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Political justification figures prominently in contemporary political theory, notably in models of deliberative democracy. This paper articulates and defends the essential role of partisanship in this process. Four dimensions of justification are examined in detail: the constituency to which political justifications are offered, the circumstances in which they are developed, the ways they are made inclusive, and the ways they are made persuasive. In each case, the role of partisanship is probed and affirmed. Partisanship, we conclude, is indispensable to the kind of political justification needed to make the exercise of collective authority responsive to normative concerns.[1]

In democratic societies, a minimal condition of political power being considered legitimate is that it be exercised in a non-arbitrary fashion. Such is the basis of any distinction between collective authority and brute force. Political justification is an important part of the process by which this distinction is maintained. As a normative ideal, political justification is linked to a model of discursive exchange by which citizens jointly frame the terms of life in common and aspire to do so on the basis of reasons widely shared. It is the means by which decision-making acquires an identifiable rationale, one which can be scrutinised and evaluated by those whom decisions will affect. As a practice, justification is attempted each time political agents confront one another in the public sphere and put forward arguments supportive of a given course of action, or explicative of why it should be modified or rejected. Our question in the following is how best to characterise the kinds of citizen activity conducive to political justification. From what channels can it be expected to flow?

The question has already received attention from democratic theorists linking it to deliberative accounts of the public sphere, a sphere where – at least in its ideal form – political justification is guided by rules of interaction considered potentially universal, open and inclusive. Authors have emphasized the relevance for justification of various democratic fora – deliberative polls, citizen juries, discursive chambers, and mini-publics – where citizens critically assess issues of common concern (Chambers 2003) (Thompson 2008). Here we shall take a different path, examining the contribution to political justification of a different mode of civic engagement, one widely familiar from

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day-to-day politics yet often the target of scepticism and distrust. This mode of engagement is *partisanship*, a largely overlooked one amongst contemporary political theorists.[2] The article examines the crucial contribution of partisanship to the process of reason-giving that underpins political justification in a democratic polity.

Despite the growing interest shown by deliberative democrats in identifying empirical sites of public justification, partisanship as a form of civic practice has largely been neglected (van Biezen and Saward 2008, esp. pp. 24-25; Johnson 2006, pp. 48-49). The persistence of principled disagreement has been emphasised by many in recent years (Gutmann and Thompson 1996) (Mansbridge 2006) (Dryzek 2000), such that Rawlsian and Habermasian notions of reasoned public consensus can no longer be considered predominant. Yet qualified acceptance of the relevance of political adversarialism for political justification has rarely led to candid appreciation of one of its paradigmatic forms.[3] Partisanship is typically associated with negotiating and bargaining from a self-interested perspective, recognised at best as a concession to political realism, and often contrasted with public-spirited efforts at political justification. Our argument is more positive: that the ideals of justification which deliberative democrats rightly adhere to are inescapably bound up in the partisan attitude. Political justification, both in its guise as normative ideal and as a real-world practice, contains an irreducible element of partisanship, and those granting the value of the former should acknowledge that much depends on the vitality of the latter. While deliberative fora of the kind mentioned are very plausible sites of justification, a complete account must give due prominence to the place of partisanship.

The argument proceeds as follows. We begin by showing how partisanship, properly conceived, is far less remote from deliberative ideas of justification than it first appears. While empirical scholars of the political party sometimes lose sight of the fact, common ground exists as regards the non-particularist *constituency* to which both modes of action make appeal. Partisanship, unlike factionalism, involves efforts to

[2] Important exceptions are Muirhead 2010, 2006; Rosenblum 2008; Goodin 2008; see also White and Ypi 2010. These authors have all emphasized the democratic relevance of partisanship, but its specific contribution to political justification remains to be explored.

[3] As van Biezen and Saward emphasize, "the more recent theories of deliberative democracy, while not necessarily unsympathetic to the notion of representation, define few, if any, of the linkages between "representatives" and "constituents" in terms of party, with parties typically regarded as belonging to the wrong side of the aggregation-deliberation dichotomy". See also Johnson 1996, p.48. One of the few texts to explore the positive relationship between partisanship and deliberation (Hendriks et al. 2007) conceives the former as the inclusion of 'relevant stakeholders': as we shall argue, this ascription of sectoral intent problematically conflates partisanship with factionalism, and thus severely circumscribes what the former can be seen as contributing to political justification. A similarly narrow view of partisanship is to be found in a recent landmark article by Mansbridge and other prominent deliberative theorists (Mansbridge et al. 2010, p. 93).

harness political power not for the benefit of one social group amongst several but for that of the association as a whole, as this benefit is identified through a particular interpretation of the common good.

Having established the fundamental compatibility of partisanship and political justification, we go on to chart their interdependence. First we focus on what we call the *circumstances* of political justification. We illustrate how these are characterised by three important features: a comparative perspective, an adversarial posture, and a basic level of public visibility. We go on to explore how partisanship, understood in ideal-typical terms as what partisans achieve at their best, is intrinsically related to each of these dimensions, thus acting as a key ingredient in the process of political justification.

The next section develops these points further by considering an important critique to the ideal of political justification in circumstances so conceived: that it is fatally undermined by real-world conditions of profoundly unequal access to deliberative resources (e.g. inequalities of education and power) which render it inaccessible to all but an elite few. Our argument complements existing deliberative efforts to counter this objection by emphasizing what partisanship has to offer to citizens in adverse circumstances. Specifically, we argue it may act as a vehicle of intellectual and political empowerment, refining citizens' views, lending them voice, and raising their critical awareness vis-à-vis the justificatory discourses embedded in unquestioned, commonsense assumptions.

Having looked at partisanship's role first in sparking justification and then in making it widely accessible, in the fourth section we examine its role in rendering justification *persuasive*. We explore the elements of which political justification is composed, expanding our discussion to include a dimension often neglected – the tacit understandings with which justification must resonate if it is to be favourably received. We discuss the contribution of partisan practices to the emergence of justificatory arguments, the elaboration of their premises, and the critique or development of the background views informing their assessment. By considering how partisanship shapes these schemes of understanding and evaluation, we highlight their influence in framing political judgment and their essential role in the normative assessment of proposed courses of action.

Finally, we ask whether the account of partisan political justification we have provided retains space for a progressive model of public life, one able to come to terms with the pathologies of 'actually existing partisanship' and whose persistent pluralism need not entail a politics of incomprehension and relativism. We examine two

important objections to our argument: that it neglects the real-world failures of contemporary partisans, and that it overlooks how partisanship undermines the very purpose of political justification – the achievement of agreement on the principles orienting collective decision-making. Recognizing these difficulties, we nonetheless show that neither is fatal to the argument. Rather than undermining a defence of partisan political justification, they give reminder of why the partisan mode of engagement is one to be endorsed and fostered.

Before proceeding, a note on our terminology. We have chosen to use the term 'partisanship', which, in contrast to 'party', points to a *practice* rather than a particular organisational form. It is a practice which involves citizens acting to promote certain shared normative commitments according to a distinctive interpretation of the public good. Their goal is to make their concerns heard in the public sphere so that they may be brought to bear on the course of collective decision-making. Partisans differ from those who wish to influence governmental policies *without* giving explicit support to a particular party, such as many (though not all) social-movement activists, independent intellectuals or scientific experts. Partisans are interested in who holds public office and in the name of what principles, and they seek to advance one or a number of sides in competition with others. At the core of their efforts is a political party, understood as the organisation within which these practices find a peculiarly dense and coordinated form. Yet partisanship as a practice does not always follow closely the contours of party membership: it will extend beyond the face-to-face contacts of membership to a broader network of political activists seeking to advance largely the same goals, even in the absence of formal attachments.

Perhaps there is nothing so unfamiliar in this approach: indeed, this is how parties used to be conceptualised when they first emerged in the modern world (Ball 1989) (Gunn 1971). Edmund Burke evoked an explicitly relational conception when speaking of parties and factions as 'political connections', and put emphasis on coordinated action in support of shared goals when giving his classic definition of the party as 'a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed' (Burke 1770, p.271). Something similar can be found in Hume's distinction between parties 'from interest', 'from principle' and 'from affection' (Hume [1748] 1998), a typology in which motivation rather than form is placed to the fore. Or think of Gramsci's understanding of the party as a 'modern prince', 'the first cell in which come together the germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total' (Gramsci 1971, p. 129). The

organisation is but the expression of a wider unity of purpose. It is true that modern usage of the term 'party' has tended to direct attention to its organisational aspects – to the ways these shared efforts and orientations come to be institutionalised – and has tended to construe partisanship as stable support for a given organisation. Partisans are regarded as marked by their fidelity to a certain collective rather than an independent body of political views (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960). But there seems worth to be had in the broader meaning, and with the term 'partisanship' we may advance a conception more akin to these earlier accounts.[4]

THE CONSTITUENCY OF POLITICAL JUSTIFICATION

Rather than as mutually supporting elements of a democratic regime, some may see a *tension* between political justification and partisanship. Let us begin by exploring this tension, for we need to soften it before a more positive argument can emerge. One way to sketch it, and then to reduce it, is by considering the question of to whom political justification is given. Justifications, political or otherwise, imply an addressee (Simmons 1999, p. 759) (Chambers 2010, p. 893). To justify is always to justify *to*, whether to an individual or a group, and whether the receiver be sympathetic and cognisant of the act or not. In the political context, one can refer to this addressee as the *constituency*.[5]

Perhaps one's initial inclination will be to regard the constituency for justification in a partisanship-based model of politics as quite different from that in a deliberative one. Justification in a deliberative conception is directed at the political body in its entirety. While deliberative theorists have recently acknowledged there may be empirical reasons why acts of justification come to be rejected by some, it is axiomatic that justification involves the provision of reasons accessible to all citizens (Cohen 1996, pp. 99-100) (Habermas 1996, pp. 463-90) (Bohman 1998, pp. 401-403). In contrast, in

[4] As one example of the limitations of an organisation-centred conception, consider those cases where a party's programmatic orientation is shifted quite fundamentally by its leaders, prompting criticism from its wider circle of activists and supporters (something experienced by a number of Europe's social-democratic parties in the 1990s and 2000s following the adoption of Third-Way ideas). When a given party departs from the principles for which individuals once endorsed it, genuine partisanship might plausibly be understood not as continued support but as the *withdrawal* of support, whether as a temporary protest or even so as to form a new party.

[5] Note that, in this reading, constituencies are not understood in the purely electoral sense as the circle of registered voters in a given territorial unit, nor as a social group constituted by clearly defined interests: they are regarded as evoked politically rather than pre-defined legally or materially. A discussion of different conceptions of constituency can be found in (Rehfeld 2005) chapter 2, but the conceptions he focuses on treat constituencies as self-standing entities to which political actors (e.g. parties) make appeal. By contrast, we treat them as entities evoked, more or less successfully, by partisans as they seek to mobilise support. They are categories of political discourse first and of social reality second.

party scholarship as well as everyday usage, justification as it emerges from the mouths of partisans is often seen as aimed at units much smaller than the community as a whole. The constituency tends to be regarded as a sub-grouping, defined by reference to a group identity, a distinctive set of pre-political values, or an aggregation of interests. One will be familiar for example with the notion that the US Republican party successfully strengthened its position in the 2004 Presidential election by increasing its share of the 'Latino vote' with carefully-crafted appeals designed to resonate with this demographic: regardless of its empirical truth, such a thesis neatly expresses the idea that partisans address their justificatory efforts to *parts* of the population, ignoring where necessary the diverging concerns of others. Perspectives such as cleavage theory (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) or interest-group pluralism (Dahl 1961) likewise evoke partisans as speaking not to the bulk of citizens taken as one large constituency, offering to them an interpretation of the good of all, but as addressing sub-units of the population, whether it be socio-cultural groupings (religious or ethnic groups) or interest-based groupings (classes, professional associations, etc.). Equally partial is the constituency for justification sometimes referred to as the 'median voter', whose preferences parties attempt to represent with diminished regard for those at the political 'extremes' (Downs 1957). Still more remote from a deliberative conception is of course the Schumpeterian account of partisanship, in which rationalist ideas of justification and representation barely play a role, being substituted instead for a focus on party-branding, advertising and the appeal to emotions (Schumpeter 1942).

Deliberative theorists rightly criticise such preference-aggregative approaches for their rather thin notion of the public good (Sunstein 1991) (Cohen 1989) (Mansbridge et al. 2010). At best, it comes to be regarded as what naturally *emerges* from partisan clashes – a bargain struck between the positions they represent. It is not something to which partisans themselves can reasonably appeal, since the interests, identities and preferences to which they orient themselves are necessarily but fractions of the whole. Analogously to the libertarian conception of the market, if the public good is served at all then it is by an invisible hand, for the actions of each protagonist are inspired rather by private goals. If the partisan model necessarily entailed this conception of justification, scepticism would be in order, for it seems the kind of rationale invoked precisely to cope with the *absence* of political justification in day-to-day politics.

Yet the idea that partisan justification need aim at something less than the whole is unfounded. Indeed, it overlooks a historically important distinction between

partisanship and *factionalism*, as developed by classical theorists such as Burke and as is crucial to their definitions of the party. For it is the *faction* which addresses a partial constituency and exhibits no concern to justify its programme to the community *in toto*; a party by contrast is that political grouping which justifies its proposals in the name of the whole. As one prominent scholar put it, '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 1968/1990, p. 26) (cf. Muirhead & Rosenblum 2006). A political grouping which, for example, seeks to promote only agrarian interests, though it may call itself a 'farmers' party', is more properly seen as a faction – unless it integrates these interests into a wider normative vision addressed to the good of the political community at large. Note that the distinction refers to aims rather than to the success with which these are met: at stake is not whether, in the eyes of the observer, a political grouping reliably *does* serve the public good (this will be a matter for political debate), but whether it *seeks* to do so given the kinds of argumentation it pursues.

The distinction between party and faction was crucial to enabling 'party' to emerge as an accepted feature of modern democracy (Ball 1989), yet in the contemporary world it can easily provoke scepticism. Some may wonder whether it is not entirely subjective: whether one person's party is just another person's faction, with there being little empirical basis on which to adjudicate. Others will argue that contemporary linguistic usage no longer permits the distinction: that we have become so accustomed to referring to all political groupings as 'parties' that it would be perverse to withdraw the label from all but a select few – that the distinction can be regarded as antiquated. Then there may be those who grant that the distinction can be operationalised, but argue one should not make too much of it: parties, it may be said, tend quickly to degenerate into factions (this was Bolingbroke's view), and so there is little sense in attaching normative meaning to the distinction.

The first of these concerns has truth to it, in that many applications of the distinction may be contestable. They need not be seen as arbitrary however. Note that the party-faction distinction does not require one to have perfect knowledge of the beliefs and intentions of those involved: much may be established by looking at their principled statements and the way the addressee is evoked. If a grouping presents itself as speaking for the good of the whole, one need not dwell on the sincerity of individual motivations; rather one can acknowledge this as the public face which the grouping

presents and the terms on which citizens encounter it.[6] The second concern – that the distinction is antiquated – is not especially forceful either, since it can be revitalised in new terminology where necessary, e.g. by distinguishing faction-parties from 'great parties' (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2006).[7] The third concern, that what we call parties tend to decay into factions, and that the distinction is therefore utopian, is an important empirical contention and we shall return to it in the final part of the article. However, it is worth noting here that countervailing empirical trends can also be discerned. The thesis described seems at odds with that large body of twentieth-century empirical research which reports the rise of 'catch-all parties' (Kirchheimer 1966). These are understood precisely as political groupings which seek to draw support from as many citizens as possible and which do *not* restrict themselves to a narrow constituency centred on pre-defined social units. Many observers, it is true, look dimly on these parties (the 'catch-all' moniker being intended as derogatory), for they suppose these efforts to broaden appeal are coupled with a dilution of normative commitments: that such groupings seek to be 'all things to all people', and consequently lose their programmatic distinctiveness and ability to engage. But these are secondary points, rooted in contestable beliefs about the kinds of political strategy needed to mobilise supporters rather than an appraisal of the constituency being addressed.[8] The point to note here is that there is little empirical reason to suppose that 'parties', as those groupings seeking the widest of constituencies, are necessarily transient or uncommon.

An understanding of partisanship as oriented to the wider public returns to the foreground practices of justification of the kind one would find in a deliberative model. In this reading political justification regains a substantial degree of autonomy from the social world, and may take on a transformative character, evoking new groupings rather than appealing to pre-political ones. The explicitly political categories of Left and Right, which draw their meaning from opposed political principles rather than social

[6] On the likelihood of compound motivations that mix altruism with self-interest, and on their consistency with the party idea, see Sartori 1976, p.22. Note also recent moves to incorporate self-interest into the catalogue of motivations consistent with deliberative ideals (Mansbridge et al., 2010).

[7] A distinction between 'great' and 'small' parties – the latter sounding very much like factions – can be found in (Tocqueville pp.203ff.).

[8] Such arguments derive from lingering attachment to the aggregative conception described above, whereby the appeal to sectoral interest is seen as the only reliable means by which parties can engage with civil society. The role of political principles in constituting interests and conceptions of justice, and developing the attachments which follow from these, is systematically under-weighted in such accounts. For a discussion of Kirchheimer's thesis which contests his equation of elite-oriented organisation and catch-all aspiration with a weakening of programmatic commitments, see Diamond and Gunther 2003, p.191. As the authors note, parties such as the British Conservatives under Thatcher, the US Republicans under Reagan and George W Bush, the Czech Social Democrats (CSSD) and Communists (KSCM), and Fidesz in Hungary, have all combined wide popularity with a sharply defined vision, thereby constituting an enduring species of 'programmatic party' (p.187).

groupings exogenous to the political process, are a familiar and paradigmatic rendition of this idea (Dyrberg 2005) (White 2011a, forthcoming). To be sure, narrower forms of subjecthood may support such categories, helping to mobilise people to a certain set of normative goals (White and Ypi, 2010). But those goals are partisan rather than factional only to the extent they are proposed in the name of the public good.[9] A workers' party, for instance, is only truly a *party* insofar as it makes the claim that a redistribution of wealth on behalf of workers serves a wider sense of justice and the public interest, and not just the sectarian good of workers themselves. This point comes through clearly in Marx's definition of proletarian claims as those coming from "a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no *particular right* because no *particular wrong*, but *wrong generally*, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no *historical*, but only *human*, title".[10] Partisan commitments are in this case expressive of universal concerns, and the interests of one particular category of agent are taken seriously insofar as the claims they make can be shared by others.

Why then is partisanship so often seen as narrower in its intended constituency and hence anathema to political justification? Probably in large part this results from the tendency of partisans themselves to portray *opposing* partisans as sectarian factions, as 'parties *of*' a particular grouping (e.g. of business, or of the public-sector middle class) rather than as 'parties *for*' a certain normative view.[11] This is, after all, an easy way to imply a competing interpretation of the public good is undesirable (Rosenblum 2008, p. 358). In some cases the charge may be accurate – modern democracies certainly contain such factions – but its usage may also be no more than a strategy of de-legitimisation.[12]

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[9] It may be objected that this conception of partisanship does not apply in so-called 'divided societies', where political groupings seek only to appeal to an (often ethnically defined) sub-community, resulting in a form of consociational politics of the kind described by Lijphart. However, this seems tautological reasoning: divided societies exactly *are* those in which partisanship as described is, at a given moment, lacking. Unless one sees politics as determined by pre-political social facts, one need not suppose that a divided society must always be such, that political claims must inevitably be addressed to just some sections of the political community; it is rather a contingent and temporally-limited condition.

[10] This, Marx continues, is "a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word [...] can win itself only through the *complete re-winning of the human being*" (Marx 1843 / 1994, p.69).

[11] Bolingbroke was perhaps an early proponent of this tactic, casting opponents as seeking 'personal power' and the narrow interest of the Court, 'under the pretence and umbrage of principle' (p.71), while speaking favourably of the 'Country party', 'authorised by the voice of the country' and 'formed on principles of common interests. It cannot be united and maintained on the particular prejudices, any more than it can, or ought to be, directed to the particular interests of any set of men whatsoever. A party, thus constituted, is improperly called party. It is the nation, speaking and acting in the discourse and conduct of particular men.' (Bolingbroke 1733 / 1997, p.37).

[12] An example may be found in British public discourse in the build-up to the 2010 General Election: those in the Labour Party hoping to shift the party leftwards with a programme of higher taxation on the wealthy were soon characterised by their political opponents and their partisan sympathisers in the media as seeking to pursue a 'core vote strategy', i.e. wilfully sacrificing the wider public constituency so as to shore up their appeal to a narrower circle of working-class voters. What might otherwise have been

The effects may be unwelcome – presenting dissenting views as disingenuous can have a corrosive impact on public debate – but again this is a separate matter. Important is that one does not mistake certain aspects of partisan rhetoric for an accurate representation of the nature of partisanship.

Partisan justification need not be contrasted to deliberative justification, certainly not as concerns the constituency to which justification is offered. In both accounts, justification may be designed so as to be accessible to all reasonable citizens – something necessary to recognise if one is not to dismiss prematurely the relevance of partisanship to political justification. Both perspectives are consistent with the idea that there is a generalising tendency to justification: that it involves an attempt to move beyond a particularist viewpoint with the aim of demonstrating how a certain claim has public appeal. Of course, a partisan model of politics is not an image of a politics without adversaries: partisanship is pursued exactly in the knowledge that others interpret the public interest differently, or wish to make public authority serve factional ends. Some such opponents may be cajoled out of their views, others will persist in their opposition. Yet if political conflict is assumed to be enduring, the partisan nonetheless addresses a constituency which is not *a priori* defined as narrow and limited in scope.

The remainder of this article looks more closely at the positive relationship between partisanship and political justification. It examines the *circumstances* in which political justification takes place, before looking at the relevance of partisanship to rendering justification inclusive and to shaping the positive body of moral and political intuitions in which it is grounded.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF POLITICAL JUSTIFICATION, AND THE PARTISAN CATALYST

We shall begin by examining certain features of political justification as it may be expected to arise in the benign circumstances of a well-functioning democracy. Our suggestion is that already here, in a political environment unblemished by major problems of citizen disengagement and entrenched inequality, partisanship makes an

read as an intervention in a public-oriented debate about fairness and equality was thereby reduced to a factional move designed to place the part before the whole. Such an interpretation does not of course require us to *reject* the strategic dimension: the point is that there was no necessary reason to cast it as dominant.

important contribution to political justification. The argument will then be developed with regard to those real-world scenarios where the challenges to democratic government are deep-seated, and where the necessity of partisanship is correspondingly greater.

The first thing to note about justification is that it is inherently *comparative*. To justify something is to indicate how it compares favourably with alternatives, all relevant factors considered. To justify a political principle, an act of public policy or a political programme is to show what makes it preferable to alternatives, with reference explicitly or implicitly to a certain set of normative commitments. Likewise, to *criticise* is to reverse this relationship so as to indicate the superiority of the comparator (the alternative evoked), even if this alternative is counter-factual. Central to processes of justification is the systematic generation of principled alternatives. We shall return to some implications of this view in the section that follows.

Our second claim is that political justification is likely to be enriched when part of an *adversarial* process, involving the interaction of multiple political agents. This is so because rather than arising naturally as part of an introspective process of contemplation, justifications imply a relational dimension. They are invoked in situations of encounter, when agents interact with others and are moved to give reasons for adopting certain viewpoints or courses of action rather than others. If just one political agent is responsible for generating proposals and the comparators by which they are evaluated, there will be little incentive to engage in the challenging scrutiny of those proposals. Insofar as offering plausible alternatives is burdensome, since it forces stronger arguments to be advanced for the desired option, where competition is absent there will be a downward pressure on the quality of alternatives offered, and therefore on the stringency of political justification. Only in the presence of an adversarial dimension, where at least one other agent seeks actively to assess the validity of a political proposal and where disputing arguments are in turn tested, will the conditions for meaningful political justification be present. The point was well recognised by John Stuart Mill, who grounded his defence of free speech in part on the idea that letting dissent emerge through the open contestation of political views serves to improve public argument, weeding out weaker opinions and consolidating the good. He was emphatic that counter-arguments carry most force when voiced by someone who believes in them, not when they are the product of disinterested speculation (Mill 1991 /

1861, p.42).[13] One should be sceptical of any notion that justification can be a consensual process pursued by an undivided whole.

Thirdly, if these processes of political justification are to resonate more widely in the citizen body, as they must if their democratic role is to be served, it is furthermore important that they have public *visibility*. Arguments need to be amplified so as to be hearable by the constituency to which they are addressed, and they need to be cognitively accessible to that constituency so as to be acknowledged when heard. Acts of justification restricted to just a small circle of elites are ultimately little different from those aimed at a partial constituency, which as we have argued above make little contribution to the democratic idea of collective self-rule.

Acknowledging the comparative and adversarial features of political justification, and its need of public visibility, highlights the relevance of partisanship in the process. We wish to argue that the efforts of partisans to promote the normative perspectives to which they are committed act as essential systematic stimuli to the circumstances of political justification.

Partisanship is, first of all, a form of engagement implying a public comparative exercise. Political views are developed and perfected in the process of confrontation with other available alternatives. Since the days of England's Whigs and Tories, and on into the age of mass mobilisation, partisanship has involved political groupings of a certain level of cohesion forming around different interpretations of the public good, arising from distinctive political histories, experiences and traditions of political argument (White and Ypi 2010) (Rosenblum 2008). Under conditions of mass enfranchisement, these political alternatives are then promoted to the public at large and modified in the course of popular engagement. Most obviously in the context of elections, but also more generally in the course of public debate, citizens are invited to compare between the various alternatives produced, be it at the level of entire programmes or specific issues. To be sure, this comparative dimension may be negated in the case of *factions*, since to the extent the political scene consists only of groups making appeal to partial, pre-defined collectivities, individual citizens may be in no position to make comparisons on how best to interpret the public good. They may perceive their identities as so tightly linked to certain political groupings that they are unable or unwilling to consider others. But where the normative visions available are

[13] For in-depth discussions of Mill's treatment of dissent and the implications of his work for a theory of partisanship, see Muirhead 2006 and Rosenblum 2008. As the latter correctly notes (p.159), acknowledging the persuasiveness of his views on contestation does not require one to endorse further arguments he makes concerning how the 'fractional truths' advanced by different sides cumulate with one another to form more comprehensive wholes.

those one can associate with *parties*, addressed to a good which is not reducible to parts, this comparative dimension is well served.

Moreover, these distinctive normative perspectives have generally matured in circumstances of conflict with other partisan agents. Partisanship breeds the conditions of adversarialism necessary to the generation and testing of acts of justification. Attempts to disseminate justifications – and to provoke them from others – are most likely to emerge in the context of political conflict, as one agent seeks public recognition and attempts to apply pressure to an opponent.[14] The presence of different partisan groupings in framing the terms of political justification allows us to understand more clearly why it is difficult for certain political conflicts to be discursively solved in advance of practical confrontation. Even if the process of political justification starts from premises accessible to all, the task of articulating these, criticizing them, rendering them part of a more complete political argument, and linking them to day-to-day concerns is completed through partisan action.[15]

Partisanship also contributes a clearer understanding of the terms of political justification. To the extent that partisans coordinate around a relatively well-defined profile, this acts as a signpost to the kind of criticisms they are vulnerable to and those they are well placed to levy at others (Johnson 2006). Such acts of political signposting are what defines the contribution of partisanship to the *visibility* of political justification. The normative orientations by which partisans identify themselves make clearer the premises of each justificatory move: a known sensitivity to this or that moral and political principle (say individual liberty or group rights) helps elucidate some of the larger ideas behind a particular line of political argumentation. Of course, these orientations become problematic when their starting assumptions are left unexplored in public debate – i.e. when they are depoliticised – or when partisans themselves leave them permanently unquestioned, preferring party loyalty to an examination of the principles on which it is based. But it is the existence of partisan alignments of some level of consistency which makes such omissions possible to identify. Furthermore, because their goal is to cultivate public support, partisans have reason to render these organising principles in a way which is meaningful and intelligible to a wider public. Quite different is the discourse of non-partisan authorities which do not compete for public approval – technocratic institutions, for instance, or constitutional courts – which may be content, insofar as they offer public justifications at all, to couch them in terms

[14] This point applies both to the intellectual activities of programmatic innovation and to the day-to-day 'scut work' (Walzer 2007, p.141) required to facilitate the wider public adoption of these ideas.
[15] On the relevance of parties to these processes, see also Christiano 1996.

impenetrable to most citizens. Rendering justification *visible* is something likely to require a collaborative effort by groups of citizens acting in concert.

To be sure, not all partisans consistently adhere to these standards. Sometimes they may be tempted to compromise their principles for strategic purposes, turning them temporarily into a source of confusion. Sometimes they may downplay their ideational commitments so as to present themselves primarily as a collection of personalities. We shall return to such 'pathologies' of partisanship in a later section. For now though, let us simply note how the circumstances of political justification flow naturally from the impulses at the heart of partisanship.

THE CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION, AND THE RESOURCES OF PARTISANSHIP

So far we have focused only on the features of a supposedly well-functioning political sphere, undistorted by the failures of real-life politics. Yet even in the most successful of democratic environments, political justification occurs in circumstances less favourable than these. Epistemic differences in citizens' capacity to understand complex social arrangements, or the presence of pervasive economic and power inequalities, are widely encountered circumstances which may undermine its contribution to collective decision-making. Critics of political justification as a political ideal emphasise the extent to which interactions in the public sphere occur among citizens whose level of education or eloquence varies, with negative consequences for the capacity of political judgement. It has been observed how the division of labour in modern societies means there may be a significant gap between the judgments of lay citizens and those of "experts" (e.g. economists, lawyers, professional politicians or even political theorists).[16] These latter are likely to contribute with specialist reasons in favour or against a given course of action, and the complexity of their views (especially on topics requiring technical knowledge) may inhibit or weaken the arguments of ordinary citizens. If political justification is to make a positive contribution to democratic life, it is not enough that it simply be made available for those who know how and where to look.

While many deliberative democrats are aware of these challenges and prepared to address them in various ways,[17] there has been little reflection on how practices of partisanship make a distinctive and crucial contribution to weakening the force of the objection. Central to any such account must be the educative potential of partisanship.

[16] For one account of the problems this might pose for democracy see Bertram 1997, esp. 577-99.
[17] See Cohen 1989 for an early discussion, Fung 2005 for a more recent one.

Partisan fora – i.e. sites of partisanship within and beyond political parties – are well suited to act as learning platforms for citizens, offering them the intellectual resources to deepen their knowledge of complex political arrangements and the opportunity to benefit from exchanges with political leaders and activists. Traditionally these partisan fora have included party conventions, branch meetings, assemblies and protests; recent additions include partisan websites, blogs and pressure groups (e.g. MoveOn in the US, Compass in the UK), or the online incarnation of older organisations (e.g. the Fabian Society). Such fora support the socialization of their members into complex political, economic and legal affairs, thus acting as effective vehicles of civic education and empowerment.

To begin with a literary example, one which, as we shall see, is by no means without real-world resonance, consider the effects of partisan engagement on the life-course of Etienne Lantier, the mine worker and protagonist of Emile Zola's well-known book *Germinal*. The novel describes the political and moral evolution of Etienne, from a poorly educated and rebellious young man whose views have led him to be fired as a railway mechanic, to an intellectually sophisticated anarchist activist who becomes the first worker to address the National Assembly in Paris. As Zola emphasizes in his account of Etienne's development, intellectual stimulation and contacts were the fruits of his involvement in the socialist movement: "His own political education was now complete. Having begun with the neophyte's sentimental taste for solidarity and a belief in the need to reform the wage system, he had come to the view that it should be abolished as a matter of policy. At the time of the meeting in the Jolly Fellow his idea of collectivism had been essentially humanitarian and unsystematic, but it had now evolved into a rigid and complex programme, each article of which he was knowledgeably ready and able to discuss" (Zola 1885/1983, p.286). That Etienne's education in its completed form should be 'rigid' as well as complex reminds that there is that further dimension to his political persona – what we might call his 'wisdom', or his deliberative ability to reflect on his education and adapt it – which remains incomplete and ripe for development in the experiences to follow. The high-point of his trajectory may be yet to come, but a crucial point in the curve has been passed.

In Etienne's case, as in the biographies of many partisan activists, membership in a partisan organization is a vehicle of intellectual empowerment (Walzer 2007, p.135).[18] An interesting historical example is to be found in Mahatma Ghandi's autobiography, as

[18] For further analysis and empirical evidence on the importance of political participation as a means of political education and intellectual empowerment see also Pateman 1970; Mansbridge 1983, esp. 239-247.

he explains the role participation in the Natal Indian Congress played in gradually training members to voice public critique and engage in political reason-giving. Due to lack of experience, the process was initially a quite exclusive one, with routine activities typically characterized by weak participation from lay activists. "Meetings", Ghandi explains, "used to be held once a month or even once a week if required. Minutes of the proceedings of the preceding meeting would be discussed. People had no experience of taking part in public discussion or of speaking briefly and to the point. Everyone hesitated to stand up to speak". Yet, as Ghandi goes on to note, with ongoing involvement in meetings, progressive exposure to sharing views in public debate and familiarization with the relevant procedures, matters improved dramatically even for the most hesitant or unprepared activists: "They realized that it was an education for them, and many who had never been accustomed to speaking before an audience soon acquired the habit of thinking and speaking publicly about matters of public interest" (Ghandi 1927, p.148).

Through partisan practice, sophisticated political judgments and the sometimes esoteric terms of political justification can cease to be available only to minority elites and may become part of a joint intellectual stock, available to other citizens and in turn reworked by them. Such actions amount to a 'pedagogy of the oppressed', one which 'makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed' as a prelude to efforts to address them (Freire 1970, p.30; see also Lukács as cited). Are partisan fora the only venue for this role? Clearly there are other institutions with an educative or informative profile (the school or the media) with something apparently similar to offer. Yet the kinds of experience made possible in partisan fora are distinctive, all the more so in circumstances where mainstream institutions suffer from the effects of power and economic inequalities. Specifically political concerns are addressed in these fora in a practical and goal-oriented fashion. Even if partisan membership ends up being an experience which is both educative (as in the school) and informative (as in the media), it is never limited to either one of these, as it is pursued with pragmatic purpose. And even if alternative deliberative fora can go some way to performing the same function, the more limited reach of these fora, their issue-specific nature and the ad-hoc basis on which citizens are involved in deliberation cannot substitute for the more encompassing forms of involvement in political justification that partisan engagement affords.[19]

[19] The point is acknowledged in a pioneering essay by Joshua Cohen (Cohen 1989, p. 32) but the suggestion to take seriously partisan fora is left undeveloped, and has not been taken up by other deliberative-democratic scholars.

The broad agreement on certain shared political principles which characterises partisanship of whatever stripe acts as the basis on which individuals can develop confidence in their views before having them exposed to more radical challenge. Citizens who, still early in their political education, experience the full diversity of views in an unmediated way, without being guided to favour some over others, risk significant disorientation. When partisan fora successfully perform their civic role, they supply opportunities for political exchange which anchor individuals in shared normative frameworks while valorising the experience and judgment of each, and emphasising the dialectics of political argument rather than brute personal preferences which resist compromise. And even though the possibility of hierarchical or manipulative dynamics can hardly be excluded, partisans retain the important capacity of exit.

What of the second issue, the distortion of political justification by power and economic inequalities, something which shapes citizens' vulnerability to manipulation and their capacity for political argument? This is another recurrent theme in critiques of deliberative accounts of political justification. Political justification, so the argument goes, is undermined when economically or politically powerful groups are able decisively to shape the terms and the style of public debate, in particular what counts as a legitimate intervention, rendering an unfair advantage to certain perspectives and certain modes of deliberation (Sanders 1997; Young 2001). Critical voices are liable to be excluded from the processes by which justification is provoked and provided.

Again, partisanship offers an antidote to such dangers. First, the inequalities which marginalise such voices can only be challenged by strong collective actors. Disparate congregations of individuals and civil-society organisations may well lack the means to do so. Partisanship offers a support network, be it of tangible resources or of a psychological and intellectual kind, without which the voices of critical citizens are likely to be silenced. To take another example from the activist world, this is one of the merits Nelson Mandela identifies in the Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws, one of the first mass campaigns of civil disobedience organized by the ANC to protest against institutionalised racism: "As a result of the campaign our membership swelled to 100,000. The ANC emerged as a truly mass-based organization with an impressive corps of experienced activists who had braved the police, the courts and the jails." (Mandela 1994, p.129). Despite their practical shortcomings, practices of partisan engagement offer an important means by which to challenge apparently insurmountable power and economic inequalities. As Mandela puts it, "the campaign freed me from any lingering

sense of doubt and inferiority I might still have felt; it liberated me from the feeling of being overwhelmed by the power and seeming invincibility of the white man and his institutions. But now the white man had felt the power of my punches and I could walk upright like a man, and look everyone in the eye with the dignity that comes from not having succumbed to oppression and fear. I had come of age as a freedom fighter" (Mandela 1994, p.130).

Including citizens in the practices of political justification is of course not just a matter of organisational empowerment. Even identifying the consequences of imbalances of power, and of the uncritical absorption of dominant justificatory discourses, may be importantly served by partisan fora. Partisans' shared experience of political activism encourages alertness to the dangers of political instrumentalization and misinformation on the part of more powerful actors. An important component of their efforts to construct alternative discourses on society is the attempt to exchange information with their fellow activists and citizens on the limits of existing discourses, and to raise consciousness of the problematic aspects of common-sense thinking.[20] The adversarial conditions in which partisans act help them develop the necessary level of critical awareness. That their challenges to existing inequalities are themselves made with power-political ends in sight is not to weaken their normative force: reason-giving can co-exist with instrumental motivation, without this undermining its authenticity.[21] Partisanship does not offer an escape from power relations, but a means to identify and contest them.[22] It makes available to the individual citizen a richer set of considerations upon which to ground her political judgment, without prejudicing the outcome of this judgement.[23]

[20] Some of these arguments have also persuasively been made with regard to the democratic significance of social movements – see for example Dryzek 2000. Note however the differences between parties and social movements as explored in White and Ypi 2010.

[21] The recent literature on deliberative democracy has clearly come to terms with both issues – the unavoidability of power, and the relevance of instrumental motivation in constructing the public good, However, here too the role of partisanship is reduced to the stage at which deliberation is complete and voting or strategic negotiation are required to step in (Mansbridge et al. 2010, p. 84 ff.). We wish to emphasise how partisanship has an essential role to play not simply *after* deliberation but as part of the very process that constructs political justification. For an empirical study of how parties and the partisan fora associated with them may foster participatory democracy, thereby acting as sites of deliberation themselves rather than simply complementing deliberative institutions, see Williams 2009.

[22] This point is particularly relevant in contexts where the voices of vulnerable social groups are unlikely to be heard: for a recent study looking at partisanship in South Africa and India, see Williams 2008.

[23] There are numerous empirical examples of how partisan fora may alert citizens to the existence of alternative perspectives on current political concerns. The example sketched above has echoes in a recent pamphlet entitled "The Good Society" produced by Compass (the partisan group close but irreducible to the UK Labour party) which challenges discourses emphasizing the contribution of flexible work conditions to economic growth and insists on the relevance of social regulation and the role of trade unions in fighting exploitation. See "Building the Good Society: The Project of the Democratic Left." p. 11.

To fully understand why this is so, we must examine more closely how partisan confrontation contributes to shaping and challenging the judgments to which political justification appeals. This requires considering the elements of which justification is composed, in particular the premises to which agents make reference when engaging in reason-giving, and the common presuppositions they may want to contest in order to give persuasiveness to a certain line of argument.

THE CHALLENGES OF PERSUASION, AND THE PLACE OF PARTISAN FRAMING

At one level, the elements of political justification are fairly easily conceived. They involve the provision of arguments supporting a given position on how to pursue collective decision-making. The agents involved face the task of drawing from the ideational resources current in society (notions of public interest, or interpretations of the basic terms of democratic discourse such as 'freedom' and 'equality'), deliberating on these, using them to interpret and categorise the social and political world, rearticulating them as political programmes, and justifying these to a constituency in opposition to those who would promote different perspectives. The practices of partisanship provide both the necessary dynamic for ideational innovation as well as a focal-point for cross-temporal continuity (White and Ypi 2010).

But discussing the elements of political justification requires focusing also on the premises on which arguments are grounded. One needs to look at what is endorsed and what is excluded in any given line of reasoning, what principles and viewpoints are considered *in need of* justification rather than tacitly assumed, which issues are prioritized and which neglected. Justification depends on certain premises being shared by the agent and the constituency: some degree of common ground, or 'frame resonance' as scholars of contentious politics term it, is required if justifications are a) to be recognised and understood as such, and b) to be received as convincing. The outcome of justificatory initiatives is heavily informed not just by the force of the reasons offered, but by their level of correspondence with pre-existing schemes of understanding. It is this ideational background which influences the extent to which reasons are received as meaningful and persuasive, and the practices of partisanship include efforts to shape it. Political justification has 'ideological underpinnings' – not in the sense that it necessarily involves dissimulation (the conception of ideology as distortion seems in any case

problematic (Freeden 1996)) – but in the sense that it is inseparable from the historically-formed intuitions it plays off.

When asked how one should conceive the starting premises of political justification, political theorists usually insist these should involve claims that no-one can reasonably reject. What does this mean exactly? It could mean one should be able to trace lines of reasoning back to general commitments of the type "freedom matters", or "people should be considered equal", or other such axioms. But these are undeniably abstract, and ostensibly similar formulations can lead to quite different, even opposing, lines of argument. How then is initial plausibility conferred, and why do certain broadly shared starting assumptions take an argument in one direction rather than another?

To answer this we need to focus on the often neglected tacit dimension – on 'common sense', as it is generally called. Is common sense external to politics? We would argue not: the trap would be to see shared premises of this kind as naturally occurring, pre-political structures – a kind of cultural inheritance drawn upon by political actors in the moment of formulating an argument. Common premises are themselves partly the outcome of partisan action, require partisan agents to develop, consolidate and systematise them, and are susceptible to some degree of revision – incremental rather than comprehensive – by those who adhere to them. The site of political conflict is then the discursive field as a whole, including its vocabulary, its sedimented meanings, and indeed its silences, as much as consciously articulated views (Freeden 1996). It extends to the common-sense ideas invoked to express and lend plausibility to political principles, and to the connotations of the terms used to signify the political struggle, even where these present themselves as part of a neutral 'middle ground'. The language of politics does much to determine which propositions carry intuitive plausibility, which carry a burden of justification, and which alternatives will prove acceptable as the basis for compromise (Young 2001). Those who would be politically successful must both engage with this terrain as they find it – else they will be unable to articulate themselves and their political claims, and render these meaningful to a wider audience – and also, exercising their creativity as interpreters, seek to criticise and reshape it so as to increase the resonance of the positions they take up. Successful partisan agents are those who project their meanings onto the outcome of collective political decision-making, onto voters and the wider society, and indeed onto opposing parties. In this way they help shape the premises of political justification and the persuasiveness of specific appeals.

These efforts may take a variety of forms. Terminological innovation and the popularisation of concepts is one: think for instance of the recent success of partisans in the Green movement in planting concepts such as 'sustainability' in the public consciousness, or metaphors such as the 'carbon footprint'. These terms provide the necessary groundwork to allow the subsequent justification of policies aimed at reducing environmental pollution. In themselves they do not point to specific policies; rather they open a space for political initiative. Without discursive preparation of this kind, the force of such justifications will be weaker, and they may easily founder against critiques appealing to established ideas of economic growth.

Consider likewise how the meanings attached to common terms of political discourse influence how certain problems are understood, and thus the extent to which policies designed to remedy them can be successfully advocated. Programmes on behalf of 'the poor' have been shown to attract 30-40% more support in US opinion polls than those framed as on behalf of 'people on welfare' (Smith 1987). Though the proposals may be considered equivalent, 'welfare' can be understood as carrying additional negative connotations of dependency, bureaucracy and waste – connotations which can be considered the legacy of partisan efforts to load the term negatively. In this case, an important stage of political justification involves not merely advancing ideal arguments on behalf of one particular normative conception as opposed to another, nor simply deploying the skills of rhetoric to state these arguments in their most pleasing form, but confronting the reasons for which common sense suggests certain views to be more acceptable than others, and examining how these background assumptions might be challenged.[24] Common sense, as one famous author puts it, 'can be questioned, disputed, affirmed, developed, formalized, contemplated, even taught, and it can vary dramatically from one people to the next' (Geertz 1983, pp.73-93). The prevalent ways in which people identify social and political problems, and the narratives of agency or powerlessness they draw on, do much to determine the kinds of arguments which make sense to them: if for example inter-ethnic tensions tend to be normalised, or if economic problems such as unemployment are deemed to be global in origin and unsusceptible to remedy, political proposals to address them are likely to fall on deaf ears (White 2010; 2011b). All these elements of the ideational background shape the commonsense intuitions to which justifications make appeal and influence the level of their popular resonance. In a partisan perspective they are recognised as central to political justification, no less than the more familiar dimensions involving the promotion of

[24] For a similar critique to normative justifications see also Mills 2005.

normative views directly responsive to public concerns.[25] Any politics of justification which is inattentive to the tacit dimension risks finding itself forever on the back foot, seeking to advance arguments on a discursive terrain shaped largely by its opponents.

One of the important ways justification plays off shared premises is, as we have seen, in its reliance on choices that depend on comparisons. These comparisons involve different combinations of view regarding what contributes to the public good: personal freedom, civic equality, social solidarity, individual incentives, ecological harmony, and so on. They establish the kinds of reason and criticism which are acceptable, the ideas that need to be questioned, the facts considered relevant, and the mechanisms by which these may be assessed.[26] Their plurality and irreducibility to a single, universal metric are important reasons why one encounters multiple conceptions of the public good and why disagreement between them may persist. What partisanship can offer is a level of consistency and visibility in the kinds of comparison invoked.

Partisan groupings are likely to vary in the relative prominence they give to these different metrics of comparison and in the ways they seek to combine them.[27] An important dimension of partisan activity is therefore the effort to determine which comparisons will be evoked in a given dispute, or are to attain ongoing pre-eminence in structuring political conflict. Partisans will prefer to invoke some rather than others according to their principled commitments, and will try to define the nature of the dispute in terms compatible with these commitments. Consider for example a public dispute related to the justification of public ownership. Partisans who defend the privatisation of a major state-owned enterprise – the post office for instance – may seek

[25] White and Ypi 2010 discusses at length the role of partisanship in harnessing normative ideas to political agency. For more historical and empirical examples of the contribution of partisan fora to progressive political change, and a lengthy discussion of the dynamic by which normative interpretations of the public good are integrated with strategic concerns, see also Ypi forthcoming, esp. ch. 2 and ch. 7.

[26] For an empirically-informed examination of these themes, see (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006), who identify six registers of comparison or 'orders of worth' commonly appealed to in complex western societies when justificatory arguments are made. This pluralist account is quite different from that commonly associated with party democracy (e.g. in the works of Dahl), in that the elements held to exist in the plural – orders of worth – each involve an appeal to presumptively *shared* criteria of value, to a *common* good, not just to particular interests and group-specific values (cf. Boltanski and Thevenot 2006, pp.215ff.). They therefore offer a vocabulary for political justification in the sense described here, not simply negotiation and bargaining.

[27] Many contemporary conservative parties for instance can be seen as mixing comparisons based on market performance and creative entrepreneurship in the economic domain with those based on a domestic model of personal bonds in the social domain. Traditional socialist parties, by contrast, may be seen as making special appeal to conceptions centred on industrial productivity and social solidarity. Parties which celebrate the qualities of a leader figure (as 'populist' parties tend to) can be considered as drawing on registers centred on individual *inspiration* and *renown* (to use terms developed in (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006). Nationalist and green parties also have their distinctive notions based on cultural tradition and ecological harmony. Note of course that parties will at times draw on the full range of such registers and are in no way limited to just one or a subset of them.

to structure public debate and government research according to comparisons based on technical efficiency, productivity and market incentives, which give nourishment to their justifications for privatisation, and to resist comparisons based on principles of equality and social solidarity which could plausibly undermine these justifications. When opposing partisans in turn seek to criticise, they have the choice either to adhere to the same metric of comparison as that in which the justification is made, arguing that it is weak on its own terms, or alternatively to adopt the perspective of a different metric – an approach which rules out a mere technical adjudication and produces a more fundamental clash of political views. Over the longer term, partisans contribute to shaping the political culture around them, embedding certain metrics and ways of seeing at the expense of others. That different partisan groupings draw on these differently need not entail cultural relativism, the impossibility of political agreement, or the need to privatise most major concerns: precisely because these metrics may be regarded as widely available across societies, and *not* each the preserve of particular subgroups within them, there exists the possibility of reaching political compromise by agreeing to prioritise a certain register in a given context, or by developing a composite position which combines elements of more than one.[28]

PATHOLOGIES OF PARTISANSHIP

How closely, it may be asked, does 'really existing partisanship' mirror the practices we have described in this article? While attentive to the imperfections of the political world in general, our argument may be thought to rest on an image of partisanship which manifests itself rarely. We have presented partisanship in largely ideal-typical terms, informed by historical examples but centred on what partisans at their best can achieve.[29] Like theorists of partisanship in many ages (Burke included), perhaps we risk condemning ourselves to matching a defence of the party idea with an inevitable lament concerning parties as they actually exist. Partisan political justification would then seem a rather precious suggestion. Let us examine the concern more closely.

There are several 'pathologies' of partisanship one might highlight. They combine tendencies that seem unavoidable in partisanship in general with those

[28] Cf. (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006) chaps. 9 and 10. Note that a compromise of either kind remains susceptible to critique from an excluded register, and is therefore more fragile and liable to relapse into contestation than the kinds of consensus generally envisaged by deliberative theorists.

[29] Further elaboration of the role of parties understood as ideal-types can be found in White and Ypi 2010.

ostensibly bound up in certain historical conditions. First, as a challenge to the notion that partisans make political conflict intelligible to a wider public, it may be said that often they have quite the opposite tendency to make things more obscure, e.g. by avoiding clear pronouncements about where they stand on key issues. Notwithstanding the advantages of a distinct programmatic profile, short-term considerations – say the desire to minimise electoral losses, to enter a coalition, to pass an unpopular piece of legislation, or to avoid responsibility for a past decision – may encourage a policy of obfuscation. Aware of the need to keep their options open, party elites may have little desire to inform and educate either the public at large or their own supporters – an empowered party membership in particular being a potential obstacle to the compromises needed to achieve power. Second, even where clarity and consistency of message are present, it may be said that this message tends to be constructed in a capricious, less-than-reasonable way. For instance, partisans may avoid articulating views on certain issues simply for fear that they might divide the party – as many European parties are said to do on the question of support or opposition for the European Union – or conversely they may talk up certain issues not because they are intrinsically important but because they can generate an effective emotional response in the electorate or can usefully divide competing parties. The consequence may be a public debate in which key concerns fail to be aired while others are exaggerated and clustered arbitrarily.

Perhaps a third objection is the most critical: that partisanship furthermore lacks a self-correcting mechanism for dealing with dysfunctions exactly such as these. Partisans, it may be said, are ultimately conformists: they put loyalty to their fellows above loyalty to reason and to their consciences (Muirhead 2010, 2006). In this view, rather than spontaneously forming allegiances and a common identity with those with whom they share similar opinions, they pick up the sense of common identity first and work backwards to the opinions they believe they should therefore hold. They engage in a perverse logic which prevents the individual partisan thinking rationally and independently. As a result, when the partisan collective deviates from the commitments one might wish it to hold to, the individual partisan may be thought unlikely to speak out in opposition.

In all these concerns is the suspicion that the defining principle of partisanship is liable to slip from political *justification* to political *strategy*. However much partisans may present themselves as groupings united in pursuit of common goals or in defence of threatened values, the sceptic will say that, amongst those who matter – the

leadership in particular – the ideational bond plays second fiddle to hard-headed calculation, be it to maximise party support or to cause difficulty for an opponent. Whatever contribution partisanship can make to political justification is then too precarious to be the object of acclaim.

There can be no doubt that the evolution of many political parties in the twentieth century and beyond offers evidence in support of these concerns. Political scientists have charted the widespread decline of the mass-party model and a shift towards parties dominated by professionalized elites whose prime concern is not so much realising a set of ideas as holding onto office and minimising the costs of losing it (Katz and Mair 2009). Changing relations of power have seen the rise of the 'party in public office' at the expense of the 'party in central office' and the 'party on the ground', leading to relative autonomy for precisely those most prone to cynical tactics and blind loyalty – the party elites who stand immediately to gain. Here lies a major challenge to partisan political justification. Scholars of intra-party democracy have highlighted how the maintenance of a distinct partisan profile can be undermined when party elites decouple themselves from the demands and orientations of the partisan base and from self-organised groups in society (Ware 1996).

Some of these pathologies may be considered intrinsic to partisan practices while others seem to result from larger institutional developments and depoliticizing trends in contemporary democracy. The former present a specific challenge to our defence of partisanship and deserve to be taken seriously even by those interested in arguments of a primarily normative rather than descriptive kind. The key question, of course, is how political justification would look were we to dismiss partisanship altogether rather than support efforts to counter some of the noted pathologies. One needs to think about how political justification would feature in a 'no-party democracy' (Goodin 2008, pp. 205 ff.) in the absence of the adversarial conditions by virtue of which partisans at least try (though they may frequently fail) to signal alternatives, scrutinize presuppositions, and critically engage with each other's reasoning in the light of different conceptions of the public good. Politics in such a scenario would no longer be driven by a collective exchange of reasons but by individuals and groups acting in an uncoordinated fashion and lacking a collective mechanism for articulating and expressing the claims motivating their actions in the public sphere (White and Ypi 2010, see also Goodin 2008, p. 213). Arguably the probable outcome would be the justification of power in terms even more personalistic, conformist and prone to political manipulation. As we have shown elsewhere, in the absence of partisan practices one

would need to rest one's hopes on morally committed individuals or ad-hoc groups – neither of which can offer the normative, motivational and executive resources needed to cultivate citizens' conviction in the worth of political agency (White and Ypi 2010), Under such conditions, political pathologies become even harder to avoid; the focus on strategy at the expense of justification is liable to become the norm rather than the exception. In short, political justification in a no-party democracy is yet more difficult to sustain than in a democracy where citizens act together, aware of the potential pathologies of partisanship, yet still committed to the forms of reciprocal engagement it makes available.

To the extent that the pathologies of partisanship are a function of larger trends in contemporary politics, they equally threaten other forms of civic engagement and sites of justification, be they social movements, interest groups, standard deliberative fora, or courts of justice.[30] This holds true for instance of the narrowing of the space for political initiative which processes of globalisation may entail. While such developments undoubtedly raise challenges for partisanship, the burden of argument falls on those who would claim alternative modes of engagement are *less* afflicted than parties. In other words, if at the root of the pathologies identified are empirical phenomena such as the tendency for decision-making power to escape mass control and to shift to technocratic and elite-driven institutions, this represents a major problem for the defence of any mechanism of political participation that aspires to be minimally accountable. A defence of partisanship should then be seen as contributing to a collective effort to rescue contemporary democracies from these problematic trends, rather than as an independent, 'stand-or-fall' alternative to be assessed in isolation.

Moreover, if real-world tendencies must not be overlooked, it is worth noting some of the more promising trends also to be found in the partisan world. In the hierarchical organisational models of the twentieth century, the negative trajectories we have described were a consistent possibility. An 'iron law of oligarchy' was discernible from early on for those with the insight to discern it (Michels 1959 / 1915). But the contemporary political scene is rapidly evolving in ways which reopen these questions. The emergence in recent years of new media of communication and alternative fora of political participation offer important possibilities for restraining centralist tendencies. Partisans beyond the confines of elite party structures, perhaps even beyond the party itself, have new opportunities for holding leaders to account by

[30] We will return to this point below; note that we have contrasted the specific contribution of partisanship relative to other forms of civic engagement in White and Ypi 2010.

identifying and publicising deviations from their stated goals. Commentators in the print media, talk-show hosts, pressure groups and political bloggers have new power to shape the political climate within which organised partisans act.[31] As well as being sources of political justification themselves, they are a further stimulus to its organised expression at the level of party elites. Partisan websites and organisations of the kind already mentioned offer new possibilities for reviving parties as a source of education and community feeling, while virtual social networks offer the necessary access-points for the hitherto uninvolved. In the phrase of Ghandi's we heard earlier, they offer new possibilities for 'speaking before an audience', that dimension of partisanship too often diminished in those party structures that have prevailed since the decline of the mass party. That these sites are fairly immune to top-down efforts to discipline them, and that they are at one remove from wider public attention, makes them feasible places of unconstrained intra- and para-party debate. They open the space for new levels of deliberation under the partisan sign (Teorell 1999). Clearly, party elites can choose to ignore these developments, or seek to utilise them to further their control and surveillance of the party (Römmele 2003): the longer-term implications remain unclear. But the scale of these changes makes it unwise simply to extrapolate the future of partisanship from past trends. For those who would seek to counter the dysfunctional tendencies in existing parties and foster their contribution to political justification, contemporary social change offers some important new resources.

Furthermore, where the pathologies of partisanship cannot be remedied by intra-party efforts at reform, they generate exactly the motivation for new partisan groupings to emerge. Denouncing those who have 'sold out', or who have ossified into a 'political class', is the favourite activity of new actors announcing their arrival on the political scene – and is itself conducive to the circumstances of political justification as described. The fact that, in a democratic political community, parties are not fixed in number, and that established ones must reckon with the emergence of newcomers – made easier by the new communication technologies – is in principle a powerful check on whatever tendencies exist amongst the partisan elite towards recoil into a self-referential world. Activating this dynamic to the full requires lowering the institutional barriers to the emergence of new partisans, be they thresholds for representation or restrictions on access to public finance (Katz and Mair 2009, pp.759ff.). Correcting the

[31] For discussion of the growing symbiosis of partisanship and political blogging, see (Farrell 2008), (Farrell 2009) and (Farrell et al. forthcoming).

pathologies of partisanship in other words involves creating more opportunities for partisanship, not fewer.

The pathologies we have mentioned are internal to an adversarial model of politics. What if one goes deeper and questions whether the conditions on which partisanship rests are not themselves pathological – pathological for democracy itself? Specifically, if the reasons that people cannot plausibly reject are so vulnerable to ongoing political interpretation, how can we be sure of the acceptability of what citizens achieve by means of political justification? And what does the persistence of disagreement tell us about the success of the entire justificatory enterprise?

This question has long troubled deliberative accounts of political justification, with the various attempts to address it contributing to what some authors call the "coming of age" of the deliberative approach as a complete theory of democracy rather than a mere ideal of legitimacy (Bohman 1998, p. 401). Most deliberative democrats now acknowledge that even though political justification as an ideal ultimately entails an attempt to develop a normative political agenda that citizens can reasonably share, the persistence of disagreement need not defeat the very aim of political justification.[32] Given this shift, the adversarial conditions underpinning the partisan model we have described are no longer considered so threatening. Some deliberative theorists are even prepared to reject the notion of "reasons that all can accept" as doing no work in settling disagreement: despite the fact that the premises of political argument may have been reconciled in advance, the different exercise of political judgment may still produce irreconcilable outcomes (Bohman and Richardson 2009, p. 257 ff.). Disagreements due to inter-subjective differences in the combination of these premises, or due to the interference of different kinds of comparative metric, are unavoidable. And unlike judicial judgment, political judgment is always open to revision: the process is ongoing, and no decision or agreement may be considered definitive (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, pp. 11-51; Urbinati 2010, pp. 74-5).

Once attention is shifted from the outcome of justificatory practices to the normative significance of the process that underpins these, the question of what forms of civic engagement are most likely to foster that process becomes pressing. As many deliberative democrats acknowledge, the remaining normative challenge concerns the

[32] Of course, important contrasts remain between those who insist on strong criteria of acceptability of reasons along the lines of earlier Rawlsian and Habermasian discussions and the many who endorse the idea of political justification but express scepticism about the possibility of final agreement. For a recent overview see Chambers 2010.

identification of forms of institutional involvement that neither sacrifice democratic ideals in the face of empirical obstacles nor adopt an overly critical attitude towards the existing components of democratic life (Bohmann 1998, p. 401; Mansbridge et al. 2010). It has been our argument that partisanship offers a significant response to this challenge. In its absence, citizens will be but patchily exposed to political justification, weakly receptive to its claims and to their own opportunities to shape these, and worryingly susceptible to the sway of uncontested assumptions which narrow the range of persuasive arguments and privilege the *status quo.* Partisan engagement allows citizens to have greater control over the conditions of political justification, and facilitates the emergence of critical political views. The persistence of partisan disagreement need not indicate that the principles emerging at the end of the process are wrong simply because they have not been unanimously endorsed. There will always remain a plurality of partisan groupings, each adhering to a different conception of the public good, with differences that are irreducible. This however does not undermine the ideal of political justification, provided that justifications arise from a process to which a variety of partisans contribute their views.

Perhaps one final objection may be made: that even though the normative theory of democracy is now able not only to reconcile itself with the presence of adversarialism but even to appreciate its positive contribution, such a manoeuvre comes at too heavy a price. For might such a position not encourage moral scepticism, an attitude that, when applied to matters of public concern, defeats the very aim of political justification? The implications of this objection are far-reaching, not only for adversarialism in general but also for our specific defence of partisan political justification, since one possible inference is that a party that is allowed to stand for the whole ultimately affords no generally acceptable public standards of good and bad. If the good of the polity is discernible only from a partisan perspective which is itself contested, what remains of its moral potency? Here though one must be careful not to confuse moral indeterminacy and the possibility of open-ended decision-making with moral scepticism and the removal of all moral standards from public life. Indeterminacy in this sense is linked to the idea that, within a frame of settled commitments, a number of contrasting and competing responses to the question of how best to interpret the public good are possible and welcome (Kateb 1981, pp. 360-61). That the best response to such a question may be contested is not to say one cannot speak of superior or inferior responses. In the model we have been outlining, partisanship is an indispensable part of the process that searches for such responses and seeks to adjudicate between them. It

neither sanctions radical scepticism nor promises unanimous agreement. It contributes important elements that many theorists (including those who accept adversarialism) do not always and openly acknowledge. Ultimately, it may not render each individual citizen an author of every law, but it brings citizens as a *collective* much closer to an exercise of authority rooted in political justification.

Conclusion

It has been the argument of this article that partisanship is a necessary underpinning to political justification both in the ideal world one might hope to live in and in the imperfect one which one can expect to encounter. We have examined several dimensions of political justification in detail, concerning the constituency to which it is offered, the circumstances in which it is developed, the ways it is made inclusive, and the ways it is made persuasive. In each case, we have sought to show the relevance of partisan practices to the execution of political justification. Partisan political justification emerges not as an oxymoron but as a valid account of how norms of democratic government may be achieved.

If partisanship plays the crucial role described, any lapse in its vigour will evidently be detrimental to the democratic polity. Insofar as partisans cease to be partisans, one need not suppose the outcome will be a consensual public sphere. Rather it is likely to be the emaciation of political justification itself, with a quite different mode of politics following. One can expect political proposals to be grounded not so much in reason-giving as in appeals to brute interest and identity, i.e. those attributes regarded as beyond justification, and a general suspicion of normative argumentation to emerge. Political activism is likely to come to be seen as governed by motives of self-interest and the search for power – as factionalism, in other words – and political clashes to be seen as clashes between individuals and personal agendas rather than larger sets of ideas. In such a world, attention to reason-giving and the impulse to evaluate normative arguments is likely to give way to a concern to explain and unmask them, to construe them as mere tools in the pursuit of material power. If such assumptions become widely disseminated, partisans themselves have every reason to conform to them, eschewing what then seem doomed efforts at reasoned justification in favour of the superficial concerns of image and personality.

No doubt this is a vision that has some resonance with the trajectory of contemporary western democracy. Many are the media interviewers and editorialists who prefer to focus on matters of political strategy rather than justification, whose first questions when public policy is proposed concern not the worth of the proposal but the motives of its advocates and its place in the 'political game'. If the arguments of this article are endorsed, moves towards the displacement of partisan practices of justification can only be a matter for concern, for they can then no longer play their basic role in linking decision-making to collective conceptions of the public good. Such developments are to be followed with concern, for partisanship and political justification seem essentially intertwined.

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