Jonathan White and Lea Ypi
The partisan claim

Book section

The Meaning of Partisanship

Jonathan White and Lea Ypi

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Introduction

Political parties have taken a pounding in recent years. In democracies across the world, organisations that endured for much of the twentieth century find themselves deserted by voters and members alike. For many a party leadership, this is a time of public rejection.[1] But what of the underlying idea they are born of? To what extent are the trials of parties indicative of the declining resonance of partisanship itself, of the more general political outlook in which it makes sense to associate with a party? Exactly how deep does the rot go?

Here the trends of the age are ambiguous. On the one hand there is evidence to suggest the difficulties facing parties are rooted in more profound processes of depoliticisation that make commitment to collective action less appealing. Coupled with an analysis of the socio-economic and institutional constraints on what parties in government can achieve, one may easily arrive at a diagnosis of long-term disenchantment with the party as a political form.[2] On this view, parties are a remnant of a different epoch, the residue of the past in the present.

At the same time one sees signs of renewed partisan engagement, often inspired by frustration with alternative modes of political agency. Whether in Latin America in the 2000s or Mediterranean Europe in the 2010s, new parties have developed out of social movements and movement coalitions to achieve significant electoral success. The accounts of activists themselves suggest there are features of the party form, notably its continuity and comprehensiveness of vision, which are prized at least as much as the alternative qualities of spontaneous action.[3] The implication is that where alternatives to the party have been tried they have been found wanting, prompting their protagonists to return to the partisan model. Nor is this interest restricted to new parties: the massive expansion of the British Labour Party in summer 2015 during and following the leadership campaign of Jeremy Corbyn shows how even long-established parties, at least in some circumstances, retain the capacity to inspire mass publics.

However divergent these readings of the present, both suggest the need to dissect the partisan experience more closely. For those inclined to see the breakthrough of new parties as anomalous, there is reason to reflect on the nature of partisanship so as to grasp the stakes of its decline. If this mode of political agency is in trouble, what risks being lost, and what can be pursued by other means? What exactly are the roles and responsibilities that contemporary partisans seem prone to default on? Such questions suggest the need for a critical standard against which to assess the significance of party malaise. Conversely, for those who would rather emphasise the model's enduring potential, the relevant questions will centre on how a defence of partisanship might look. What, if anything, is desirable about the practice, and what normative standards should underpin it?

In these ambiguous circumstances for the future of partisanship, a number of observers have drawn attention to its place in a well-functioning polity. The most

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[1] Mair, Peter (2013), *Ruling The Void: The Hollowing Of Western Democracy* (London: Verso).

[2] Streeck, Wolfgang (2014), 'The Politics of Exit', *New Left Review* 88, July-August.

[3] Cf. Della Porta, Donatella and Daniela Chironi (2015), 'Movements in Parties: OccupyPD', *Partecipazione e Conflitto* (PACO) 8 (1), p.89; Katz, Claudio (2013), 'Socialist Strategies in Latin America', in Jeffery Webber and Barry Carr (eds.) *The New Latin American Left* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), pp.45-6. Social-movement scholars themselves show increasing interest in parties and a wish to reconnect the two research fields: see e.g. Della Porta, Donatella (2009), *I Partiti Politici* (Bologna: Il Mulino); McAdam, Doug and Sidney Tarrow (2010), 'Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements', *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (2); cf. Mudge, Stephanie L. and Anthony S. Chen (2014), 'Political Parties and the Sociological Imagination: Past, Present, and Future Directions', *Annual Review of Sociology* 40, pp.315ff.

intellectually ambitious and accomplished of these efforts have come from the United States, where dissatisfaction with the major parties has an extensive past. Amid contemporary concerns about unmeasured and unprincipled partisanship in the House and the Senate, Nancy Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead in particular have tried to show why parties were ever thought desirable in the first place. Examining the normative foundations of a party system, they have offered powerful accounts of why democracy might need its partisans. These are generally neglected issues in the political science of parties, largely focused as it is on the structural determinants of partisan behaviour. They are matters equally neglected in political philosophy, where normative reasoning has become increasingly detached from analysis of the institutions that might deliver on moral concerns.[4]

The book that follows is of a piece with these efforts to rejuvenate the theoretical study of partisanship. But the arguments it develops are different in focus and substance. Whereas Rosenblum and Muirhead write primarily with the US experience in mind, our account is influenced by partisan politics in the wider global setting. In Europe, for instance, the historical shift from mass parties to parties of looser association has been more dramatic, as has been the remaking of the political ideologies by which they define themselves. It is a context of far-reaching partisan change, even if core features of the practice persist. Further, it is a context of far-reaching change in the institutional setting, as is equally true in Latin America. Whether in view of the changes associated with regional integration or the revolutionary overthrow of regimes, partisanship unfolds in an ever-shifting political framework. This is a world of apparently few constitutional essentials, in which comprehensive change continues to occur.

Our account takes a distinctive theoretical turn too. Emphasising ideals of public justification as a constitutive element of partisanship, our account is in some ways more demanding. Partisans, we suggest, are defined not just by a commitment to regulated adversarialism – to a struggle that is tempered by rules – but by a commitment to persuade others of their views through the appeal to reasons that can be generally shared. Ours is an account of partisanship as a highly principled mode of activity – one that has real-world expression in the ideals and practices of existing agents, but often alloyed with actions less principled. At the same time, in some ways our account is *less* demanding than the alternatives, for we wish to make few assumptions about the broadly well-functioning character of existing political institutions. Some of the important virtues of partisanship, in our account, can be conceived independently of the institutions that might nurture and regulate it – a significant point given existing arrangements may be deeply flawed. Included in our concept of partisanship is the possibility of transformational political ends.

Furthermore, we wish to go beyond existing accounts by considering, in addition to the contribution of partisanship to a democratic system, the viewpoint of partisans themselves. Independent of what party politics can offer the citizenry as a whole, what is the value of partisanship to those who might embrace it? And what distinctive ethical ties might the practice of partisanship entail? What is the significance of the activity as seen from within? Addressing these questions requires an expanded perspective, one that extends not just from the study of party systems to the study of the party – a move proposed by Panebianco already in the 1980s in a study of party organisation – but one that takes us beyond the study of partisan behaviour to the study of the normative outlook that gives meaning to it.

Rational reconstruction is the term sometimes used to describe an exercise of this kind.[5] Its point of departure is an existing social practice – one that may display variations,

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[4] Cf. Waldron, Jeremy (2013), '*Political* Political Theory: An Inaugural Lecture', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21 (1), pp.1-23.
[5] In the relevant sense, it is developed by Habermas to analyse the legitimacy of the legal order of the modern state (see Habermas, Jürgen (1996), *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law*

inconsistencies and degenerate forms, but also a basic coherence from a conceptual point of view. On the basis of theoretical reflection disciplined by empirical observation, one builds an analysis of the normative presuppositions structuring the activities of those who take part in, preserve, extend, reproduce or contest the practice. This is our intention for the practice of partisanship, augmented with an attention to why the practice at its best is one worth defending. In common with interpretative approaches more generally, the aim is to balance an understanding of empirical specifics – how actors engage in the practice, criticise it, make claims for it and make sense of it – with sensitivity to the counterfactual elements on which the meaning of the practice seems predicated or which could plausibly enhance its meaning. Identifying in this way the norms that inspire it, one develops an account of where the value of that practice should be expected to lie, as well as a critical yardstick with which to assess its possible reform.

Conceived in these terms, the book develops an account of the defining features of partisanship as a civic ideal. It lays out the distinctive ideas, orientations, obligations and actions that combine in this political form, and connects them to some of the core concerns of contemporary democratic theory and practice. The account should speak both to the detached observer, for whom partisanship is something that others do, and to the activist herself, who one hopes will see something of her own outlook in the analysis proposed.

The book can be thought of in three parts. The relation between the partisan and the political community at large is the subject of the first, explored across a series of chapters that analyse the challenging but potentially crucial contribution of partisanship, properly conceived, to political life. The relation between the partisan and their party is the topic of the book's middle section, investigated in terms of the value of political commitment and the ethical ties that underwrite it. The third of our themes concerns the complex relation between partisans and political institutions, as revealed in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. In more detail, the book's structure is as follows.

Chapter 1 presents the essentials of our concept of partisanship. We seek to grasp it not only as a set of empirical practices but as a normative idea that describes them in their most defensible form. The chapter examines the tendency in political science towards an encompassing definition of party that includes all political groups that contest elections, and notes how this departs from an older perspective in which what distinguished this political form was a commitment to certain kinds of end. To retrieve the normative core of the concept requires, we suggest, renewed emphasis on what can be called the distinctive partisan claim – to be advancing principles and aims that are *generalisable*, i.e. irreducible to the beliefs or interests of particular social groups.   Partisans advance a claim of this kind and take coordinated action in support of it, all the while acknowledging the contestable character of their claim. The chapter further examines how taking this claim seriously invites us to look beyond the party as membership group to a wider field of partisan activity.

Chapter 2 looks at how the partisan claim has persistently met with scepticism in the history of political thought. Whereas the defence of parties has tended to be premised on a contrast with *factions*, those unwelcome doubles that corrupt rather than serve the public good, such a distinction has long been resisted. For centuries, party and faction were assimilated: political divisions of all kinds were despised for undermining the unity of the political community. The chapter examines what is at stake in the distinction between party

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and Democracy (Cambridge MA: MIT), p.82; see also Gaus, Daniel (2013) 'Rational Reconstruction as a Method of Political Theory between Social Critique and Empirical Political Science', *Constellations* 20 (4), pp.553–70; Patberg, Markus (2014), 'Supranational Constitutional Politics and the Method of Rational Reconstruction', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 40 (6), pp.501–21). Our usage is significantly different however: we apply the concept to a non-state practice (partisanship) and remain open to transformations in the political-institutional context.

and faction, revisiting some salient critiques of the partisan idea and acknowledging the force of the concerns that inform them. While the distinction between factions and parties is crucial, we suggest, it is for the purpose of critical evaluation rather than taxonomy. The same political grouping may display features of both, depending on its political choices and its institutional context.

Where the relation between partisan and political community is well configured, this mode of civic involvement promises a major contribution to the democratic principle of collective self-rule. In Chapter 3 we examine this promise more closely by considering how partisanship is constrained by and contributes to standards of political justification. We endorse the norms of reason-giving central to deliberative accounts of democracy, often presented as antithetical to partisanship, and seek to show how partisanship is less remote from such accounts than it first appears – indeed, how it supplies what is otherwise missing in them. Three dimensions of justification are examined in detail: the constituency to which it is offered, the circumstances in which it is developed, and the ways in which it is 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.

As we move to the middle phase of the book, we look beyond the virtues of partisanship for the political community at large to examine why partisans themselves have reason to come together and what kinds of tie their association implies. To be a partisan is, after all, first and foremost to stand in a certain relation to others who share similar views. Chapter 4 introduces the key notion of *commitment* in this regard. It argues that the ideal of collective self-rule requires political commitment, and that such commitment is sustained and enhanced when politically committed agents form a lasting associative relation – when they form a party, in other words. If the price of their association is a measure of intransigence, the sacrifice of some independence of thought and action, it is a price often worth paying in view of the merits of political commitment.

By entering into relations of association in this way, partisans acquire a distinct set of mutual obligations – this is the argument of Chapter 5. The point needs careful elaboration, since it is exactly in such notions of in-group loyalty that critics of partisanship see an unwelcome constraint on the independence of individuals. If it is true that partisans are bound by special obligations to their associates, on what moral basis are these grounded? The chapter begins with an analysis of why partisanship without obligations is implausible, examining the deficiencies of a highly fluid conception of association based on ideas of contingent order amongst the like-minded and a process of perpetual reconstitution, in the tradition of anarchist thought. Drawing on analyses of obligation in other contexts, it goes on to argue for a compound perspective based on the moral principles of contract, reliance and reciprocity. It is shown how different kinds of partisan may be affected by these principles differently – depending, for example, on whether they hold formal party membership or whether theirs is a non-membership-based affiliation.

Chapter 6 shows how the associative obligations of partisans extend in time, based on the cross-generational character of the project to which they commit themselves. The meaningfulness of the party idea depends on partisan efforts to coordinate in time. It follows that, to borrow terminology from discussions of intergenerational justice, partisans may be said to have 'ascending' obligations to their predecessors and 'descending' obligations to successors. Though these obligations need not always be decisive, they are of some significance in an age when many partisans are engaged in an effort to redefine their normative commitments to suit changed historical conditions, sparking concerns amongst their fellows that in the process they risk sacrificing their party's soul.

Partisanship is defined by political commitment and the special obligations that attend it, yet to be a partisan is also to know when to compromise, especially when the prospect of governing is at hand. Chapter 7 examines this challenge. Is it possible to reconcile the principled commitments of partisanship with a larger set of institutional constraints? What burdens of compromise does the task of government introduce, and how are they best negotiated? The chapter explores the nature of partisan compromise, the relationship between compromise and integrity, and the challenge of compromising with one's political adversaries. It further asks whether partisan compromise should be understood as principled or pragmatic, and offers an account of partisan virtue that steers a middle ground between a sectarian approach that deems all compromise unacceptable and an opportunistic one that empties the party of its foundational commitments.

The complex relation of partisans to political institutions is never more visible than in transformative circumstances where the institutional architecture itself is in question. Our next two chapters examine partisanship in politically unsettled contexts, looking first in Chapter 8 at partisanship in revolutionary times. The chapter examines two theories of revolutionary action typically placed in contrast: one emphasising the centrality of spontaneous action and mass participation (the spontaneist account), and another defending the central role of vanguard parties in preparing the people for revolution (the centralist account). We highlight the virtues and limitations of each at two distinct phases: firstly, at the point of sparking revolutionary action to fight the injustice of an oppressive regime, and, secondly, once revolutionaries have been successful and face the challenge of founding a new legal and political order that is legitimate in the eyes of the whole people. The chapter defends a hybrid account that acknowledges the tensions between these two stages and that allows better appreciation of the value of partisanship in revolutionary circumstances.

The transnational sphere is another paradigmatic context in which partisanship contends with unsettled institutions. Chapter 9 addresses partisanship in this increasingly salient domain of political philosophy and practice. That parties might successfully organise transnationally is an idea often met with scepticism. The chapter argues that while certain favourable conditions are indeed absent in this domain, this implies not that partisanship is impossible but that it is likely to be marked by certain traits. Specifically, it will tend to be episodic, socially diffuse, and delocalised in its ideational content. These tendencies affect the normative expectations one can attach to it. Transnational partisanship, the chapter argues, should be valued as a transitional phenomenon, as a pathway to a more acceptable international order, rather than as a desirable thing in itself.

What does our account of the normative structure and value of partisanship suggest for the practical configuration of a party? In Chapter 10, our concluding chapter, we trace out the organisational implications that follow from the arguments previously made. Accepting that organisation can be a matter of reasoned design and not just the outcome of functional imperatives, we suggest a number of principles of organisation consistent with the meaning of partisanship as previously described and outline the kinds of practical arrangement that may serve them. Issues of salience in many realworld parties – e.g. to do with the role of material incentives, the burdens of membership, the place of hierarchy, coercion and intra-party deliberation, and the consolidation of commitments in a party constitution – are points given critical discussion. By unpacking the normative stakes bound up in these organisational questions, the chapter reconnects the study of partisan ethics with some of the key challenges facing parties in the contemporary world.

Chapter 1
The Partisan Claim

One of the intriguing properties of political language is that many of its key terms are used both to express things as they should be and things as they are. To pick just a few examples: citizen, democracy, law, legitimacy, state, constitution and community – each is commonly used to describe both a political ideal and its approximation in everyday life. Democracy is studied as a set of practices as they exist in a given realworld setting, yet typically with an understanding that the concept is not reducible to those practices. They are democratic to the extent they retain traces of an ideal, however contested and evolving it may be. In like fashion the law is approached positively as a set of practices engaged in by judiciaries, lawyers, legislators and others, but generally with a clear sense that it is not *just* the sum total of these activities: that the law is something discovered as well as made. An empirical and a normative tendency coexists in these concepts and many others by which politics is organised and lived. This fact reflects, amongst other things, the twin impulses that run through political analysis: to criticise reality and to account for it.

In the case of the political party, the dual character of the concept tends to be overlooked, at least in contemporary study. The party is typically approached as a mainly empirical phenomenon, as a concretely-existing mode of organisation to which our concept of party should be adjusted so as best to describe it. Typologies highlight the changing forms of partisan activity – from cadre to mass party, catch-all to cartel party – often with the explicit suggestion that no particular form should be privileged as the superior instantiation of an ideal. The concept evolves, untethered from any notion of what a party *should* be. This empiricisation of the idea of party corresponds, one may add, to its centrality in political science and its weak presence in political philosophy.

This chapter aims to show why the party should be recognised as a normative concept as well as an empirical one. In reflecting on the meaning of party and partisanship, one should keep in view both the evolution of an historical set of practices and how those practices in their most defensible form can raise and respond to normative questions. While its changing organisational features are of singular significance, they should be appraised in the context of the ends that the party might in principle be expected to serve. Only by balancing these two considerations does one arrive at a category with useful critical potential.

In line with this point of departure, the chapter examines what gets lost in a one-sidedly empirical conception of the party, in particular one that reduces partisanship to the activities of those holding membership in an organisation contesting elections. It looks at the good reasons for adopting a richer account that includes the kinds of political principles and aims agents seek to advance, and that highlights the interaction not just of those who share formal organisational ties but of those operating at the boundaries of the membership group. As we go on to argue, exploring partisanship's normative dimension is to some degree an act of retrieval, as it was with this aspect to the fore that the concept of party first emerged and was theorised in the modern setting. The chapter examines some of its intellectual origins as a normative as well as empirical category, before outlining the conception to be carried forward in this work.

Appreciation of the two dimensions, empirical and normative, matters especially in a time when many of the actors that go by the name of party in contemporary politics are widely thought, by publics and scholars alike, to have significant and perhaps fatal shortcomings. Scepticism towards the particulars leads to scepticism towards the idea. Under such

conditions it is particularly important that theoretical discussion of the value of partisanship is not distorted by the problems that attach to it in specific incarnations – any more than theoretical discussions of citizenship, democracy or the law should be distorted by the limitations of their practical instantiations. To defend partisanship is not to defend it in all its contemporary forms.

The Party as Observed: Tendencies in Empirical Study

Partisanship describes a collective phenomenon: this is the common point of departure for all that has been written on it. At the heart of it is some form of coordination between individuals committed to similar political ideas. There can be no party of one, no partisan without partisan peers. Moreover, this cooperation unfolds under conditions of conflict. Partisans unite to oppose those with whom they are at odds. Their coordination is outward-facing. Yet what the unity of the partisan collective consists in is less certain. One can usefully probe the variety of positions on this question by looking first at the empirical political science of the party as pursued in comparative politics, before going on to recall some older views.

One of the most widely-adopted conceptions in twentieth-century scholarship saw the party as the organised expression of group interest. What unified a set of partisans was their relation to the social structure. In the words of an early exponent of the view, 'each [party] is the representative, the special champion, of a particular group of citizens for whose … interests it seeks the recognition and fostering care of the state …'[6] The party is a conduit by which social facts find political expression: each defends the interests associated with a particular segment of society, be it a class, status group, or hybrid formation. The perspective discounts the rhetoric by which parties might claim to be advancing generalizable principles and aims: whatever they say, they represent the part and no more.[7] In North America especially, this broadly sociological perspective would become widely influential in the mid-twentieth century in the context of theories of interest-group pluralism.[8] In Europe, in a distinct but related form, it would find early expression in the work of Max Weber,[9] before developing more fully as the 'cleavage theory' of partisanship, in which political constituencies are taken to be a function of underlying societal divisions rooted in interests and sedimented cultural oppositions.[10]

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[6] Morse, Anson (1896), 'What is a Party?', *Political Science Quarterly* 11 (1), p.77; cf. p.80: 'the true end of party – the end, I would repeat, of which it is itself conscious – is, in ordinary times, to promote not the general interest, but the interest of a class, a section or some one of the many groups of citizens which are to be found in every state in which there is political life, an interest which is always something other – and generally, though not always something less – than the national interest'; p.81: 'In a general sense what the state undertakes to do for the people, a party undertakes to do for a group. To promote the national interest, that is, the interest that is common to all, is the immediate end of the state; to promote the group interest is the immediate end of party.'

[7] Morse ('What is a Party?', p.77) was keen to present his as an empirical conception: distancing himself from the Burkean conception we shall come to, and any likeminded normative conception of partisanship, he states: 'if true, the definition must hold of every party, both present and past.'

[8] E.g. Dahl, Robert (1966), 'Some Explanations', in Robert Dahl (ed.), *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven: Yale UP), pp.348-86.

[9] Weber, Max (1978), 'The Distribution of Power within the Political Community: Class, Status, Party', in *Economy and Society* Vol. 2, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: UCP), pp.926-40.

[10] See e.g. Lipset, Seymour and Stein Rokkan (1967), 'Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: an Introduction', in Lipset and Rokkan (eds.) *Party systems and voter alignments: cross-national perspectives (*New York: Free), pp.1-64; also Lipset, Seymour (1960), *Political Man: the Social Basis of Politics* (New York: Doubleday).

Particularly in the latter twentieth century, it was clear to many observers of western democracy that not all, perhaps not even most, of the groups contesting elections could easily be grasped in this way as the political expression of social structure. New emphasis came to be put rather on the party as a network of elites, unified by their common desire for the power and prestige of political office.[11] Sometimes known as the economic view of the party, due to its emphasis on utilitarian motivation and adoption of methods from the study of market behaviour, this family of approaches saw partisans first and foremost as interest-maximisers, building support to advance their own personal position. Their appeal to a wider public took the form of chasing the preferences of the 'median voter': rather than consistently representing a defined social group, they would adopt whatever opinions seemed conducive to majority support. This highly pragmatic orientation, and the programmatic contradictions it might lead to, were evoked by those who saw partisans as engaged in a 'catch-all' effort to assemble an electoral majority through the aggregation of disparate preferences.[12]

That a party might also be organised around a set of principled political commitments, reducible neither to the interests of a social group nor to the self-serving rhetoric of elites, was a possibility few observers of this period would dispute. A distinctive class of 'ideological' parties was acknowledged as a real feature of politics in electoral and non-electoral contexts, and often associated with the European left.[13] A minority strand of thought even articulated this as the essence of the party idea and a necessary foundation of representative democracy.[14] Such a grouping was typically treated as a curiosity however. Ideological parties were rare, and hardly able therefore to act as a prototype for empirical analysis in general.

Faced with these differing understandings of what the unity of a party might lie in, the most common response in comparative politics as a whole has been to map these different conceptions onto different kinds of party. A pluralist approach has been taken.[15] Thus the major surveys of the field have tended to distinguish between *parties of group representation* (described variously as 'class parties', 'ethnic parties' and 'cleavage-based parties'), *parties of elite convenience* (including 'clientelist parties', 'brokerage parties', 'electoral-professional parties' and 'personalistic parties'), and *parties of principle* (sometimes termed 'ideological' or 'programmatic').[16] These distinctions are typically combined with additional ones to do with organisational structure, and used to note the varying preponderance of different types in different national and temporal contexts. The concept of party is thereby

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[11] See e.g. Downs, Anthony (1957b), *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley); Schlesinger, Joseph A. (1991), *Political Parties and the Winning of Office* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan)..

[12] Kirchheimer, Otto (1966), 'The Transformation of the Western European Party Systems' in La Palombara and Weiner (eds) *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton: PUP).

[13] See e.g. Duverger, Maurice (1954), *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activities in the Modern State* (London: Methuen).

[14] See e.g. Bobbio, Norberto (1987), 'Representative and Direct Democracy', in *The Future of Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell), p.51. The point is well made also by Sartori, albeit in one of the less well heeded sections of his book on parties and party systems (Sartori, Giovanni (1976), *Parties and Party Systems* (Cambridge: CUP),,p.26; see also Chapter 2 below).

[15] Such a move recalls Hume's distinction between parties 'from interest', 'from principle' and 'from affection' – a distinction intended to clarify the *dangers* he associated with partisanship (Hume, David ([1748] 1998), 'Of parties in general' and 'Of the parties of Great Britain', in *Hume: Political Essays* ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: CUP), pp.33-39 and pp.40-5).

[16] See e.g. Diamond and Gunther, who identify 15 kinds of party as part of their contribution to an 'empirically more comprehensive and accurate set of party types that are more truly reflective of real-world variations among parties' (Diamond, Larry and Richard Gunther (2003), 'Species of Political Parties: A New Typology', *Party Politics* 9 (2), p.171); see also Katz, Richard S. and William J. Crotty (eds.) (2006), *Handbook of Party Politics,* (London: SAGE), esp. Introduction. A valuable recent discussion of party types is Scarrow, Susan (2014), *Beyond Party Members: Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization* (Oxford: OUP), esp. chap 2.

applied to a very diverse range of political groupings, whose common denominator is that they contest elections.[17] At the micro level, the unity of the party form has been further weakened by disaggregating it into separate elements. In V.O. Key's influential account, what one actually encountered was a fractured phenomenon: the 'party-in-the-electorate', the 'party-as organisation' and the 'party-in-government'.[18] Only sometimes could they be expected to form a meaningful whole.

As an effort to record the empirical variety of actors participating in the political institutions of western democracy, these approaches have much to be said for them. It is exactly this variety of forms that confronts the observer. That some political groups have a more distinct social base than others, and that some seem little more than the vehicles of a detached political class or a charismatic individual, are reasonable observations for anyone surveying the political landscape of modern democracy.

Furthermore, an even-handed attitude that treats all these different actors as variations of the same (i.e. as different kinds of *party*) has some clear advantages for empirical research. By taking an inclusive approach to the range of motivations that can inspire collective action and the forms that may ensue, one can hope to keep at bay some of the interpretive choices that need to be made whenever deciding what counts as a party. The empiricist goal of replicable data collection is more easily preserved. Aspirations to value neutrality can also be maintained. The scientist can disavow normative claims about what a party *should* be and instead seek to engage with reality in all its sheer variety. A large data set is another welcome consequence. Comparative analysis is facilitated if one treats all political groupings that contest elections as one or another variety of party: there will always then be a sufficient plurality of parties in any given national context that one can speak confidently of a 'party system', and thereby make comparisons with other such systems.[19]

The preference for minimal definitions of the party is also the expression of some underlying intuitions about democracy. Though declaredly empirical, it is not without normative ancestry. It corresponds with a line of thought that holds political conflict to be tolerable to the extent it is *not* primarily about contending principled commitments but a process of mediating between competing interests.[20] By evoking party democracy in its normal form as the interaction of diverse political groupings, only a minority of which are consistently wedded to generalisable principles and aims, such accounts conjure a more stable political order.

The inclusive approach to what constitutes a party comes at a high cost, however. Part of that cost may be to empirical analysis itself. Typologies of partisanship that give equal status to ideas- and interest-based parties risk overlooking the reflexive aspect of all forms of collective action. Even groups which speak only the language of interests are in no sense merely a passive medium of representation. Interests have to be *selected, defined* and *articulated* compatibly with a certain idea of advantage, and it seems hardly possible to perform this role without reference, even if implicit, to principles of some kind – in question

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[17] Hence the prominence of elections in political-scientific definitions of party: e.g. Epstein, Leon (1967), *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (London: Pall Mall), p.9: a political party is 'any group, however loosely organized, seeking to elect government officeholders under a given label'; also Aldrich, John (1995), *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Parties in America* (Chicago: UCP), pp.283-4: 'Political parties can be seen as coalitions of elites to capture and use political office.'

[18] Key, V. O. (1942), *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* (New York: Crowell).

[19] The classic account of party systems remains Sartori, 'Parties and Party Systems'. An intelligent recent addition in this tradition is Ezrow, Lawrence (2010), *Linking Citizens and Parties: How Electoral Systems Matter for Political Representation* (Oxford: OUP).

[20] Classically, see Hume, 'Of Parties in General'; see also Kelsen, Hans (2013), *The Essence and Value of Democracy*, (eds.) Nadia Urbinati and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), p.40, pp.69-70.

will rather be the *nature* of those principles. Seeing parties primarily as mechanisms of representation, these sociological accounts tend to assume a largely unidirectional relationship between the forms of subjecthood existing in society and those in the political arena. They are treated already as groups *for themselves* as well as *in themselves*, in other words: the role of the party in developing this self-consciousness, by creatively articulating political subjects, is often under-specified.[21]

The problem is also a normative one however. Though well suited to certain kinds of empirical ambition, a stripped-down conception of the party as any kind of group contesting elections dulls sensitivity to some of the key normative questions at stake. The practices of a given moment, in all their empirical specificity, come to eclipse the ideals behind them.[22] A normatively defensible concept of partisanship must reject this evenhandedness and privilege a certain kind of ideas-based grouping grounded in principled commitment. It must include at the core of the idea of party the pursuit of political visions irreducible to the self-centred aims of sectoral groups or to personal interests.[23] Such criteria are important not just for locating the political worth of partisanship – notably, what it might contribute to ideals of democracy – but for identifying why it is reasonable for individuals to associate with parties in the first place. Relatedly, in place of a predominant focus on party *systems*, where the normative ends of actors inevitably pale beside the concessions that may arise in the course of their interaction, we need to retrain our vision on the standards to which partisans properly aspire.

To begin to see why this is so, it is worth considering an older tradition of thinking about partisanship in which its normative significance is more visible.

Normative Roots of the Party Concept

When party as a concept and practice first emerged in the modern world in the latter eighteenth century, its defining characteristic was widely thought to lie in the kind of ends it pursued, not the organisational means by which it pursued them.[24] A party was conceived first and foremost as a community of shared principle. Partly this can be explained by the weak organisational structure of the early parties, notably as they emerged in Britain and the US. As groups of individuals located primarily in the legislature, they displayed little in the way of a functional differentiation of roles, so it made little sense to define them by their

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[21] For a useful critique from within sociology of the idea that parties merely translate conflicts from the social to the political sphere, see DeLeon, Cedric, Manali Desai and Cihan Tuğal (2015) (eds.), *Building Blocs: How Parties Organize Society* (Stanford: Stanford UP).

[22] One is reminded of Marcuse's critique of 'one-dimensional thought': cf. Marcuse, Herbert (1964 / 2002), *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge), chap. 1.

[23] A well-known twentieth-century precedent for an expressly normative conception of partisanship is the APSA report on 'responsible parties': see APSA (1950), 'Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: A Report of the Committee on Political Parties', *American Political Science Review* 44 (3), Part 2, Supplement.

[24] Cf. Mansfield, Harvey C. (1965a), *Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (Chicago: UCP), p.17; Ball, Terence (1989), 'Party', in Ball, James Farr and Russell L. Hanson (eds.) *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (Cambridge: CUP), pp.169ff.; Beyme, Klaus von (1978), 'Partei, Faktion', in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.) *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta), p.688 (by the early eighteenth-century, in England 'parties' differ from 'factions' because the latter term is reserved for 'small groups … that concentrate on the modalities of gaining power and influence without offering a comprehensive vision for the exercise of rule' (author trans.)); see also Rosenblum, Nancy (2008), *On the Side of the Angels An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: PUP); Hofstadter, Richard (1969), *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: UCP); Pombeni, Paolo (1994), *Partiti e sistemi politici nella storia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino).

structural characteristics. But the emphasis on the association's ends corresponded equally to the belief amongst those sympathetic to these emerging entities that their distinctive contribution to public life lay in how they united individuals around shared principles. They divided the realm along lines of freely-chosen opinion, quite in contrast to the divisions of religion associated with the seventeenth century, and equally in contrast to divisions of private interest.[25] Our aim here is not to give an historical account of how these views emerged and the debates in which they were deployed, but rather to indicate the broad outlines of a normative conception of party.

The classic reference-point is of course the work of Edmund Burke. He famously defined 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'.[26] This conception puts the ends of the association to the fore. The group is defined by agreement in political ideas: 'principle' is what gives shape to the unity of the party. These ideas are generalisable: the good pursued is one possible to construe as the 'national interest', not an evidently personal or sectoral one.[27] As he goes on to elaborate: 'every honourable connection will avow it is their first purpose, to pursue every just method to put the men who hold their opinions into such a condition as may enable them to carry their common plans into execution, with all the power and authority of the state.'[28] The aim to gain control of political institutions is essential to the partisan method, but it is instrumental to the furthering of 'common plans' grounded in shared opinion. It is these shared, generalisable principles and aims which mark out the party as an 'honourable connection'. Praising the Whigs of Queen Anne's reign, Burke wrote: 'They believed that no men could act with effect, who did not act in concert; that no men could act in concert who did not act with confidence; and that no men could act with confidence, who were not bound together by common opinions, common affections, and common interests.'[29] Rather than as a way to oil the wheels of organization, shared commitments were cast as the foundation of the partisan endeavour.

Was it plausible to speak of the party in this high-minded fashion? Many doubted the empirical validity of this view, a concern expressed in scepticism about the possibility of distinguishing party and *faction*.[30] A common suspicion was that few political groups could adequately be described as 'party' if this demanding conception was to be applied,[31] and that, echoing the earlier scepticism of Lord Bolingbroke,[32] those that did fit this description would quickly degenerate into something less noble. As the next chapter illustrates, such concerns were hardly misplaced: empirically, such tendencies were real. Yet they did not cancel the *ideal* of party against which existing political associations might be judged.

The reason Burke put such emphasis on this concept of party was because he considered it necessary to the institutionalisation of popular sovereignty and liberty. Recent scholarship suggests his thoughts on the theme first developed in the 1750s, in response to

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[25] On the importance of settlement of the religious question to the acceptance and then celebration of party difference, see Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government*, pp.8-9.

[26] Burke, Edmund ([1770] 1998), 'Thoughts on the cause of the present discontents', in *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-revolutionary Writings* (London: Penguin), p.271.

[27] Note though that Burke assumes the national frame: a contemporary understanding of 'generalisable', sensitive to the transnational, may have to pose things differently.

[28] Burke, 'Thoughts on the cause'. As Mansfield notes (*Statesmanship and Party Government*, pp.181-3), implicit in Burke's conception is that more than one party can advance a plausible claim: it is a defence of *parties* rather than the singular party.

[29] Burke, 'Thoughts on the cause'.

[30] See Chapter 2; also Rosenblum, *On the Side of Angels*.

[31] Cf. Morse, 'What is a Party?'.

[32] Cf. Bolingbroke, Viscount (1733 / 1997), 'A Dissertation on Parties', 'Letter on the Spirit of Patriotism' and 'On the Idea of a Patriot King', in David Armitage (ed.), *Political Writings,* (Cambridge: CUP), p.37.

the increasing concentration of power in the hands of William Pitt;[33] their mature expression in 1770 was conversely a response to the monarchical ambition of George III.[34] Though the contexts were quite different, the common reasoning was that only strong, principled association could adequately protect the mixed constitution from the overweening and arbitrary power of a dominant individual.[35] Firm party ties grounded in principle would empower the Commons by protecting its members from undue influence by the mighty; this in turn would ensure government was broadly in tune with the opinion of the people.[36] To put one's faith rather in the virtue of individuals – the king, his courtiers and unattached MPs – would be unwise. Party discipline and the rules of association were to be trusted over the good intentions of the few. In this sense his concept of the party, however demanding, was born partly of political realism. To be sure, as a partisan himself, by describing partisanship in these terms Burke was putting the actions of himself and his fellow Whigs in a favourable light, casting them as the defenders of the national interest. His was undoubtedly an argument with a partisan tinge. But it made sense only in the context of a larger preoccupation with averting tyranny and securing the conditions of popular self-rule.

Views not dissimilar to Burke's were expressed in the nineteenth century by a number of continental-European thinkers.[37] The German-based Swiss jurist (and active partisan[38]) Johann Kaspar Bluntschli likewise developed a conception of party in which what marked it out from competing political groups was its associates' common aim to pursue the good of the whole (here understood as the state, society and the 'fatherland') rather than the good of the part. Parties, he suggested, are 'free social groups' ('freie … Gesellschaftsgruppen') which are 'allied for common political action by a shared attitude and aim.'[39] Depending on its orientation either to the good of the state or to special interest, 'the identical association will be either a political party or a faction. It has taken the path of faction as soon as self-aggrandisement or cantankerousness overwhelms love for the fatherland, and the party consciously and deliberately fails to serve the good of the state and society in general, but rather does that which is dictated by its passions.'[40] Again, organisation played an important but supporting role: 'if a party wants to fulfil its aims and attain the goals for which it united, it must to some degree organise itself as an active community and act as a close-knit collective in public life, in electoral meetings, and in councils.'[41]

An emphasis on the distinctive goals of partisanship as marking it out from other types of association was shared by many in this period. Another jurist in the German tradition writing on the concept of party, one who influenced Bluntschli and one who was also himself

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[33] See Bourke, Richard (2012), 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', *The Historical Journal* 55, pp.619-52.

[34] Bourke, Richard (2015), *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton: PUP), Part III, chapter 5, section 5.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid.* Burke's biographer convincingly argues the argument was ultimately about popular sovereignty, not simply an attempt to defend aristocratic privilege. As Whigs like Burke saw it, 'in their hands, government was a tool of the people as much as it was lever of the king.' He continues: 'The people might be misled in their judgments, but their sentiments were mostly sound: "Whenever the people have a feeling [said Burke], they commonly are in the right." It was the job of a representative assembly to ascertain that feeling. … The House of Commons was at once a representative and a deliberative chamber, which had to echo the attitudes of the people without being bound by their proposals.' See also Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government*, esp. pp.138ff., pp.157ff.

[37] Bluntschli, Johann Kaspar (1869), *Charakter und Geist der Politischen Parteien* (Nördlingen: C.H. Beck). A useful overview is Pombeni, *Partiti e sistemi politici*.

[38] He allied himself with the Conservative- Liberal party of Zurich in the 1830s-40s.

[39] Bluntschli, *Charakter und Geist*, p.9, author trans.

[40] Bluntschli, *Charakter und Geist*, p.11, author trans.

[41] Bluntschli, *Charakter und Geist*, p.12, author trans.

a partisan, was Robert von Mohl.[42] He too saw the distinctiveness of this political form, in contrast to 'factions' and 'groupings', to lie in the specific kind of principles and aims it defined itself by. As he put it: 'a state party is the sum of all those who want to direct state power in a certain way, or who want to establish certain public institutions and conditions. Depending on the specific circumstances, they want to achieve this either by lawfully taking over the government itself or, at the minimum, by exercising a decisive influence over it. A party is oriented towards a public ideal, and promises that realising this will serve the welfare of all – including, of course, the welfare of its own members; but it is not directly and exclusively a selfish aim. A party is conscious of its goal and openly avows it, and seeks to win as many followers as possible.'[43] For von Mohl, the party as organisation was very much a secondary aspect: indeed, his concern was that an excess of organisation might undermine the party as normative agent.[44]

To assert that parties by their nature were oriented to generalizable principles and aims was not necessarily to deny that more partial motivations might be joined to this.[45] A sense of the ideal standards of partisanship did not exclude political realism. Alexis de Tocqueville advanced a conception sensitive to both: 'when the citizens entertain different opinions upon subjects which affect the whole country alike, each for instance, as the principles upon which the government is to be conducted, then distinctions arise which may correctly be styled parties.'[46] Shared political commitments were the essence of such parties: 'The political parties which I style great are those which cling to principles more than to consequences; to general, and not to especial cases; to ideas, and not to men.'[47] Yet partial motivations were never absent: 'in them [great parties], private interest, which always plays the chief part in political passions, is more studiously veiled under the pretext of the public good; and it may even by sometimes concealed from the eyes of the very person whom it excites and impels.'[48] Private interest was, he felt, unquestionably the animating force behind the empirical political groupings he encountered in America. But in the case of the higher form of party, the great party, while it remained a reconciliation of the private and the public, an orientation to the latter was nonetheless a defining feature. It was here, in its capacity to cultivate in citizens a concern for the public good and to protect them from domination by the most powerful, that a party's potential to contribute to popular sovereignty lay.[49]

It would later become a trope of socialist thought that a party might simultaneously advance the good of a social group *and* be the vehicle of a universal good. Marxist theories

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[42] von Mohl, Robert (1859 / 1966), 'Die Parteien im Staate', in Klaus von Beyme (ed.) *Robert von Mohl: Politische Schriften* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag). He associated with the liberal Reichspartei as member of the Reichstag in the 1870s.

[43] von Mohl, 'Die Parteien im Staate', p.239, author trans. On the irreducibility of the party to the interests of family and estate, see also Rosenkranz, Karl (1843), *Über den Begriff der politischen Partei* (Königsberg: Theile).

[44] In nineteenth-century Germany in particular, the party as community of conviction ('Gesinnungsgemeinschaft') was typically emphasised over the party as organisation: cf. von Beyme, 'Partei, Faktion', p.699.

[45] Discussing von Mohl's thought on this, see von Beyme's introduction in von Mohl, 'Die Parteien im Staate', p.xxxv.

[46] Tocqueville, Alexis de (2002), *Democracy in America,* trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: UCP), Vol. 1, Part 2, chap. 2, p.167.

[47] Ibid. Cf. Bonetto, Gerald M. (1981), 'Alexis de Tocqueville's Concept of Political Parties', *American Studies* 22 (2), p.65.

[48] Ibid. That Tocqueville's realism here is not intended to dissolve the great / minor party distinction is evident from the sentence that follows: 'Minor parties are, on the other hand, generally deficient in political faith. As they are not sustained or dignified by a lofty purpose, they ostensibly display the egotism of their character in their actions.' Note that Burke too had a place for private interest in the party (for discussion: Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government*, p.188).

[49] Cf. Bonetto, 'Tocqueville's Concept', pp.74ff.

of political mobilisation are typically treated as theories of class action, and there can be no denying that a much stronger link is drawn by many Marxist thinkers between party and group interest.[50] But for a large number of active socialists of the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the point was exactly that the greater good of society as a whole, properly understood, was aligned with the interests of the working class. The sense in a party seeking to advance the latter was that it thereby advanced a cause irreducible to proletarian interest. Ramsay MacDonald - co-founder and theoretician of the British Labour Party, and later its first Prime Minister – provides powerful illustration. 'Socialism,' he wrote in his 1907 work of the same name, 'is no class movement. Socialism is a movement of opinion, not an organization of status. It is not the rule of the working-class; it is the organization of the community.'[51] His portrayal of the Labour Party in his 1919 piece on *Parliament and Revolution* expands on the same theme: 'it [the Party] believes in the class conflict as a descriptive fact, but it does not regard it as supplying a political method. It strives to transform through education, through raising the standards of mental and moral qualities, through the acceptance of programmes by reason of their justice, rationality and wisdom. … It walks with the map of Socialism in front of it and guides its steps by the compass of democracy.'[52] Eduard Bernstein was equally emphatic that the goal of Germany's Social Democrats was to bring the goods of political citizenship to the masses and thereby *reconfigure* society, not merely defend a section of it.[53] Such partisans, one may say, were radicalising the already-present connection in political thought between partisanship and the idea of collective self-rule. Bound by its commitment to socialist goals, and with an educative as well as executive purpose, the party in their view was no more a mere interest group than it had been for Burke in the eighteenth century.

What one sees then in these older views on the party, from Burke to MacDonald, is an emphasis on the defining significance of particular normative visions of the purpose of

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[50] See e.g. Engels, Friedrich (1895 / 1978), 'The Tactics of Social Democracy', in Robert W Tucker (ed.) *The Marx/Engels Reader* (New York: Norton), esp. p.557. Note however that the merging of class interest with the interest of society as a whole is a possibility already present in Marx's early writing on revolution: see Marx, Karl (1843 / 1994), 'From the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', in Joseph O'Malley (ed.) *Marx: Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: CUP), pp.1-27. Note also that in Gramsci's influential account, parties do not simply express the existing sectoral interests of society but are crucial to the *making* of a socially progressive class. In addition to his key text 'The Modern Prince' (Gramsci, Antonio (2011), *Prison Notebooks, Vols. 1-III*, ed. and trans. Joseph Buttigieg (New York: Columbia UP)), see Gramsci, Antonio (1921), 'I partiti e la massa', *L'Ordine Nuovo,* 25 Sept.: 'Politically, the great masses do not exist unless they are incorporated into political parties: the changes of opinion to which the former are subject as a result of pressure from dominant economic forces are interpreted by parties; the latter are in turn split, first in different currents (tendenze), and then again in a multiplicity of new organic parties'.

[51] MacDonald, in Barker, Bernard (1972), *Ramsay MacDonald's Political Writings* (Allen Lane, London), p.162.

[52] *Ibid.*, p.240.

[53] Bernstein, Eduard (1899 / 1993), *The Preconditions of Socialism*, ed. Henry Tudor (Cambridge: CUP), p.146: 'Social Democracy does not want to break up civil society and make all its members proletarians together; rather, it ceaselessly labours to raise the worker from the social position of a proletarian to that of a citizen (Bürger) and thus to make citizenship universal.' See also, from an earlier generation, the co-founder of the German SDAP August Bebel outlining his party's goals in 1870: 'since it is not a question of oppression of the minority by the majority but rather of the equal treatment and equalisation of all, one cannot speak of a situation of class- or status-group-domination, as the working class supposedly seeks. On the contrary, what is sought is a reasonable democratic society the likes of which the world has never seen. … The state should therefore be transformed from a state based on class rule into a people's state, into a state in which there are no privileges of any kind … The people's state should be brought about initially by the education of the masses regarding social and political conditions, and this education can be advanced by the organization (founding) of party associations, trade unions etc, the creation and dissemination of suitable newspapers and publications etc.' (Bebel, August (1870), *Unsere Ziele: eine Streitschrift gegen die 'Demokratische Korrespondenz'* (Leipzig: Thiele), author trans.)

political institutions. Principled commitments were considered essential to this form of political subjecthood: it was in these that the party's claim to normative value was grounded. As we have seen, such a view could be endorsed by liberals, conservatives and socialists alike. Empirical politics might fall well short of this norm, with other types of motivation coming to the fore. But it was against this standard that empirical groups should be judged and, where necessary, found wanting. Implied by this view was that the institutional expression of partisanship – the party as organisation – was secondary to its shared ideas. The unity of the partisan community lay in its shared principled commitments. The coordinated effort to control state institutions (increasingly focused on the contestation of elections) was the means to achieve these ends.

Some may wonder whether there was not a significant risk implicit in these approaches. By locating the defining features of partisanship primarily in the principles and aims advanced, these thinkers seemed to be directing one either to a highly political assessment of whether certain commitments genuinely serve the public good, or – no less problematic – to the study of *intentions*, and thus to something very difficult to ascertain in the particular instance.[54] Were these theorists then not opening an unbridgeable divide between the normative and the empirical, such that a party could only be imagined, never confidently observed? The problem is one we shall return to. Arguably the subsequent empiricisation of the party concept in political science was a response to a valid concern, albeit a response overdrawn.

The main conclusion of this section though is the following. What one sees by recalling these older conceptions of the party is that, in the course of empirical study in the twentieth century, the word party came to be applied to groupings from which thinkers of an earlier period would have withheld the term. When contemporary scholars extend typologies of parties to include 'cleavage representation parties', centred on the interests of a defined sectoral grouping, or 'elite parties' centred on the interests of a narrowly defined network of individuals, or 'personalistic parties' grounded not in shared ideas but the charisma of an individual, they are faithful to what one may encounter in empirical politics, but sacrifice the political ideal that originally lay at the heart of the partisan claim.

Towards a reconciliation of the empirical and normative

This brief overview of conceptions of party suggests the challenge is essentially the following. A view that seeks to reflect the variety of political groupings that present themselves on the electoral scene, though it may be a useful basis for empirical observation and categorisation, risks emptying the idea of normative content. By suggesting a basic equivalence between interest groups and communities of principle, it dignifies the former and devalues the latter, equalising what one has reason to keep separate. A defence of party democracy is then weakened from the outset. Preserving the normative specificity of partisanship means highlighting a certain kind of claim – that to be advancing political commitments of a principled kind. Yet in adopting this more elevated view, clearly one needs to avoid arriving at a conception wholly detached from empirical study. How then may one concretely proceed?

In what follows we propose an understanding of partisanship as an ongoing associative practice formed and sustained by those sharing a particular interpretation of how power should be exercised and with what scope.[55] We refer to the principles and aims that

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[54] On problems arising from the 'teleological prejudice' in the study of parties, see Panebianco, Angelo (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (Cambridge: CUP), pp.4ff.

[55] The latter is especially relevant to the transnational dimension of partisanship to which we turn in Chapter 9.

inform these interpretations, along with the specific policies they give rise to, as shared political projects. The partisan claim,[56] always contestable – and acknowledged as such by the partisan – is that their project serves ends irreducible to the interests of a sectoral grouping. Associations are genuinely partisan to the extent that they appeal to principles and aims that are plausibly *generalizable*. As well as direct efforts to promote the project that unites them – typically by seeking control of decision-making institutions – partisan activities involve seeking to convince a wider public of its appeal. Faced with the countervailing projects of rival actors, partisans seek to persuade others that theirs is a cause worth aligning with.

To speak of partisans' orientation to a principled project is not to make application of the concept hang on knowledge of the intentions of those involved. This orientation is a matter of affirmed commitment rather than private motivation. It takes the form of a visible claim, revealed in the kinds of statement a collective produces, the justifications it advances, and how it evokes its addressee. Claims based on the appeal to generalizable principles and aims are discernibly different from those grounded in sectoral interest, even if they may envelop them.[57] They are also distinguishable from other ways of rationalising political action such as appeals to necessity or to a population's brute preferences.[58] The important question then will be the extent to which a group acts in a way consistent with the claim it advances. Authentic partisans are those who not only speak the language of generalisable principles and aims, but who can account for their commitments in these terms and can demonstrate how the actions they undertake plausibly serve these ends.[59]

To seek to persuade others of the desirability of one's projects is to accept their appeal may not be self-evident. It is intrinsic to the partisan attitude as we understand it that partisans acknowledge in this way the contestability of their claims. This is not to suggest they need doubt the rightness of their goals: partisans may be convinced of the superior appeal of those ideas to which they are committed. But they acknowledge by their actions that their appeal needs to be argued as part of a public process of debate, persuasion and contestation, and that the conclusive demonstration of their superiority may fail even then due to differences in first principles and the limits of factual evidence.[60] In empirical terms, this means partisanship finds its home in institutions that express the legitimacy of political contestation – where

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[56] The term 'claim' has recently been widely adopted as a way to think about *representation* (see Saward, Michael (2010), *The Representative Claim* (Oxford: OUP)). While it is used there for a quite different set of purposes from our own (not least the aim to conceive representation in *non*-partisan contexts), some of the good reasons to use the term apply in both contexts, notably the emphasis it gives to the contestable character of the arguments actors advance (see also Saward, Michael (2006), 'The Representative Claim', *Contemporary Political Theory* 5 (3), p.302).

[57] On compound motivations that mix altruism with self-interest, and on their consistency with the party idea, see Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, p.22; also Tocqueville above.

[58] Some have argued the effect of a public audience is systematically to lead actors to abandon the language of self-interest, even as it continues to guide their actions (on the 'civilising force of hypocrisy', see Elster, Jon (1998), 'Deliberation and Constitution making', in Elster (ed.), *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: CUP), pp.97-122). The familiarity of appeals of a non-principled kind usefully reminds that the partisan claim is by no means omnipresent.

[59] This applies, one may add, also to when partisans choose to *compromise* on their commitments (e.g. when entering coalition government). True partisans are those who, when deviating from the letter of their commitments, acknowledge and justify this *in terms of their commitments*. On compromise, see Chapter 8.

[60] On this point, see Chapter 3. See also Rawls's discussion on the burdens of judgment in Rawls, John (2005), *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP), pp.55-8; also Mason, Andrew (1993), *Explaining Political Disagreement* (Cambridge: CUP). We may contrast this attitude to that of the *technocrat* or the *populist*, neither of whom accepts the contestability of claims (cf. Müller, Jan-Werner (2014), '"The People Must Be Extracted from Within the People": Reflections on Populism', *Constellations* 21 (4), p.490).

offices are elected, where disagreements are debated. Such democratic institutions are at the core of partisan activity, whether as partisans find them, or as they hope to establish them.[61]

Partisanship, we argue, should be valued both as a vehicle for channelling public justifications (seen from the outside) and as an associative practice required to sustain and enhance political commitment (seen from within). Although the processes of reason-giving that shape partisan commitments will feature concrete proposals for a particular time and place, their anchoring in more abstract normative visions gives them an open-ended quality that resists temporal delimitation. Victories can be achieved in their name, but there is little prospect of their immediate fulfilment, and the gains made will need to be defended.[62] Partisanship is a practice oriented to long-term projects.

Often this associative practice has at its centre a recognised organisation, the political party, conventionally understood, which embodies a distinctive collective will and gives it executive expression. In thinking about the relationship between the party organisation and partisanship it may be useful to reflect on the analogy with a more familiar set of concepts: the state and the people. The state is what gives institutional expression to the collective will of a (political) people. But a (political) people may also survive the collapse of the state or be only imperfectly reflected in it. Likewise, a party, understood merely as an organisation, is desirable to give executive expression to the collective will of partisans, but in reconstructing the meaning of partisanship it would be reductive to focus only on recognised and well-established parties.[63] In some cases, a party with which partisans identify has existed in the past but is no longer politically prominent. In other cases, the formal organisation may only be there as an aspiration.

Recognising partisanship's orientation to principled commitments is important because this is likely to be central to its democratic rationale. It is what invests it with the potential to give expression to the ideal of collective self-rule. If, in the modern setting, this ideal entails that political authority should be engaged in a process of justification, such that the exercise of power is non-arbitrary, and susceptible to popular influence such that it is non-exclusive, then the party as a collective promoting its demands in generalizable terms is arguably critical to its realisation.[64] By developing and publicising normative views on how power should be exercised, parties at their best cultivate practices of justification. Where public discourse is structured in terms of partisan claims, it gives reasons for political consent that are not systematically exclusive. By articulating these views through associative practices that promote and enhance political commitment, partisans provide epistemic and

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[61] Partisanship as we develop it involves a democratic orientation, even if it need not entail acceptance of a particular institutional settlement. The partisans of a 'one-party state' are partisans only to the extent they do not seek to exclude rival perspectives: history suggests the combination is rare.

[62] On the long-termism of partisanship, see also Muirhead, Russell (2014), *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP), p.139. A single-issue campaign is qualitatively different from the kind of normative commitments we have in mind (see also below). To be sure, a movement with one precisely-defined goal (e.g. to prevent the building of a nuclear-power reactor in a given locale) may sometimes choose to contest elections, but to the extent it does not subsequently develop a more wide-ranging, open-ended agenda, it does not constitute a partisan association in our sense. On partisanship as a cross-temporal project, see also Chap. 6.

[63] As Hans Kelsen puts it, 'these social organizations usually retain an amorphous character. They take the form of loose associations or, often, lack any legal form at all. Yet, a substantial part of the governmental process occurs within these parties: Like subterranean springs feeding a river, their impulses usually decisively influence the direction of the governmental process before it surfaces and is channeled into a common riverbed in the popular assembly or parliament' (Kelsen, *Essence and Value*, p.38).

[64] These points are elaborated more fully in the following chapters; see also White, Jonathan and Lea Ypi (2010), 'Rethinking the Modern Prince: Partisanship and the Democratic Ethos', *Political Studies* 58 (4), pp.809-28; Goodin, Robert E. (2008), 'The Place of Parties', in Goodin, *Innovating Democracy* (Oxford: OUP); Muirhead, *The Promise of Party*.

motivational support to the individual. And by making government responsive to these commitments, they bring the demands of political justification to bear on decision-making such that normative ends can be feasibly advanced. In this way, consistent with the expectation of early pioneers of the concept, the party may contribute to realising the democratic ideal of collective self-rule. A society wholly sceptical of the partisan claim is either one that is sceptical of the very prospect of political justification, or one that can define politics only in negative terms as a balance struck between competing interests.[65]

To conceive party in the terms suggested is to combine elements of the empirical and the normative. It bears the imprint of historical experience: it is a conception that draws inspiration from the claims political agents have made for themselves, the ways they have acted in pursuit of their ends, and their self-understanding as partisans. A variety of agents are plausible candidates for description in these terms: this conception does not limit itself to those of just one persuasion. Groups as diverse as socialists, liberals and environmentalists may credibly be included, along with others we shall discuss. Yet as an ideal type, our idea of party is intended not merely to describe reality but to regulate the observations and evaluations one makes of it – to draw attention to what partisans properly aspire to, and to highlight those cases where their actions fall short.[66] Perhaps no existing political group fits the model precisely: how far a collective lives up to the partisan ideal will depend on its actions and discourse in context. Indeed, any empirical application of this conception will have a debatable aspect to it. In designating a particular group as a 'party', one is necessarily making a judgement about how credible its claim to ideas-based unity really is, and how far the ends it pursues can genuinely be said to be informed by generalizable principles and aims. Such choices will be complicated by the way groupings that might more appropriately be described under a different name may have strategic reasons to present themselves as 'parties'. Sometimes one may need to question whether agents commonly referred to as parties are genuinely partisan in make-up. But these challenges notwithstanding, it is an understanding of party that can be used both interpretatively and evaluatively, and thus as a bridge between theoretical and empirical study.[67].

To illustrate this balance of the empirical and normative, consider the following. History tells us that many a party has compromised its long-standing normative commitments, often in response to some change in its political environment. Partisans have been moved to renege on their commitments so as to take immediate advantage of opportunities for institutional power, or to take advantage of the policy shifts made by their rivals.[68] Not only have partisans opportunistically set their commitments aside, but sometimes they have allowed them to become incoherent, such that what the party stands for is unclear. Actions of this kind highlight a gap between practice and ideal. They indicate how partisans, as a matter of empirical fact, may be swayed by system-level developments that tug against their programmatic commitments. At the same time, our intuitions tell us such moves must carry a burden of justification: they typically strike us as problematic, and we know that, taken to

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[65] Cf. Mansfield, Harvey (1965b),'Whether Party Government is Inevitable', *Political Science Quarterly* 80 (4), esp. p.529.

[66] Cf. Pombeni, *Partiti*; also Muirhead, *The Promise of Party* (pp.202ff.) on 'high partisanship', as distinct from the 'low partisanship' of ambition, strategizing etc. that is never far from it in practical settings.

[67] On the dislocation between the two in party scholarship: van Biezen, Ingrid and Saward, Michael (2008), 'Democratic Theorists and Party Scholars: Why They Don't Talk to Each Other, and Why They Should', *Perspectives on Politics* 6 (1), pp.21-35.

[68] For an empirical test of theses about system-led party repositioning, see Adams, James and Zeynep Somer-Topcu (2009), 'Policy Adjustment by Parties in Response to Rival Parties' Policy Shifts: Spatial Theory and the Dynamics of Party Competition in Twenty-Five Post-War Democracies', *British Journal of Political Science* 39 (4), pp.825-846.

an extreme, they are denounced by peers as compromising what partisanship is about.[69] Such actions provoke because they are held to an ideal. Rather than adapt the ideal to better fit the practice, our aim should be to improve our understanding of the ideal: to put some order in the intuitions that inform it, so that it can better act as a critical yardstick.

To approach party in the way described is to maintain, at a conceptual level, a clear distinction between parties and interest groups. Unlike the latter, the former define their activities in relation to a good irreducible to that of a sectional grouping. They elaborate explicitly *political* identities, which citizens do not passively inherit as part of their social experiences and position within society, but towards which they orientate themselves reflexively based on an evaluation of the associated political objectives.[70] Parties, in this view, are not primarily about interest representation – they are distinct from corporatist actors.[71] What distinguishes them is not that they 'aggregate' interests, but that they offer principled justification for the particular combination of ends they promote.

The conceptual distinction between party and social movement is less stark, but is also to be underlined. Unlike the movement, the party seeks to harness directly the power of institutions. While usually this means efforts to *enter* institutions (by taking seats in parliament, by sitting on the executive), it may also mean efforts to *create* them, as evidenced for instance in some forms of transnational partisanship. In both cases, partisans differ from those who wish to influence governmental policies *without* giving explicit support to a particular party.[72] This distinction concerning institutions must be understood in conjunction with parallel distinctions. With its orientation to the public good, as something that involves weighing competing values, the party has reason to seek the legitimation that shared institutions can provide. The partisan claim is unmistakeably contestable, as it touches on a wide range of political questions, and thus demands institutional validation. A social movement, by contrast, may hope to bypass this requirement by advancing a more closely delimited, issue-specific set of demands.[73] The concern to harness institutional power also means the party must be a long-term project. Durability is required if one is to engage with the spaced-out rhythms of the democratic cycle. To advance a political cause in this way, and to defend its achievements, requires patient efforts over a sustained period of time. The social movement, by contrast, can choose spontaneity over durability.

In this brief account of the specificity of partisanship, we have said nothing about the institutional and ethical *constraints* on it. It might be wondered whether these are not a necessary component of any normatively-aware conception of what partisanship is. It is sometimes observed, for instance, that the growing acceptance of party-based division in nineteenth-century societies, and thus the consolidation of party as a legitimate phenomenon, was closely linked to the emerging idea of loyal opposition.[74] One of the ways a party was said to express its commitment to the ideals of political justification was by respecting its political adversaries, above all (though not only) by agreeing to be bound by common procedures. Generalised consent to the existing institutional system amongst parties of government and opposition is widely regarded today as a necessary foundation of party

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[69] Cf. Chapter 6.

[70] Cf. Urbinati, Nadia (2006), *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogies* (Chicago: UCP), pp.36ff.

[71] On the latter: Schmitter, Philippe C. (1974) 'Still the Century of Corporatism?', *Review of Politics*, 36 (1), pp.85–131.

[72] Those holds true not just of social-movement activists (insofar as they are not also partisans) but independent intellectuals and scientific experts.

[73] Cf. Offe, Claus (1990), 'Reflections on the Institutional Self-transformation of Movement Politics: A Tentative Stage Model', in Russell J. Dalton and Manfred Kuechler (eds.), *Challenging the Political Order: New Social and Political Movements in Western Democracies* (Cambridge: Polity).

[74] Hofstadter, *Idea of a Party System*.

democracy. Following this line of thought, might one not regard it as definitional of the party, at least as a political ideal, that it is a group that 'plays by the rules'?[75]

While the concerns that suggest such a move are well grounded, one must resist evoking partisanship in this domesticated fashion. It is not just that, empirically, solid agreement on the so-called constitutional essentials is rarely manifest in party politics, that procedures are invariably politicised. More to the point is that playing by the rules is ultimately a situational virtue, dependent on the existence of structures that are relatively fair and stable over time. The concept of party cannot be limited to such situations: on the contrary, their absence may be one of its inspirations. Honouring the partisan claim to be acting on behalf of generalisable principles and aims will occasionally require *departing* from institutional arrangements as they are.[76] Protecting party-political pluralism itself will sometimes be one of the ends appropriately served by contesting existing structures.[77] The concept of partisanship must retain space for the extraordinary and the disruptive – for the logic of revolutionary action, and for action aimed at creating new institutions. What properly tempers partisanship is not the willingness to accept existing procedures, but the acceptance of the contestable character of the partisan claim, which any new institutional settlement should reflect.[78] It is this ethos, rather than a certain relation to existing institutions, that we wish to underline. The obvious risks that attend the politicisation of procedures are not sufficient to make consent to them a defining characteristic of partisanship.

Who is a Partisan?

Notwithstanding the important distinctions between party, interest group and social movement, it follows from our description that one can be a partisan even if one is not formally a member of a party organisation. At the core of the efforts of partisans is an organisation within which partisan practices find a peculiarly dense and coordinated form. Yet, as we have emphasised, partisanship as a practice need not always follow closely the contours of party membership: it may 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.[79] Partisanship, we suggest, is more than what party members do.

There are several reasons why it is important to understand partisanship in this larger sense. One is because the wider circle of partisans who lack formal ties to the group may still contribute much to its cause. This is most obviously true at the very beginning of its life: a

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[75] The possibility is suggested in Muirhead and Rosenblum's discussion of Rawls and the idea of 'quasi-great parties' (Muirhead, Russell and Nancy Rosenblum (2006), 'Political Liberalism vs. "The Great Game of Politics": The Politics of Political Liberalism', *Perspectives on Politics* 4 (1), pp.101-2); cf. Rosenblum, *On the Side of Angels*, chaps. 8 and 9.

[76] On some of the unexpected possibilities inherent in the concept of 'loyal opposition', see Waldron, Jeremy (2011), 'The Principle of Loyal Opposition', *NYU Public Law and Legal Theory Research Paper Series,* 12-22.

[77] Consider in this regard efforts in the UK to reform or abolish the House of Lords: amongst their rationales is the aim to make government more responsive to the public and to revitalise Westminster as a site of meaningful partisan debate.

[78] I.e. while the contestation of institutional procedures may sometimes be appropriate, the aim to produce new institutions insensitive to political contestation (e.g. authoritarian ones) is not. We return to this point in the discussion of transnational partisanship.

[79] See White, Jonathan and Lea Ypi (2011), 'On Partisan Political Justification', *American Political Science Review* 105 (2), pp.381-396; also Scarrow, *Beyond Party Members*. This less structured constellation resembles what von Mohl described as a 'grouping', i.e. a politically-focused collection of individuals that 'lacks defined organisation or boundaries' (von Mohl, 'Die Parteien im Staate').

party can only be founded by those who are not yet formally associated with one another and whose ties consist only in their commonality of purpose. Partisanship prefigures the party. The importance of non-members holds true also over the course of a party's development. Those thereby aligned with the partisan association are an important source of members-to-be. Not only may these sympathisers replenish the party at critical moments with those committed to its principles and aims, but the prospect of their joining in future gives members reason to maintain the party's ideational focus. As scholars of social movements have come to emphasise, these liminal relations between party members and partisan sympathisers are highly significant for preserving the political identity of both.[80]

Those beyond a party who consistently align with it may also help mediate between the party and the wider society. They influence the extent to which its projects are heard and sympathetically received. Indeed, the strength of their contribution may derive precisely from the fact they are *not* formally associated with the party. For much of the modern period, media organisations have had informal ties with parties whose cause they have helped advance exactly by being organisationally independent of them, and thus able to claim impartiality for their opinions. In the present period, a similar status is cultivated by think-tanks, blogs and other online forums.[81] Especially in an age of scepticism towards parties, these non-member partisans may carry a level of public authority that significantly augments a party's prospects of success and capacity to justify its cause.[82] Their interventions help shape the commonsense ideas that determine how far a party's proposals are socially resonant.[83]

The benefits and sacrifices associated with partisanship do not, in other words, map neatly onto the membership group. Individuals and groups may be the locus of partisanship, even without formal links to the party organisation.[84] This raises the possibility of relations of obligation between partisan members and non-members. By virtue of their shared commitments and coordinated efforts to advance them, partisans may be said to develop ethical ties, additional to whatever ties are associated with their background identity as citizens, nationals, and so forth. The party, one may say, is an *ethical* unity before it is an organisational one – though the two interrelate – and it is by appeal to such obligations that partisans may hope to remedy some of the empirical problems that come with organisation and the distribution of roles.[85] Ethical ties across the membership boundary also raise questions concerning partisanship's norms of publicity – the extent to which, for example, members and non-members have an obligation to the wider political community to declare their mutual allegiances. An adequate conception of partisanship must recognise, in other words, the full force, ethical and power-political, of the ties that link party members and their

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[80] See McAdam and Tarrow, 'Ballots and Barricades'.

[81] On the relation between party organisations and think-tanks, see Pautz, Hartwig (2012) *Think-Tanks, Social Democracy and Social Policy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); on partisanship and blogs, see Farrell, Henry, Eric Lawrence and John Sides (2010), 'Self-Segregation or Deliberation? Blog Readership, Participation, and Polarization in American Politics', *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (1), pp.141-57.

[82] On the importance of conservative media outlets in the US for the success of the Tea Party, see Skocpol, Theda and Vanessa Williamson (2013), *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford: OUP).

[83] On the use of a television persona to achieve this effect, see the reflections of the leader of *Podemos* (Iglesias, Pablo (2015), 'Understanding Podemos', *New Left Review* 93 (May / June)).

[84] The converse is also true: party membership is not sufficient to make a partisan. Members who cease to promote generalizable principles and aims, who are largely passive, or who act persistently at odds with the commitments of their party, fail to meet the description of a partisan.

[85] Cf. White, Jonathan (forthcoming), 'The Party in Time', *British Journal of Political Science*; also Chaps. 5 and 6 below. On the challenges of organization: Michels, Robert (1959 / 1915), *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Dover); Panebianco, Angelo (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (Cambridge: CUP).

sympathisers in view of their shared commitments. An exclusive focus on that part of the partisan association that is organised and legally recognised will miss much of what is politically consequential.

To insist on the significance of non-member partisans is not to suggest organisation and membership are inessential components of partisanship. A party, in contrast to a movement, is not well seen as a spontaneous order. The acts of coordination that produce it predictably require regulation by decision-making rules, coupled with boundaries to demarcate who is included and excluded. Although empirical researchers correctly identify the increasingly fuzzy and permeable boundaries of many contemporary political groups, and the rise of intermediary and less demanding forms of affiliation,[86] a normative conception of the party cannot embrace such tendencies indiscriminately. Ease of affiliation can dilute the commitments around which the party claims to unite, as well as the investment expected of members. Likewise, a party lacking regularised procedures is likely to be one more easily dominated by the few (this being one reason why parties in some jurisdictions are legally required to have a constitution). Partisan associative practices cannot be decoupled from the party as member-based organisation.

The point is rather that the two must be seen in conjunction. Partisanship needs an organised party at the centre of it, to give it shape, continuity and executive capacity, but at the same time the organisation draws strength from those who are more loosely aligned, yet who are considerably more engaged than mere 'supporters'. Just as activists need the enduring organisation of the party to be successful, members benefit from the *non-membership* of others allied to their cause, and each may develop obligations to the other. At the transnational level especially, as well as in extraordinary political moments, we may be interested in the interactions of those who do not share party membership, yet whose cooperation seems qualitatively different from a pact of expedience. Rather than question the value of membership and organisation, the point of an enlarged perspective is to appreciate the potency and indispensability of what non-members do, and how a party prospers when thus embedded in a more loosely structured community of partisans.

Conclusion

As this chapter has sought to show, something important is lost if the concept of party is approached in purely empirical fashion. Rather than build one's understanding solely by observing the kinds of political group that contest elections, one should approach it – as so many political concepts are approached – as a point of intersection between realworld practices and normative ideals. Concretely, this means renewing an emphasis on what is arguably the distinctive partisan stance: the claim to endorse principles and aims that are irreducible to the interest of a sectoral grouping, that are to be pursued in coordination with like-minded peers, and that depend on persuasion of others if they are to be successfully advanced.

One reason it matters to approach partisanship in this way is so that the failings of political groups as we encounter them are properly assessed. A conception of party that is normatively undemanding will lead either to an uncritical attitude towards parties as they exist, or to an unnuanced critique that tars some by association with others. In contemporary scholarship the latter especially is visible in the work of deliberative theorists who, certainly until recently, have tended to dismiss parties as the intrusion of private interest on public

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[86] Cf. Scarrow, *Beyond Party Members*, p.3, on 'multi-speed membership parties'; cf. Gauja, Anika (2015), 'The Construction of Party Membership', *European Journal of Political Research* 54 (2), pp.232–48.

reason. Where no distinction is made between party and interest group, the former will tend to be dismissed for the failings of the latter. Only if one reaffirms the distinctiveness of the partisan claim, even in circumstances where perhaps just a minority of existing political groups credibly advance it, will one have a feel for why parties were ever thought crucial to democracy.

There are also good empirical grounds for wanting a normatively demanding conception of party. It helps sensitise one to some of the less obvious reasons for which individuals may choose to associate with a party – reasons connected to the epistemic value of shared political commitments, and the motivational appeal of contributing to a long-lasting political project alongside a community of the like-minded.[87] It draws attention to the kinds of obligation that partisans may be said to incur, how they negotiate them, and the practical challenges they face in fulfilling them. It also puts focus on how choices concerning the structure of a party may give rise to particular kinds of grievance or disaffection. A normatively-aware conception of partisanship opens up further lines of empirical research in other words, and therefore holds relevance for the political science in this area.

The chapters that follow seek to flesh out further the points we have sketched. We look more closely at the ideas, orientations, obligations and practices constitutive of partisanship properly understood, and how these intersect with some core features of democratic life. Such an account should highlight in distinctive fashion why democracy needs its partisans, as well as put in relief some of the key trends of contemporary politics.

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[87] See chapters 4 and 6.

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