PARTISANSHIP AND POLITICAL LIBERALISM:
FURTHER THOUGHTS ON PUBLIC REASON, POLITICAL OBLIGATION, AND DEMOCRATIC LINKAGE

BY

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Partisanship and Political Liberalism:
Further Thoughts on Public Reason, Political Obligation and Democratic Linkage

Matteo Bonotti

I am extremely grateful to the contributors to this symposium for their thoughtful commentaries on my book *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*. In this paper, I provide a critical reflection on the issues they raise with regard to some of the key aspects of my analysis, focusing especially on political obligation, public reason and democratic linkage.

Response to Enrico Biale

In his attentive commentary, Enrico Biale advances two key criticisms against my account of parties and partisanship. First, my account undermines pluralism and excludes radical perspectives such as progressivism and libertarianism. Second, it neglects the agonistic dimension of politics. I will consider them in turn.

According to Biale, "[my] perspective entails a problematic understanding of parties and partisanship that limits political

pluralism and curtails democratic conflict" since "the Rawlsian framework represents only one possible interpretation of the ideals [of freedom and equality] and not necessarily the most inclusive one" (Biale 2021, 20). For example, Biale argues, political liberalism excludes progressivism – which challenges asymmetries of power and advances egalitarian goals – and libertarianism – which assigns priority to self-ownership and economic freedoms, and challenges distributive policies. I would like to contest this conclusion.

First of all, Biale's line of argument seems to presuppose that political liberalism entails a specific and narrow understanding of distributive justice, i.e. the one presented and defended by Rawls (1999a) in *A Theory of Justice*. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Bonotti 2019), this assumption should be challenged. It is plausible to argue that the fact of reasonable pluralism and the burdens of judgment concern not only the kinds of religious and ethical comprehensive doctrines often central to debates on political liberalism and public reason but also views about socio-economic justice. While Rawls never developed his political liberalism in this direction, he does acknowledge that in diverse liberal democratic societies, principles of social and economic justice should not be entrenched in a constitution and thus insulated from democratic debate, since people tend to disagree about them more than they do about basic rights and liberties such as religious liberty, free speech or freedom of association (Rawls 2005, 230). In my book (Ch. 3), I draw on this point to argue that Rawls's political liberalism allows much more scope for democratic contestation on these issues that many critics of political liberalism might often assume. This democratic contestation will include, among others, libertarian views that emphasize the importance of classical liberal property rights (e.g. Tomasi 2012) and progressive views that defend the idea of social rights (e.g. Fabre 2000). These views interpret and rank shared political values such as freedom and equality in different ways which, however, can be potentially

consistent with the accessibility view of public reason that I embrace in my book (Bonotti 2019, 499). For this to be possible, however, and contrary to what authors such as Tomasi and Fabre argue, none of these rights should be constitutionalized and insulated from the democratic contestation of which parties are key agents, precisely because, as Rawls himself observes, there is significant disagreement about these issues. Entrenching these rights in constitutional charters would entail neglecting those political values (e.g. other rights and liberties) that are not granted constitutional protection, thus resulting in an unreasonable balance of political values that contravenes the demands of public reason (Quong 2011, 207).

Furthermore, Biale's critique overlooks an important aspect which perhaps I do not sufficiently stress in my book. The political liberal framework in which parties, in my idealized account, operate, is one that corresponds to what Rawls calls "a well-ordered constitutional democratic society" (1999b, 573), i.e. a society in which all citizens endorse and are willing to comply with the same liberal democratic principles of justice, which are reflected in basic social institutions. Yet, most if not all real-world societies are far from matching that ideal. In these societies it is possible, in fact it may often be desirable and necessary, for parties to advance political agendas that will facilitate a transition towards a well-ordered political order. This will allow scope for progressive parties that challenge power asymmetries and socio-economic injustice.

The second main criticism raised by Biale against my account concerns my alleged lack of focus on the antagonistic dimension of partisan politics. According to Biale,

> [t]he adversarial process that characterises interpartisan relationships aims not at analysing and revising political proposals in order to identify the best alternative according to some standard of correctness that is external to the preferences of citizens but at winning the argumentative struggle and defending the partisan viewpoint to which someone is committed. This form of partisan antagonism does not simply require that partisans support a certain perspective but that they limit the alternative perspective that is incompatible with theirs. Within this context, partisans aim at defining a language or values that constitute the common ground on which citizens develop the arguments that are most favourable to the values to which the partisans are committed (Biale 2021, 23).

In order to accommodate partisan antagonism, Biale (*ibid.*, 24) suggests expanding and modifying the political liberal framework central to my book based on three criteria: a) "justifiable antagonism" (advancing policy proposals grounded in a distinctive partisan horizon); b) "democratic loyalty" (a commitment to democratic institutions and ideals); and c) "intellectual honesty" (accepting that one's perspective is not the only one, while remaining epistemically partial). I do not have any objections to b) and c). Democratic loyalty is clearly central to political liberalism and to the idea of respecting other citizens as free and equal. And so is intellectual honesty. Indeed accepting that one's perspective is not the only one is central to the Rawlsian idea of reasonableness: in order to be reasonable, we need to accept the "burdens of judgment", i.e. "the many hazards involved in the correct (and conscientious) exercise of our powers of reason and judgment in the ordinary course of political life" (Rawls 2005, 56). Empirical evidence is often complex and can be interpreted in different ways, and people assign different weight to considerations concerning empirical and moral matters. This is particularly clear when it

comes to moral, social and political issues: even when we agree on the importance of certain values, principles and political goals, we may disagree regarding which of them should be prioritized. But the burdens of judgment also affect the way in which people evaluate scientific evidence (Badano & Bonotti 2020; Barnhill & Bonotti 2022). Hence we often witness disagreement on scientific matters not only among citizens in general but also among members of the scientific community. As long as that disagreement is a genuine result of the burdens of judgment rather than of flawed methods or "gross epistemic error" (Vallier 2014, 106), being epistemically partial – e.g. being committed to a certain interpretation of evidence – is not in tension with political liberalism. For these reasons, I also do not have any objections to Biale's point that "[p]artisanship entails an adversarial relationship that does not require to assign the same value to every proposal" (Biale 2021, 22). It is precisely because partisans committed to political liberalism acknowledge the burdens of judgment that they can assign different weight to different empirical and moral considerations, and compete in the political arena in order to advance their preferred evaluation of those considerations in an adversarial way.

But what about justifiable antagonism? Does this criterion signal a departure from the political liberal framework central to my account of partisanship? According to Biale, partisans should not act as "detached deliberators" (*ibid.*, 25). Instead, they may embrace "a partisan interpretation of the common good" (*ibid.*) which is responsive to certain citizens' interests and values. This is not in principle incompatible with my account of partisanship, and with political liberalism more generally. In fact, according to Rawls himself, and as I point out in my book (Bonotti 2017, 117), in order to achieve "full" (rather than "pro tanto") justification, it is necessary that public reasons in support of policies are also related to the diverse comprehensive doctrines that citizens endorse

(Rawls 2005), thus de facto introducing a convergence conception of public reason into Rawls's consensus approach (Vallier 2014, 131). And this is of course crucial for partisans' responsiveness to their constituents (what I refer to as "vertical accountability" in my book – Bonotti 2017, 133-138). However, to the extent that Biale considers justifiable antagonism sufficient for public justification, then his account inevitably departs from mine. In the absence of any shared grounds for public justification across the partisan spectrum, it seems that we are left with a convergence account of public reason which risks exacerbating factionalism (*ibid.*, 116-117) and may potentially lead to state inaction if the partial reasons advanced by different parties (especially those in opposition) can defeat the justification for policies (Vallier 2016, 603; Vallier 2019, 114).

Response to Giulia Bistagnino

Giulia Bistagnino's insightful contribution to this symposium focuses on the accessibility conception of public reason central to my account of partisanship, and particularly on the role of science and scientific claims in party politics. Bistagnino rightly observes that "accessibility seems particularly well-suited to shape an ideal of partisanship in line with the demands of political liberalism for it grants a certain common – in this case epistemic – grounding, while at the same time allowing for disagreement and pluralism with respect to policies and proposals" (Bistagnino 2021, 39). However, she notes, a commitment to accessibility may also have some unwelcome consequences. More specifically, Bistagnino points out, since accessibility is grounded in shared evaluative standards that "enjoy intersubjective recognition" (Vallier 2014, p. 108), scientific evaluative standards can only provide the basis for accessible reasons if they do enjoy that kind of recognition—something that we cannot take for granted. In fact, Bistagnino

adds, it is not even clear from my account (as well as from Rawls's work) what the criterion for considering scientific evaluative standards (or any evaluative standards more generally) the object of intersubjective recognition should be. For example, she argues, a simple majority criterion, by which an evaluative standard is shared if recognized by 51% of citizens, "would not only be extremely difficult to assess, but also contrary to the spirit of accessibility" (Bistagnino 2021, 40-41). The lack of a clear criterion for establishing whether evaluative standards are shared (and, therefore, whether accessible reasons grounded in those shared standards are possible), Bistagnino argues, can pose significant problems with regard to concrete policy issues such as vaccination policy. According to Bistagnino,

> [a]lthough anti-vaccination supporters are a minority of the population in many countries, the number of individuals who hesitate and reject vaccination does not seem so small to not at least pose a threat to the accessibility of scientific evaluative standards that are at the heart of vaccination policies. Indeed, in addition to disagreement on what course of action should be taken with respect to compulsory vaccination because of different ethical theories, laypeople do find the scientific arguments grounding the safety of vaccines not accessible and controversial (Bistagnino 2021, 41-42).

I believe that this important statement needs to be unpacked and analysed, especially in order to explain what "not accessible and controversial" means in this context. As Anne Barnhill and I (2022, ch. 6) have argued elsewhere, scientific positions (and, by extent, citizens' views regarding scientific matters) could be categorized in the following ways.

In the first instance, there are majority scientific views, i.e. views that are grounded in shared evaluative standards (the standards of science), are not the result of gross epistemic errors, and are endorsed by the majority in the scientific community. A second category consists of minority scientific views. These views also rely on shared evaluative standards, do not involve any gross epistemic errors, but are only endorsed by a minority within the scientific community. The distinction between majority and minority scientific views can be ultimately traced back to the burdens of judgment: people (including scientists) start from the same premises but reach different conclusions due to the different weight they assign to evidence. A third type of scientific positions, Barnhill and I argue, involves "bad science." Bad science is grounded in shared scientific evaluative standards but, due to gross epistemic errors, it results in incorrect conclusions.

None of these three kinds of scientific positions challenges accessibility since they all recognize the presence of shared evaluative standards (the standards of science). Therefore, even if anti-vaccination positions, as many would argue, are an instance of bad science resulting from gross epistemic error (and cannot therefore be legitimately used to ground public policy), this does not undermine the accessibility of science-based policy, since those endorsing such positions still recognize (while misusing) the evaluative standards of science.

The problem highlighted by Bistagnino only arises when we consider a fourth kind of position, what Barnhill and I call "pseudo-science." Those who defend pseudo-scientific positions rely on evaluative standards that are different from those of science, and indeed some anti-vaccination positions are grounded precisely in these kinds of perspectives (Hornsey et al. 2018). To the extent that defenders of pseudo-science reject the evaluative standards of science, then the question arises of whether those

standards enjoy sufficiently widespread support to provide the basis for accessible reasons, e.g. reasons in support of vaccination policy.

The foregoing analysis does not aim to dismiss Bistagnino's criticism. It simply intends to show that we cannot simply assume that certain policy positions (e.g. anti-vaccination) undermine the accessibility of science-based policy, since sometimes these positions may still presuppose acceptance of scientific evaluative standards.

This still leaves the question of whether and how we can salvage the use of scientific reasons in party politics when the evaluative standards of science are not widely shared, as when pseudo-scientific anti-vaccination positions enjoy significant support in a society. Bistagnino suggests four potential strategies. First, she argues, we could assume that citizens generally believe in science and the scientific method. However, Bistagnino points out, the growing presence of people endorsing conspiracy views – another instance of pseudo-science – in contemporary liberal democratic societies seems to challenge this position. Alternatively, we could accept that scientific evaluative standards are only shared if they enjoy widespread acceptance, and that if/when this is not (or no longer) the case, they cease to provide grounds for accessible public reasons. This, according to Bistagnino, would have the undesirable consequence of rendering parties that advance science-based scientific proposals alike to factions, since the reasons they use in support of those proposals will not be based on evaluative standards that all/most of their fellow citizens share. Bistagnino also reject the idea of "in principle accessibility" (Badano & Bonotti 2020, 54-56), arguing that it relies on a comprehensive philosophical conception of what science is.

I would like to set these strategies aside and focus on a fourth and final one suggested by Bistagnino. This strategy, Bistagnino,

argues, is centred around the epistemic and educational role of parties (White and Ypi 2016, pp. 90-3), which could involve "systemizing and spreading not only political, but also scientific knowledge" (Bistagnino 2011, 45-46). Yet Bistagnino finds this strategy problematic too, since parties' promotion of a scientific mindset, she argues, would constitute a form of "epistemic perfectionism" (Talisse 2008) inconsistent with political liberalism. However, I am not convinced by this conclusion. Parties do not necessarily need to promote some form of epistemic perfectionism in order to contribute to widespread knowledge and acceptance of science's evaluative standards.

To understand why, let's consider a point that has been neglected so far. It is one thing to argue that in certain policy areas – e.g. vaccination policy – many citizens defend views that reject the evaluative standards of science. It is another to claim that those standards are rejected across the policy spectrum. It is likely that many of those who defend anti-vaccination positions based on conspiracy theories, for example, still accept the value of science when it comes to, say, energy policy or even other aspects of public health (e.g. cancer treatment). It may often be the case that the rejection of scientific standards in certain policy areas is driven by other factors, e.g. personal or ethical views which somehow "colour" people's evaluation of scientific standards in those areas but leave their acceptance of those standards untouched with regard to other policy areas. If this is the case, parties that advance science-based policies will only be alike to factions with regard to specific policy areas, i.e. those in which there is significant rejection of scientific evaluative standards among citizens. In such cases, parties can play a key role in persuading citizens to embrace those standards. Since public reason is not static (Flanders 2012), parties (and social movements more generally) can be key agents of public reason change (Bonotti 2017, 135-136). Parties that advance science-based policies can therefore mobilize their resources in

order to persuade citizens to endorse the evaluative standards of science. In doing so, parties can leverage their distinctive multi-issue platforms, which distinguish them from most other civil society associations. For example, partisans can use rhetorical devices (cf. Badano & Nuti 2018) during electoral campaigns and public debates in order to show those citizens who reject the evaluative standards of science in areas x and y of their platform (e.g. vaccination policy and climate change) that they do endorse those standards in other areas also considered in their platform, and that therefore their views are internally inconsistent. Or they can expose gross epistemic errors in the way those citizens (and parties that represent them) use science's evaluative standards, thus showing that those standards are de facto accepted by them. In other words, we should not consider party platforms as homogeneous policy blocks whose components may be equally threatened by bad or pseudo-science. Perhaps very few people reject science tout court, i.e. across the policy spectrum. Parties can exploit this situation in order to ensure that the evaluative standards of science become widely endorsed across all policy areas when they are not already. This would not be a form of epistemic perfectionism as it would rely on what citizens already believe with regard to other policy areas.

Response to Chiara Destri

In her thoughtful analysis of my book, Chiara Destri argues that my account of public reason is very demanding for partisans, even more demanding than Rawls's. After initially suggesting that partisans in my account cannot benefit from the wide view of public reason, Destri recognizes that the division of justificatory labour between elected and non-elected partisans that I defend does help at least some partisans to benefit from the wide view, via vertical accountability and interaction with constituents. While that

is correct, I would also like to stress that elected partisans can also benefit from the wide view during the process of horizontal accountability. For example, when defending a policy in parliament, partisans can appeal to comprehensive doctrines as long as in due course they also provide public reasons. The main difference between them and non-elected partisans is therefore that while both categories of partisans can benefit from the wide view, non-elected partisans do not need to fulfil the Rawlsian proviso when engaging in the process of vertical accountability.

But Destri also raises another issue regarding my account. More precisely, she argues,

> while such a division of labour helps us draw a line between elected and nonelected partisans, it does not help clarifying what Bonotti means by "constituents." If by constituents he means any person who could possibly vote for the party, this explicitly contradicts the requirements [to comply with public reason] he mentions in chapter 4 and opens the possibility for partisan, widely intended, to speak their mind without following public reason constraints (at least in conversations with friends and relatives). If, on the other hand, by constituents he means people who usually vote for a certain party, then the line between constituent and partisan as party sympathizer (Bonotti 2017, 67, 73) becomes much more blurred. Accordingly, partisans would be justified in exchanging reasons based on their comprehensive doctrines only between themselves, but never with citizens who are not already known to be party supporters (Destri 2021, 60).

I do not find this conclusion entirely persuasive. For a start, the fact that all partisans have an intrinsic duty to comply with public reason is not necessarily in tension with the rest of my account. The main purpose of my analysis of partisanship and political

liberalism is precisely to articulate what partisans' fulfilment of the duty of civility requires, moving beyond the simplistic dichotomy compliance/non-compliance. Furthermore, since I endorse an indirect approach to public reason, in which the main goal is to ensure that laws and policies are publicly justified, rather than compelling every individual citizen or partisan to comply with public reason (Bonotti 2017, 124), my account creates a space for the use of non-public reason among partisans and between partisans and constituents. Hence, whether by constituents we intend any potential voters or those who already vote for a party, the substance of my argument does not change. Ultimately, it is up to elected partisans to comply with public reason. Deliberation among non-elected partisans within parties, and between partisans and non-partisan constituents (however the latter are defined), can be conducted based on non-public reasons.

A second issue highlighted by Destri concerns the fact that my account of partisanship only applies to well-ordered societies. This, she argues, might have two puzzling implications. First, "[in] societies [that] share illiberal evaluative standards, this entails the somehow odd consequence that a liberal party campaigning for freedom and equality…would count as a faction exactly because this party would not provide reasons based on the illiberal political culture of its society" (Destri 2012, 63). However, as Flanders (2012) points out, and as I also stress in my book (135) and elsewhere in this paper, public reason is historical and mutable and its vocabulary, so to speak, may change over time. Parties, and social movements more generally, can play a key role in this process of change. This does not entail that parties employing reasons that are not widely shared (or accessible) in their society do not display factional features based on the political culture of the country in which they operate. But it does imply that such parties can, so to speak, "de-factionalize" over time, if they are able to change the terms of public reason in their society.

Furthermore, Destri points out that based on my account of partisanship and public reason, "a perfectionist party in a well-ordered society would also count as a faction…even if it addressed all citizens with its proposals, in order to convince them of the desirability of its claims, and even if these proposals were more than a mere collection of sectorial interests" (Destri 2021, 65). I am not convinced by this conclusion. As I argue (for example in Bonotti 2017, 88-89), many of the proposals advanced by Green parties in Europe a few decades ago would have probably been considered perfectionist and controversial. Yet, these parties managed to gradually change and enrich the terms of public reason, by rendering concepts like "sustainability" broadly endorsed (White & Ypi 2011, 390) and de-factionalizing their political agendas. As in the case of liberal parties in illiberal societies, we encounter again the mutability of public reason, a process to which parties (including perfectionist parties) can make a key contribution. Therefore, in both cases, and contrary to what Destri argues (Destri 2021, 64), "the transformative potential of partisan agency" is not jeopardized. And to the extent that parties fail to produce this change, then they may indeed be alike to factions. But it is important to stress that between pure idealized parties and pure idealized factions there is a spectrum of possibilities, and that real-world parties may sit more or less close to either end of the spectrum, depending on how strong and diffuse across their political platform their failure to comply with the public reason of their society is.

Response to Steven Wall

In his rich and engaging contribution to this symposium, Steven Wall offers an account that aims to expand the scope of political partisanship beyond the boundaries present in my analysis. Wall especially focuses on the fact that, due to the burdens of judgement

and the fact of reasonable pluralism, citizens may disagree regarding which conceptions are included in the family of reasonable political liberal conceptions of justice. When two groups of partisans, Wall argues, display this kind of disagreement, this does not undermine political liberalism. In his view,

> [t]here is a difference between thinking that one's opponents are mistaken, and thinking that they are not fighting fair, or acting in bad faith. Since the first group of partisans in our example accept the burdens of judgment, they should be open to the possibility that the second group is making a reasonable mistake, and not furtively rejecting the political liberal project. Correspondingly, the second group should be open to the possibility that the first group of partisans are making a reasonable mistake in excluding PL4 from the family of reasonable conceptions of political justice (Wall 2021, 82).

I do not object to this conclusion. But I believe that what appears to be a disagreement about the family of reasonable conceptions of justice normally presupposes agreement on shared fundamental political values, based on the accessibility conception of public reason that I defend. That family contains a broad variety of political conceptions of justice, depending on how shared political values are combined and prioritized by different people. To understand this, consider Jonathan Quong's (2011, 205) example of Tony and Sara, two members of the public who are debating whether the Catholic Church should be legally compelled to hire female priests. Tony appeals to the value of religious liberty to justify the Church's right to only employ male priests, while Sara appeals to the values of gender equality and non-discrimination to justify the view that the Church should be obliged to hire female priests. Since both religious liberty, on the one hand, and gender

equality and non-discrimination, on the other hand, are widely shared political values in liberal democratic societies, and assuming that Tony and Sara are committed to both of sets of values (even though they assign different weight to them in their reasoning, and even if each of them believes that the other is mistaken in doing so), then they are both providing accessible reasons for the policies they defend. In this sense, an accessible reason must provide a "plausible [or reasonable] balance of political values… [i.e. it must recognize] that there are multiple political values at stake, and [offer] a plausible explanation as to why one public value ought to be prioritized over the other in cases of this kind" (Quong 2011, p. 209). It is likely that both Tony and Sara endorse comprehensive doctrines that influence the way in which they weigh the shared political values at stake. But while each of them may think that the other is mistaken, they both recognize that their views belong to the family of political conceptions of justice. I believe that the pluralism of political conceptions of justice resulting from the different ways in which citizens weigh shared political values is central to party politics and partisan divisions in contemporary liberal democracies.

Despite my doubts concerning Wall's argument, I find one of the implications of his analysis very interesting. According to him, sometimes we must be content with what he refers to as "Tier-2 legitimacy." This kind of legitimacy "does not require partisans to agree on the criteria of liberal legitimacy for matters of basic justice in a political liberal order. But it does require agreement on the presumptive authority of the order itself. It requires something akin to what Rawls had in mind when discussing a constitutional consensus" (Wall 2021, 87). As a result, Wall argues, we should not think of public justification as uniform across the party system. Instead, he claims,

[r]ecognizing the futility of efforts to secure public agreement on a family of acceptable conceptions of political justice, and the consequent futility of efforts to publicly justify all matters relevant to public justification in their society, partisans might aspire to achieve broad-based, rather than full, public justification for their proposals. This would complicate the horizontal responsibilities of partisans. They would now need to distinguish those partisans who were potential partners, as it were, and with whom they would aspire to reach mutual justification on their proposals [Tier-1 legitimacy], from other partisans, who while remaining political liberal citizens in good standing in their eyes, would not be potential partners. The responsibilities owed to the former group would mirror the horizontal responsibilities Bonotti highlights, but the responsibilities toward the latter would differ. With these latter groups, the partisan responsibilities would encompass fostering and maintaining trust among them, and efforts to reassure them that they are not viewed as unreasonable members of the society despite their reasonable disagreement over the boundaries of political liberalism [Tier-2 legitimacy] (Wall 2021, 88).

While I reject Wall's sharp distinction between Tier-1 and Tier-2 legitimacy, I agree that a more nuanced account of the horizontal relationship between parties across the political spectrum would enrich my account of partisanship and political liberalism. What would distinguish close from distant parties in this more nuanced account, however, would not be the type of legitimacy that characterizes their relationship but, based on the accessibility conception of public reason, the way in which different parties interpret and weigh shared political values. While distant parties and partisans may interpret and weigh those values in different ways, close parties and partisans (e.g. those that participate in coalition governments) are likely to endorse more similar interpretations of them and weigh them in similar ways.

Acknowledging these differences could help to develop a more refined account of partisanship and political liberalism within the boundaries of an accessibility conception of public reason.

Response to Fabian Wendt

In his insightful commentary, Fabian Wendt focuses on my account of partisan political obligations. According to him, neither of my main arguments for partisan political obligations – based, respectively, on consent and fairness – is particularly persuasive.

When it comes to consent, Wendt argues, it is difficult to understand what (if anything) exactly one (expressly or tacitly) consents to when they decide to join a political party. "The problem," he argues, "is that the notion of partisanship is fuzzy and vague not just because formal party members, activists and supporters are partisans to different degrees and in different ways, but also because different formal party members are partisans to different degrees and in different ways" (Wendt 2001, 94). I am happy to accept this criticism, since I believe that the consent argument, as I also state in my book (Bonotti 2017, 14), does not provide a comprehensive justification for partisan political obligations.

But what about my fairness-based account of partisan political obligations? For a start, Wendt argues, it is not clear that party politics (like a football match) is a "cooperative venture", since "[t]he players in the football match as well as partisans in a party system at best produce some benefits as a *side effect* of what they're doing. They do not do what they do in order to produce the benefits" (Wendt 2021, 96-97). However, I am not convinced by this observation. I believe that parties do not only aim to win elections but also (at least to some extent) to produce good governance for the whole political community. Compare, for

instance, the rhetoric of politicians with that of footballers. The former, of course, ask citizens to vote for them but, in doing so, they normally also explain in what ways their (and their party's) proposed policies will benefit the whole community. That benefit is not simply a side effect of their actions but one of their key goals. Footballers, instead, only aim to win games and trophies, and the fact that a good game of football may result from two teams' self-interested endeavours – something that neutral observers, as well as supporters of both teams, are likely to appreciate – is indeed a mere side effect of what they are doing.

But even if we assume that party politics is a cooperative venture, Wendt argues, this is still not sufficient to show that partisans have fairness-based political obligations, since partisans (and, more generally, all citizens) already have a natural duty to comply with liberal democratic values and institutions and refrain from using violence. As I explain elsewhere in the chapter, however, this does not necessarily undermine my argument. If Wendt is correct, then that still leaves open the possibility that partisans have further (fairness-based) political obligations in addition to the natural duty-based obligations that all citizens already have. Wendt does consider this possibility but rejects it, arguing that "one's duties in general – the duty not to kill other people – are not altered (made more stringent or intense or continuous) when natural duties get accompanied by voluntarily incurred [or fairness-based] duties of the same content" (Wendt 2021, 99). But laws against murders are not the only laws partisans have to comply with in order for the cooperative venture of party politics to work and produce its benefits. Partisans also have to comply with more specific laws which are distinctive of their polity. And the natural duty argument, as some have pointed out, does not seem to be capable of justifying these distinctive obligations (e.g. see Simmons 1979, 2005). If that is the case, then fairness-

based partisan political obligations are no longer redundant, contrary to what Wendt seems to suggest.

Wendt also observes that sometimes the benefits I ascribe to party politics – e.g. the greater visibility and influence that some partisans (e.g. party leaders) enjoy – are private rather than public. According to him, these kinds of benefits are "not the result of party politics understood as a cooperative venture that is beneficial because parties bundle societal demands into platforms and help to organize democratic decision-making" (Wendt 2021, 100) and do not depend on other partisans restraining themselves but rather on other factors such as a partisan's rhetorical abilities, intra-party dynamics, etc. I would like to reject this conclusion. While these other factors are of course also relevant, their ability to produce partisans' "private" benefits depend on the presence of a functioning democratic system, a public good which does rely on all partisans' restraint. And, as Rawls (1999a, 302-303) also argues, this intuitively seems to generate stronger political obligations for those who benefit more than others from this public good.

Relatedly, I would also like to resist Wendt's conclusion that "[my] reply to Simmons's objection does not succeed…[because]…[t]he good of living in a working democracy, to which political parties contribute, is non-excludable; no one can willingly accept or refuse the good of living in functioning democracy, and this is why fairness considerations do not arise" (Wendt 2021, 101). One answer to this question could be that goods need not be excludable in order to generate fairness-based political obligations, if they are "presumptively beneficial" (Klosko 2004, 39) or "indispensable for satisfactory lives" (Klosko 2005, 6) – and a working democracy seem to fit these criteria, especially when it comes to partisans, at least in liberal democratic societies. But even if one rejects this conclusion and argues that excludability still matters, it is not clear that the implications are similar for

ordinary citizens and partisans. While we cannot tell whether ordinary citizens accept or refuse the benefit of a working democracy, this it is not true about partisans. By voluntarily deciding to engage in party politics, and often enjoying benefits that are even more distinctive and significant than those a working democracy provides ordinary citizen with, partisans proactively accept the good of living in a working democracy. The fact that they may not be able to reject that good no longer matters since (unlike most ordinary citizens) they have proactively accepted it, and this generates fairness-based political obligations for them.

Response to Fabio Wolkenstein

In his thoughtful analysis of my book, Fabio Wolkenstein takes issue with my account of parties and partisanship which, he argues, is overly idealized and pays little attention to the empirical reality of party politics, and especially to how party politics has changed in liberal democracies over the past few decades. Wolkenstein especially highlights how contemporary party leaders, thanks to traditional and social media, have gradually become capable of communicating directly with citizens via what Nadia Urbinati calls "direct representative democracy" (Urbinati 2015, 480), thus rendering the mediating linkage function of parties increasingly obsolete. "We can safely conclude from examining these arguments," Wolkenstein argues, "that PPL [*Partisanship and Political Liberalism*] is operating with an ideal of socially rooted parties that is dramatically out of sync with the organisational reality of contemporary party democracy" (Wolkenstein 2021, 116).

I would like to resist Wolkenstein's conclusion, also in view of his own extensive and groundbreaking work on party linkage and intra-party deliberation. As Wolkenstein argues in one of his

several works on this topic, parties, including local party branches, can still be viewed as key institutional channels that can connect citizens with government, especially if rendered more internally deliberative. For example, Wolkenstein argues,

> In the deliberative model…the emphasis is not only on channelling the inputs of citizens into the party, but also, and more strongly so, on processing these inputs discursively by pooling relevant arguments and specifying interpretations in discussions and debates. Thus party members are not merely messengers, but deliberative agents who jointly subject the information provided by citizens to critical scrutiny (Wolkenstein 2016, 303).

Intra-party deliberation, Wolkenstein argues, must start at the grassroots level, and specifically within party branches, since these are the only sites which "are closely linked to the local communities in which their members are based. They are directly in touch with the local constituency, and have the authority to delegate representatives to hierarchically higher party bodies to make local concerns heard…[as well as being]…'natural' deliberative fora" (Wolkenstein 2016, 303).

The picture of parties and party politics that emerges from these and other similar analyses provided by Wolkenstein in his work seems to bear little resemblance with the kind of "direct representative democracy" that he argues my account of partisanship neglects. On the contrary, it seems to rely on a similar assumption: that parties still present organizational structures which offer key sites for communication and interaction between party leaders, members and citizens. True, the linkage role of parties may have weakened over the past few decades and there is much scope for improvement – e.g. via intra-party democratic and

deliberative reforms, as Wolkenstein himself has extensively argued. Indeed, the task of normative political theorists is not to develop normative arguments that simply reflect and legitimize empirical facts and processes. Instead, it is to explain whether, why and how certain empirical trends and processes ought to be countered. This is what Wolkenstein has extensively done in his work on intra-party deliberation and party linkage, and this is what I have aimed to do in my work on parties, partisanship and public reason.

In sum, while it is undeniable that something like "direct representative democracy" has become a more prominent feature of contemporary liberal democracies, we should not assume that the traditional organization and functions of parties have disappeared. And it is precisely this organization and functions that provide the framework within which the kind of partisan public reasoning that I defend in my book can play an important role.

Wolkenstein's second main criticism of my account of partisanship concerns the relationship between parties' "discursive" and "organizational" ideals (Wolkenstein 2021, 109). He rightly points out that, in my analysis, the vertical two-way relationship between citizens and partisans is important for parties' ability to justify their policies based on public reasons. And I do not object to the idea that where this vertical linkage has weakened, it should be restored or strengthened. But, Wolkenstein argues, this may result in a paradox for my account since "[t]rying to re-anchor parties in the background culture of society in order to make sure that they do not violate public reason norms might in practice unleash forces that eventually come to violate public reason norms because they demand an altogether different society" (*ibid.*, 120). I believe that this point neglects a very important aspect of my account. Public reason is not static, it can change (Flanders 2012). And, as I emphasize in my analysis (Bonotti 2017, 135-136), parties

(like social movements) can be key agents of public reason change. This is where parties' organizational and discursive ideals meet, so to speak. Not only is parties' vertical communication with citizens crucial for helping them relate their comprehensive doctrines to public reason. It can also help (re)define public reason itself, e.g. by introducing new shared political values or new interpretations of existing ones.

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