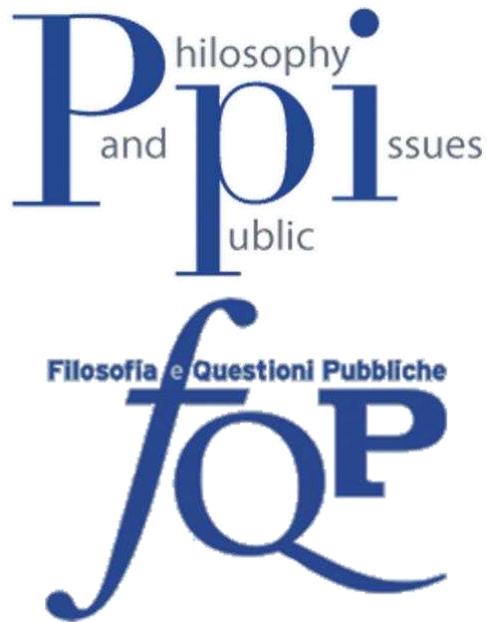BEYOND UNREASONABLENESS

AND FACTIONALISM

NOTES ON BONOTTI'S THEORY OF PARTISANSHIP

BY

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Beyond Unreasonableness and Factionalism
Notes on Bonotti's Theory of Partisanship

Javier Gil and David Sánchez Piñeiro

Introduction

Matteo Bonotti's *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies* joined an outstanding recent theoretical literature that urges us to think of parties and partisanship as a major issue within political theory and political philosophy. The book was preceded by a series of noteworthy articles by Bonotti that appeared in the 2010s and has received considerable attention and debate recently among specialists in these areas. A common denominator in this research community is the conviction that parties and party systems continue to be a central political institution for both the performance and development of representative democracy, and that this centrality extends to the practice of partisanship that it is inherent to them rather than merely a concomitant factor. Analogously to a series of contemporary phenomena with which this subject is related (as, for example, the high levels of citizens' disaffection and electoral

abstention, and the duties and commitments of representatives and public servants), partisanship and parties are now considered from a normative point of view and not only analyzed in purely empirical terms and as a subject of specialized disciplines of sociology and political science. Matteo Bonotti expresses a shared concern among the new pro-party theorists in stating that the political parties are in crisis and that "how that crisis could be reverted is a question which is becoming increasingly central to scholarly debate, and deservedly so" (Bonotti, 2017, 175). The ambitious claim that a normative perspective on political parties as indispensable components of pluralist democracies should contribute to face the crisis of political parties is to be understood, in turn, as a part of the major concern on how to deal with the crisis of greater magnitude that threatens today's representative democracies worldwide.

However, Bonotti's book does not support its normative proposal with a detailed diagnosis of the current crisis of political parties nor is it involved in a reflection on the causes thereof. It assumes, rather than analyzes, the answer to the questions of what the true situation of the parties is, how these have gotten this far and what realistic prospects are opening up for them in the present, issues that are closely related to some of the most pressing problems facing contemporary democracies. The book focuses instead on the questions of how the reasonable partisans should understand themselves and which duties they should honor. Generally speaking, Bonotti's approach is closer to those of Jonathan White and Lea Ypi in *The Meaning of Partisanship* than to other challenging and innovative approaches that have been published in the major books that mark out the scholarship on the topic to date (White & Ypi 2016). *On the Side of the Angels* by Nancy Rosenblum and *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* by Russell Muirhead were mainly concerned with defending partisanship and exploring its characteristics, rationale, and history, and offered an

ethics of partisanship centered on the norms and virtues of adversarialism and the intraparty ties (Rosenblum 2008, Muirhead 2014). On the other hand, the more recent *Rethinking Party Reform* by Fabio Wolkenstein reorients the focus to the importance of parties' internal structure and makes the case for a deliberative model of intra-party democracy (Wolkenstein 2020). In contrast to both the ethics of partisanship and the deliberative reformism of parties, White and Ypi as well as Bonotti have introduced a "theoretical turn" (White & Ypi 2016, 3) that links partisanship as a normative ideal to public reason and political justification. Moving inside the analytical political philosophy, the goal of Bonotti's book is to rescue "Rawls's theory from the widespread accusation that it is inhospitable to real-world politics, and especially to party politics" (Bonotti 2017, 175). Certainly, Rawls' theory did not concern too much with political parties and even expressed disdain for party politics (Muirhead & Rosenblum 2006, 99). However, Bonotti makes explicit a sophisticated account of partisanship as a distinctive associative activity according to the ideal of public reason and specifies the role political parties can legitimately play within political liberalism (as defined by Rawls, 2005 and 1997).

In the first two sections, we will analyze the distinction between factions and parties that serves as a benchmark, a foundation, and a normative axis of most of the normative theories of partisanship, placing it in relation to a Burkean-Sartorian tradition that contemporary pro-party theorists continue and rework. The second section also tries to identify a common ground among them to trace a shared understanding of the current crisis of party politics and its degenerations. In the third section we will present some critical considerations on the paramount role of the notion of reasonableness in Bonotti's account of partisanship, notion that serves as a liberal mold for reinterpreting the aforementioned distinction. These critical considerations concern the inadequate

accommodation of political pluralism (or, at least, the insufficient inclusion of those who fall outside reasonable pluralism), the vagueness of the adscriptions of factionalism in the melting pot of the so-called unreasonable parties and partisans, and some lack of clarity about the admitted need to contain the potentially dangerous parties or factions.

I

Factions vs Parties

Like other normative theorists of political parties, Bonotti gives credit to the distinctions between factions and parties offered by the conservative English philosopher and politician Edmund Burke among the modern thinkers and the Italian political scientist Giovanni Sartori among the contemporaries.

Burke was the first author to propose a positive conception of parties that differentiates them from factions. Famously, he defined the party as "a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed" (Burke 1770, 271). In contradistinction to a vast majority of relevant authors in the history of political thought well into the nineteenth century, Burke valued parties as political associations whose members unite around a shared understanding of the common good and its consequences. Burke's historical vision and political experience also led him to establish an original contrast with factions as partial associations binding by the interest of a few. An influential anti-party tradition harking back to the ancient world and still dominant in Burke's times placed these political realities on the same level. Even later famous theorists and prominent practitioners of parliamentarism on either side of the Atlantic – among them, the American founders and French revolutionaries – took parties and

factions as ontologically overlapping entities. Burke, a partisan himself, argued that parties, unlike factions, are not merely expressions of particular interests, nor do their members aspire to achieve and exercise power to promote and assert their own particular welfare. Rather, they are partial associations that promote the interest of the community as a whole, seeking thereby a common good that, far from being given in advance, they contribute to shape.

Giovanni Sartori takes up this Burkean distinction, updates it and turns it into the normative benchmark of the theory presented in *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, a book published in 1976 and reedited by Peter Mair in 2005 (Sartori 1976, 3-38). Sartori contends not only that Burke's conception that parties are a respectable instrument of government supposes "the turning point in the realm of intellectual history" (*ibid.*, 12) and that anticipates on a theoretical level some crucial aspects of what would still have to be done in political practice with the institutionalization of elections and the development of the representative function of the legislatures and the interplay of government and opposition. He also shows that Burke's parliamentary conception is still aristocratic, in Tocqueville's sense that parties organize "connections" in parliament and not members outside of parliament, as in the democratic conception. Such connections would not yet be those of an electoral party, turned outward in search of the majority vote, which ended up forming the party system of twentieth-century democracies. Certainly, Sartori's definition is of Burkean lineage. For him, parties are not factions, the latter being "only a part for itself" and harmful to the common interest; parties are rather "parts-of-a-whole", because, although they channel particularistic values and interests, they serve the entire political community: "The difference is, then, that parties are instrumental to collective benefits, to an end that is not merely the private benefit of the

contestants. Parties link people to a government, while factions do not… If a party is not a part capable of governing for the sake of the whole, that is, in view of a general interest, then it does not differ from a faction. Although a party only represents a part, this part must take a *non-partial* approach to the whole" (Sartori 1976, 22 and 23). However, Sartori's view goes beyond the Burkean one insofar he contends that "parties are the central intermediate and intermediary structure between society and government" (Sartori 1976, xxi) and, thanks to their linkage function, "parties are upgoing transmission belts of claims and grievances" and "channels of expression…, an instrument, or an agency, for *representing* the people by *expressing* their demands" (*ibid.*, 25 and 27).

Sartori envisions the relapse into factionalism as a degeneration of parties that are unable and unwilling to govern in view of the general interest. More on that later. But, as Bonotti reminds us, he also warns against the danger of unitarism, meaning "the tendency of a party to be 'englutted by the whole' (Sartori 1976, 58) and increasingly merge with the state apparatus", which "in extreme circumstances involves denying legitimacy to other parties or even eliminating party pluralism" (Bonotti 2011b, 109-110; 2012, 155; 2017, 10). Parties, themselves plural and the product of pluralism, translate the pluralism into the political sphere. So, they must avoid both factionalism and unitarism and evolve through achieving a balance between their own partial and holistic tensions. Again, in Bonotti's (2011a, 23) words: "The ideal meaning of party politics lies therefore in this permanent tension between plurality and unity, partiality and wholeness, that is, the contrasting tendencies that parties ought constantly to keep in balance."

In sum, Sartori assumes the basic evaluative markers that have become the distinctive traits of the Burkean tradition: the party retains the virtuous and desirable sense of public-minded promotion of the common good, while the faction holds a

dangerous and undesirable meaning of the prevalence of sectarian interests. However, in contrast to the pioneering treatment of the topic by Burke, Sartori defends a democratic, two-faced, and deep pluralist view of parties, and it is this Sartorian version that has become the true benchmark of the distinction between factions and parties to which the current pro-party theorists adhere. Let us mention a few instances.

In one of their early collaborations, Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum argued that parties are both connective and divisive in a singular way. They are performative agents, since "they discover and define politically relevant differences [and] create the terms of contest" (Muirhead & Rosenblum 2006, 103). In addition to the ability to draw the borders of the social, they have a "unique status as bridging institutions… with one foot in both the background culture and the public forum" (Muirhead & Rosenblum 2006, 103). They are Janus-faced and bilingual at the same time: as associations with roots in the civil society and quasi-official actors in the state public sphere, they can act as "points of connection" between both domains and articulate particular interests and affiliations with general interests and principles of justice (Muirhead & Rosenblum 2006, 104-105). Around the same time, Nadia Urbinati suggested that parties have the ability of not being lost in translation: "A political party translates the many instances and particularities in a language that is general and wants to represent the general. No party claims to represent only the interests of those who belong to or side with it" (Urbinati 2006, 37).

In her seminal book *On the Side of Angels*, Nancy Rosenblum makes a distinction between two types of anti-party currents within

the history of political thought[1]. While the advocates of the "holistic" tradition censure parties as organisms that either do not recognize or betray the common good of society, those aligned with the tradition of "fatal divisiveness" recognize the existence and legitimacy of political parties, but criticize their irrepressible tendency to fracture and polarize. According to some exponents of the latter tradition, parties can make positive contributions as long as they maintain their loyalty to party spirit and do not degenerate into selfish and conflicting factions. However, the turning point in the modern appreciation of the reality and normativity of parties and partisanship comes from Burke's preventative view of them as a form of regulated rivalry and his acknowledgment of managed conflict as an achievement (Rosenblum 2008, 18-19, 119-126, 130 and 364-365). Partisanship' commitment to regulated rivalry involves the recognition that parties are just a part in a permanently pluralist politics: "Partisans see themselves as firmly on the side of the angels, but regulated rivalry demands acknowledging their partiality, that they do not and cannot speak for the whole, and that their exercise of power is provisional" (Rosenblum 2008, 124). Parties, for their part, are creative and inclusive agents that draw the lines of political conflict and attempt to win the support of the majority, that are willingness to search for compromises and look for comprehensive political views. Hence, unlike "interest and advocacy groups [which] are typically "single-issue" pressure groups", parties are wide-ranging associations, and it is morally distinctive of partisanship "a

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[1] This historical reconstruction of antipartyism involves a productive reworking of Sartori's deeply pluralist approach, mentioned before. Something similar can be said of Urbinati's view of the populist phenomenology of factionalism (Urbinati 2019c) and of her characterization of the paradox of populism (Urbinati 2019b).

comprehensive account of what needs to be done" (Rosenblum 2008, 260 and 361).

Although Muirhead initially treated the distinction as a sort of *differentia specifica* (Muirhead 2006, 717), it seems to be not so decisive in later writings as to Bonotti and other authors. For him, factions cannot be entirely avoided in politics, so "they must be attended to, and somehow included, in any stable polity" (Muirhead 2014, 35). One way to tame factions is to make partisanship as widespread as possible among the citizenship as a whole and to promote the civic education for partisanship. These tasks involve regaining a normative conception of partisanship and indeed an ethics of partisanship. According to this, the good partisan is one who stands with a political group striving for democratic legitimacy and making a claim to rule, and who possesses principled convictions and a more or less accurate understanding of the common good, which motivates her to take an interest in office and aspire for her party to garner the widest possible majority. Therefore, she might be willing to adapt her principles to attract other political agents, be they rival partisans or even copartisans (Muirhead 2014, 19). This characterization embraces the aforementioned virtues of partisanship outlined by Rosenblum (2008, 356-362): loyalty, comprehensiveness, inclusiveness, and disposition to compromise. Although these virtues are often intertwined, it is above all the second one that marks the relevance of the distinction between party and faction: "Comprehensiveness is what definitionally separates a party from a faction. Comprehensiveness means that partisans take a view on the full range of issues that constitute the public interest. In contrast to single-issue advocacy groups, parties address the public good in the widest sense. This is why parties have platforms that do not claim to benefit just one group at the expense of others, but to benefit the nation. At their best, partisans attempt to address the common good, even though they do not presume to speak for the

whole" (Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2020, 105; see also Muirhead 2006, 717 and 719)[2].

In the two first chapters of *The Meaning of Partisanship*, Jonathan White and Lea Ypi address the Burkean distinction as a normative criterion for their conception of partisanship. Unlike factions, political parties should serve ends that are "irreducible to the interests of a sectoral grouping" and provide citizens with a "wider normative vision involving claims that can be generalized" (White & Ypi 2016, 21, 59). Such generalizable political claims are those that bind a party together while addressing to all citizens. Therefore, the normative understanding of partisanship "appeals to a non-particularist constituency" and "involves efforts to harness political power not for the benefit of one social group amongst several but in the name of the people as a whole" (White & Ypi 2016, 57). Following Sartori's pluralist formula that parties "should exhibit a non-partial commitment to the whole", the distinction between partisanship and factionalism points to the normative view that unavoidable disagreements of principle, which "may persist where efforts are made to advance generalizable views, … can be channeled by appeal to reasons that can be generally shared [and so] contribute to identifying the general interest rather than undermining it" (White & Ypi 2016, 39 and

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[2] For Wolkenstein, the distinction is further displaced as an internal problem of the parties consisting in a case of bad deliberation. The relevance of factions is based on the inability of rival groups not only to agree on the central issues of their agendas, but also even to talk to each other in a respectful and constructive way, which can generate a drift of dissolution due to the pervasiveness of "corrosive internal conflicts" (Wolkenstein 2020, 130). Not surprisingly, Wolkenstein regards Burke's influence distantly. His main reference in history is Hans Kelsen's "sober and non-moralistic approach to understanding collective political agency" (2020, 11), as well as his arguments for both the internal democratization of parties and its positive impact on the exercise of the popular sovereignty.

48). Once the Burkean distinction is reviewed in this way for the purpose of critical evaluation alongside the ideal of a party as essential to collective self-rule (White & Ypi 2016, 5, 34, 53-54), it provides a foundation for White and Ypi's sophisticated approach of the relationship between partisanship and political justification (White & Ypi, 2016, 57; see also 2011, 382). In sum, parties differ from factions precisely in their ability to articulate principles and aims that could in principle be endorsed by everyone or, in other words, that meet deliberative criteria for general and reciprocal justifiability.

The distinction is taken up in chapter 6 of *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies* (Bonotti 2017, 103-111). As other authors before him, Bonotti identifies an anti-partisan current with prominent advocates such as Thomas Hobbes, David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who saw the parties as factions whose interests interfere with the general interest of the political community. The pro-party tradition started by Bartolo da Sassoferrato and Edmund Burke established instead a conceptual difference between associations whose principles and motivations are essentially divergent. Bonotti mentions Robert von Mohl and Johann Kaspar Bluntschli's praises of the "public-spirited" character of the parties as opposed to the sectarian nature of the factions and, like White and Ypi, endorses Sartori's idea that parties should "take a *non-partial* approach to the whole" (Sartori 1976, 23; Bonotti 2011a, 23; 2017, 105). This historical retrieving combines with a philosophical argument that clears up the ideal of partisanship in terms of the commitment to the common good through the public use of reasons. Hence, Bonotti can equally write either that "partisanship (unlike factionalism) involves a *commitment to the common good* rather than the sole advancement of merely partial interests", or that "partisanship involves a *commitment to public reasoning* that rules out sectarian and factional politics" (2017, 101 and 36; emphasis added). As we will see later, this philosophical

argument renews the Burkean and Sartorian distinction with the Rawlsian notion of reasonableness, which make political liberalism compatible with partisanship and, therefore, detach them from factionalism: "There is a correspondence between the normative demands of political liberalism and those of partisanship, as both of them require that policies and laws be defended on the basis of public reasons, rather than by appealing to sectarian and factional values that only reflect the interests and conceptions of the good of a specific group of citizens" (Bonotti 2017, 111; see also *ibid.*, 63).

II

Parties as factions

The new theories of parties and partisanship have adopted the Sartorian revision of the Burkean distinction for at least three reasons. First, Burke's definition connected parties to a form of association and political practice that bore a collective understanding of, and a search for, the common good. The current theorists focus on the "meaning" and the "spirit" of partisanship as an associative political practice – White and Ypi (2016, 83-85) even characterize it as a form of political friendship –, moving beyond the purely empirical view of parties as organizations with a high level of institutionalization (Wolkenstein 2019). By recoupling the lifeworld practice to the systemic organization, they prioritize a form of political intersubjectivity and reconsider the traditional linkage function of parties from this perspective. Second, the distinction between party and faction serves as one of the theoretical bases for this family of normative theories that agree on resisting, to a greater or lesser extent, the "empiricization of the idea of party" (White & Ypi 2016, 8; Bonotti 2017, 105). The distinction should be understood not as an architectural

foundation but rather as providing coherence along with the rest of theoretical elements. The above-mentioned theories draw different consequences from the shared basic distinction, although all of these theories, to a greater or lesser extent, integrate deliberative components. And third, the distinction centers the normative relevance in the political construction of the common good, which is the concern par excellence of political philosophy. Partisans are political subjects united around a series of ideologies and particularistic values and interests, but they are not sectarian as far as they assume commitments and obligations that are based on principles that refer in turn to the search of a generalizable understanding of the common good. "Presenting partial values and demands in a way that takes into account general ends and the common good, therefore, is the distinctive normative attribute of partisanship" (Bonotti 2017, 105).

The distinctiveness of parties and partisans "at their best" should enable to critically assess the actions and interactions of the really existing parties. This critical and potentially transformative perspective connects with the idea of party-faction reversibility that can be found with varying intensities in Sartori and Urbinati among others. According to Sartori, factions have long preceded the rise of parties and have always been a part of politics for "simple and compelling" reasons. It is just because of such longevity and inertia that "parties may well relapse into something resembling faction. In this sense factionalism is the ever-present temptation of a party arrangement and its ever-possible degeneration" (Sartori 1976, 22-23). Urbinati also warns that parties can be reverting into factions insofar as today they are mostly "seen as detrimental to the general good… [M]ature democracies are characterized by a mass reaction against parties, whose progressive separation from society makes them resemble factions". For her, the recent political theories of parties invite "to think that at the bottom of this phenomenon [i.e., the reaction

against parties and the growth of anti-partyism] there is precisely the erosion of partisanship and its transformation in factionalism" (Urbinati 2019d, 101; see also Sala 2019, 229). Arguably, the new theorists aim to face the contemporary crisis of political parties - and, in part, the mutations of democratic societies- by adhering to the normative view with which Sartori (1976, 23) responded to the inescapable propensity of parties to factionalism: "The actual distinction between party and faction may indeed become fine; but precisely for this reason it should be kept conceptually firm. The more parties come to behave like factions, the more it is important to realize that our rebuke is directed less against the idea of party than against its factional degeneration."

The diagnosis of such crisis and mutations has been pointed out and analyzed by several contemporary political scientists (Mair 2013, Ignazi 2017). Parties should bridge between the state and society, as Sartori stated, but they no longer do so, Peter Mair sentenced in his book *Ruling the void*. They have become so disconnected from society and have been integrated to such extent into state structures while having turned economically dependent, that they are no longer able to function as political mediations and linkage. It is their development in representative democracies that has led them to degenerate on both sides: on the one hand, the establishment of the cartelization that favors technocracy and, on the other hand, the fostering of the disaffection of the masses that fuels the populist moment. The kernel of the matter reappears once and again in the advocates of the new party theories. For instance, Rosenblum and Muirhead identify the current crisis in "the failure of parties to do their fundamental job: they are not connecting representative legislatives to the people" (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2012, 102-103; see also 2020, 97-98 and Muirhead 2019). The problem animating *Rethinking Party Reform* by Wolkenstein is to counter the inability of contemporary political parties to mediate between citizens and the state (Wolkenstein

2020). Quotations could be multiplied at will. Contemporary parties that increasingly lead to the decoupling while turning into factions obviously betray their traditional functions, such as those of representation and mobilization. As a consequence of the fact that the rise of populisms derives from, and takes advantage of, the failure of traditional parties to fulfill their mediating and motivational functions, some theorists see populism's strength as consisting precisely in the delegitimation of party democracy and party pluralism (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2015, Urbinati 2015, 2019a and 2019b; for the case against the new conspiracism, see Muirhead and Rosenblum 2019, 81-100).

Certainly, the reasons for resisting the "empiricization of the idea of party" remain responsive to the reasons explaining the decline of membership-based party politics, the dealignment between parties and constituents, the erosion of their traditional social anchorage, and the electoral volatility and growing abstentionism. The new pro-party theorists are quite sensitive to the concomitant processes of the endogenous mutation of both our audience democracies (Manin 1997) and the cartelization of parties (Katz and Mair 1995), which have turned them ideologically blurred and dependent on the media, as well as to consumerist and market logics that increasingly colonize and confiscate the autonomous dynamics of the political, whose operation has to be guided by social and collective principles. Their shared concern is that the strengthening of partisanship should contribute to reactivate or reform above all party justificatory and linkage functions. The aspired reconnection would be possible only if ordinary partisans regain prominence. Parties would distance from factions insofar as more and self-conscious partisans join and organize themselves according to shared understandings and interpretations of the common good. Partisanship is here an associational practice that overlaps but also takes precedence over parties as organizations that have become "public utilities" (Van

Biezen 2004). On the one hand, only by placing engaged partisanship at the center of political life would it be possible for the parties to recouple the functions they should activate into the political system with the functions they are responsible to develop in the lifeworld. On the other hand, the central role of partisanship in political life and its extent to broader layers of citizenship should better channelize the expression of political claims and reasons to influence the decision-making and be included in laws and policies. For deep pluralist theorists as Rosenblum and Muirhead, the practices by which partisanship is oriented to the common good relay on the virtues of loyalty and regulated and non-violent rivalry, that is, on the duties of honestly engaging and confronting others on the basis of the political recognition thereof as opponents with different or even contrary but legitimate views. For the theorists of public reason, the orientation to the common good relies on specific duties of justification that are internal to the partisan practice and positionality (Bonotti, 2017, 100) or is due to "an attempt to move beyond a particularist viewpoint with the aim of demonstrating how a certain claim has public appeal" (White & Ypi 2011, 385). In both cases, the normative understanding of parties as particular associations that promote the good of the whole political community highlights them as bilingual agents with the abilities to speak both to the fellow partisans and supporters and the general public, to articulate particular perspectives and values through justifications based on public reasons, and to monitoring the further translation of laws and policies in the real life of the people. Moreover, the *defactionalization* of parties would be presumably a crucial contribution to solving the hitherto decaying motivation of the masses to participate democratically, a hope which the deep pluralist advocates of the ethics of partisanship think to focus more realistically than the approaches centered on public reason (Muirhead 2019).

III

Beyond unreasonableness and factionalism

To counter the usual accusations directed at Rawls' theory for being "inhospitable to the kind of democratic contestation of which political parties are the main channels", Bonotti intends to show that "there is in fact considerable scope for democratic contestation within political liberalism" (2017, 40). Political liberalism nurtures party politics and party pluralism precisely because it leaves key issues open to democratic disputes, among them – as Bonotti mentions towards the end of Chapter 3 of his book – the controversies around religious issues and, more importantly, the highly contested socio-economic matters that have drawn the longstanding parties' borders on the left-right political spectrum in most of the Western party systems: "This disagreement [regarding issues of social and economic justice], we might add, is grounded in the burdens of judgement and it is here to stay. To ignore it, or to minimize its significance, would be highly problematic" (2017, 60). Certainly, Bonotti's preference for the democratic openness qualifies some Rawlsian views, such as the scope of the guarantee of constitutional protection of the freedom of speech. Regarding the latter, he states more generally that "granting constitutional recognition to certain principles and rules removes them completely from democratic contestation only in ideal terms. Even the most undisputed and 'permanent' constitutional provisions, that is, can in practice be revoked or amended […] After all, many rights and liberties are constitutionalized within liberal democracies but people may still disagree regarding how these are best realized" (2017, 50 and 60). In contrast to this sort of second-level disagreement, contentious questions of social and economic justice in contemporary liberal democratic societies should not even be constitutionalized, or only could be so under penalty of being unreasonable. For Bonotti, who

here agrees with Rawls while criticizing Cécile Fabre (2000), the constitutionalization of social and economic rights would not be respectful of the reasonable disagreement on liberal and egalitarian principles neither consistent with political liberalism. Therefore, the issues concerning the implementation of these rights, which inevitably fuel further disagreements, are both reflected in and projected by the partisan debates and party programs. As the 'wide' conception of public reason allows comprehensive conceptions to enter public discussion, provided that public reasons are offered in due time, it is up to the members of parties to identify and articulate the reasons with which the decisions concerning these highly contested issues will have to be justified.

Despite Bonotti's willingness to accommodate diversities and dissents and ensure a wide scope for democratic contestation within political liberalism, central elements of his idealized account of parties and partisanship seem to hinder such a democratic openness and limit the real range of what might be contestable. Parties and partisans are explicitly restricted to liberal societies and view the political community as united by "certain broadly shared values and principles such as freedom and equality" (Bonotti 2017, 106). By inescapably moving within the boundaries of political liberalism, parties and partisans cannot but express and shape reasonable disagreements –that is, disagreements that are nonetheless in accordance with the shared evaluative standards of political liberalism- if they are to avoid relapsing into factionalism. In other words, they are constrained to be reasonable, that is, to ground their proposals on accessible reasons while adhering them to shared liberal values; otherwise, they turn into factions. In the pages that follow we make some comments on the apparent selectivity of this view of parties as carriers of reasonableness in a Rawlsian sense, and on the difficulties to host in this way the wide and abstract category of "parties and partisans that endorse unreasonable doctrines" (Bonotti 2017, 175).

It should be noted first that that the very meaning of factionalism is largely resignified by the constraints of reasonableness. Bonotti's argument combines an intrinsic defense and an instrumental defense of partisanship (Efthymiou, 2018): internal obligations to party practices and partisan positions support the prevailing justification-based account, which aims in turn at ensuring democratic legitimacy and stability. Partisans' location within the public political forum, their influence upon coercive state institutions, and the specific normative demands of partisanship provide the rationale to the claim that partisans ought to display a singular commitment to public reasonableness (Bonotti 2017, 173 and 156). Even if fair play obligations do not exhaust the range of duties and commitments that underpin the intrinsic defense of partisanship, the constraints of public reason that partisans need to meet by justifying their claims signal the specific difference with factionalism, since such constraints publicly frame and shape the range of proposals and contestations that serve as instruments for the public good that partisans endorse.

Hence, the key to distinguish parties from factions is not only the Burkean-Sartorian distinction, but above all the Rawlsian idea of "reasonableness". More precisely, it is the former molded and reinterpreted through the latter. According to Bonotti, the good partisan seeks to promote that which from the perspective she shares with other partisans is the good of the entire political community; moreover, she strives to justify her political and legislative proposals to the whole political community, not just the like-minded citizens, constituents and fellow partisans; and in undertaking this justificatory task she collaborates to shape the common good: "commitment to the common good [is] manifested specifically in a commitment to providing public reasons in support of legislation" (Bonotti 2019b, 498). In contrast to these partisans' commitments, members of factions and interest groups

do not have to respect the common good if what they seek is their own partial interests and their particular conception of the good. Likewise, factionalists are not obliged to reason their claims or at most they reason them from their own and exclusive points of view. Partisans are instead committed to publicly reason and debate with other parties and other citizens their proposals constrained by a non-particularistic conception of the good.

While Bonotti wants to reconstruct the normative dimension internal to the partisan practices, one can still wonder whether his idealized view of parties as agents of justification, as Muirhead and Rosenblum point out, "revolves around an independent concept of justification and stands apart from existing political institutions", and whether it neglects in this way other democratic functions "such as representation, political mobilization and the definition of the terms of the political division" (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2020, 102). Bonotti has reacted to this kind of objection and has discussed the tension between linkage and public justification functions of parties (Bonotti 2020). However, it is also worth asking whether it offers at least an operational criterion to sharply differentiate between genuine political associations that aspire to discover and build the general interest and those that pursue objectives of a purely particular or even sectarian nature. Certainly, democratic parties often strive to show that their ideological foundations provide reasons for endorsing shared values and institutions more generally. Yet it might be argued that real-world partisans continually take into account the common good thanks to a sort of "civilizing force of hypocrisy" mechanism. Alongside their legitimate aspiration to win and unite as many wills as possible, they may well be "extrinsically motivated by the fear of social sanction due to widely accepted norms concerning how partisanship or political speech ought to look; … or by the dynamics of party competition to present their proposals in terms

of the common good" (Wolkenstein 2018, 258).[3] Further, it might be argued that a clear dichotomy can hardly be sustained in pluralistic societies where real politics understandings and expressions of the public good are overdetermined by particular interests. Many self-interested agents in society try to speak to the general public and pass themselves off as democratic parties, and parties that primarily stand for particular interests or single issues (for instance, animal and agrarian parties) dress up and conform to the convenient rhetoric of a non-particularistic conception of the good. Yet local and regionalist parties or environmental parties, for instance, are not necessarily more factional than national and catch-all parties. It is not only, as White and Ypi often recognize, that there is a continuum rather than a dichotomy (White & Ypi 2016, 5, 34; Bonotti et al. 2018). Rather, the entanglement between parties and factions is so inextricable and ubiquitous that a critical assessment is pretty often impracticable. Moreover, the "self-attributions of reasonability" frequently abound (Ferrara 2019, 225). The rhetoric of culpable transgression of the dichotomy is not less uncommon that the rhetoric of the common good in ordinary political contest, where self-attributions of reasonableness often enough become delegitimating charges against political adversaries.

Moreover, even if the distinction would offer a non-arbitrary criterion to demarcate overlapping entities, "it does not give us the means to evaluate a wealth of discourses and practices that may

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[3] Sartori argued in a similar vein when differentiating parties from factions: "To be sure, party members are not altruists, and the existence of parties by no means eliminates selfish and unscrupulous motivations. The power-seeking drives of politicians remain constant. What varies is the processing and the constraints that are brought to bear on such drives. Even if the party politician is motivated by crude self-interest, his behaviour must depart – if the constraints of the system [of parties' competition] are operative – from the motivation" (Sartori 1976, 22).

run counter to the principles of political pluralism without directly challenging democracy's minimal institutional framework" (Herman 2017, 741). At the end of the book, Bonotti briefly mentions the broad and internally plural category of "parties and partisans that endorse unreasonable doctrines" (2017, 175). This category extends to that of "unreasonable parties and partisans", which, according to Bonotti, are those that do not recognize Rawls's definition of reasonableness, which means that they disregard the burdens of judgment and do not endorse fair terms of cooperation (Rawls 2005, 49, 375). Given the restrictive internal connection that he establishes between partisanship and reasonableness, it is not surprising that such parties do not only fall outside the domains of political liberalism but are also excluded from the very concept of party and partisanship: "Parties that fail to do this [i.e., to honor the commitment to reasonableness] therefore lie outside political liberalism and, more importantly, outside the very realm of partisanship, intended as a normative ideal. In this sense, they are factions rather than parties" (2017, 137-138). The category of "unreasonable parties and partisans" seems to encompass a broad range of specimens of nonliberal factionalism: not only those who hold racist claims, misrecognize and attack minorities, or explicitly support fascist platforms, but also all sort of populist parties, as well as all sort of the so-called "anti-system parties", i.e., "parties that are not fully committed to liberal democratic norms" (2017, 137). The label "anti-system parties" was once applied to (former) communist parties and green parties. Yet, presumably, they could include among others anti-establishment parties that take advantage of liberal and democratic institutions they do not believe in and that even would drop or undermine them whenever they could. At the end of the book, Bonotti also declares that he has neglected the assessment of those "unreasonable parties that are truly inimical to the central tenets of political liberalism" (2017, 175). Although he left this unanswered

question as a worthy subject for a future research, such an absence seems to be actually a problem for his theory.

What Bonotti (2017, 137) does reveal in the book is that it is consistent with his liberal theory to try to curb such factions or self-styled parties that violate the criterion of shareability while they participate in a democratically governed polity. In this regard, he reminds us Rawls's expression concerning the existence of unreasonable "doctrines that reject one or more democratic freedom", which "gives us the practical task of containing them – like war and disease – so that they do not overturn political justice" (Rawls 2005, 64). In his response to an objection from Enrico Biale urging him to clarify how populist parties could be contained (Biale 2019, 220-221), Bonotti declares in favor of different forms of intervention according to "degrees of unreasonableness." For this reason, while softer measures will usually suffice to graduate the tolerance to the intolerant, "more drastic interventions (e.g., in the spirit of militant democracy)" (Bonotti 2019a, 233) should not be ruled out in exceptional cases. Severe, even aggressive liberal measures of militant democracy might come to be applied to "more extreme types of unreasonable parties." That seems to be the case when explicitly fascist and authoritarian parties, segregationist parties or parties promoting terrorism seek to undermine constitutional essentials, reverse liberal democratic values, and violate fundamental rights. As we are told elsewhere, Bonotti also considers a proportionate measure the banning of parties that resort in a continuous, persistent and recalcitrant way to vituperative forms of hate speech: "partisans should be subject to the same penalties incurred by citizens in general when they use hate speech. Furthermore, in exceptional circumstances this might also justify banning those political parties that make a systematic and sustained use of hate speech, as Nancy Rosenblum, for

example, suggests" (Bonotti 2017, 173-174)[4]. Arguably, these types of interventions that restrict the political rights of some groups of citizens to protect the rights of other groups should not only be exceptional and proportionate, but also temporary and subject to independent and regular evaluation (Kirschner, 2014). On the other hand, it is not entirely clear whether Bonotti would support the dominant model of court-centered "judicial review", also known as the constitutional paradigm of militant democracy, or he rather favor that the political mechanisms for guarding democracy should be publicly discussed and decided in view of the political contingencies.

However, rather than the self-contained democratic self-defense that should guide the proportionated measures of militant democracy (Kirschner 2014), Bonotti seems to prefer that "milder forms of intervention" be applied in response to the degrees of unreasonableness that characterize most populist parties, which are an expression rather than purely a rejection of democracy. As much as these parties legitimately claim to embody democratic values and give a legitimate role to competitive elections and the decisions by majority, they cannot help but continue to be factions that oppose the democratic system as it is understood by political liberalism. Bonotti cites approvingly the "duty of pressure", which Badano & Nuti (2018) define as "a moral duty requiring that ordinary reasonable citizens press the unreasonable they know (e.g., relatives, friends and colleagues) on their political views to change their mind and push them towards greater reasonableness". While for Badano and Nuti it is an imperfect moral duty assigned to all reasonable citizens in their encounters in nonpublic forums

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[4] Along with the incitement to hate, Rosenblum (2008, chapter 9) critically assessed other three justifications for banning political parties: violence, existential threat to the political identity, and outside support, interference, and control.

with their unreasonable acquaintances, Bonotti suggests that "parties could play an important role in fulfilling this duty in a more systematic way" (Bonotti 2019a, 33). Again, it is not clear how such measures would be implemented. Moreover, it is not always possible (or even advisable) to promote the assimilation and respect of civic duties "to discursively engage the unreasonable that befalls citizens" nor to press rhetorically and persuasively the alleged factionalists to change their minds. Bonotti could perhaps accept the institutionalization of other ordinary practices to contain the spread of unreasonableness at the level of the party system as well. The potential of tailored engagement in the private censure of unreasonable citizens could be publicly transformed and institutionally encouraged with the introduction of measures that could be viewed as contemporary forms of ostracism (Malkopoulou 2016 and 2017). These de-presentative measures would be alternatives to militant democracy that place the *demos* at the central stage of the struggle against extremist parties and rely on political commitments resulting from self-imposed duties by all reasonable parties.

We think that Bonotti roughly shares the argument of the parties as factions and the picture of the current crisis of party politics as outlined in section 2 of this paper. By concentrating the essence of partisanship in the norm of reasonableness, he aspires to signal the criterion for normatively taming distorted political practices in our contemporary democracies. Obviously, the theorist cannot but speak from a particular and situated point of view. However, the position of the enunciation hardly avoids revealing traces of moral superiority, seemingly so invested as to decide who are eligible to have their membership card for liberals, democrats or for both withdrawn. However, the absence of a clear answer to the questions of the severe and effective containments or, at most, the appeal to a defensive position and "sterilizing strategy" (Urbinati 2019b, 1072) against those who contest what

should not be questioned reveals precisely what a democratic theory of partisanship has to reframe in a more radical way: the political relevance and the democratic challenge of what Bonotti calls those "parties and partisans that endorse unreasonable doctrines" and those alleged factions that, while contesting the liberal-democratic model, are nevertheless democratic agents that have legitimate interests and therefore rights to participate in our really existing democracies.

The idealization that partisans should build the common good in terms of reasonableness deflates once partisanship is regarded from the perspective of a deeply pluralist and adversarial conception of democracy. Then the notion of reasonableness itself (combining the recognition of the burdens of judgment and the endorsement of mutually acceptable terms of cooperation) can only become useful to appease contemporary partisans' discrepancies insofar as it has had a historical development and retain a contextual character. To say it with Muirhead, "our agreement is the residue of earlier partisan fights" (Muirhead 2014, 74) and even our most foundational values are but products of partisan conflicts. Reasonable partisans, in this sense, recognize the persistence of conflicts in such a way that regard their political community itself "as a site of contestation in which even our foundational commitments nourish disagreement" (Muirhead 2014, 77). In brief, political disagreement runs so deep that it cannot be reasonably overcome, and all social and political agreements are therefore contingent, provisional, and reversible.

The search of solutions to the current crisis of parties does not consist so much in the avoidance of their alleged propensity to relapse into factionalism, as in reacting in the first instance to their increasing inability to propose attractive and transformative horizons and to solve problems that citizens consider as their most relevant and high priority concerns. A radical-democratic

alternative could be in a position to reframe the normativity of the parties and the demandable qualities of partisans in light of this need to reform political organizations and to revitalize the associative spirit among free and equal engaged citizens. This doesn't need to be seen as a sort of crusade for the *defactionalization* of parties. There are at least two senses of radical democracy involved here, one that urges to rethink the centrality that socio-economic issues have for parties and partisan practices from the perspective of their democratizing interventions, and another that takes conflict as pivotal in political communities and calls for vigorous partisan contestation as the central mechanism for the mediating parties to articulate demands and influence decision-making. These meanings address the linkage function of parties, but neither of them requires to be burdened with the liberal ideal of reasonableness. According to the second meaning, democracy has rules and actors, no restrictions and guardians in advance. Contrarily to liberal measures of militant democracy, it is incumbent on partisans themselves to identify the range of permissible contestation and to fight for compromises among democratic parties rather than amputations or sterilizations of extremist ones. According to the first sense, Bonotti's misguided view of good partisans in a sufficiently just liberal society when real societies remain deeply unjust (Ypi, 2019) disregards the inequalities of power and wealth that undermine and disturb the social and economic conditions of democratic practices, including those of partisans. In a radical-democratic view of partisanship, parties should work both as advocates of the political rights generally, also those their partisans exercise and represent, and as an instrument of influence and control over the state and, from the public institutions themselves, also over the economic powers that factionalize politics. Ultimately, a radical democratic position takes partisanship as an indispensable political intersubjectivity that should deepen and ensure the wide conditions in which collective

self-rule can be exercised and to contribute in this way to habilitate citizens with the democratic channels for the civic appropriation of power.

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