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N.L. Rosenblum: On the Side of the Angels

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INTRODUCTION

An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship

Antipartyism and its partner in negativity, antipartisanship, have a distinguished, even brilliant pedigree. *On the Side of the Angels* is my assessment of antipartyism, designed to map the field, to facilitate comparison among enduring aversions to political parties, to see whether contemporary antiparty thinkers echo orthodox arguments or are creative in their loathing. The materials I draw on to represent antipartyism are scholarly and literary, with added dollops of political commentary. From the furious railings of what I call the “glorious traditions of antipartyism” before democracy to the “post-party depression” that stretches to the present and shows few signs of lifting, antipartyism is one subject where the usual chasm between philosophy and common understanding is shrunk, closed really. I expect that my readers share the aversions I record, are frustrated with parties in practice, are quick to express antipathy, or are confirmed in their indifference. It is likely that any acceptance of parties is pragmatic, unexuberant, unphilosophical, grudging. I expect readers to be skeptical of a sympathetic theory of parties.

Yet that is my challenge: to rehabilitate parties and partisanship in readers’ minds. From the long history of antipartyism, I retrieve rare moments of appreciation. I also propose my own. Parties are truly “the orphans of political philosophy,”¹ and I show why democratic theorists should adopt them and take them in. Rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

of parties in practice is another matter, deserving of whatever scrap of utopianism is in us.

Disregard: The Bad Attitude of Contemporary Political Theory

Parties and partisanship are indisputably orphans of political philosophy. The list of advocates of parties and partisanship in contemporary political theory is spare. The classic work on the concept of representation, for example, pays them scant attention.² When they address the subject at all, political theorists reproduce the antiparty temper that dominates the history of political thought. In democratic theory today, parties either are the object of reflexive antipathy or suffer utter disregard.

It is hardly surprising that *philosophers* derogate partisanship. Whether their aspirational perspective is subversive Socratic questioning or Humean impartiality, a transcendent “view from nowhere” or stringent “public reason,” it is the antithesis of a partisan perspective. That is expected. More remarkable is that contemporary democratic theorists who describe their work as “nonideal theory” have little to say. Democratic theorists refer to parties rarely or accusingly in passing. The problem is not that democratic theorists are inattentive to institutions generally. On the contrary, their interests extend to just about every institution for participation, representation, decision making, and political education *except* parties. Here is a brief rundown of the true objects of political theorists’ affections: advocacy groups (self-styled public interest groups chief among them) and social movements; direct democratic institutions such as referenda, and experiments such as “citizen juries” and “deliberative polls.” Theorists of multiculturalism and the “politics of difference” value self-organized identity groups and arrangements for guaranteed representation.³ Democratic theorists of almost every stripe look to the associations of civil society to cultivate civic virtue and political engagement, and affirm that hope for democracy rests on “exploring the unrealized possibilities in . . . institutions such as schools, workplaces, churches and synagogues, trade unions and social movements.”⁴ The exclusion of parties from

INTRODUCTION

exhaustive catalogues of the associations of civil society is particularly curious, given the foundational concern with mediating institutions that bridge society and government. Finally, for stern proponents of deliberative democracy for whom overcoming disagreement is a regulative ideal, partisanship is anathema. Even those who do not aim at consensus would assign disciplined deliberation a place of its own, removed from conventional political arenas, elections, and parties, such as specially created “mini-publics” with participants chosen to represent “lay citizens and nonpartisans.”⁵ It would be too harsh to cast these dominant strains of democratic theory as antipolitical, but contemporary theorists write—sometimes expressly—as if democracy could and should do without parties and partisanship.

If parties are the orphans of political philosophy, they are the darlings of political science. They are built into the standard definition of democratic government as “one chosen periodically by means of popular elections in which two or more parties compete for the votes of all adults.”⁶ The touchstone of governments that call themselves democratic is frequent and fair elections, made meaningful by party competition.⁷ Political science puts parties at the core of its signature preoccupation with voting and elections. Democracy is “unthinkable save in terms of parties,”⁸ and “democratic deficit” typically cites their absence.

The disjuncture between political science and political theory is striking. Political theorists have abandoned the field, and the study of parties and partisanship is carried on in political science terms (or in terms set by constitutional and election law). I have gone on a scouting expedition into the territory of political science, off the usual paths of political theory. My discussion of contemporary antipartyism moves back and forth between political science and political theory, imagining a conversation, and using resources from both to assess the achievement parties represent and the moral distinctiveness of partisanship.

The Sounds of Silence

The plain disproportion between a record of relentless, ferocious opposition to parties and moral disdain for partisans, on the one

INTRODUCTION

hand, and reticence bordering on silence when it comes to defending parties, on the other, brings to mind classical writings on democracy. With the partial exception of Aristotle's *Politics*, the great Greek texts reveal their authors' hostility to democracy.⁹ They broadcast its failings. Philosophic arguments undermined democratic premises; Socrates' subversion of popular opinion is the most powerful instance. Why was there no corresponding philosophical defense of democracy?¹⁰ One thought is that Athenian democracy in the fourth and fifth centuries was so deeply entrenched as popular ideology and practice that it stimulated no theoretical justification. No wonder "it was much easier for John Adams to find a thousand quotations and historical examples from the ancients in support of mixed government than for any Anti-federalist to find even one endorsing simple democracy."¹¹

Something similar may hold for political parties, at least after the consolidation of electoral democracy when parties competing in regular elections became a familiar feature of the political landscape. Today, parties are acknowledged as "convenient vehicles for conducting" elections,¹² mechanisms for "reducing the transaction costs" of democracy.¹³ Further justification seems superfluous. The energy of thought is committed instead to identifying the pathologies of "the system" and devising correctives.

We might assume that partisanship itself is a defense of parties. Not so: when partisans had to justify organizing, they typically argued for the necessity of combining in their own particular case, not for the respectability of parties per se. ("When bad men conspire, the good must associate."¹⁴) Whether partisans adopt the standard historical defense that theirs is "a party to end parties" or simply affirm that theirs is on the side of the angels, they give little thought to the value of parties in general or to partisanship as a political identity.

Established party systems have not stopped antiparty political theorists from aspiring to democracy without parties and proposing designs to contain or circumvent or eliminate them. But entrenched parties *do* appear to inhibit theorists from challenging utopias in which all citizens are Independents, and from acknowledging the

INTRODUCTION

value of parties and partisanship. I take Bernard Crick's warning to heart; "boredom with established truths is the great enemy of free men."¹⁵

Speculating about silence is hazardous, of course. I will simply note that the absence of appreciation is not the result of disillusion. There was no initial enthusiasm for parties' promise followed by inevitable dashing of hopes. Disgust with parties as "unscrupulous power groups" and moral disdain for partisans as "little more than a Conspiracy of Self-Seekers"¹⁶ dominate the history of political thought, and contemporary thinkers have not dissented from that view. Canonical political theory from antiquity is studded with precursors and echoes of the philosopher Hume, who famously wrote: "As much as legislators and founders of states ought to be honored and respected among men, as much ought the founders of sects and factions to be detested and hated."¹⁷ And Jefferson, co-founder of the first popular political party, nonetheless contended, "If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all."¹⁸ There are few corresponding champions of political parties. Parties' positive contributions to regulating political conflict, governing, exciting political participation, and deliberating go mostly unacknowledged. Parties do have one classic defender, Edmund Burke, of whom William Goldsmith wrote in 1774, "Here lies our good Edmund. Who, born for the universe, narrowed his mind. And to party gave up what was meant for mankind."¹⁹

Political theory harbored no great political expectations parties could disappoint, then. Burke's positive definition—"a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed"²⁰—was rejected by dour detractors from the start. One writer juxtaposed a definition of party as a group held together by the "cohesive power of public plunder."²¹ In any case, the charge that parties and partisans have not lived up to Burke's principled concern for the national interest is only one thread of antipartyism, hardly the sole cause of universal antipathy. Simply, no aspiration for what parties could be or might do, and no account of the virtues of partisanship existed, or was sufficiently believed, to give rise to disillusion. Parties' failings

INTRODUCTION

were reported, and the reports mounted once parties took shape as permanent institutions for organizing elections and governing. But antipathy is not disappointment. As for partisans, they have always been mistrusted as blind loyalists or hacks, manipulated or bought. “Sounds of silence” refers to appreciation, not aversion.

Excoriation of politicians as power-hungry and treacherous, deformed by hypocrisy, tainted by personal and institutional corruption is as old as ruling and being ruled. It preceded party politics and will doubtless carry on after. I will show that distinctive moral and political pathologies are said to taint partisanship and parties: the very existence of parties signals a falling off from wholeness or original unity, for one, and the fatal divisiveness of party strife for another. If nothing else, parties make vivid the politics—the ceaseless strategies, collective efforts to exercise power and to deny its exercise to others, the arrant partiality of legislating and governing (and shaping public opinion). And there is the sheer indignity of partisanship.

One explanation for the loud and nearly ubiquitous sounds of antipartyism is that antipartyism is everywhere because parties are everywhere. In the words of one scholar, “parties are potential in every regime where they are not actual; and where they are actual, there are also potential parties lurking beneath every opinion taken for granted by the actual parties.”²² And why are parties everywhere? One answer is, because politics is partisan. In saying politics is partisan, I am saying the obvious: politics is about disagreement that brings conflict. Politics exists only when the fact of pluralism is accepted and there is latitude for open agitation of groups with rival interests and opinions.²³ In this respect, parties might be expected everywhere that they are not brutally repressed. The problem with this logic is that both historically and today, parties are *not* everywhere. They are not the only way to organize political conflict, and are seldom the favored way. Of course politics is partisan, but parties are not the only carriers of partisanship. (Partisans of a cause form caucuses, alliances, associations, and movements, to say nothing of subversive groups bent on revolutions, coups, and civil wars.) If political parties were inevitable, irrepressible, and ubiquitous, they would not be achievements.

INTRODUCTION

Appreciation

Between carping and disapproval of parties and partisanship, on the one hand, and taking their uses for granted or utter disregard, on the other, we lose sight of the achievement of parties and partisanship. We miss the historical innovation of regular party rivalry, and the conceptual breakthroughs required to imagine and accept the political work parties do. Above all, we miss the creativity of party politics and the moral distinctiveness of partisanship. Parties create, not just reflect, political interests and opinions. They formulate “issues” and give them political relevance. Party antagonism “stages the battle”; parties create a system of conflict and draw the lines of division.²⁴ Moving back and forth between metaphors of natural and artistic creation, Maurice Duverger tried to capture this shaping power: parties crystallize, coagulate, synthesize, smooth down, and mold. Creativity in politics is almost always identified with founding moments, constitutional design, transformative social movements, or revolution, not with “normal politics.” Modern party politics is the ordinary, not (ordinarily) extraordinary locus of political creativity.

Partisanship warrants appreciation, too. We do not need to admit the virtues of partisanship or admire partisans even an iota to see that representative democracy benefits from them. Ardent partisans may not be deliberative personally and individually, but at the level of the polity partisanship fuels collective discussion of men and measures; partisans are the agents of “trial by discussion.”²⁵ Important as that is, I think partisanship deserves recognition on its own terms. I advocate for the moral distinctiveness of partisanship and propose reasons to elevate partisanship over its nemesis, the much vaunted pose of “Independence.” Partisanship is the only political identity that does not see pluralism and political conflict as a bow to necessity, a pragmatic recognition of the inevitability of disagreement. It demands severe self-discipline to acknowledge that my party’s status is just one part in a permanently pluralist politics, and hence the provisional nature of being the governing party and the charade of pretending to represent the whole. Partisanship, I argue, is *the* political identity of representative democracy. It may seem like an

INTRODUCTION

unsettling reversal of the common-sense view that partisans supports parties to argue, as I do, that one value of political parties is to serve as “carriers” of partisanship. Political theorists today do not connect the practice of democratic citizenship with partisanship, or the virtues of citizenship with the qualities of partisanship. I intend to repair this lapse.

Partisanship is separable from parties, and in the sense of advocacy for an interest or cause is always with us. Partiality and disagreement are universal and irrepressible too, as are political groups organized in opposition to one another. But once again political parties in representative democracy are not, and neither is partisanship tied to parties, “party ID.” I will show why we should recognize them as achievements.²⁶

I argue that on their own terms democratic theorists’ inattention or antipathy to parties is indefensible—or demands a defense that is not offered. We should charge parties with carrying some of the heavy moral water of democracy, including for example deliberation, which has become the academic touchstone for democratic legitimacy; indeed, for some theorists deliberation defines representative democracy. Parties do a lot of this work already, even if that is no partisan’s noble intention. And no other institution, actual or imagined, is positioned to do more. Although I respond directly to antipartyism in political theory, I do not mean to say that philosophical standards such as deliberation are the only standards that apply to parties, or that every failing of party politics can be repaired by making partisans more deliberative. Still less that every deviation from deliberation (or any other regulative ideal) is damning. Rescuing politics from the unreasonable is unreasonable. I have kept this caution in mind: “no recipe can be given for founding an enduring political party . . . that will contain the exact dosages required for satisfying every human sentiment,” for there will always be a fusion of lofty sentiments and low passions, of precious metal and base metal—“otherwise the alloy will not stand the wear and tear.”²⁷ Valuing parties entails accepting this alloy. In this spirit, Duverger introduced his “general theory of parties” by advising that the subject is one where “high feeling and special pleading are the rule.”²⁸ High

INTRODUCTION

feeling and special pleading are perfectly appropriate for partisans, certain they are on the side of the angels. High feeling and special pleading on behalf of parties in general are defensible, too. There is no way to rally the ideas and energy needed to make a crack in the great wall of antipartyism without sentiments as strong as arguments. That is the temper appreciation demands.

A dispassionate, outside views of parties was seldom attempted, at least not until political science made parties and elections its signature subject. Only a few philosophers have assumed a detached perspective. Hume examined parties from the standpoint of the impartial observer, and Mill envisioned parties engaged in “a serious conflict of opposing reasons,”²⁹ each party “deriving its utility from the deficiencies of the other,”³⁰ providing a dynamic of mutual correction, even progress. Neither philosophical standpoint offers a satisfactory view of parties, I argue, and neither pose is appropriate for partisans. Nonetheless, these philosophical moments of appreciation are significant, and I mention them here at the outset as indicative of the stern rejection of high feeling and special pleading by those few theorists who entertain the subject. Contemporary political philosophers may concede that “the clash of political beliefs, and of the interests and attitudes that are likely to influence them, are . . . a normal condition of human life,” but they still rue that “much political debate betrays the marks of warfare . . . rallying the troops and intimidating the other side.”³¹ Nothing could arouse revulsion more dependably than Teddy Roosevelt’s urging that fearless criticism and high principles are not enough, that thoughtful men should not be too delicate for party politics and must “show them that one is able to give and to receive heavy punishment without flinching.”³² Contemporary philosophers are averse to “high feeling and special pleading” by partisans or on their behalf.

Readers may judge that I go too far in the direction of appreciation, or that I apologize for parties without sufficient attention to their content, or that I am inadequately appalled by partisans’ characteristic intemperateness, or “extremism,” or, equally likely, their blind loyalty or passive acquiescence to “leading strings.” So I have made it my aim, along with assessing antipartyism and retrieving grounds

INTRODUCTION

for appreciating parties, to suggest elements of an ethic of partisanship. My goal is to chip away at the moral high ground claimed by partisans' adversaries, Independents, and to provide partisanship with at least an iota of dignity.

In 1880 Henry Adams, the historian and heir of two presidents, published a novel, *Democracy*.³³ Adams's heroine is a New York socialite, Madeline Lightfoot Lee. Mrs. Lee suffers from ennui. She has lost interest in salons, in philanthropy, in business. "She had resorted to desperate measures," Adams writes: "she had read philosophy in the original German, and the more she read, the more she was disheartened that so much culture should lead to nothing—nothing." Desperate, Mrs. Lee transplants herself in Washington, where enthralled by "the clash of interests" of forty million people, she is revived. The human interest of politics attracted her: the personalities and ambition, the indignities and betrayals, the occasional heroic successes of poet Alan Dugan's "winner," whom people bet on and bet against. Party politics is a dramatic agonistic contest, and not surprisingly a favorite subject for literature (and American musical theater³⁴). Every writer on democratic politics, no matter how severely analytic or social scientific, was once gripped by "the great game of politics,"³⁵ the high stakes waged by those who believe they are on the side of the angels. I will try not to lose sight of the game entirely.

Plan of the Book

Readers who want to go directly to my appreciation of parties and partisanship can make their way to chapter 3, "Moments of Appreciation," chapter 7, "The Moral Distinctiveness of 'Party ID,'" and chapter 8, "Centrism and Extremism and an Ethic of Partisanship." These set out my account of the achievement parties represent and their worth as a subject for political theory. Be advised, however, that the surrounding chapters on historical and contemporary antipartyism provide more than context and setup for this work of reclamation. They hold independent interest, bringing to light antipartyism as a significant, understudied element of the history of political thought. These chapters also reveal the striking lapse in contemporary democratic theory,

INTRODUCTION

where parties are the objects of antipathy or studied neglect. As this plan of the book explains, my challenge is to create a typology that makes the ceaseless story of antipartyism manageable and to assess in some detail attempts to circumscribe, circumvent, or eliminate parties and to transform errant partisans into judicious Independents.

My objective in part 1 is to introduce two of the high points on my map of the terrain of antipartyism. The two “glorious traditions of antipartyism” that are the subjects of chapters 1 and 2 derive from the etymology and literal meaning of the term “party.” Parties are parts. And in Latin *partire* means to divide. The two traditions can be thought of in terms of abhorrence of parties as “unwholesome parts” and abhorrence of parties as literally “divisive.” From the standpoint of what I call “holism,” all social and political groups threaten the unity and integrity of political order. Because parties have partiality and opposition *as their aim*, they stand out among parts as the most morally, politically, and aesthetically unadmirable. The second high point on the antiparty terrain accepts social and political parts and partiality but sees parties as fatally divisive. These two antiparty traditions held sway from antiquity, losing their dominance only in the late nineteenth century. This discussion is historical but it will be apparent that my inquiry is from the standpoint of the present. I invite readers to consider how much contemporary antipartyism rests on either the latent appeal of holism or antipathy to the divisiveness that is the necessary work of political parties.

Apart from its intrinsic importance and centrality to the story of antipartyism, holism is not safely in the past. Partisans of holism exploit electoral politics in order to erase pluralism and impose an ideal, undivided order. A party to end parties is the pose of utopian and revolutionary parties—Puritan Levelers, Jacobins, Communists; it is the pose of parties of virtue, of national unity, of ethnic purity. I look at several living variations of holism: parties of virtue, “one-partyism” (why one party instead of no party?³⁶), and majoritarianism when it assumes the form I call “shadow holism.” Resistance to parties and partisanship in the holist tradition rests on ideas that are widely rejected today as antipluralist and antidemocratic. Rejection is not total, however. When parties claim the moral ascendancy that

INTRODUCTION

comes from earning the approval of “the great body of the people,” represent the minority as a sinister interest opposed to the people, and invoke a majority (a moral majority, a silent majority) as if it were the whole, we recognize the semblance of holism.

Holists cast parties as *parts against* rather than *parts of* the whole. In contrast, the second “glorious tradition” of antipartyism accepts pluralism but does not follow the logic of pluralism to parties. The objection to parties here is not to their partiality per se but to the fact that they are dangerously divisive, and there are myriad historical expressions of the view that parties are wantonly selfish and sinister factions, engines of destructive partiality. In chapter 2 I try to make this array of charges manageable by identifying several major themes: the Roman archetype, “the irrepressible hydra,” and the classification of parties as a way of taming by categorization. The distinguishing mark of this glorious tradition of antipartyism is that parts and partiality are acceptable, but parties are not. They impede balance or harmony among recognized social parts. The mixed constitution is the most important and enduring example of the recognition and representation of pluralism without parties. After its decline, thinkers struggled to conceive how to organize government and manage political pluralism without parties. I illustrate the persistence of this tradition of antipartyism in American and European thought with the Federalists and Antifederalists, Sieyès’s theory of political representation, and Hegel’s corporatism.

Reconciliation to parties is possible from the standpoint of the second antiparty tradition because parties are less symptoms of deeper intolerable division than drivers of arrant divisiveness, disrupters of political equilibrium. They can conceivably be tempered and put to use. It is in response to the second glorious tradition of antipartyism that we get grudging acceptance of the divisions parties create and the trouble partisanship causes.

The episodic defense of parties of constitutional necessity is a half-way house between absolute condemnation and sympathy. In addition to acceptance of the exceptional party of necessity, there are three genuine “moments of appreciation,” my subject in chapter 3. One moment sees parties as a form of regulated rivalry and acknowledges

INTRODUCTION

managed conflict as an achievement: “The Parties who are Out, are always a Curb, and a Bridle to those which are In, and the Parties which are In, are always a Terror and a Stirrer up to Vigilance in those which are Out.”³⁷ A second appreciates parties as a way of organizing government and recruiting governors. These moments of appreciation owe to experience and are grasped by partisans themselves. A third is philosophical, the view from outside, remote from the ordinary self-understanding of partisans. This moment of appreciation casts parties as complementary, bearers of partial truths, agents of progress. In eclipse, I bring these moments of appreciation out of the shadows to serve as guides to the achievement of parties. They are the work of Burke, Hegel, Hume, and Mill.

These moments of appreciation were articulated before the rise of electoral parties, and remind us that orthodox standards of representativeness or responsiveness or accountability are not the only ones. Regulated rivalry, governing, and fruitful conflict have independent merit. They are touchstones for rehabilitating parties, and they provide groundwork for the ethics of partisanship I propose in part 3. These initial points on the terrain of antipartyism and moments of appreciation are sharply defined and surprisingly fixed. I illustrate them by drawing from the canon of European and American political thought and show that often contemporary opponents of parties and partisanship stand on well-worn spots of ground. Holism and fatal divisiveness are not the only sites of antipartyism, however. The landscape of antipartyism is also marked by high points shaped by later experience with broad electorates and institutionalized parties, what I call “post-party depression.”

Beginning in the nineteenth century, extended suffrage, regular elections, and legalized party systems gave rise to a fresh set of attacks and prescriptions I gather under the rubric “progressive anti-partyism” in chapter 4. Parties are reviled as corrupt and corrupting (“There can be no question that a great many men do deteriorate very much morally when they go to Albany”³⁸). Parties’ “open, conscious appeal to the body of the citizens”³⁹ is not salutary. Parties pander to voters or special interests; their business is “trafficking in policies.”⁴⁰ As for partisans, they are seen as blind loyalists or craven

INTRODUCTION

“hacks” or, only slightly better, as rational calculators out for spoils. Partisans’ undisputed moral superiors are “Independents,” and a recurrent progressive fantasy is a party of Independents. Progressive hope for reform is not easily sustained, though. “The fundamental trouble,” Teddy Roosevelt offered in uniquely vivid fashion, “was that the country was sick and tired of reform.” “The average man was tired of decency in politics,” and “the dog returned to its vomit.”⁴¹ Antipartyism raises the troubling question: if parties are central to elections and elections integral to democracy, “Is Democracy a failure?”⁴²

The array of complaints that comprise “progressive antipartyism” dominate political theory today. Although historical Progressivism is a parochial American pose, a latitudinarian view of progressive aversions resonates widely. So do the anxieties and correctives I discuss in chapters 5 and 6. The same holds for the normative arguments I make in Part III in defense of parties and partisanship. My materials in these chapters are predominantly American. This is not a project in comparative politics, clearly. But neither do the arguments apply exclusively to the United States. Some antipathies and correctives speak mainly to two-party systems, but for the most part they are familiar throughout democracies and democratic theory today.

Post-party depression is a tenacious political mood, and progressive antipartyism articulates its discontents. Virtually every element of contemporary antipartyism and every scheme for correcting the system by eliminating, circumventing, or containing parties echoes progressive antipartyism. In chapter 5, I show the persistence of progressive antipartyism in charges leveled at parties entrenched in what is aptly called “the system.” In these accounts of party convergence, collusion, and cartel, parties fall short of the basic achievement of regulated rivalry. And insofar as parties are competitive, they are not responsive to “the common, recognizable interests of ordinary people, and nothing more.”⁴³ The confounding ambiguity dividing critics is whether parties should be seen as agents of corporate predators, captured by “special interests,” or as principals advancing their own special interests, extortionists involved in their own “elaborate influence-peddling scheme.”⁴⁴ Is the “invisible government” behind the “ostensible government” actually run by parties, or by forces that

INTRODUCTION

work through them? I call this the “anxiety of influence” and trace the flip back and forth about the direction in which “undue influence” flows. I illustrate the phases of the anxiety of influence by looking at justifications for campaign finance reform.

Progressive antipartyism gives rise to a persistent set of schemes for “correcting the system,” my subject in chapter 6. Like progressive aversions, these corrections remain the principal touchstones of antipartyism today. Two correctives stand out, sturdy features of American political life, which is my focus, and evident in other democracies as well. One is voluntarism, first put into self-conscious use as an anti-party alternative during the Progressive era. Nothing is more familiar than confidence in people’s ability to organize associations in the public interest in opposition to special interests. “The group principle” and “good” civil society are democratic expectancies. They promise resources and motivation for civic engagement, potential counterweights to sinister interests, and, collectively, a democratic alternative to “the system” of parties and partisanship. The sometimes fanciful reflections of civil society theorists do not pose a grave challenge to parties and partisanship, on my view, but the actual explosion of groups—advocacy groups, interest groups, self-styled public interest groups—does. These groups embody an unreconstructed pluralism that inhibits the work of parties, and reflect a plurality of political identities in competition with and often in opposition to partisanship.

A second corrective to the party system concedes the centrality of voting and elections but sees parties as corrosive of democratic participation. These reforms are designed to address a new charge: that both for strategic reasons and as the unintended consequence of their failings, parties depress participation, demobilize citizens, “turn voters off.” The interventions theorists propose would revive and refashion electoral participation, making it deliberative and nonpartisan. We recognize contemporary political theorists of civil society and deliberative democracy as heirs of early progressives in disposition and political imagination, in their implacable antipartyism, and in their visions of reform.

Unquestionably, the high point of antipartyism today is aversion to partisanship specifically. Part 3 is my appreciation of parties and

INTRODUCTION

partisanship, and I begin by answering the charges laid on partisanship. At moments of party polarization such as the one in which I write, the barb “partisan” comes out of improbable mouths, a virtual reflex. It is no virtue to cultivate the disposition that your party is “on the side of the angels.” We recognize “partisan” as invective. Even if parties have their uses, it seems, partisanship is abhorrent. While partisans battle one another, all claiming to be on the side of the angels, critics demonize them all and see Independents as virtuously above the fray. Antipartisanship is rooted in a view of partisans as degraded citizens, political dependents. Whatever the source of dependency—clientelism, capture, sheer gullibility, or abandonment of personal judgment—the partisan exhibits not an iota of political self-reliance. “Independence” is a superior status, morally and politically. It is more than simple nonpartisanship; independence is a distinct political identity. The luster of independence, its positive valence, can be explained. It borrows from a broader civic ideal of independence with deep roots in American political ideology, replanted in the soil of electoral politics. An ideology of independence may be distinctively American, but turning away from partisanship and favoring independence is a widespread phenomenon. The luster of independence can be dulled, as I attempt to do, by demonstrating its “weightlessness.” In chapter 7, I take sides—not between opposing partisans but between partisanship and independence. I make a case for the moral distinctiveness of “party ID,” and sketch an ethic of partisanship for private citizens.

An ethic of partisanship for party officials, activists, and partisan representatives is my subject in chapter 8, “Centrism and Extremism.” “Extremist” is not a neutral term of political geography. It is leveled by partisans against the opposition and by political pundits selecting the strongest possible negative label. “Extremist” is a radical intensification of “partisan” as a term of attack, the ultimate political opprobrium. “Centrism” is not neutral, either; it is meant to offer political reassurance. The title of this chapter poses a puzzle: the disjuncture between regular accusations of extremism in day-to-day politics, on the one hand, and what is often described as the characteristic centrism of major American parties, on the other. Political science’s

INTRODUCTION

“spatial model” and “median voter” go only partway toward explaining incessant appeals to the terms “centrist” and “extremist.” Also at work, I argue, are normative ideas about democracy, and in this respect the subject is not uniquely American. Extremism is something more than a reference to ideological positioning, an electoral strategy, or a term of political abuse. “Extremist” is convenient shorthand for three ways in which parties and partisans are unfaithful to democratic expectations and violate elements of an ethic of partisanship. “Extremist” signals abdication of responsibility for educating and mobilizing voters; it signals unresponsiveness to the comprehensive range of problems major parties are uniquely able to identify and address; and it signals the adoption of intransigence as a public value at the expense of getting the public business done.

Throughout *On the Side of the Angels* I defend parties and partisanship. Not all parties are defensible, of course. Not all parties are lawful, or should be. “Militant democracy” is the name for self-defense against parties that would exploit regulated rivalry in order to undo it. It is democracy’s response to parties that do not accept that they are parts. The grounds for banning parties confirm, in the negative, the value of parties and virtues of partisanship. In chapter 9, I look at justifications for banning political parties, drawing on materials from a wide range of democracies. Violence, incitement to hate, existential challenges to political identity, and outside interference and control are the principal reasons for criminalizing parties. This list of reasons alerts us that in recent decades thinking about the bounds of permissible party organization has shifted away from the original terms of democratic self-defense that defined “militant democracy.” The orthodox justification for banning parties with overtly antidemocratic political ideologies such as fascism or communism cannot be neatly applied to parties that incite hatred against an ethnic or regional group, to religious parties that oppose some aspect of secular government, to parties with separatist programs, or to parties that pose existential challenges to national identity.⁴⁵

This final chapter points up the parameters of my study. The appreciation of parties and partisanship I set out has meaning in the context of freedom of political association and competitive elections,

INTRODUCTION

where pluralism expressed in the form of the regulated rivalry of political parties is accepted. *On the Side of the Angels* is not an account of politics per se, and my appreciation does not apply, or not without serious accommodation, where pluralism is effectively thwarted.

Antipartyism: Coherence via Aversion

“Antipartyism” suggests that its object, “party,” is an identifiable kind of political group. What is a political party? Jefferson encouraged the thought that political parties are universal: “Men have differed in opinion, and been divided into parties by these opinions, from the first origin of societies, and in all governments where they have been permitted freely to think and to speak, the terms whig and tory belong to nature as well as to civil history.”⁴⁶ The claim that parties have persisted through all of history, much less the specific opposition between Whigs and Tories, is hyperbole, of course. I do not take up Jefferson’s claim, nor do I trace the institutional history of parties, their changing types. That is the work of historians who struggle to define “party” in specific periods and political contexts. Interpretive debates about Roman factions have occupied scholars since the 1930s, to take one example. Did the Romans have stable political associations that could be called parties? If using modern ideological and electoral parties as a standard is inapt, what are the criteria for designating a political group a faction or party? Or, to take another example, which criteria determine the point at which political groupings in post-revolutionary America became political parties proper? Did the “fledgling parties” of the 1790s “define issues, shape public awareness, wage election campaigns, and organize government on a continental scale” and “successfully create a workable machinery to manage national politics”? Does it matter that creators themselves called the machinery “a party”?⁴⁷ The confident assertion that “parties are a phenomenon of the last 150 years, and as such are creatures of modernity”⁴⁸ begs the question.

Analytically, too, “party” is incoherent. If we recall the definition proposed by their chief defender, Burke, a party is “a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest,

INTRODUCTION

upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.”⁴⁹ This is no definition, but a target of interpretation and quarrel. Not all parties are parties of principle; the emphasis should be on *particular*, not principle. Not all partisans share politically relevant preferences, even. Unsympathetic definitions substitute the pursuit of private interests for the national interest. Madison famously defined faction as a number of citizens united and actuated by some common impulse of passion or of interest adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interest of the community.

Cognizant of the vicissitudes of the history of parties and the variety of contexts in which they operate, and eschewing the normative quagmire, political scientists instead propose typologies and developmental steps. A fair culling of the literature suggests three main moves. First came parties as associations or caucuses of officeholders within legislative assemblies. Parties in government preceded the party in the electorate and the organization connecting officials to the world outside government. Mass electoral parties came later, products of extended suffrage, which incorporated large numbers of people into the political process. (Duverger subdivided mass parties further on the basis of origin—“internal parties” created by officials within government and “external parties” mobilized outside and often against the dominant forces in representative institutions—Socialist or Christian Democratic parties, for example.) Finally, on the view that at least some contemporary parties constitute a third type, political scientists struggle to characterize it. A modicum of consensus casts these parties as service organizations to candidates in a system described as “audience democracy,” with “catch-all” parties geared to immediate electoral success and marked by the dominance of candidate-centered choice over platforms and programs.⁵⁰ The extreme of this type has been called the “instant party,” which exploits communication technology and marketing strategy to appeal directly to voters; the exemplar is Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia born from the ambition and financial capital of one man.⁵¹ A much discussed question in political science is whether the typology and evolutionary story of parties based on West European and American experience applies to newer European democracies, post-communist

INTRODUCTION

states, and others transitioning to representative democracy. Do they follow a similar trajectory and arrive at similar party forms, or diverge from them?⁵²

Historical and social science studies of party go some way toward satisfying the great scholar of parties who complained about the confusion that results “from the tendency of lazy people to imagine that all things known by the same name must be the same.”⁵³ It is wrong to assume that “a party is a party whether found in the United States in 1800 or in 1940.” But too much delicacy and thick description can thwart understanding, too. I am encouraged to assert something general for the purposes of my work, even if it is something less than a full account of the defining characteristics of parties.

Parties are associations organized for political conflict; they are one form political conflict takes. That is a start, but this most basic element—political groups in opposition to one another, organized to exercise power—fails to distinguish parties from cabals, say, or revolutionary groups or what Mosca called “the struggles between gangs and gangsters.”⁵⁴ When Madison said that parties arise in every *political* society, his point was telling. Parties do not arise in every society but only in political society where there is government with political offices to be occupied. “Parties live in a house of power,” Weber wrote.⁵⁵ The aim of party conflict is to hold office and participate in government, not just a general “bid for power.”⁵⁶ This distinguishes parties from revolutionary attempts to overturn rather than occupy office, from secret political clubs and societies tarred with the brush of sedition, from enterprising interest groups and pressure groups that seek political influence but not office,⁵⁷ from “movements” engaged in what Hofstadter usefully called “a nonresponsible critique of government,” meaning they are not organized to govern.⁵⁸

In short, a party is a group organized to contest for public office; it is avowed in its partisanship and operates not conspiratorially but in public view; it is not an ad hoc coalition or arrangement for vote trading and compromise on a specific issue, but an institution formed for ongoing political activity; and it can claim a substantial number of followers, in current terms, a partisan “base.” Today, of course, the definition of party includes an additional element: parties

INTRODUCTION

contest for electors' votes. Hence Sartori's definition, which we now recognize as time-bound and truncated: "any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections . . . candidates for public office."⁵⁹ There is one more notable piece. After saying that parties are "office-seeking," Weber goes on: their action is oriented toward the acquisition of social power . . . *no matter what its content may be.*⁶⁰ A main theme of my project is just this: creating the content, drawing the lines of division, is the achievement of parties and partisans.

I suspend any further hunt for conceptual coherence, for what I think is a good reason. Before the emergence of modern governing and electoral parties, "party" was principally an aversive label. To put simply what I hope to demonstrate in detail, "party" was an accusatory term. Not all partial, political groups aspiring to govern were considered parties, and political pluralism was defended without extending acceptance to parties. Parties were often contrasted, in accusatory mode, with benign social divisions and political groups, organized classes or interests. Staple accusations against a noxious political group earn it the dishonorable label "party." These aversions have endured over time, and I take the latitude of referring to them as traditions of antipartyism. It is less party that gives *On the Side of the Angels* coherence than antipartyism. And it is antipartyism that paradoxically provides the terms for moments of appreciation and the elements of an ethic of partisanship. I begin, then, with "glorious traditions of antipartyism."