

## Of Parties and Factions<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

After decades of neglect, normative approaches to political parties have recently flourished (Rosenblum 2008; Muirhead 2014; White and Ypi 2016; Bonotti 2017; Biale 2018; Wolkenstein 2020). Since these theories aim to explain and justify the value of parties within democratic institutions, they do not take parties as they are, but as they should be. With some notable exceptions (Muirhead 2010; Efthymiou 2018), most offer a normative picture of political parties as inherently valuable for democratic politics. We know from political science that there are various types of party, but that the common denominator is the following: parties are organisations that contest elections (Epstein 2019; Aldrich 1995; Sartori and Mair 2005). When a political association attempts to put its candidates into public offices through an electoral process, that association counts as a party. Let us call this the descriptive requirement. Small or sectorial as it is, if it runs for office like a party, if it contests elections like a party, it's a party. What normative theory tells us is that this descriptive criterion is insufficient (White and Ypi 2010). In order to assess parties normatively, we need to add a normative criterion to our picture and this criterion serves to separate parties from their evil alter ego: factions.

Although their etymological origin differs, parties and factions have been traditionally associated and distrusted. As Jonathan White and Lea Ypi observe, "Taking sides, maintaining a position, adopting a stance—all attitudes we tend to link to the spirit of partisanship—seem to have been immediately associated with the threat of division, the disruption of political community, a conflict for power and the worst excesses of sedition" (White and Ypi 2016, 35). If we take partisanship simply as a "political orientation of citizens who *stand with a party*" (Muirhead 2006, 714), we cannot discriminate between cases in which parties fulfil a beneficial role in democratic institutions and cases in which parties are threatening those institutions. A positive, or at least more nuanced, evaluation of partisanship and parties requires first the possibility of distinguishing them from factions, because otherwise any contribution to the democratic ethos that they can give is distorted by the latter's seditious dangers.

This article aims at shedding some light on the distinction between parties and factions by analysing two important accounts that have been given of it. Firstly, I will introduce White and Ypi's view, which is characterised by two normative requirements that are meant to complement the descriptive one I just mentioned: the common good and the contestability requirement. As I will try to show, the combination of these requirements, though innovative and compelling, is ultimately unsuccessful at drawing the line

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between parties and factions. Secondly, I will extensively analyse Matteo Bonotti's proposal, which provides a Rawlsian understanding of the common good requirement. While Bonotti's account is certainly more demanding than White and Ypi's, I will argue that it is also unconvincing, for different reasons. I think that Bonotti's attempt at showing the intrinsic connection between partisanship and public reason fails, but points to a possibly fruitful way to draw the distinction between parties and factions. I will sketch this third option in the conclusion.

### **Are Parties Different from Factions?**

Jonathan White and Lea Ypi read Western philosophers' traditional suspicion of and even blunt hostility towards parties as a mistaken conflation between parties and factions. Factions, they argue, are rightly seen as dangerous and disruptive of the political system because they "represent a corrupt display of passions, triggered by arrogance, envy, and the desire to accumulate wealth, and lead to the explosion of destructive conflicts between opposing parts of society" (White and Ypi 2016, 38). Parties, on the other hand, offer "principled visions of what society should look like for the benefit of all" (White and Ypi 2016, 51). Rather than mere aggregations of certain sectoral interests in society, parties provide partisan but not partial conceptions of the common good and aspire at harnessing political power to govern in the name and for the benefit of the people. Let us call this normative criterion the common good requirement. While factions pursue partial interests, parties advance principled views of the common good. Furthermore, White and Ypi consider also partisans' acceptance of the contestability of their claims as "intrinsic to the partisan attitude" (2016, 22): parties must always recognise the contestability of their claims vis-à-vis other partisans.

Together, these two normative requirements are necessary to qualify a political grouping as a *proper* party and contribute to explaining what positive role partisanship can play for democratic institutions. Interestingly, White and Ypi's normative requirements are clearly internal: they do not impose external constraints on partisanship but show what partisanship at its best means. Because proper parties are not factions, they can give expression to partisanship in a valuable way.

However, citizens in contemporary democracies widely disagree over the common good, and any recognition of the value of political parties stems from the idea that disagreement is part and parcel of a democratic society. Given the fact of pluralism, one party's conception of the common good may appear partial and factional in its adversaries' eyes. While White and Ypi explicitly appeal to "principles and aims that are plausibly generalizable" (2016, 21) and to goals that are "proposed in the name of the whole people and with reference to principles and aims that could in principle be endorsed by everyone" (2016, 60), they do not provide more flesh to the bones of the common good requirement.

In fact, they *cannot* provide it. For these two requirements pull in different directions. On the one hand, the common good is not independently specified and hence political groupings qualify as parties as long as they appeal to *their* own view of the common good, which may widely differ, and do not explicitly offer *only* considerations based on sectorial interests (White and Ypi 2016, 60). This is even clearer if we consider that, contrary to what White and Ypi claim (White and Ypi 2011), there are important structural differences between public justification and partisan justification (Muirhead 2010). As Enrico Biale points out, when partisans offer reasons in favour of their programmes, they are neither impartially assessing all available proposals, nor aiming at finding out what the best proposal really is (Biale 2018, 137-8). Rather, they aim at winning elections by convincing other citizens of the soundness of their programme, towards which they are inevitably partial (Biale 2018, 141-3). But this entails that each party that does not explicitly advocate only for sectorial interests will reasonably claim to be a party in the normative sense.

On the other, the requirement of contestability entails that parties must always be open to criticism from adversaries<sup>2</sup>. White and Ypi mean this second criterion to express partisans' democratic orientation: because parties accept a "public process of debate, persuasion, and contestation", they are at home only under institutions that "express the legitimacy of political contestation – where offices are elected, where disagreements are debated" (White and Ypi 2017, 22-23). Acceptance of contestability, however, does not *require* democracy: a party may allow for debate and contestation by other parties while firmly holding on to power and denying elections. Democracy needs more than contestation: it needs the acceptance of popular sovereignty and political equality, at least (Dahl 1989). Furthermore, thanks to contestability, each party can deny its adversaries' sincere commitment to generalizable principles while asserting its own, and they can do it based on their own evaluative standards. Even though a left-wing party may defend teachers' interests because of a principled view of the importance of state-provided education, its adversaries can always object that this defence is factional as it looks at a specific group's interests. As White and Ypi note, "at stake is not whether, in the eyes of the observer, a political grouping reliably does make claims in the name of generalizable principles (this will be a matter for political debate), but whether it *seeks* to do so given the kinds of argumentation it pursues" (2016, 59).

According to the common good requirement, therefore, all groupings that offer more than an aggregation of sectorial interests may count as parties, on their terms. According to the contestability requirement, all parties can legitimately accuse their adversaries to be no more than factions, on their terms. On the one hand, the common good requirement is overinclusive, because it allows almost all political groupings to qualify as parties even if these parties may advance conceptions of the common good that are inconsistent

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<sup>2</sup> Being open to criticism entails neither moral scepticism, nor relativism, as White and Ypi observe (2016, 74). It does, however, entail that if each party must recognise the contestability of its claims, it must be open not only to adversaries' rejection of its political justification but also to their denial that such a justification is rooted on a conception of the common good instead of on factional interests. At the same time, being open to such criticism cannot entail *accepting* it; hence parties are free to reject other partisans' contestation.

with democratic institutions. On the other, the contestability requirement is underinclusive, because it allows each party to deny the legitimacy of other partisans' claims, irrespective of whether these claims are compatible with the democratic game.

This is a problem for White and Ypi, because the combination of these two normative requirements does not seem sufficient to draw a clear and publicly recognisable line between factions and parties. Furthermore, the presence of just institutions, intended as the set of procedures regulating conflict to prevent domination, such as "separation of powers, due process, respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law" (2016, 52), is certainly required, but far from sufficient to separate parties from factions. As they observe, institutional remedies that correct the effects of inequalities without neutralising the system of production of such inequalities are not enough and, as a result, factionalism "understood in the classical sense as the unequal influence that those with more power and wealth exercise over the rest of the political community, continues to haunt principled partisan politics" (2016, 53).

### **Parties as Agents of Public Reason**

To solve this problem, Matteo Bonotti in his *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies* has recourse to political liberalism. Since reasonable disagreement is a core feature of well-ordered societies, partisans may find a common ground in a political conception of justice. Indeed, parties play the role of bridges, or connections not only between citizens and government (White and Ypi 2010; Muirhead and Rosenblum 2012) but also between citizens' comprehensive doctrines and a freestanding political conception of justice (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2006; Bonotti 2017). According to Bonotti, partisans are thus agents of public reason, because they translate citizens' particular demands and private reasons into public reasons. Political liberalism provides normative standards, rooted in the liberal values that citizens of a well-ordered society share, and these standards allow us to draw a clear distinction between factions and parties. While factions offer private reasons, parties trade in public reasons<sup>3</sup>.

As is widely known, Rawls calls public reason "the reason of equal citizens who, as a collective body, exercise final political and coercive power over one another in enacting laws and in amending their constitution" (Rawls 2005, 214). Because coercive power must be exercised in accordance with constitutional essentials that all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse (2005, 137), political justification of laws must be grounded on liberal values that all citizens of a well-ordered society share. Consequently, political agents in institutional roles, such as judges, elected officials or candidates, must be willing to provide reasons that are public, i.e., reasonably acceptable by all citizens as free and equals. Rawls calls this the duty of civility, which is a moral duty "to explain to one another on

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<sup>3</sup> Partisans are allowed to offer nonpublic reasons to their constituency when they engage in what Bonotti calls vertical justification, but they cannot appeal on comprehensive doctrines when they justify policies or laws to adversaries or other citizens (Bonotti 2017, 134). See note 3.

those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason” (Rawls 2005, 217). Ideally, lay citizens are also under the same duty when they vote, because by their vote they hold officials accountable. Hence, they should “think of themselves *as if they were legislators* and ask themselves what statutes, supported by what reasons satisfying the criterion of reciprocity, they would think it most reasonable to enact” (Rawls 2005, 444–45). It goes without saying that this view is particularly demanding. However, Rawls adds two important limitations. Firstly, he endorses a wide view of public reason, according to which nonpublic reasons can be offered as justifications for political decisions at any time, *provided* that public reasons are also given in due course (Rawls 2005, 462–66). Secondly, he seems to limit public reason to “constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice”(Rawls 2005, 214), thereby leaving other political issues, such as tax or environment legislation, out of the constraints of public reason (but see Quong 2004; 2011).

Bonotti proposes another way to make public reason less demanding without resorting to these limitations. He exonerates regular citizens from the duty of civility and applies it only to partisans (Bonotti 2017, 133). While lay citizens are hence free to propose their nonpublic reasons, partisans must always comply with the duty of civility and justify their proposals on the basis of reasons that are acceptable to all citizens as free and equals. Bonotti’s view is then less demanding on ordinary citizens, but still quite demanding on partisans, since they cannot benefit from Rawls’s limitations on public reason.

Firstly, the limitation on constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice does not work for partisans because they are meant to elaborate complex manifestoes, which include both nonfundamental and fundamental matters, and which partisans must justify in their entirety (Bonotti 2017, 69). Secondly, partisans are tasked with the elaboration of these complex platforms and their justification based on reasons acceptable to all their fellow citizens. Even though they are permitted to offer nonpublic reasons to their constituents (Bonotti 2017, 134), they must confine themselves to public reasons when they attempt to convince citizens of different political positions to vote for their party. What engenders a surprisingly demanding implication is Bonotti’s quite wide view of partisan identity, including candidates, party members, activists, supporters and sympathizers (Bonotti 2017, 15). Since he thinks that any of these people acts *qua* partisan as soon as she has the intention of convincing her friends or relatives to vote for her party, this leads to the odd implication that even a simple party supporter will need to comply with the constraints of public reason *in her private conversations*, while her interlocutors will not have the same duty, unless of course they are also party supporters (Bonotti 2017, 67). Here Bonotti proves to be even more demanding than Rawls, because partisans cannot appeal to the wide view of public reason to justify their use of comprehensive doctrines to fellow citizens.

To be fair, in chapter 7 Bonotti spells out a division of justificatory labour which allows certain partisans to benefit from a wide view of public reason. He distinguishes between horizontal and vertical

accountability. While the former is conducted among partisans of competing parties, who are supposed to keep each other accountable thanks to public reasoning (Bonotti 2017, 130), the latter takes place between partisans and their constituents (Bonotti 2017, 134). Since its function is to keep elected officials accountable to their constituents, so that they are responsive to constituents' comprehensive doctrines and voice their demands, vertical accountability allows for nonpublic reasons and makes the wide view of public reason available also for partisans<sup>4</sup>. This calls for a division of justificatory labour: elected officials should focus on public reasons and nonelected partisans can focus on "ensuring that their elected fellow partisans are responsive to citizens' non-public reasons" (Bonotti 2017, 143). Unfortunately, while such a division of labour helps us draw a line between elected and nonelected partisans, it does not help clarifying what Bonotti means by "constituents". If by constituents he means any person who could possibly vote for the party, this explicitly contradicts the requirements he mentions in chapter 4 and opens the possibility for partisan, widely intended, to speak their mind without following public reason constraints (at least in conversations with friends and relatives)<sup>5</sup>. If, on the other hand, by constituents he means people who usually vote for a certain party, then the line between constituent and partisan *as party sympathizer* (Bonotti 2017, 67, 73) becomes much more blurred. Accordingly, partisans would be justified in exchanging reasons based on their comprehensive doctrines only between themselves, but never with citizens who are not already known to be party supporters<sup>6</sup>.

The ideal of public reason is therefore quite constraining on partisanship. However, Bonotti does not simply offer public reason as an external constraint on parties and partisanship. In chapter 6, he openly rejects this view, introduced in chapter 4, and defends an intrinsic account, according to which public reason is intrinsic to partisanship, well understood. As Bonotti claims, "partisanship, intended as a distinctive normative category, already involves something like a commitment to the Rawlsian idea of public reason" (2017, 104). In order to argue in favour of such a claim, Bonotti resumes White and Ypi's analysis of parties as different from factions and agrees that "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, 106). As we have seen, though, White and Ypi leave the common good requirement too indeterminate and, most importantly, too entirely dependent on each parties' own view of it to have it available as a discriminating criterion between parties and factions. If the common good is anything a party claims it is and if a political grouping only needs to appeal to its view of the

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<sup>4</sup> This is particularly important for Bonotti because it is the only way in which social and political change in public reason is possible. See Bonotti 2017, 135.

<sup>5</sup> It would also contradict what Bonotti states again in chapter 7: "all partisans, I would like to stress again, have an intrinsic duty to comply with public reason" (Bonotti 2017, 142).

<sup>6</sup> This would in turn make the possibility of social and political change in public reason much more difficult. If partisans must employ only public reasons with all citizens who are not fellow partisans, it is difficult to see how they can introduce new values into the set of shared ones (Bonotti 2017, 135). How could have Green parties planted ideas of sustainability and carbon footprint in the public discourse if they had to restrain themselves to reasons that were *then* public with ordinary citizens?

common good to count as a party, then all political groupings that contest elections are parties, as long as they do not explicitly defend only partial interests. Furthermore, the contestability of partisan claims means that in each partisan's eyes adversaries may easily and legitimately appear as factional, because each party must be open to having its claims contested.

The novelty of Bonotti's approach lies in dropping the contestability requirement and calling on public reason to specify the common good requirement. Following Muirhead and Rosenblum, parties can be considered bilingual entities that ensure the achievement of overlapping consensus, by integrating the political conception of justice into citizens' comprehensive doctrines (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2006). But why should parties construe their view of the common good in Rawlsian terms? Not all principled views of what society should look like conform to a reasonable conception of justice. Bonotti replies to this objection by resorting to the idea of well-ordered societies: "In liberal democratic societies [...] a sincere commitment to the common good cannot amount to the promotion of a comprehensive conception of the good as the basis for state legislation, as this would fail to respect many citizens as free and equal persons" (Bonotti 2017, 108). Since these societies are characterised by reasonable pluralism and by a public political culture centred on the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation among free and equal citizens (Rawls 2005, 13–14), imposing rules based on reasons that other citizens cannot accept would amount to failing to respect them as free and equal.

As has been extensively pointed out, actual democratic societies are far less consensual than Rawls's well-ordered societies. Actual democratic citizens tend to disagree more on issues that according to Rawls should only allow for reasonable solutions and the number of unreasonable citizens is steadily surging, contrary to his hope that it would decline over time. This entails that many citizens will support parties that are themselves unreasonable, i.e., that are not willing to provide fair terms of cooperation that other citizens are reasonably expected to endorse and to acknowledge the burdens of judgment.

Bonotti's answer to this first strain of criticism is that his proposal only applies to well-ordered societies characterised by a shared liberal political culture (Bonotti 2017, 111). A shared political culture provides the necessary evaluative standards based on which parties can formulate their reasons. As a result, parties do not share the same reasons, but they share the standards of what counts as a reason. These standards include firstly what Rawls defines the "guidelines of inquiry: principles of reasoning and rules of evidence in the light of which citizens are to decide whether substantive principles properly apply and to identify laws and policies that best satisfy them" (Rawls 2005a, p. 224). This is what makes reasons accessible: they can be recognised as reasons by all citizens because all citizens share the same evaluative standards. But secondly, and importantly, these standards also include a "weak form of shareability" (Bonotti 2017, 116): it is not enough that citizens in a well-ordered society share guidelines of inquiry, they also need to share liberal political values of freedom and equality. As Bonotti states, "accessibility is a *necessary* but not

*sufficient* condition for public justification” (Bonotti 2017, 116), because mere accessibility would allow public support for illiberal policies.

Bonotti’s account has two problematic implications. Firstly, since his view only applies to well-ordered societies, it leaves out those decent societies characterised by a shared political culture that is not liberal. As Bonotti tactfully puts it, “It is not unreasonable to claim that in such non-liberal societies, due to the specific character of their political culture, the commitment to the common good that characterizes partisanship as a normative ideal may be consistent with the advancement by political parties of political platforms which would be considered unreasonable in liberal democracies” (Bonotti 2017, 107). But if these societies share illiberal evaluative standards, this entails the somehow odd consequence that a liberal party campaigning for freedom and equality in a less than well-ordered society would count as a faction exactly because this party would not provide reasons based on the illiberal political culture of its society.

Secondly, even in a well-ordered society there may be unreasonable citizens, though admittedly few. If these citizens do not share the same liberal values that by definition all their fellow citizens share, why should they follow their same evaluative standards? Bonotti would reply that if a party in a well-ordered society does not abide by the requirements of public reason, it must be considered a faction rather than a proper party. But this so-called faction may well advance a general view of society and not simply sectorial interests. A right-wing populist party does not explicitly promote the interests of a part of society; quite the contrary, it claims to represent the entire people versus powerful elites and often harmless minorities (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). By their own lights, populist partisans are advancing a conception of the common good, and they may even provide reasons that are accessible to other citizens, even though these are not based on shared liberal values. Think of another case: in a well-ordered society, there may be (few) perfectionist citizens who conscientiously adhere to liberalism but reject its justificatory form (Raz 1986; Enoch 2011; Bistagnino 2018). A perfectionist party would provide good reasons based on values such as autonomy, but they would not provide public reasons, intended as reasons rooted in a *political* conception of justice which is itself freestanding with respect to comprehensive doctrines. If we were to follow Bonotti’s Rawlsian interpretation of the common good requirement, a perfectionist party in a well-ordered society would also count as a faction. Importantly, it would thus count even if it addressed all citizens with its proposals, in order to convince them of the desirability of its claims, and even if these proposals were more than a mere collection of sectorial interests.

Both consequences seem puzzling. If what matters for a partisan conception of the common good is that it conforms to standards shared in a given society, the transformative potential of partisan agency is seriously threatened, as the case of a liberal party in an illiberal society shows. Accordingly, while parties of a well-ordered society would manage to respect the intrinsic connection between partisanship and



public reason, all partisans who find themselves in less than well-ordered societies would either lack a shared set of evaluative standards that define which conception of the common good is acceptable or they would be required to abide by an illiberal set of evaluative standards, thereby being prevented from offering reasons based on liberal values. In these cases, they either are necessarily indistinguishable from factions or they act like factions when they are advocating for freedom and equality. If, on the other hand, what matters is that such a partisan conception conforms to public reason standards, regardless of whether these are shared or not, then Bonotti's interpretation of the common good requirement is certainly normative but hardly seen as intrinsic to partisanship itself. In other words, contrary to what Bonotti claims, public reason ought to be viewed as an extrinsic constraint on partisanship, which should be recognised as valuable only insofar as it conforms to political liberalism.

## Conclusion

We have seen that partisanship scholars in political theory insist on providing normative accounts of what parties should be. Accordingly, the descriptive requirement that a political grouping must contest elections to count as a party is not sufficient to distinguish between a proper party, which is supposedly valuable for democratic institutions, and a faction, which is instead dangerous. While White and Ypi offer a combination of common good and contestability requirements, Bonotti argues in favour of a requirement of common good intrinsically connected to public reason.

Though a political scientist, Giovanni Sartori is not unfamiliar with such a normative understanding of partisanship: he acknowledges not only that parties are different from factions, but that parties acquire a positive connotation because of that difference (Sartori and Mair 2005, 21). Parties are indeed parts of a pluralistic whole: "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 and Mair 2005, 23). Despite this recognition, Sartori offers a minimal definition of parties in line with political scientists' traditional view: "A party is any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office" (Sartori and Mair 2005, 57). While, as he admits, this definition might not "hit on what matters most" (Sartori and Mair 2005, 57), it is necessary to identify those cases where parties fail to respect their normative vocation by pursuing the sectoral interests of a part instead of the public interest.

In other words, a minimal definition is *descriptively accurate*, insofar as it manages to track those political associations that contest elections without pursuing the common good, and *normatively adequate*, insofar as it manages to draw a line between bad parties and good parties, which pursue the common good. Parties are shown to be valuable only insofar as they meet this further normative desideratum. A minimal definition of parties, therefore, maintains that these are political groupings that contest elections, and a

normative assessment of parties allows us to see if and when parties, intended as groupings that contest elections, are indeed valuable for democratic ends.

This is not simply a terminological dispute concerning the conditions under which it is appropriate to call something a “party”. As we have seen, a normatively loaded definition of parties may be convincing in showing that parties, properly understood, advance conceptions of the common good in a contestable way but fails to offer a full-fledged account of when parties are indeed valuable, or, differently put, when they can be separated by dangerous factions. White and Ypi provide a compelling normative definition of parties. And yet, when we employ this definition to identify proper or valuable parties in the real world, we see that virtually all political groupings can qualify as parties as long as they offer more than an explicit aggregation of sectorial interests. Even if there are good reasons to doubt that “catch-all parties” (Kirchheimer 1966) really aim to elaborate a consistent view of the common good, rather than simply mixing various demands in order to appeal to as many citizens as possible, their programmes often present principled views of society, though admittedly with tenuous ideological consistency. Similarly, a regional party explicitly advances the interests and values of *its* people, but often does so based on a conception of justice and democracy<sup>7</sup>. Additionally, each self-proclaimed party can deny the same status to its adversaries in virtue of the contestability of partisan claims. While this is to a certain extent the inevitable consequence of political debate, I think that adopting such a normative definition of parties entails to problematic drawbacks. Firstly, it does not provide a clear and public distinction between proper parties and factions. Second, it loses sight of the possibility that so-called proper parties can put forward a conception of the common good in a contestable way while at the same time also posing a threat for democratic institutions.

A normative assessment of parties calls for the specification of external criteria that allow us to distinguish valuable from dangerous parties. Bonotti’s account is an interesting contribution in this respect, because he offers a criterion of discrimination between good and bad parties (or between parties and factions, as he would say): public reason. However, this is also too demanding. Firstly, his view of an intrinsic connection between partisanship and public reason leads to unpalatable conclusions concerning less than well-ordered societies. Secondly, even in a well-ordered society, it is not clear why those few unreasonable partisans who address their programmes to their fellow citizens, accept the contestability of their claims and sincerely offer reasons grounded on *their* conception of justice and the common good should be treated as dangerously factional. The only reason seems to be that partisanship and public reason in well-ordered societies are compatible “as a matter of definition” (Ypi 2019).

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<sup>7</sup> Think of the Scottish National Party, which defines itself as “centre left and social democratic” (<https://www.snp.org/about/>) and pledges to defend the democratic process (“Stronger for Scotland – The SNP General Election Manifesto”, n.d., 13), while being clearly regional in its constituency.

A proper distinction between parties and factions requires something less than Bonotti's proposal and something more than White and Ypi's. I think that parties can be viewed as valuable only insofar as they publicly accept the legitimacy of the democratic process. Naturally, this normative requirement is more or less demanding depending on the conception of democratic legitimacy that is endorsed. However, even if we give a quite minimal view of the democratic process, as for instance characterised by the ideals of popular sovereignty, political equality and open and fair discussion (Christiano 1996, 3), such an account has two interesting strengths, I think. Firstly, it is much more inclusive than public reason and may safely be applied even in less than well-ordered societies. Secondly, this proposal explicitly recognises that political parties, whether they are internally distinguishable from factions or not, have a conditional value with respect to democracy. In fact, this view helps single out those parties that fail to respect democratic ideals even while proposing principled views of the common good and accepting the contestability of their claims. When, for instance, a political party baselessly rejects democratic outcomes as illegitimate or pass laws that facilitate voter suppression, what makes this party a dangerous faction is neither the partial set of interests it advances, nor its inability to live up to public reason constraints. It is, more simply, its rejection of democracy as a legitimate decision-making procedure.

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