Licinius Crassus Dives Mucianus (*RE* 72), P. Mucius Scaevola (*RE* 17).

23 Münzer 1920: 302, 422 describes the movement as a 'Gracchischen Bewegung'.

24 Syme 1939. Münzer's prosopographical model was also followed by Schur 1927, Scullard 1951, Briscoe 1982 & 1992. Badian 1958, Astin 1967 and Gruen 1968 & 1974 all make some use of Münzerian groups centring on powerful individuals but see them more as informal, fluid arrangements than rigid factions or parties.

25 Syme 1939: 11.

For Syme, political success depended on retaining a sufficient number of powerful and influential backers. He saw the contributing factor in Cicero's exile, his failure as a politician, as his lack of family connections and *clientela*. The orator was the leader of neither a *factio* nor a 'Ciceronian party'.²⁶ Similarly, Tiberius Gracchus came to grief when he lost the support of his influential sponsors.²⁷ Syme credited this 'party of the Gracchi' with being the first to use the tribunate as 'a means of direct political action'. Thenceforth, the tribunate became a weapon which was used by aristocratic demagogues, who styled themselves *populares*, against their rivals in power who invoked the 'specious and venerable authority of the senate.'²⁸

Syme described the politics of the late Republic as a conflict between a dominant oligarchy drawn from a set of powerful families, and their opponents. In his view, the senate governed by virtue of its *auctoritas* and was ruled by a clique of *nobiles* (he takes Gelzer's meaning) who also controlled access to the consulate.²⁹ His model proposed that late Republican politicians were motivated less by policies than by feuds between factions. He saw 'optimates' as the members of the ruling clique or *factio* of post-Sullan times.³⁰ His view of 'populares' was a simple one based primarily on demagogic tactics and strategy: they were tribunes, or men who used them, who advanced their own personal ambition in opposition to the ruling clique.³¹ Picking up the thread of cynicism from Mommsen's model, he too cast doubt on the sincerity of political claims made by late Republican politicians about the balance of power.

Scullard also described Republican politics in terms of a Münzerian model of family parties. He proposed that there were three fairly stable groups centring on the Fabii, the Aemilii and the Claudii. The two latter families formed alliances with others giving rise to an Aemilio-Scipionic group and a Fulvio-Claudian group.³² He suggested that the intensity of the struggles between family groups declined in the period leading up to the tribunate of Ti. Gracchus. From this point on, divisions between 'optimates' and 'populares' became more important. He defined 'opti-

26 Syme 1939: 16. Also 60, 'Without a party, a statesman is nothing. He sometimes forgets that awkward fact. If the leader or principal agent of a faction goes beyond the wishes of his allies and emancipates himself from control, he may have to be dropped or suppressed.'

27 Syme 1939: 60.

28 Syme 1939: 16.

29 Syme 1939: 18. Gelzer 1912: 22–32 defined *nobiles* as those possessing a consular ancestor. Thus also Shackleton Bailey 1986a. Contra Brunt 1982 who proposed that the *nobiles* included all those possessing the *ius imaginum*. See also Bleicken 1981, Burckhardt 1990. On the permeability of the oligarchy see Hopkins 1983, Badian 1990. Gruen 1995: ix sees the predominance of *nobiles* as 'an unassailable fact' and disputes over the exact definition as unfruitful. Jehne 2006a: 16 makes the point that since the politicians of the Republic regularly needed to succeed in popular elections and although descendants of ancient noble families had a statistically higher chance of doing so, 'new men' were also successful. The term 'aristocracy' is thus a perfectly acceptable label for the senatorial political class.

30 This view was based on Cic. *Rep.* 3.23 where the character of Philus (L. Furius Philus (*RE* 78)) notes that *factio* is the name given to a state where men rule by means of wealth, birth or other advantage and adds that these rulers are called *optimates*.

31 Syme 1939: 65 also identifies 'populares' as those who adopted 'the Marian tradition.'

32 Scullard 1951 on the period 220–150. See also Gelzer 1962: 201–10.

mates' as those who controlled the senate and forced their opponents, the 'populares', to seek support from the assembly. As a group, the 'optimates' upheld the oligarchy. The 'populares', on the other hand, shared common tactics and backgrounds but varied in motive. Some sought to bring down the dominant oligarchy, while others were reformers harbouring a genuine wish to improve the lot of the people.³³

In his article on *optimates* for the *Real-Encyclopädie*, published in the same year as Syme's *Roman Revolution*, Strasburger challenged the view that 'optimates' and 'populares' represented political parties. He argued that any ideological antithesis between 'populares' and 'optimates' was quite lost in its application to the opposing sides in civil war (Marians-Sullans, Caesarians-Pompeians) since it was the armies which played the major parts in such conflicts.³⁴ Senators and *equites* appeared on both sides: there was no 'class war' in these situations.

On the basis of an examination of the literary sources, Strasburger argued that the word *populares* did not denote an identifiable group or collective.³⁵ Rather, individual 'populares' formed a series of predecessors and successors, linked on an intellectual level by particular goals and tactics and giving rise to a concept of a 'popular' tradition. However, the characteristics of such a tradition were very wide-ranging since most 'populares' were identified on the basis of one or very few deeds.³⁶ Furthermore, he noted that the reforms of individual 'populares' tended to stabilise the government, strengthening the authority of the aristocracy.³⁷

Strasburger concluded that 'optimates' could not be defined as a group in conflict with a group of 'populares' since the latter did not exist. He suggested that although it was harmless to identify an 'optimate' party in terms of class interest, there was no 'optimate' political programme.³⁸ Similarly, since there was no 'popularis' party, there was also no 'popularis' programme.

In a response to Strasburger's view that *optimates* and *populares* did not exist as political parties, Taylor returned to a model of ideological conflict between 'upholders of senatorial authority' and 'proponents of the people's rights.' She defended Mommsen's party-based picture of Roman politics, explaining that he was perfectly aware of the lack of principle or programme among the 'populares' and that the parties he described were amorphous, as were the political parties of his

33 Scullard 1959: 7.

34 C. Marius (*RE* 14; supb. 6), L. Cornelius Sulla (*RE* 392), C. Julius Caesar (*RE* 131). Bennett 1928 comes to the same conclusion. Strasburger 1939: 786 noted that the sources made clear the personal rivalry between Marius and Sulla. Contra Taylor 1949: 18 who sees the conflict as primarily between 'optimates' and 'populares', adding that the personal rivalry between Marius and Sulla served to *complicate* it (my italics).

35 He suggests, 783–4, that the *factio popularis* described by Valerius Maximus (*Numidicus autem Metellus populari factione patria pulsus in Asiam secessit*, 4.1.13), refers simply to the coalition formed by Marius, L. Appuleius Saturninus (*RE* 29), and C. Servilius Glaucia (*RE* 65).

36 Strasburger 1939: 794.

37 Strasburger 1939: 797. Followed by Meier 1965: 557, Martin 1965: 223.

38 Strasburger 1939: 793. Followed by Gruen 1974: 50, 'The term 'optimates' identified no political group.'

own times: the problem for modern historians was that the word 'party' had changed in meaning since the nineteenth century.³⁹

She equated Sallust's references to divisions between senate and people with the 'optimates' and 'populares' of the *Pro Sestio* despite remarking on Cicero's tendency to use the word *partes* to refer not to political groups but to personal parties centred on 'revolutionary' leaders such as Marius, Sulla, Sertorius and Caesar.⁴⁰ She also pointed out a marked variation in Cicero's attitude to those he described as *populares* before and after his exile. In the earlier period he made a distinction between 'good' *populares* who served the state and demagogic 'bad' *populares*, while on his return *populares* were almost always presented in a bad light.⁴¹

Taylor defined 'optimates' as a clique of powerful nobles who controlled the senate and who 'were determined to uphold or regain the constitution of their ancestors and to keep for themselves and their associates the great gains of empire'. She suggested that they could be called a party on the grounds of their interest in senatorial politics and legislation. These 'optimates' were united by family ties and bonds of *amicitia*. Defining their opponents, the 'populares', was more complex. Using the example of the restoration of the tribunate by Pompey and Crassus, after which both men employed tribunes to achieve rival purposes, she characterised the two as leaders of 'two rival "popular" parties'.⁴² Grain distributions, agrarian legislation and the extension of the citizenship were put forward as the chief elements of the programme of the 'popular' party which had a serial rather than a continuous existence.⁴³ However, she observed that 'the best indication of the lack of organized parties at Rome was that there were no generally accepted names for special parties.'⁴⁴

Taylor suggested that ideological conflict between 'optimates' and 'populares' arose not only in the senate but also in legislative campaigns in the tribal assembly. Elections, however, were conducted on a different basis. In the campaign for office, ideological differences were put aside and support was mustered along the lines indicated by the *Commentariolum petitionis*. Nevertheless, despite attributing political programmes to both 'optimates' and 'populares', Taylor added that there were large numbers of 'middle of the road' senators who tried not to align with either party. On the occasions when such alliances were formed, she saw the basis as personal rather than ideological.⁴⁵

Taylor's model thus incorporated the concepts of ideological party conflict between senate and people as well as familial groups and personal parties centring on

39 Taylor 1949: 12.

40 C. Sallustius Crispus (*RE* 10), Q. Sertorius (*RE* 3).

41 Taylor 1949: 11–12. She criticises (p. 10 n. 39) Strasburger's 'stress on what he calls the abstract meaning of *partes*.'

42 Taylor 1949: 14. M. Licinius Crassus (*RE* 68). Ward 2004: 105 stresses that "'populares" competed with each other as much as with "optimates" and vice versa.'

43 Taylor 1949: 22.

44 Taylor 1949: 13.

45 Taylor 1949: 7–8, 13, 15. She thus proposed that elections were fought in Gelzerian terms about the mobilisation of personal support.

military leaders and dynasts. She saw the true goal of the 'popular' leaders (with the exception of the Gracchi) as personal supremacy and admitted that although the conflict between the two parties was theoretically based on programmes, what it actually amounted to was a difference in method.⁴⁶ Her model thus combined those of Mommsen, Münzer and Gelzer but restored an emphasis to the concept that 'optimates' and 'populares' were parties with programmes. Like Syme, she saw Cicero's presentation of 'good' and 'bad' *populares* as a consequence of his rhetoric.

Meier took issue with Taylor's assertion that ideologically-based divisions between groups of 'optimates' and 'populares' occurred only in certain political situations.⁴⁷ He disputed both Münzer's model of family-based parties and Mommsen's ideological division, building instead on the views of Strasburger and Gelzer that neither type of party existed at Rome.⁴⁸ His concept of *Gegenstandsabhängigkeit*, formalised in the second edition of *Res publica amissa*, proposed a fluid model of issue-based political division and transitory allegiances.⁴⁹

At the beginning of his article on *populares* in the *Real-Encyclopädie*, Meier admitted that the phenomenon of 'popular' politics was very difficult both to understand and to describe.⁵⁰ He noted that the people itself had no political initiative but was 'directed' by the aristocratic magistrates it elected. 'Popular' politics was thus the province of politicians not the people. He observed that the word *popularis* was used to describe senators of various types: reformer, adventurer, parvenu, aristocrat, moderate and radical.⁵¹ Only a few of these 'populares' appeared to embrace long-term goals and most acted in a way described as *popularis* for only a short time. He saw this complexity as the main stumbling block to the drawing of general conclusions about 'populares' and their politics.⁵²

Rather than trying to attribute motives and intentions to their actions, Meier concentrated on the demands and claims made by those described as *populares* by the ancient sources. He suggested that while some, especially in the second half of the second century, had aims which were clearly democratic, 'populares' did not aim at the democratisation of the Roman constitution. With the exception of C. Gracchus, no 'popularis' wanted to alter the essential fundamentals of the political or social order. Nor did any want to make notable improvements to the lot of the urban plebs or the political position of the people's assembly. Meier saw the underlying aim of the 'populares', or more precisely, those men who were temporarily acting in a 'popular' manner, as the improvement of the position of those to whom they were obliged or whose support they wanted to win. This might include indi-

46 Taylor 1949: 13, 22.

47 Meier 1965: 567–8 criticised as absurd the consequence that minority factions within the senate would put aside their differences in elections.

48 Meier 1966: 182 singled out Syme, Taylor, Scullard and Badian for their adoption of Münzer's principles. Meier 1965: 554 acknowledges the fundamental parts played by Strasburger 1939 and Gelzer 1912 in his work.

49 Meier 1980: xxxviii–xxxix.

50 Meier 1965: 549.

51 Martin 1965: 222 identifies three types of 'popularis': 'Reformtribun, der Demagoge und der nach persönlicher Macht strebende Feldherr und Politiker'.

52 Meier 1965: 554–5. See also Meier 1966: 116–50 on the 'popular' method.

viduals, powerful politicians or communities or sections of them such as veterans or the equestrian class.⁵³

He observed that 'popular' action claimed a fundamental division between senate and people and its common, identifying feature was opposition to the senate. However, not every issue taken before the people could be classified as 'popularis'. The assembly dealt with many day-to-day matters which were not undertaken in opposition to the senate. Meier thus drew a distinction between day-to-day, small-scale politics and the exceptional situations which became more frequent in the last years of the Republic.⁵⁴

He identified a 'popular' tradition based on a series of claims and slogans and rooted in a conflict in which the people had sought to restore their liberty from the arbitrary rule of the senate. He also distinguished between pre-Sullan politicians such as the Gracchi who appeared to exhibit real concern for the rights of the people and those of the post-Sullan age for whom the origins of the 'popular' tradition formed no more than rhetorical claims used to manipulate the crowd.⁵⁵

From a survey of the application of the word *popularis* to individuals, Meier suggested four categories of meaning. Firstly, the term referred to politicians who placed themselves in the 'popular' tradition and acted as champions of the people against the senate, using 'popular' methods and working for 'popular' goals. A second sense was used of politicians who manipulated the people's assembly using appropriate arguments and skills while a third described those who took up the matters and politics of the people, parading them before the *plebs urbana*, embracing the *causa populi*. The fourth referred to the manner adopted by a politician who used 'popular' means to prolong a political career. Meier found that the most common meaning was the third, the emphasising of the *causa populi* before the urban plebs.⁵⁶ This led him to define a 'popularis' as a politician of the late Republic who adopted a particular political style, advancing his own affairs by using the people's assembly, promoting himself as a champion of the people and using arguments relevant to the masses.⁵⁷

As part of his analysis of the claims and arguments put forward by 'populares', Meier examined 'popularis' legislation. He divided it into three groups dealing with different but interconnected subjects: the restoration of *libertas*, the removal of arbitrary rule by the senatorial clique and the improvement of conditions for the poorer classes through the enlargement of their political rights. These subjects, like the claims which underpinned the 'popular' tradition, provided goals and arguments for the 'populares'.⁵⁸ He noted that the social order and the *mos maiorum* were not targets of such legislation. Nor were the rights of the senate, magistrates and priests, the structure of the assemblies and the principles of voting.⁵⁹

53 Meier 1965: 557.

54 Meier 1965: 590–91.

55 Meier 1965: 558.

56 Meier 1965: 569.

57 Meier 1965: 549.

58 Meier 1965: 598.

59 Meier 1965: 611.

Meier perhaps sidestepped the issue of whether a 'popularis' ideology existed by claiming that although there were groups of themes and justifications used by 'populares' which fulfilled the function of an ideology, these did not actually constitute an ideology.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, by creating several strands in his definition, his model allowed a set of behaviours and measures with varying features to be categorised as 'popularis'.⁶¹ Meier's theory, like that of Gelzer before it, emphasised the importance of the networks of public and private ties on which senatorial politicians relied. By concentrating on the methods and claims adopted by those who opposed the senatorial majority, he provided a behavioural model which did not concern itself with attributing motive to political action. He thus established the *popularis ratio* as a method-based interpretation of the way in which opposition politics worked in the late Republic. Nonetheless, this concentration on method exposed the main difficulty of the model: namely, that it could be adopted by 'optimates' politicians.⁶² The defining characteristic of 'popularis' activity was therefore opposition to the senate.⁶³

Brunt's analysis of the parts played by *amicitia*, patronage and *factio* in late Republican politics questioned not only the validity of Münzer's theories but also those of Gelzer and Meier.⁶⁴ He saw the many examples of laws 'passed or carried in conformity with popular demands against the will of the senate' as evidence that the aristocratic control mechanism of *clientela*, certainly after the Social War, was unable to deliver sufficient reliably loyal voters.⁶⁵ The reduced importance of patronage implied that the formation of factions among the nobility, either long- or short-term was also not a reliable means of manipulating the vote.⁶⁶ Furthermore, although the term *amicitia* was used to describe political relationships, it was used in many other different ways from a simple courtesy title to a reference to the harmonious accord of Scipio and Laelius.

Although he demonstrated that the theories about aristocratic control put forward by Münzer and Gelzer were not sufficient by themselves as models of late Roman political life, Brunt did allow that there were collaborative 'coteries' surrounding particular politicians such as Cato, Scipio Aemilianus and L. Crassus.⁶⁷ However, he suggested that by Ciceronian times, politicians entered into 'shifting

60 Meier 1965: 592.

61 Followed by Tatum 1999: 1–31.

62 Meier 1965: 556, 578, 580. His primary examples are the two Livii Drusi.

63 Thus Meier: 1965: 594, 'Alle p. haben sich gegen den Senat gestellt.' Thus also Tatum 1999: 11, 'For us, given the nature of our sources, the 'popularis' exists in the exercise of his opposition to the senatorial leadership, usually in a conflict brought to an extreme pitch.'

64 Brunt 1988. See particularly 351–81 on *amicitia*, 382–442 on *clientela* and 443–502 on factions. Meier 1966: 169–74 analysed Pompey's political relationships in the 60s and 50s and showed that families did divide on political issues. Gruen 1995: viii also comments on the 'fragility of constructs that interpret Roman politics as dependent on a network of mutual obligations.'

65 Brunt 1988: 28–32. Thus also Mouritsen 2001: 67–79.

66 Brunt 1988: 32–45. Brunt sees patronage as the reason behind the domination of the nobility over elections to higher office. See also Burton & Hopkins 1983.

67 L. Licinius Crassus (*RE* 55).

combinations to promote their preferred personal or public ends at a given moment.⁶⁸ Clients had loyalties to different patrons. Their actions were also governed by their personal interests as well as views about moral duty to the public good. Groupings thus tended to be small and transient. His view of politics thus highlighted the role of decisions made by individuals and the assertion that concerns over the public good had 'a moral claim transcending all private obligations.'⁶⁹

Rejecting the view that Roman politics centred on power struggles between members of the elite, Brunt stressed the involvement of other classes and sections of Roman society. He defined his model in terms of a conflict of principle between 'optimates' who upheld the authority of the senate and 'populares' who were prepared to oppose the senate in the name of the public good.⁷⁰ These men were not reformers aiming at the democratisation of the system but if they 'saw or professed to see a need for the people to intervene' they would resort to the popular assembly. Their common characteristic was the assertion of 'the sovereign right of the people to take decisions without prior sanction of the senate, but in the public interest, as they saw it.' He proposed that it was fundamentally plausible to suppose that 'optimates' believed that political power should reside with the senate and that the supremacy of the senate coincided with their own class interests about the retaining of power among themselves.⁷¹ He conceded that although some 'populares' may have acted out of altruistic motives about benefiting the state, for many, their claims about the defence of popular sovereignty were more likely to have been a means to an end. Brunt saw the acceptance of the designation *popularis* by some politicians as an indication of the inaccuracy of Cicero's descriptions in the *Pro Sestio*.⁷²

He also pointed out the moral judgement implicit in the use of the word *optimates* to describe 'good' men. Their opponents, by contrast, were characterised as 'wretched' and 'needy'.⁷³ Brunt emphasised the view that shifting alliances and loyalties between senators precluded the existence of durable or cohesive groups which could be identified as 'optimates' or 'populares'.⁷⁴ This transitory nature meant that differences between such factions or groups were far less significant than the conflicts of principle over what constituted the public good which divided 'optimates' and 'populares'.⁷⁵ These arguments drew on Brunt's earlier work on social conflicts and, in many ways, the emphasis he placed on the role of individuals' views about what constituted the public good typified a growing concern over

68 Brunt 1988: 38.

69 Brunt 1988: 30, 38–9. The conclusions of Achard 1982 support this view. He observes that Romans of the late Republic tended to describe themselves in terms of both their obligation to a party/the state as well as to powerful individuals rather than to one or the other.

70 Brunt 1988: 32.

71 Brunt 1988: 53. Similarly Ward 2004: 105 who defines 'optimates' as 'those who sought to limit the role of popular institutions in the elite competition and keep decision-making within the cozy confines of the noble-dominated senate as much as possible.'

72 Brunt 1988: 32 n. 62.

73 Brunt 1988: 53–4.

74 Brunt 1988: 36–45.

75 Brunt 1988: 38–9.

the role of the people in Republican politics which was to dominate the latter part of the twentieth century.⁷⁶

Perelli sought to explore the role played by the needs and demands of the commons in political affairs.⁷⁷ He took his definition of 'populares' from Cicero's *Pro Sestio*, seeing them as those who strove to please the masses. He found Strasburger's observations that 'popularis' leaders had no intention of democratising the constitution and that their reforms tended to stabilise the aristocratic system paradoxical.⁷⁸ He proposed that there was a 'popularis' programme or movement centred on issues concerning the powers of the tribunes and the extension of the citizenship as well as land and grain distributions.⁷⁹ Those who championed this 'popular' movement, whether or not their motives grew from genuine concern for the people, were 'populares'.⁸⁰ By considering the beneficiaries of the proposals brought forward by these 'populares', Perelli identified a base of support coming from various sections of society: disaffected rural and urban dwellers, veterans, soldiers, Italians and *equites*.⁸¹ His model emphasised attitudes among the aristocracy towards reform as the fundamental dividing factor in post-Gracchan politics. By identifying the differ-

76 Brunt 1971b. On the Gracchan 'reform' and the reaction to it see 74–111. On the role of the people see Nicolet 1976, Ste Croix 1981: 350–62, Finley 1983, Hopkins & Burton 1983: 107–116, Beard & Crawford 1985: 49–52. There are differing views over the extent of 'democracy' and popular participation in late Republican politics. North 1990: 9–10 describes the combination of views that Rome was controlled by an effectively closed oligarchy, that voters were controlled via patronage and ties of mutual obligation, that the ruling elite consisted of stable alliances formed on the basis of family allegiances, that the assemblies were manipulated by rival groups and therefore that voter opinions on issues had no relevance, as 'the frozen waste theory of Roman politics.' He agrees (p. 13) with Millar on the importance of the role of the orator in Roman politics but questions the extent to which the word 'democratic' can be applied to Rome. Millar 1998 proposed that the public nature of Republican politics and the efforts orators made to persuade the people was evidence that the people had a great influence over politics and that their opinion was important. Yakobson 1992 suggested that in addition to wealthy citizens, the first class also contained citizens of more modest means. Also the votes of the 'lower' centuries were important even if they did not carry as much weight as those of the 'higher' ones. In combination, this meant that the vote of the 'ordinary' citizen was important and it was therefore fought over. Mouritsen 2001 argued that political participation was small, due both to the physical size of the voting enclosures and the associated time constraints. Further, little leisure time among the urban plebs and a lack of relevance of the subject matter meant that *contiones* were more likely to be attended by members of the propertied classes. In the late Republic, although participation increased, the *contio* tended to become 'closer to a partisan manifestation than to a public debate' (p. 52). Jehne 2006b, on the other hand, argues for the existence of a *plebs contionalis* drawn from a mixed social background. For further views on the issue of democracy see also the 1995 volume *Demokratie in Rom? Die Rolle des Volkes in der Politik der römischen Republik*, edited by M. Jehne. On the *contio*, see Pina Polo 1996, on the role of the urban plebs see Laser 1997.

77 Perelli 1982.

78 Perelli 1982: 9 on Strasburger 1939: 797. Meier 1965: 566 reprises Strasburger's comments.

79 Perelli 1982: 26–7.

80 Perelli 1982: 11 accepts the view of Serrao 1970 that the motivation of 'popularis' leaders was not important. It was their claims and actions that counted.

81 See also the analysis of Meier 1966: 64–115, Martin 1965.

ent groups who were targeted by 'popularis' activity, he highlighted the broad and varied nature of its audience.⁸²

Burckhardt, on the other hand, explored the methods and tactics which typified 'optimates' politics.⁸³ He defined 'optimates' as that part of the nobility which acted against popular tribunes or military men supported by their armies.⁸⁴ Although he found no evidence of a coherent conservative strategy, Burckhardt identified 'optimates' policies as those dealing with legislative subjects such as *repetundae*, *ambitus* and *sumptuaria*. Their political methods included the use of the veto, religious obstruction and the *senatus consultum ultimum*.⁸⁵ However, as Gruen notes, Burckhardt's analysis still provided 'no clear criteria for discerning the size, makeup or organisation of this shadowy cluster of personages.'⁸⁶

In the early 1990s Mackie responded to the models of 'aggressive individualism' in Roman politics, questioning the view that 'populares' were simply adopting a particular political 'style'. She set out by observing that the division of politicians in *Pro Sestio* 96 and Cicero's related comments in the *post reditum* works were polemical in nature. Further, they did appear to confirm the view that the term *popularis* identified a certain, cynical political method.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, she proposed that there were two phenomena explained neither by Cicero's definitions nor by modern ones: firstly, that the Romans themselves could distinguish between 'true' and 'false' *populares*, and secondly, that the *popularis ratio* covered 'substantial elements of ideological legislation and justification.'⁸⁸ She concluded that these phenomena could not be explained,

'... except on the hypothesis that there was a real debate between *populares* politicians and their opponents; meaning by that a debate based on shared values which made the arguments of each side worthy of serious consideration

82 See also Kühnert 1991 on the diverse make-up of the urban plebs. Tatum 1999: 3 cites the application of the 'popularis' label to laws which benefited the equestrian order, 'a very limited and privileged portion of the populus' as an illustration of the danger of considering 'populares' as the champions of the poor.

83 Burckhardt 1988.

84 Burckhardt 1988: 10–12. See 18–9 for the exception of Sulla. Burckhardt notes that although his reforms strengthened the position of the aristocracy, the arbitrary methods Sulla employed to gain and secure his position were disapproved of by the 'optimates'. This was because these methods emphasised Sulla's own personal power, separating him from the aristocratic collective and damaging its cohesiveness.

85 On obstructive methods employed by the senate see also Mouritsen 2001: 69–70 and De Libero 1992.

86 Gruen 1995: xii.

87 Mackie 1992: 50–51.

88 Mackie 1992: 51. The first point is based on Yavetz 1969: ch. 3. The second refers to the findings of Seager 1972a. Kaster 2006: 34 notes that 'important distinction lay not between *optimates* and *populares* but between 'true' and 'false' *populares* – those who really had the interests of the people at heart and those who claimed to do so out of self-seeking motives. There are two separate arguments visible here. As will be argued in detail below, the ancient division between 'true' and 'false' *populares* is based on an assessment of whether or not something is in the popular interest. The modern argument is about whether a particular individual can be categorised according to certain criteria that are identified as 'popularis' in some way.

by the other, and a debate in which the popular assembly and its members actually played a part. On an ideological level it was a debate about the rights and powers of populace versus senate, about what constituted legitimate government at Rome.'⁸⁹

So in order for political debate between 'populares' and their opponents to be meaningful, it must have been based on a shared ideological ground. Mackie proposed that this common ground was based on common values of *res publica*, *senatus auctoritas*, *libertas populi*, *mos maiorum* and *leges*. She observed, however, that this did not make the identification of the two sides any easier since their arguments were not based on two different value sets. The opponents in such debates tended to carefully compose 'equivalent or superior arguments of their own' rather than simply rejecting those of the other side.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the reaction of the listening crowd showed that the arguments used had meaning and were not just a game of words.⁹¹

Although she noted that 'popularis' activity appeared most effective at times of particular economic difficulty, it was not limited to offers of material benefits for the populace.⁹² Mackie suggested that along with such legislation, 'populares' put forward an ideology 'supporting the transfer of power from senate to people'.⁹³ The range of issues implemented under the 'popularis' umbrella showed the effectiveness of this ideology and its power as a persuasive tool.⁹⁴ She objected to the argument that 'populares' were simply self-interested manipulators of the populace since the ability of the Romans themselves to distinguish between 'true' and 'false' *populares* suggested that not all had ulterior motives.⁹⁵ She concluded that true 'populares' were not identified on the basis of a style of speaking or legislating aimed at pleasing the people. Nor, indeed, did the criterion hinge on the passing of 'concrete' legislation in the people's favour. Nor was the identification made on an assessment of motive. Instead, she suggested that it was 'public commitment to this abstract [ideological] theme [of popular rights and powers] that gave the *popularis* politician his identity'.⁹⁶ Mackie thus proposed that 'populares' could be identified on the basis of a commitment to a particular ideology and that the power of this ideology lay in its capacity to persuade and convince the audience at which it was aimed: the Roman populace.

In his 1997 article on the problems of the role played by ideology in the late Republic, Ferrary criticised the theories of Meier and Gelzer. He suggested that

89 Mackie 1992: 51–2.

90 Mackie 1992: 58–9. See also Martin 2003.

91 Mackie 1992: 65–6.

92 Mackie 1992: 64–5.

93 Mackie 1992: 61–2.

94 Mackie 1992: 65 cites *provocatio*, *privilegia*, praetorian and popular justice, election of priests, popular sovereignty in foreign affairs as examples of these varied issues. Also Tatum 1999: 5 who sees the very variety of 'popularis' legislation as the reason why it 'defies neat definition.'

95 Mackie 1992: 70.

96 Mackie 1992: 71.

there was no reason to deny the existence of political ideology just because it was often subverted in the interests of personal ambition. Nor was it sufficient to deny its existence because there were no political parties.⁹⁷ Strasburger had observed the existence of a 'popular' tradition. Ferrary now proposed that in the pattern of repeated issues and the repeated refusals of the senate to accept reform lay two different and coherent visions about the hierarchy and wielding of power. On one side was the authority of the senate and on the other, the rights and powers of the people. The debate between the two could be seen in the juxtaposition of two value systems such as the public good and the benefit of the people or in the manipulation of common values like *libertas* in divergent ways. He extended the theory of Martin who had suggested that 'popularis' ideology had come about as a reaction to the reforms of Sulla, dating it instead to the time of the Gracchi.⁹⁸

Ferrary saw one of the ambiguities of 'popularis' politics as the imbalance between the practical goals it pursued, which never fundamentally changed the aristocratic nature of power, and an ideology and method which seemed far more radical in nature. It was significant that the methods adopted by the Gracchi were seen as more dangerous than their aims. He viewed the ideology claimed as justification for these actions as more dangerous still. This danger was rooted in the senate's refusal to consider reform and resulted in the adoption of a method and ideology quite out of proportion with the task at hand. Ferrary perceived a similar incongruity between the political actions and ideology of the senate, commenting that the authority of the senate was eroded by its resistance to reform and its inability to respond to the changing circumstances which came with the extension of Rome's domination over Italy and the Mediterranean.⁹⁹ The effect of these observations was to highlight the inconsistency between the ideological claims of both 'populares' and 'optimates' and the realities of their political actions.

Hölkeskamp added to this argument, suggesting that too great an emphasis had been placed not only on the ephemeral nature of political groupings but also on the view that the 'popular' method was simply a style of political action used to oppose the senatorial majority. This emphasis had led to the perception that conflicts between 'populares' and 'optimates' were a series of exceptions, isolated from each other by their individual circumstances.¹⁰⁰ He agreed with Ferrary's views about the patterns of repeated political issues and proposed that the gulf between political claims and political actions raised further important questions about the nature of senatorial politics. Firstly, the senate's refusal to endorse 'popular' projects and also its attempts to prevent permission being given by the assembly highlighted the autonomy of the latter.¹⁰¹ Secondly, these repeated refusals by the senate were characterised by its opponents as partial and unlawful. This characterisation was fuelled both by a latent discontent and a growing expectation that things would never change. The senate was thus perceived, and portrayed by 'populares', as the party

97 Ferrary 1997: 227–8.

98 Ferrary 1997: 228–31. Martin 1965.

99 Ferrary 1997: 229.

100 Hölkeskamp 1997: 232–3.

101 Hölkeskamp 1997: 234.

of refusal, the 'no' party, and seen as favouring an aristocratic subset of the people rather than the whole community. This in turn threw into question the legitimacy of the senate's governmental role.¹⁰²

Hölkeskamp suggested that these questions were damaging to the entire aristocratic structure. This was due to the central role played by the concept of popular sovereignty not only in the identity of the *res publica* itself but also in the identity and public role of the political class. He concluded that the plausibility of 'popularis' propaganda lay both in the 'popular' method and in a 'popular' ideology founded on the traditional role of the *populus*. Both the method and the ideology claimed to represent the people as a whole and thus accentuated arguments about senatorial partiality.

Wiseman returned to the arguments in favour of a political model based on ideological conflict between senate and people.¹⁰³ He suggested that it was the premise of Cicero's argument in the *Pro Sestio* that should be believed rather than its content.¹⁰⁴ He pointed out the links between the words *popularis* and *optimas* and Greek political language, relating *popularis* to *populus* and thus the δῆμος, and *optimates* to *optimi* and thus the ἄριστοι.¹⁰⁵ Wiseman proposed that a fundamental division between aristocratic and democratic 'camps' had characterised the history of the Republic since Gracchan times.¹⁰⁶ In particular the violent deaths of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, Saturninus, Drusus, Sulpicius and Clodius were evidence that the adoption of their example simply as a political strategy or method was not a likely career choice.¹⁰⁷

The publication of Morstein-Marx' book on mass oratory and political power provided a further twist to modern interpretations about 'popularis' behaviour. Millar's democratic interpretation of late Republican politics had highlighted the role of the orator and the value Cicero placed on the importance of public opinion.¹⁰⁸ Morstein-Marx expanded on this by focusing on the speeches given against the Rullan land proposal in 63 in which it is clear that both Cicero and Rullus made claims to be *populares*. He observed that legislative debates did not pit claims of 'optimate' policy against 'popularis' ones.¹⁰⁹ Instead, each side claimed to be a 'true' *popularis* and accused their opponent of being a 'false' one. He saw this kind of discourse as indicative of an 'ideological monotony' in which both sides competed to be seen as

102 Hölkeskamp 1997: 234–5.

103 Wiseman 2002, 2009.

104 Wiseman 2002: 287. Contrast the views expressed in Wiseman 1985b.

105 Wiseman 2002: 285. On links with Greek terminology see also Lintott 1999: 173–4, 'Cicero's terminology reflects that found earlier in the Greek world.' He proposed that a cause of 'conservatism' linked *boni* with 'optimates'.

106 Wiseman 2002: 286–93.

107 Wiseman 2002: 307–9. P. Sulpicius (*RE* 92), P. Clodius Pulcher (*RE* 48).

108 Millar 1998. Jehne 2000 observes that senators adopted a particular way of communicating in popular assemblies. They emphasized their own duty to the state and the competence of the people to make decisions, in order to 'level' the difference in status between speaker and audience. He terms this behaviour 'Jovialität'.

109 Morstein-Marx 2004: 160–203 on political debate, 204–40 on the invisible 'optimate'. Achard 1981 argues for the existence of an 'optimate' rhetoric. See also David 2006.

the 'true' representatives of the same 'popular' ideology.¹¹⁰ He therefore suggested that the style and topics of speech appropriate for the *contio* should be understood as constituting an ideology themselves. To describe this, Morstein-Marx coined the term 'contional ideology'.¹¹¹ On the basis of his analysis of late Republican debates, he suggested that in the context of the *contio* and its centrality to political life, no politician could afford to present himself as anything but acting in the people's interests, that is as *popularis* in the positive sense of the word.¹¹² This variation in the way that the term *popularis* is used in an oratorical context adds yet another layer of complexity to categorisations of late Republican politicians as 'optimates' or 'populares'.¹¹³

Having considered various ways in which the political life of the late Republic has been modelled, it is now time to draw together some of the key points and problems of the theories examined so far. In brief, Mommsen's initial thesis that 'optimates' and 'populares' represented political parties was challenged by the views of Gelzer and Münzer. Their models gave rise to two 'schools'. Those who followed Münzer interpreted late Republican politics in terms of family parties. Gelzer's model, on the other hand, proposed that the balance of power was not governed by parties, either family- or ideologically-based, but by the bonds of patronage, obligation and *amicitia*. Strasburger further challenged the view that the terms *optimates* and *populares* referred to political parties or programmes. Taylor proposed that elections were governed by personal relationships whereas ideological differences

110 Morstein-Marx 2004: 229. He explains the behaviour of P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica (*RE* 354) who while opposing a grain distribution in 138, told the crowd to be silent because that he knew better than they what was good for the state (*V. Max.* 3.7.3) as aristocratic arrogance which quickly became anachronistic. Mackie 1992: 54 sees this incident as an example of the justification of the authority of the senate on the basis of its superior judgement about the good of the state. David 2006: 424 notes that Nasica's words gave him an 'air of authority'.

111 Morstein-Marx 2004: 31 claims that the *contio* was central to political life. However, he does not believe that this made 'the political system more than minimally responsive to popular needs.' For an alternative, and perhaps less cynical, view of the importance of presenting oneself in a *contio* see Hölkeskamp 1995. In response to Millar's proposal that the public nature of Republican politics served to ensure that policies were tailored to the demands of the people, Hölkeskamp saw the people as an essentially passive participant in the political process. He suggested that the *contio* formed the most important vehicle for communication between the political class and the *populus* which bestowed office and honours in return for service and duty to the state. See Flaig 1995: 77–91; 2003: 155–74, 184–93 for the view that the popular assemblies were not decision making bodies but vehicles for producing and consolidating consensus.

112 This model is followed by Harries 2006: 239 who notes that "“optimates” were senators whose politics favoured the elite. In practice most senators represented themselves as being accountable to the people and therefore “populares”."

113 This lack of clarity is reflected in a tendency among modern scholars to relegate the problem to a simple paragraph, footnote or glossary item. Lewis 2006: 310–11 simply provides a single entry for 'optimates'. Other typical examples include Keaveny 1982: 3, Evans 1994: 141 n. 5, Canfora 1999: 484–5, Lintott 1999: 173–6, Everitt 2001: xiii, Harries 2006: 239, North 2006: 266, Tatum 2006: 191. Lobur 2008: 47 follows the same pattern: 'populares' are radicals while 'optimates' are conservatives. Tan 2008 makes a division between 'populares' and 'anti-populares'.

between 'optimates' and 'populares' dominated debates in the senate and over legislation. Brunt disputed the existence of long-lived, stable family groups, preferring a vision of ephemeral alliances which were dependent on a variety of factors including individual views about what was in the interest of the Republic. Meier continued this emphasis on issue-based politics and proposed a new theory which defined 'populares' in terms of their political style and methods. Nevertheless, the recent views of Wiseman, Ferrary, Hölkeskamp and Morstein-Marx testify to the fact that late Republican political ideology is still a 'hot topic'.

There is less controversy over identifying 'optimates' than 'populares'. Their identification ranges from the members of an 'aristocratic party' to the upholders of senatorial authority to the supporters of the class interests of the wealthy. Perhaps the most wide-ranging view is that of Brunt who combines the two latter characteristics, describing 'optimates' as those whose beliefs about senatorial control over political power coincided with their own class interests about retaining this power for themselves.¹¹⁴ However, as Gruen and Alexander comment, clear identification of 'optimates' remains a major problem.¹¹⁵

The intricacies involved in defining 'populares' are more complex still. Modern views have characterised 'populares' as members of a 'popular', 'democratic' or 'reform' movement. They have also been seen as individuals who adopted a certain political 'style'. Their actions have been attributed to a variety of motives ranging from self-seeking personal ambition to an altruistic desire for reform. Some scholars propose that this difference in motivation is a characteristic by which true 'populares' can be identified.¹¹⁶ Others argue that sincerity of motive mattered little and it was sufficient simply to 'walk the walk' and 'talk the talk' in order to be considered 'popularis'.¹¹⁷ Importantly, discerning the motives behind the actions of late Republican senators is fraught with difficulty, primarily due to the nature of our source material and its heavy reliance on the Ciceronian corpus.¹¹⁸ Further major problems stem from the wide range of meaning of the word *popularis* and the way in which Ciceronian rhetoric exploits this.¹¹⁹ Meier pointed out that the word *popularis* was applied in a different sense to individuals than to legislation and other matters. In the first case, the term denoted the use of a particular political method while in the second, it was less specific and described the (variable) attitude of the people to a particular matter.¹²⁰ Syme devoted an entire chapter to an examination of political invective and the use of common ideology and 'political catchwords' as propaganda by both sides of a conflict. He concluded that categories and values

114 Brunt 1988 cited above p. 25.

115 Alexander 1992: 142 cited in the Preface.

116 E. g. Mackie 1992.

117 E. g. Meier 1965, Serrao 1970, Perelli 1982.

118 Tatum 1999: 7 proposes that this divination of motive is the 'insurmountable difficulty'.

119 The word varies widely in meaning covering both positive and negative qualities and reflecting its derivation from the word *populus*. Unlike the polarities in meaning that we see between *libertas* and *licentia* or *populus* and *volgus*, *popularis* covers the entire spectrum from popular to populist. See Chapter 3 below.

120 Meier 1965: 571.

suggested by Cicero were 'very far from corresponding with definite parties or definite policies'.¹²¹ On the subject of the words as political labels, Taylor commented, 'There is nothing to show what they called themselves, but it is significant that neither Caesar nor Sallust uses *populares* to describe Caesar's party.'¹²²

To conclude, modern models which describe late Republican politics as a conflict between 'optimates' and 'populares', interpret these terms in widely different ways. Much debate remains over whether the terms refer to political groups, traditions, strategies or ideologies. Whether the models attempt to explain late Republican politics using arguments about ideological principles concerning the balance of power between senate and people or about the adoption of particular political methods or behaviour, the single common characteristic appears to be conflict between the senatorial majority and their political opponents.

121 Syme 1939: 153.

122 Taylor 1949: 14.