



Universidade do Minho
Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas

The Interplay Between Political Parties and Public Reason:
How Can Political Parties Promote John Rawls' Public Reason?

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RESUMO

TÍTULO: A Interação entre Partidos Políticos e Razão Pública

RESUMO: Esta tese explora a complexa relação entre os partidos políticos e o modelo de razão pública Rawlsiana. Dado que os partidos políticos são os principais agentes de criação de leis nas democracias liberais representativas contemporâneas, e que John Rawls é o teórico mais influente do liberalismo político, torna-se fundamental compreender e aperfeiçoar o funcionamento dos partidos políticos com base na teoria de legitimidade de Rawls. O objetivo principal da tese é analisar o modo como os partidos políticos influenciam a legitimidade e a estabilidade de um Estado democrático constitucional, avaliando simultaneamente os correspondentes deveres de justificação que devem cumprir. A metodologia de investigação adota uma abordagem dialética que integra tanto a teoria ideal como a teoria não ideal. Começando com uma análise da teoria da legitimidade de Rawls, é dada especial ênfase ao debate intersubjetivo participativo como um aspeto fundamental do último modelo Rawlsiano de razão pública. De seguida a tese realça o papel que os partidos políticos desempenham, idealmente, na promoção da razão pública. No entanto, contrapondo-se, efetua uma análise do funcionamento empírico dos partidos, identificando potenciais obstáculos que estes podem apresentar à realização da razão pública. Através deste processo dialético, a investigação pretende chegar a uma síntese que estabeleça um equilíbrio no impacto exercido pelos partidos políticos sobre a razão pública. No centro do estudo está a identificação de mecanismos-chave, como a deliberação democrática, que contribuem significativamente para o papel positivo dos partidos políticos na promoção da razão pública. Para aperfeiçoar a análise e avaliar as implicações práticas, a tese incorpora a teoria de Matteo Bonotti sobre partidarismo e justificação pública. A construção teórica de Bonotti, enraizada nos princípios Rawlsianos, fornece uma visão inestimável sobre como os partidos políticos podem efetivamente defender a razão pública. Um aspeto essencial explorado na tese é a noção de Bonotti de divisão do trabalho justificativo e a dispensa dos cidadãos do dever moral de civilidade. No entanto, este estudo argumenta contra a concessão aos cidadãos de uma isenção do processo de justificação, defendendo a sua participação e envolvimento ativos. As conclusões deste estudo oferecem uma visão valiosa sobre garantir a legitimidade das leis promulgadas num quadro constitucional marcado por uma pluralidade de partidos políticos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: John Rawls, legitimidade, Matteo Bonotti, partidos políticos, razão pública

ABSTRACT

TITLE: The Interplay between Political Parties and Public Reason

ABSTRACT: This thesis explores the intricate relationship between political parties and a Rawlsian model of public reason and political legitimacy. As political parties serve as the primary agents of representation and law-making in contemporary representative liberal democracies, and as John Rawls is the most influential theorist on political liberalism, understanding and refining their functioning based on Rawlsian principles of public reason becomes paramount. The thesis primary objective is to analyze how political parties influence the legitimacy and stability of a constitutional democratic state while evaluating the corresponding justificatory duties they should uphold. The research methodology employed combines rigorous theoretical analysis with empirical investigation. By adopting a dialectical approach that integrates both ideal and non-ideal theory, this study delves into the impact of political parties on public reason. Beginning with an exploration of Rawls' theory of legitimacy, particular emphasis is placed on the significance of participatory intersubjective debate as a fundamental aspect of the latter Rawlsian model of public reason. The thesis highlights the pivotal role political parties ideally play in promoting public reason. However, it concurrently undertakes an examination of the empirical functioning of parties, identifying potential hindrances that they may present to the realization of public reason. Through this dialectical process, the research aims to attain a synthesis that strikes a balance in the influence exerted by political parties on public reason. Central to the study is the identification of key mechanisms, such as democratic deliberation, which significantly contribute to the positive role of political parties in promoting public reason. To refine the analysis and assess practical implications, the thesis incorporates Matteo Bonotti's theory on partisanship and public justifiability. Bonotti's framework, rooted in Rawlsian principles, provides invaluable insights into how political parties can effectively uphold public reason. An essential aspect explored within the thesis is Bonotti's notion of the division of justificatory labour, which posits guidelines for political parties to adhere to in upholding public reason and exempts ordinary citizens from the duty of civility. However, the study argues against granting citizens an exemption from the justificatory process, advocating for their active participation and engagement. The findings of this study offer valuable insights into how to ensure the legitimacy of laws enacted within a constitutional framework marked by a plurality of political parties.

KEYWORDS: John Rawls, legitimacy, Matteo Bonotti, political parties, public reason, legitimacy

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the tapestry of modern constitutional democracies, a captivating interplay emerges between the coexistence of diverse worldviews encompassing justice, morality, religion, and the pursuit of a good life. At its core, these vibrant democracies are animated by a representative system intricately woven with the threads of political parties. Political parties assume a pivotal role in steering the intricate landscape of democratic governance, undertaking the dual responsibilities of aggregating the interests and aspirations of like-minded individuals and organizations, and engaging in deliberative activities within legislative assemblies to advance policy proposals and enact laws. Considering their substantial legislative power, any present-day normative understanding of democracy or legitimacy necessitates careful consideration of both the diversity of political parties and the diversity of worldviews they represent.

Within the realm of political liberalism, John Rawls stands as a prominent figure, placing great emphasis on the question of achieving political legitimacy within the context of reasonable pluralism where citizens, even when acting in good faith and sound mind, hold deeply divergent viewpoints. In this thesis, I defend Rawls' liberal constitutional framework of legitimacy, wherein the mechanism of public reason assumes a pivotal role in bestowing legitimacy upon the basic structure of society, its constitutional matters, and its coercive laws (Rawls, 1996: 212-255)¹. Rawls advocated for a framework where the fundamental structure of society is seen as legitimate by every citizen. This legitimacy stems from grounding the structure in shared political values intrinsic to a constitutional democracy. Public reason posits that political decisions, on fundamental matters, must be justifiable to all citizens, calling upon public officials, including political parties, and citizens, to ground their decisions on shared reasons rather than personal beliefs. In essence, public reason enables citizens to reason from and about the shared political values of a constitutional democratic society (Rawls, 1997). I see it acts as a powerful tool to promote dialogue, understanding, and a sense of legitimacy that transcends individual beliefs, ultimately strengthening the fabric of pluralistic democracies by upholding the values of constitutional liberal democracies.

However, given the central place of political parties, and given that they bear the responsibility of representing citizens and securing electoral victories, a critical examination of their alignment with the deliberative requirements of public reason becomes imperative (Bonotti, 2017; Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006). Notwithstanding Rawls' brief acknowledgement that public reason applies to political

¹ Throughout the thesis my focus is primarily on Rawls' later works, particularly *Political Liberalism* (1993), where I use the revised version of 1996 that includes subsequent writings, such as an *Introduction to the Paperback Edition* and the article *Reply to Habermas* (1995), and I will also focus on the article *Public Reason Revisited* (1997). However, for methodological purposes that complete Rawls' thoughts, I find it important to also include certain passages from earlier texts like *A Theory of Justice* (1971), utilizing the revised edition of 1999, as well as *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001).

parties, it is evident that his treatment of this aspect remains limited. The intricacies of how political parties, with their multifaceted roles and functions, could effectively integrate the demands of public reason are noticeably absent from his work. Furthermore, Rawls' analysis lacks an exploration of the inherent antagonistic dimension inherent in partisan politics, which significantly shapes the behavior and dynamics of political parties. This scholarly lacuna raises compelling questions regarding the compatibility of public reason with the broader functions and realities of political parties. How do political parties, driven by electoral competition and the pursuit of power, reconcile their partisan interests with the demands of reasoned discourse and shared justification? Does the antagonistic nature of political parties hinder their ability to effectively engage in public reason and uphold the ideals of political legitimacy? These critical inquiries warrant closer scrutiny, as they shed light on the complex interplay between public reason and the multifaceted roles that political parties assume in democratic governance.

Henceforth, as an advocate of the liberal constitutional account of Rawls' theory on legitimacy, this thesis holds as its primary objective a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between Rawls' theory of political legitimacy, with a particular emphasis on the crucial component of public reason, and the associated duties or guidelines that political parties should uphold to effectively fulfill these demands. By shedding light to the many ways political parties' dynamics can impact public reason, the central aim of this research is to discern the specific duties and guidelines that ought to be placed upon political parties, and their members, to uphold the principles of public reason. The focus lies on identifying practical and realistic measures that align with the goals and realities of political parties, while still honoring a Rawlsian model of public reason. By investigating these demands, we strive to deepen our understanding of how political parties can effectively honor public reason while pursuing their political objectives.

Chapter 1 offers a throughout examination of Rawls' political liberalism, with a particular focus on his theory of public reason. It begins by understand the predicament faced by contemporary democratic societies that Rawls tries to solve, grappling with the challenge of achieving political stability and legitimacy amidst reasonable differences of opinion. Rawls' political liberalism provides a compelling solution by underscoring the crucial role of public reason in establishing legitimacy. The chapter meticulously constructs the progression from Rawls' methodological foundations to the attainment of full justifiability and legitimacy. It delves into the mechanisms of reflective equilibrium and overlapping consensus, shedding light on their operation within Rawls' framework. I will also argue there is an evolution in Rawls' conceptualization of public reason, wherein recent formulations emphasize an actual intersubjective

deliberative process rather than a purely philosophical one. Arguing in favor of the latter Rawls, the chapter distinguishes between the idea and ideal of public reason. At the heart of Rawls' framework lies the duty of civility, representing the ideal moral obligation to ensure the achievement of public justifiability (Rawls, 1996: 216-220). The chapter explores the flexibility of this duty, accounting for diverse circumstances and contexts. Furthermore, it delves into the practical application of this ideal within the complexities of modern democratic governance. The overarching objective of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive explication of Rawls' framework concerning public reason and political legitimacy. By establishing this foundation, subsequent chapters can seamlessly delve into the examination of how political parties can align themselves with and effectively incorporate the concept of public reason in their decision-making processes and policy formulation.

Chapter 2 of the thesis delves into the intricate relationship between political parties and the Rawlsian theory of public reason. The chapter initiates by scrutinizing the scattered references made by Rawls regarding political parties, recognizing the limited attention he dedicates to their effective role within the framework of his political liberalism, particularly in relation to public reason. However, recent debates have highlighted the significant role of political parties in deliberative democratic models and their relevance to political liberalism and public reason. Scholars such as Jonathan White and Lea Ypi (2011, 2016), Matteo Bonotti (2015, 2017), Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum (2006, 2020) have argued the importance of parties in public justification, in the functioning of political liberalism, and the alignment between public reason and partisanship. The central argument of this chapter is that in order to delineate the appropriate orientations and constraints for political parties within the realm of public reason, it is imperative to first comprehend the intricate relationship between parties and the fundamental concept of public reason. This understanding involves examining how parties can either harm or strengthen public reason, thus providing insights into the guidelines necessary to avoid or promote specific dynamics that impact public reason. A dialectical approach is adopted to analyze the positive and negative effects of political parties on Rawls' model of public reason. By exploring how parties ideally operate and how parties currently operate in liberal constitutional democracies, an ideal of public reason aligned with Rawls' realistic utopia can be formulated. By engaging in a dialectical examination of how political parties can either support or undermine Rawls' notion of public reason, this chapter highlights the nuanced equilibrium that parties must navigate.

Finally, in Chapter 3, the focus will shift towards an exploration of Matteo Bonotti's contribution to the development of Rawls' theory on public reason. Bonotti (2015, 2017) picks exactly the theme of this

thesis as he develops a Rawlsian model of public justifiability specifically tailored for political parties. This model retains the core criterion of shareability found in Rawls' idea of public reason, while also taking into account the practicalities and additional objectives that political parties typically pursue. In doing so, Bonotti's approach seeks to strike a balance between upholding the ideals of public reason and acknowledging the complexities and multifaceted nature of political party dynamics. The initial objective is to comprehend Bonotti's conception of partisanship and the role of political parties. Bonotti (2017) puts forth a theory of partisanship that aligns the demands of political parties with the imperatives of public reason, making parties goals intrinsically related to the demands of public reason (pp. 99-124). Additionally, he develops a scheme he called the division of justificatory labour, which enables parties to effectively represent and connect with the diverse worldviews held by their constituents while maintaining the same level of justifiability as advocated by Rawls (pp. 125-152). The ultimate aim is to assess whether Bonotti's theory is well-suited to address and navigate the various ways in which political parties may undermine public reason.

In conclusion, this thesis embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between political parties, public reason, and political legitimacy within the framework of political liberalism. By delving into Rawls' theory of public reason and its application to political parties, as well as examining the contributions of scholars like Bonotti, this study seeks to shed light on the challenges and possibilities that arise at the intersection of political parties and public reason and the pursuit of a more robust form of public justification.

2. RAWLS' PUBLIC REASON: A NORMATIVE STANDARD FOR POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

The main objective of this chapter is to offer a thorough interpretation of Rawls' political liberalism and his notion of public reason. The focus is placed on his more recent works such as *Reply to Habermas* (1996) and *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited* (1997) because the purpose of this analysis is to grasp a more profound comprehension of Rawls' philosophical endeavor by exploring his ideas accompanying their own evolutionary trajectory. The chapter intends to provide a formal and clear elucidation of the overview of Rawls' political liberalism and specially its core concept of public reason.

In the first sub-chapter I aim to delineate the predicament that public reason endeavors to resolve, highlighting the relevance of public reason in contemporary democratic societies. In a heterogeneous society, the challenge of achieving political stability and legitimacy amidst reasonable differences of opinion is an intricate issue. Rawls' theory of political liberalism provides a compelling solution to this issue by highlighting the significance of public reason. He asserts that a liberal democratic polity can attain legitimacy and stability, even when confronted with contentions stemming from religious convictions, philosophical viewpoints, and individual notions of the desirable existence, provided that citizens, while wielding political authority, look for shared reasons rather than their subjective beliefs. **(The Significance of Public Reason: The Search for Political Legitimacy and Stability)**

In the second sub-chapter, a thorough examination will be undertaken of Rawls' methodology in establishing the principles of legitimacy and stability. We'll start by thoroughly evaluating Rawls' epistemological foundations, before analyzing his fundamental objectives in developing these principles. We'll then go through a step-by-step analysis of the process required to achieve the desired outcomes, clarifying the necessary actions that need to be taken. The two basic political ideas of society as a cooperative system for everyone's benefit and persons as free and equal citizens in that system are consistent with otherwise vastly different belief systems. Endorsing these two ideas commits one to liberalism, but Rawls stresses that they can be interpreted differently within certain limits, allowing for citizens to hold different conceptions of justice. Through the use of public reason, Rawls believes that we can construct political conceptions of justice that are freestanding from comprehensive doctrines, and that can be the subject of an overlapping consensus among diverse comprehensive doctrines. Rawls argues that the type of reasoning utilized, and the reasons presented, are crucial in ensuring the existence of an overlapping consensus of different comprehensive doctrines on the political conception that is to be applied to the fundamental structure of society. If such an overlapping consensus can be achieved, Rawls

asserts that we can establish legitimacy and stability for the right reasons. **(From Epistemological Foundations to Political Legitimacy: The Constructive Process of Public Reason)**

In the third sub-chapter, an analysis will be conducted of Rawls' normative conception of public reason as a sovereign reason. The analysis will delve into the conceptual evolution of public reason and comprehensively explore its scope and limitations. Public reason, as Rawls contends, is the idea that the exercise of political power must be justifiable to all to be legitimate. When political power is exercised in settling constitutional essentials and issues of basic justice, agents invested with political power must only support decisions grounded in public reason. Public reason requires offering arguments that are independent of deep comprehensive commitments and that are an interpretation of the fundamental political-moral values of society. A critical examination will be presented, comparing earlier formulations of public reason with the latest ones. This analysis will demonstrate that the recent formulations make public reason more dependent on an actual intersubjective deliberative process rather than on a purely philosophical process, as in the original position. While public reason serves as a unifying foundation for political deliberation and determination, it is insufficient in addressing the entire spectrum of concerns that emerge in a heterogeneous and multifaceted community. Public reason has certain boundaries and a specific purview. It pertains only to topics deemed fundamental to society, such as constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice, and it solely applies within the public political forum. **(Rawls' Normative Theory of Public Reason: Exploring its Conceptual Evolution and Boundaries)**

In the fourth and last sub-chapter I will clarify the distinction between the idea of public reason and the ideal of public reason. Separate from Rawls' concept of the idea of public reason is the ideal of public reason, which consists of specific guidelines for how citizens and public officials should reason when exercising political power in fundamental cases. The duty of civility is one of the key elements of Rawls' ideal of public reason, which citizens invested with political power should adhere to. Rawls' conception of the ideal is not a one-size-fits-all standard, but rather a flexible one that considers the varying circumstances of different actors and political situations. This sub-chapter will delve into Rawls' envisioning of this ideal and its practical application throughout society, providing insights on application of this ideal within the complexities of modern democratic governance. **(Rawls' Ideal of Public Reason: Exploring Its Application and Flexibility)**

This analytical discussion aims to establish a foundation for the succeeding chapter, where a detailed examination will be conducted to ascertain the exact means by which political parties can align with and engage with the concept of public reason. The chapter will provide a thorough exploration of Rawls'

philosophical construct of public reason and its associated framework of political legitimacy. This groundwork is necessary to facilitate a more nuanced exploration of the specific mechanisms and strategies that can enable political parties to incorporate the notion of public reason into their decision-making and policy formulation processes.

2.1) The Significance of Public Reason: The Search for Political Legitimacy and Stability

2.1.1) The Challenge of Achieving Political Legitimacy and Stability in a Pluralistic Society

What is the foundational premise or basis that underpins Rawls' theory of political liberalism? Starting from this starting point, what is the core problem that Rawls endeavors to resolve by utilizing the framework of public reason, and how does this framework contribute to the solution of the said problem? Grasping the foundational premise that underpins Rawls' theory of political liberalism is essential to understanding the broader implications of his work.

“Both Theory and PL attempt to say how a reasonably just and well-ordered democratic society might be possible. (...) The answer we give to the question of whether a just democratic society is possible and can be stable for the right reasons affects our background thoughts and attitudes about the world as whole.” (Rawls, 1996: lx-lxi).

Rawls' political theory is based on the core belief that a constitutional democracy can be a reasonably just and workable system of government that is worth defending. In the latter passage, he challenges the assumption that a well-ordered society is unattainable, urging us to carefully consider whether we should accept this conclusion so readily. Rawls contends that our belief in the possibility of a just society influences our attitudes towards politics and the world at large. If we assume that such a society is impossible, this will be reflected in our public culture and political conduct. Rawls further illustrates the repercussions of a society that has lost faith in a just political system by citing the example of Weimar's constitutional regime. He argues that Weimar's downfall was, in part, due to the lack of support from traditional elites in Germany who were unwilling to cooperate in making the constitution work. They no longer believed a decent liberal parliamentary regime was possible, and this attitude was reflected in the quality and tone of the public culture and political conduct. The result was a series of authoritarian governments and ultimately the rise of Hitler (Rawls, 1996: lx-lxi).

It's important to stress that Rawls' theory on political liberalism is not written for all liberal or democratic societies, but only for a specific type of regime – constitutional liberal democracies², “(...) another aim of PL: saying how a well-ordered liberal political society is to be formulated” (Rawls, 1996, xlviii). This is a form of regime that asserts its authority to create lawful regulations through the combination of possessing a democratic system and a liberal constitution³. Rawls seeks to show that it is possible to create a political framework that aligns with the fundamental normative principles of a constitutional democracy and that can produce legitimate laws that are accepted and adhered with a strong allegiance by its citizens. Hence, what are the challenges and complexities involved in establishing a constitutional democracy that is effectively and cohesively governed, a well-ordered society?

Rawls postulates that political justice needs to address two fundamental questions, which he subsequently amalgamates into one inquiry (Rawls, 1996: 3). The primary concern that arises is how to elucidate the appropriate framework for a conception of justice that is suitable for a democratic constitutional society. Rawls contends that a just and well-ordered society is feasible owing to the moral nature of human beings, which is capable of comprehending, adhering to, and being adequately motivated by a reasonable political conception of justice that upholds the principles and ideals of such a society (Rawls, 1996: lxii). However, the question that arises is understanding what constitutes the underlying foundation of such a shared notion of justice and how can citizens recognize themselves and adhere to that notion.

Why to focus on justice? For Rawls, “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions” (Rawls, 1999, 1) and finding a shared basis of justice is crucial for the functioning of society, especially in regard to the basic structure of political and social institutions⁴.

“I return instead to our first question and ask: How might political philosophy find a shared basis for settling such a fundamental question as that of the most appropriate family of institutions to secure democratic liberty and equality? ” (Rawls, 1996: 8)

I consider that, to tackle these complex issues, we must take into account a multitude of factors such as power distribution, allocation of rights and duties, and the extent of individual liberty. This implies applying

² Rawls uses a variety of terms to describe this system, including "constitutional democracy" (e.g. Rawls, 1996: 33), "liberal constitutional democracy" (e.g. Rawls, 1996: 22), "modern liberal democracy" (e.g. Rawls 1996: xlix) and "democratic society" (e.g. Rawls, 1996: 24). He notes that they are largely interchangeable, and he will primarily use the term "constitutional democracy" for convenience (Rawls, 1996: 11). I will follow his thought and choice of words.

³ In expounding upon the concept of the two moral powers of citizens, I will elucidate the reasons why the adherence to these powers compels us to embrace a liberal constitution.

⁴ The term *basic structure* refers to the key political, constitutional, social, and economic institutions of society, and their interconnectedness in forming a cohesive system of social cooperation over a sustained period. This structure falls solely within the political domain (Rawls, 1996: xliii).

a notion of justice to the fundamental structure of society that takes into consideration all the basic values and can give a systematic answer to the problems surrounding them. Furthermore, finding a shared basis of justice is crucial because it allows all citizens to examine and critique whether the institutions of their constitutional democratic regimes are properly functioning.

The second concern that worries Rawls pertains to toleration in a broader sense and the issue of reasonable pluralism. Rawls acknowledges that a democratic society is characterized by a permanent diversity of conflicting and irreconcilable reasonable comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines, which are adopted by citizens and shaped by the public culture of a constitutional democracy (Rawls, 1996: 4). As such, a political conception of justice that aims to govern the basic structure of society must account for this fact and provide a framework for addressing the challenge of accommodating a diverse array of reasonable comprehensive views.

“Combining both questions we have: how is it possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?” (Rawls, 1996: 4)

Rawls acknowledges the existence of intense conflicts arising from differences in religion, worldviews, and moral beliefs. Despite these differences, it is of the uttermost importance that cooperation between citizens occurs and ensure that our society is stable and just. However, historical evidence indicates that this is rare. Political liberalism offers a unique solution to this common problem, where public reason, in my point of view, is a critical and crucial component, especially for any deliberative enterprise or any deliberative model of democracy.

To address these issues, Rawls elaborates on concepts such as comprehensive doctrines, burdens of judgment, reasonable pluralism, political conceptions of justice, legitimacy, overlapping consensus, and stability for the right reasons. It is crucial to understand how the pieces of the puzzle fit together in order to grasp the full picture, and, in this thesis, it is important to lay-out, at least in a superficial way, the construction that Rawls makes of a well-ordered society, especially because public reason, and political parties, will play a major role within such a complex system. The first pieces of the puzzle I think we need to address to understand the predicaments Rawls tries to resolve are the concepts of comprehensive doctrines, burdens of judgments, and reasonable pluralism.

Comprehensive doctrines are sets of beliefs that citizens affirm. They are different worldviews that provide a framework for interpreting and making sense of the world, including beliefs about what is valuable and

how we should live. They can be religious, philosophical, or moral, and they can be quite different from one another (Rawls, 1996: 59). Usually, they have a wide range of scope and depth, and include metaphysical and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality or the justification of moral beliefs. One prominent example of comprehensive doctrines are religious worldviews as they often provide a broad framework for understanding not only moral matters, but also metaphysical and epistemological issues. Rawls also includes in comprehensive doctrines the theory of utilitarianism, which emphasizes the maximization of happiness or pleasure as the ultimate goal of morality, and Kantianism, which centers on the idea of duty and the moral worth of actions performed out of respect for the moral law (Rawls, 1996: 13). He also limits his scope of study to reasonable comprehensive doctrines⁵ because those are the doctrines that reasonable citizens, in principle, will assume (Rawls, 1996: 59)⁶.

He argues that, in a constitutional democratic society, citizens usually hold at least one comprehensive doctrine, and it is unlikely that all citizens will share the same comprehensive doctrine. Is this pluralism attributed to citizens' self-interest or the interests of their social class, as well as their inherent inclination to perceive the world through a narrow perspective? Is it an "unfortunate condition of human life" (Rawls, 1996: 37)? Why do rational individuals with similar reasoning skills and judgment tend to arrive at different conclusions and adopt different comprehensive doctrines? Reasonable people may draw different conclusions despite having similar cognitive abilities because of what Rawls referred to as the *burdens of judgment*: when attempting to form a reasoned judgment about a complex issue, individuals may encounter a range of factors that create burdens of judgment (Rawls, 1996: 56), factors of assessing and evaluating metrics that lead us to different reasonable conclusions.

First, the empirical or scientific evidence of a complex and interdisciplinary case may be conflicting, which makes it challenging to evaluate what's the relevant information. Secondly, even when we agree about the metrics that are relevant for the case, we may still differ in how we weight those factors, especially when there are trade-offs present between the different factors, which will lead us to different judgements, even when departing from the same metrics. Thirdly, many concepts in moral or political philosophy are

⁵ He characterizes reasonable comprehensive doctrines by three main features. Firstly, they are an exercise of theoretical reason that covers major religious, philosophical, and moral aspects of human life in a coherent and consistent manner. They organize recognized values so that they are compatible with each other and present a meaningful worldview. Secondly, they are an exercise of practical reason: in deciding which values to prioritize and how to balance them, they use both theoretical and practical reason where they differentiate themselves from others by emphasizing certain values and giving them particular weight. Finally, reasonable comprehensive doctrines belong to or are drawn upon a tradition of thought and doctrine. They are stable over time and evolve slowly in response to good and sufficient reasons. He also adds that it is important to note that this definition of reasonable comprehensive doctrines is intentionally broad to avoid arbitrarily excluding any doctrine. Without strong grounds based on clear aspects of reasonableness, excluding any doctrine would be unfair (Rawls, 1996: 59).

⁶Rawls acknowledges that every society, no matter how reasonable its citizens are, will inevitably contain certain unreasonable doctrines that are incompatible with a democratic society and limit the aim of realizing a fully reasonable democratic society. He suggests that the appropriate political principles of justice must be employed to settle the issue of how far unreasonable doctrines can be tolerated in a constitutional democratic regime. Although there are limits to what it can be accomplished, he stresses the importance of attempting to realize the ideal of public reason to the fullest extent possible (Rawls, 1997: 806).

vague or lack a clear formulation, which means that they're application to empirical situations will be interpreted differently and will probably not be applied consistently throughout the different cases. Fourth, our individual and subjective experience, our background story, our environment, or the time of history we were born into will influence our judgment and how we access evidence or weigh moral or political cases. It is also very difficult to arrive at the same degree of assessment when the issue has different sides and all with strong compelling normative considerations. Finally, Rawls adds that not all moral or political values can be secured by social institutions and that makes it even harder to set priorities or make adjustments. Overall, these burdens of judgment can contribute to differences in the judgments reached by individuals who possess similar reasoning abilities, contributing to different comprehensive worldviews who are not just motivated by "ignorance and perversity, or else in the rivalries for power, status, or economic gain." (Rawls, 1996: 58).

Rawls refers to this pluralism as *the fact of reasonable pluralism*: free institutions in constitutional democracies, alongside the free practical reason of their citizens and the burdens of judgment, will naturally and inevitably generate a variety of doctrines and views, some of them reasonable and comprehensible and, simultaneously, irreconcilable (Rawls, 1996: 36-37; 135). To recognize these burdens of judgements is to acknowledge that our doctrine holds no exceptional significance for individuals other than their own subjective evaluation of its merits. And it is to recognize that those who hold contrasting beliefs are also reasonable and entitled to their opinions (Rawls, 1996: 60) and, hence, those who hold political power aren't entitled to use it to repress doctrines that are not unreasonable (Rawls, 1996: 61). If citizens cannot reasonably concord on the same comprehensive doctrine, how will they adhere to the political conception of justice that is applied to the basic structure of society? In other words, how can we have a basis of social unity⁷ that governs and directs our democratic system? For Rawls, the answer lies in the legitimacy of the general structure of authority.

I see legitimacy, broadly speaking, as the quality of the state that provides it with validity and recognition. It happens when the citizens of a community or state accept and recognize the political authority of their government as their own. They believe that the government's actions or decisions are legitimate because the government is a type of extension of its citizens and has the right to do so. Hence, citizens recognize its power to make laws on their behalf. Because citizens see the government as a legitimate source of law and authority there is widespread trust and support, which allows the community to be ruled

⁷ Rawls states that a reasonable basis of social unity comprehends three factors. Firstly, the basic structure of society is regulated by one political conception from a family of reasonable liberal conceptions of justice. Secondly, all reasonable comprehensive doctrines in society support some member of this family, with citizens who affirm these doctrines forming a majority over those who reject them. Finally, public political discussions are reasonably decided based on public reasons, particularly on matters related to constitutional essentials and basic justice (Rawls, 1996: xlix).

effectively and cohesively, maintaining the social order and making it prosper. It's a critical component of the broader democratic project and serves as a fundamental precondition for an effective and stable exercise of political power in constitutional democracies.

How can the principle of collective self-rule, a government by the will of the people, which is integral to the concept of a legitimate democratic government, be reconciled with the reality that citizens, even if in good faith and sound minds, hold deep disagreements regarding significant aspects of morality, justice, or ethics?

Some theorists argue that a government is legitimate only if the people it governs have effectively consented to be governed by it (Simmons 2001). However, this standard is problematic for a liberal democratic society for several reasons. Firstly, obtaining the explicit or implicit consent of all citizens in a society is an unrealistic expectation. The unanimity of views and opinions necessary for complete and valid consent is rare, if not impossible, in a diverse and complex society. Therefore, using consent, understood as unanimity of views, as a basis for political legitimacy can lead us to a deadlock that can undermine the effective functioning of a society. Secondly, even if we assume that what counts is the rule of the majority, where what's legitimate is defined as what the majority of the citizens consent, this can lead us to what is referred as the "tyranny of the majority" where the government, legitimized by the majority, can oppress minority groups with impunity. In such a scenario, the government can legitimately violate individual freedoms or rights, undermining basic principles of justice.

Another approach for political legitimacy is the idea that the legitimacy of the political is derived on some objective moral or political truth. This standard holds that a government is legitimate only if it adheres to the correct moral or political principles. However, this standard also presents challenges for a liberal democratic society. Firstly, given the fact of the burdens of judgment and of reasonable pluralism, it can be very problematic to establish a consensus on what exactly constitutes objective truth or morality, and different groups will inevitably present their idea of the truth and their own beliefs on what the correct principles should be. This again leads us to a stalemate, where the effectivity of the state to be conduct itself is endangered. Secondly, this standard of truth can be used to impose a particular set of beliefs, using coercion or oppression to dissent views that don't see truth in those principles, which can again lead to the curtailment of individual rights and freedoms.

The ability to express the shared will of citizens is an essential feature of constitutional democracies. However, the fact of reasonable pluralism can make it difficult to achieve such political legitimacy. As a result, there is a significant obstacle to the legitimacy of constitutional democracies that stems from a

deep conflict, not only from comprehensive doctrines, but also from citizens' interpretations and justifications of the fundamental normative concepts that underlie this regime⁸. Hence, one may question whether a constitutional democracy can be established and accepted by a majority of citizens without resorting to the tyranny of the majority, coercion and manipulation. Rawls contends that, with the fact of reasonable pluralism, there is usually *the fact of oppression*. When the basic structure of a society adheres to a single comprehensive doctrine, like a particular religious or moral doctrine, the oppressive state power and coercion become crucial in preserving that one and same shared understanding. This is because alternative views must be suppressed, and force is often used to achieve this. Rawls gives the example of the Catholic Church and the Inquisition on how a comprehensive doctrine can lead to oppression and injustice when it dominates society's basic structure.

“If we think of political society as a community united in affirming one and the same comprehensive doctrine, then the oppressive use of state power is necessary for political community. (...) Call this “the face of oppression.” (Rawls, 1996: 37)

The existence of reasonable pluralism within a society means that there will inevitably be a diversity of comprehensive doctrines held by citizens. The imposition of one of these worldviews to the entire structure of society, with all its institutions and social arrangements, would be at the expense of other doctrines who would be repressed from holding different beliefs and would not see their government as legitimate. Therefore, Rawls argues that the legitimacy of constitutional democracies must be derived from principles that allow the coexistence of different comprehensive doctrines, rather than the imposition of any one of them. The principles to be applied to the basic structure of society must propose “guidelines for how basic institutions are to realize the values of liberty and equality” (Rawls, 1996: 4), be independent from comprehensive doctrines (since none of these can serve as the basis for public justification), while still being supported by a substantial majority of its citizens (Rawls, 1996: 38).

“(...) to serve as a public basis of justification for a constitutional regime a political conception of justice must be one that can be endorsed by widely different and opposing though reasonable comprehensive doctrines.” (Rawls, 1996: 38)

⁸ Rawls argues that constitutional democracies are founded on the values of liberty and equality, which have been interpreted differently and have given rise to conflicting traditions within democratic thought. One tradition, associated with Locke, emphasizes modern liberties such as individual rights and the rule of law, while the other tradition, associated with Rousseau, prioritizes ancient liberties such as equal political participation and communal values (Rawls, 1996: 4-5).

Rawls recognizes that a well-ordered constitutional democracy requires a coherent and widely accepted political conception that citizens can see as legitimate and can guide its governance in a just and effective manner.

“The problem of political liberalism is to work out a political conception of political justice for a constitutional democratic regime that a plurality of reasonable doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, liberal and nonliberal, may freely endorse, and so freely live by and come to understand its virtues.” (Rawls, 1996: xi).

The challenge lies in the reconciliation of divergent perspectives and values held by citizens, without resorting to actual consent, compromising on truth or morality or on one comprehensive doctrine that can only be maintained by the oppressive use of state power. It’s about understanding how to create the legitimacy of the power of the state in a constitutional democracy marked by a reasonable pluralism, where different citizens with different worldviews all see the government and the basic structure of their society as legitimate, as one that represents them and where they present some degree of recognition, while still allowing citizens to disagree on other factors.

Rawls is concerned not only with the issue of justice and legitimacy, but also with the problem of stability, particularly regarding *stability that for the right reasons*. In other words, Rawls believes that a just society must not only be legitimate but must also be able to maintain its legitimate structure over time. This requires that the principles of justice applied to the basic structure are widely accepted and endorsed by the members of the society, and that citizens are motivated to abide by these principles even in the face of disagreement and challenges. Rawls argues that such stability for the right reasons is necessary for a just society to flourish and be sustained (Rawls, 1996: xxxix).

Rawls desires to move away from a political situation where agreement on a political conception of justice, is not derived from a *modus vivendi*. I see *modus vivendi* as a strategic agreement, based on pragmatic grounds, that is subject to change based on contingent factors. Rawls gives the example of a treaty between two states that have conflicting interests. In a *modus vivendi* each state would negotiate the treaty in a way that creates an equilibrium point where neither side has an advantage in violating it. Each state would view adherence to the treaty as being in its own national interest, including its reputation as a trustworthy state that honors its commitments. However, this is a practical arrangement that does not resolve the underlying conflict between the two states. If circumstances were to change, either state might pursue its own goals at the expense of the other. He argues that a similar dynamic can be seen in any social consensus that is based on self-interest, group interests, or political bargaining. In such cases,

social unity is only apparent, as it is contingent on circumstances remaining favorable for the convergence of interests (Rawls, 1996: 147). We can have stability, but not a *stability for the right reasons*, as it does not address the deeper source of disagreement.

To address these challenges, Rawls proposes his theory of political liberalism as a solution, where public reason is a core concept connected to legitimacy and stability. By establishing a practice of public reasoning, Rawls hopes to construct a more stable foundation for democratic governance where different worldviews all adhere to the same principles to be applied to the basic structure of society for reasons that strengthens citizens allegiance to democratic shared values.

2.1.2) The Concept of Public Reason and its Role in Political Legitimacy

In this section I will briefly address what's the role of public reason within the predicaments underlined. Public reason is the normative concept that political and legal impositions should be publicly justifiable to all citizens in order to have some degree of legitimacy. This concept serves as a normative framework for political dialogue by providing a set of guidelines that are both rational and impartial. It is a means to establish a common foundation for the basic structure of society and for political decision-making in fundamental matters, despite the variety of belief systems. Public reason prioritizes rationales that can be agreed upon by every reasonable individual, irrespective of their comprehensive doctrines. This fosters legitimacy by guaranteeing that political decisions are reached through an equitable procedure that is accessible to all citizens of society and on which all citizens recognize the validity of political authority.

Public reason approaches are, therefore, a theoretical framework that aim to move away from objective standards of truth, to move away from relying solely on exogenously defined religious, moral, or philosophical doctrines as the basis for legitimate political impositions. Instead, they focus on the subjects' own reasons and what they can accept as appropriate reasons for political and legal impositions. This shift is intended to avoid imposing values on individuals and groups from an external perspective, instead opting for a more intersubjective perspective in justifying the use of political power. From a Rawlsian perspective this means appealing to reasons citizens can reasonably accept.

“Citizens realize that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines. In view of this, they need to consider what kinds of reasons they may reasonably give one another when fundamental political questions are at stake. I

propose that in public reason comprehensive doctrines of truth or right be replaced by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens.” (Rawls, 1997: 766)

A public reason approach attempts to identify the types of reasons, reasoning, and justifications that can be considered acceptable and appropriate for political and legal impositions. Rawls turns to the idea of the *politically reasonable*: when making a stand on fundamental matters or when deciding what is the conception of justice to be applied to the basic structure of society, Rawls asks us to turn only to political values and to political conceptions of justice that are reasonable (Rawls, 1996: 38).

By turning to reasonability, Rawls aims to provide a framework for political decision-making that can accommodate the diversity of comprehensive doctrines while ensuring that political power is exercised in a fair and legitimate manner. The politically reasonable is addressed to citizens as citizens rather than as adherents of a particular doctrine (Rawls, 1997: 800). This means that public reason is not based on any particular comprehensive doctrine, but rather on a shared commitment to democratic values and principles that people can reasonably accept. Public reason is grounded in a criterion of reciprocity of reasons and Rawls expresses it through the liberal principle of legitimacy:

“Our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions- were we to state them as government officials- are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons.” (Rawls, 1997: 771).

Rawls contends that the legitimacy of political power is contingent upon the kind of reasons that are presented when exercising such power. Public reasons, which are those that others can reasonably accept, should be employed when wielding political power, at least on fundamental matters. Therefore, a public reason approach rests in the idea that the legitimacy of the political power is dependent on the type of reasons and the type of reasoning that are presented for the exercise of that power. These reasons are not drawn by any comprehensive doctrine of truth or right but are evaluated by the degree to which they can be reasonably endorsed by individuals with opposing beliefs, irrespective of their comprehensive doctrines.

I intend to delve into the concept of public reason and explore the notions of reciprocity and acceptability. However, at the present, a more elaborate explanation is required to fully comprehend how Rawls progresses from basic moral values that are implicit and shared in a constitutional democracy, to political conceptions of justice, to legitimacy, and ultimately to stability for the right reasons. In the forthcoming chapter, I will undertake a comprehensive analysis of this process, elucidating each step in detail.

2.2) From Epistemological Foundations to Political Legitimacy: The Constructive Process of Political Liberalism

2.2.1) Starting from Rawls' Epistemological Foundations

Rawls starts with basic assumptions on the nature of liberal constitutional democracies: he sees society as a fair system of cooperation, he sees persons as free and equal citizens, as well as reasonable and rational, he sees a permanent pluralism of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, and that political power is always the power of the citizens as a collective body. Before I go in detail into these epistemological foundations, it is necessary to understand why Rawls turns to these ideas as basic values found in well-ordered constitutional democracies.

Rawls' approach to the normative foundation of a legitimate constitutional democracy does not involve creating and supporting a new or superior theory of justice. Instead, he refrains from presenting one single conception of justice as the one that ought to be applied to the basic structure of society and from where legitimacy comes from⁹. This is “the fundamental difference” (Rawls, 1997: 806) between *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*. The former aims to develop a comprehensive liberal doctrine, presenting Justice as Fairness as the political conception of justice all citizens should adhere to (Rawls, 1996: xviii). However, this contradicts the fact of reasonable pluralism, which refers both to the existence of reasonable comprehensive doctrines and to the existence of multiple reasonable liberal political conceptions of justice¹⁰ (Rawls, 1997: xxxviii). Therefore, Rawls recasted his theory of justice, presenting it as a political conception, freestanding from comprehensive doctrines, not being referred as the true or best political conception of justice but “as reasonable instead” (Rawls, 1996: xxii). Rather than aiming to determine the most just or legitimate political conception, his theory of political liberalism seeks to understand how different reasonable political conceptions of justice, and comprehensive doctrines, can coexist and support the same basis of social unity. Instead of drafting an idealized account of justice or legitimacy that is too utopic and separate from its historical time, Rawls became more realistic and started to operate within the established values of society that he endeavors to reorganize and reinterpret them in a new way.

⁹ It is my interpretation, as I've referred, that Rawls believes a single political conception of justice should be applied to societies' basic structure, chosen from a group of reasonable political conceptions. Although *Justice as Fairness* is one of the options that Rawls regards highly, he presents it only as a potential choice (Rawls, 1996: xlviii-xlix).

¹⁰ Thus far, I have only addressed the issue of pluralism with regard to comprehensive doctrines. However, it is crucial to note that this pluralism also extends to political conceptions of justice, and Rawls takes this into account. In the following chapter, I shall elaborate on the reasons for this pluralism.

“(...) if we are to succeed in finding a basis for public agreement, we must find a way of organizing familiar ideas and principles into a conception of political justice that expresses those ideas and principles in a somewhat different way than before.” (Rawls, 1996: 9)

He identifies certain fundamental normative ideas within the public political culture of a constitutional democracy that he aims to work with, such as the belief in religious toleration and the rejection of slavery. These basic ideas need to be incorporated into any political conception of justice for the conception to be reasonable and suitable for a basis of legitimacy. Therefore, the starting point for creating such a framework of social unity is the shared fund of implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles in the public culture itself. By formulating these ideas and principles clearly enough, it may be possible to create a political conception of justice that is in line with the society’s most firmly held convictions.

Rawls stresses that in a constitutional democratic regime, any political conception of justice must start to be drafted from the conception of society as a fair system of social cooperation and the conception of citizens as free and equal persons (Rawls, 1997: 776). These conceptions are moral and political, but not metaphysical (Rawls, 1996: xlv), as they are not derived from comprehensive doctrines and belong to the political domain.

Society is seen as a *scheme of social cooperation* over generations because in constitutional democratic regimes citizens don’t view the social order as having “a fixed natural order” or as having an “institutional hierarchy imposed by religious or aristocratic values” (Rawls, 1996: 15). It’s implicit in their conduct and political debates that society should be a fair system between the cooperation of all citizens who create and draft their basic structure and their constitutional essentials¹¹. Rawls contends that the idea of fair terms of cooperation lies between the idea of impartiality and mutual advantage. Impartiality is based on altruism, where individuals are motivated by one conception of the general good, while mutual advantage is based on each person being advantaged in their present or expected future situation. The fair terms of cooperation Rawls’ stress, on the other hand, are a relationship between citizens that is expressed through principles of justice. These principles regulate a social world where everyone can benefit, judged with respect to an appropriate benchmark of equality defined by the citizens within that world. He uses the example of a society with very unequal property distribution to illustrate that transposing people from such a society into a just society does not necessarily guarantee that everyone will gain by the change,

¹¹ Rawls adds that this idea of social cooperation has 3 elements: it is distinct from mere coordination of activities, as it involves the acceptance of “publicly recognized rules and procedures” that regulate the conduct of those cooperating; it requires fair terms of cooperation, which specify principles of justice that regulate basic rights and duties within societies’ institutions and ensure that benefits are distributed and shared fairly from one generation to the next, granting “all who are engaged in cooperation (...) are to benefit in an appropriate way as assessed by a suitable of comparison”. The conception of social cooperation also requires an idea of each participant’s rational advantage or good, which specifies what individuals or groups are trying to achieve when engaging in cooperation “from their own standpoint” (Rawls, 1996: 16).

particularly those who own large properties (Rawls, 1996: 17). This demonstrates that the idea of reciprocity, with whom public reason is closely connected, cannot be reduced to mutual advantage because not all parties benefit equally in a transition from an unjust to a just society. Instead, fair terms of cooperation are a relation between free and equal citizens in a well-ordered society, expressed by its public political conception of justice.

Rawls further supplements that, connected with this idea, is the *conception of citizens as free and equal persons* and the possibility of society to be regulated by a political conception of justice that is publicly accepted and recognized.

“I have said that in justice as fairness the fundamental idea of society as a fair system of cooperation over generations is developed in conjunction with two companion ideas: the idea of citizens as free and equal persons, and the idea of a well-ordered society as a society effectively regulated by a public political conception of justice.” (Rawls, 1996: 35)

First, it's important to note that Rawls addresses people as citizens and I read this as a way to create a "conception of the person as political" (Rawls, 1996: 29), trying to distance his foundations from other metaphysical conceptions of what it means to be a person, and address people in their political form as citizens of a community.

Citizens are free because they are not naturally subject to other people's moral or political authority, and equal because they are equally situated with respect to this freedom from the natural authority of others (Rawls, 1996: 18-19). These ideas commit us to a general idea of liberalism where the individual autonomy should be protected. Rawls identifies freedom as the result of people having two moral powers: a capacity for a sense of justice, hence their moral power of reasonability; and a capacity for a conception of the good, hence their rationality. Reasonability and rationality are two moral powers every person can possess when engaging in society. By reasonable Rawls means the ability to propose and follow fair terms of cooperation that others can also accept and follow. By rational Rawls means the ability to judge and deliberate means and ends, how these are adopted, prioritized, and affirmed (Rawls, 1996: 48-54). He argues that these ideas are implicit in the public political culture of democratic societies and that any political conception of justice needs to be “agreed upon by citizens so conceived” (Rawls, 1996: 35). Essentially, I interpret that Rawls presumes that individuals possess the capacity for rational reflection

and moral discernment and can act upon such judgments in a manner that reinforces a just and well-ordered society¹².

Finally, we have the idea that society can be regulated by a political conception of justice that is publicly accepted and recognized. Rawls states that it is implicit in the public political culture of democratic societies the fact of reasonable pluralism (that free institutions and the practical use of reason by citizens generates a pluralism that is reasonable and not just the product of irrationality or bad faith), the fact that if the political community is to be guided by any of the reasonable doctrines then the oppressive use of state power is necessary (as people not all share the same doctrine given the fact of reasonable pluralism), and the fact that a democratic regime to be stable and long-lasting, without being divided into conflicting ideological beliefs or social classes, needs to have the willing and voluntary support of a significant majority of its politically active citizens. This leads Rawls to affirm that a well-ordered democratic society needs to be able to allow citizens to adhere to one publicly recognized political conception, while they still adhere to their comprehensive doctrine.

“The idea of a well-ordered democratic society must be framed accordingly. I assume, then, that citizens' overall views have two parts: one part can be seen to be, or to coincide with, the publicly recognized political conception of justice; the other part is a (fully or partially) comprehensive doctrine to which the political conception is in some manner related.” (Rawls, 1996: 38)

All these epistemological foundations led Rawls to question how to legitimize political power: by what principles and ideals is the coercive power of the state justifiable to all the citizens, given that they are all free and equal, reasonable and rational, they hold different worldviews, they exercise political power over one another, and society is seen as a fair scheme of cooperation over generations (Rawls, 1996: 136-137)? How to draft political conceptions of justice that respect these basic moral ideas in a way where citizens can relate these conceptions with their comprehensive doctrines and thus allow a more robust type of allegiance to their democratic system?

In the ensuing sections, I will elucidate Rawls' approach to formulating a political conception of justice from within these basic ideas.

¹² Although Rawls discusses political conceptions of justice in this context, and this thesis centers on public reason and political parties, it is crucial to comprehend which political conceptions of justice are permissible for political parties to introduce. Thus, these components are vital when examining the link between public reason and political parties and will be further used in understanding what dynamics political parties can perform that are significant to public reason.

2.2.2) Linking Public Reason and Political Conceptions of Justice

How do we go from implicit ideas found in the public culture of a constitutional democratic society to political conceptions of justice? The two basic political ideas of society as a cooperative system and of citizens as free and equal persons are consistent with otherwise vastly different belief systems. Endorsing these two ideas commits one to liberalism, but Rawls stresses that they can be interpreted differently within certain limits, allowing for citizens to hold different conceptions of justice.

“(..) since these ideas can be interpreted in various ways, we get different formulations of the principles of justice (...). Political conceptions differ also in how they order, or balance, political principles and values even when they specify the same one.” (Rawls, 1997: 774)

In this sense he acknowledges that there is a reasonable pluralism not only of comprehensive doctrines but also of political conceptions of justice, and, hence, there are many forms of liberalism and related views that aim to establish a just and fair society. For Rawls, justice as fairness, his preferred theory of justice, is just one of the many forms of liberalism that adheres to this criterion of reciprocity¹³. These principles of justice are developed into political conceptions of justice that comprehend certain elements.

What are the elements that make a political conception of justice a reasonable one? Rawls states that all of them need to respect the criterion of reciprocity, a criterion that comes from the idea of society as a fair scheme of social cooperation between free and equal people, and recognize the burdens of judgment that create a reasonable pluralism (Rawls, 1996: xlix). Hence, the criterion of reciprocity bounds all the different political conceptions but commits one to a liberal view because it requires certain features. To respect this criterion, a political conception needs to make sure all citizens have certain basic rights, liberties, and opportunities, which are given special priority over other claims, such as those of the general good or perfectionist values, and that these basic rights and liberties ensure that each citizen has the necessary means to make effective use of their freedoms (Rawls, 1997: 774). All this also means that the political conception is *freestanding* from comprehensive doctrines, meaning that it “it is not presented as derived from, or as part of, any comprehensive doctrine” (Rawls, 1996: xliv), as it is drafted from within shared basic ideas found in constitutional democratic society, it has “its own intrinsic (moral) political ideal expressed by the criterion of reciprocity” (Rawls, 1996: xlviii).

¹³ For instance, Rawls provides an example of one such alternative conception that replaces Rawls' difference principle with a principle aimed at improving social well-being while ensuring that everyone has access to a sufficient level of adequate all-purpose means. He states that this alternative conception could be a reasonable and acceptable way of achieving justice as fairness, as long as it meets the criteria of reciprocity and recognizes the burdens of judgment (Rawls, 1996: xlix).

Having established the process of constructing a freestanding political conception of justice and the existence of a reasonable pluralism of political conceptions, the next step is to determine the most reasonable political conception for the basic structure of society. This involves considering the role of public reason, which is crucial in this process, and I'll address briefly here.

Rawls presents different interpretations of the concept of reciprocity in his writings¹⁴. On the one hand, he argues that reciprocity is an element of the ideal of fair social cooperation that is implicit in the public culture of democratic constitutional system, a suitable benchmark of comparison that seems to be defined by the political conception of justice. This involves citizens engaging in reciprocal cooperation with one another to uphold the principles of justice that underpin the system.

“Fair terms of cooperation specify an idea of reciprocity: all who are engaged in cooperation and who do their part as the rules and procedure require, are to benefit in an appropriate way as assessed by a suitable benchmark of comparison. A conception of political justice characterizes the fair terms of cooperation.” (Rawls, 1996: 16)

On the other hand, as expressed in latter texts, such as *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, Rawls defines the criterion of reciprocity as expressed by public reason (Rawls, 1997: 771), as reasons that we can reasonably expect others to accept. Let's remember the liberal principle of legitimacy that affirms:

“(…) our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions (...) are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons. To be reasonable, political conceptions must justify only constitutions that satisfy this principle.” (Rawls, 1997: 771)

As Langvatn (2020) explained, it seems that Rawls makes an ascent from a focus on reciprocity of cooperation defined by a political conception of justice to a focus on reciprocity in reasons and in justification (and the connected idea of public reason) (Langvatn, et al., 2020: 7). It's still true that any political conception of justice needs to meet the criterion of reciprocity to be reasonable¹⁵. However, since there are multiple possible reasonable political conceptions of justice, Rawls recognizes that citizens may have differing justifications for their political decisions. He isn't just looking for a set of fair cooperative rules steamed from just one political conception that everyone can agree on for the sake of it. Instead, he's searching for a set of rules that all citizens can agree on because they see them as reasonable,

¹⁴ Rawls' evolving views on political legitimacy and public reason account for the different meanings of reciprocity discussed above. In point 2.3.2) of this thesis I will delve into the changes in Rawls' conceptualization that will provide a comprehensive understanding of these variations.

¹⁵ Needs to have the 3 features listed above that make sure a political conception respects the idea of society as a fair scheme of social cooperation and of citizens as free and equal persons and that recognizes the burdens of judgment.

namely an idea of reciprocity in reasons and justification, where citizens exchange reasons that support their own political conceptions of justice. This ensures that citizens can accept a political conception of justice together as reasonable, even if they have different justifications for their beliefs.

“Practically, the most reasonable basis, one that might actually come about, is one in which all citizens agree that the regulative political conception is reasonable and some think it the most reasonable.”

(Rawls, 1996: I)

Rawls aims to find a political conception that citizens see as reasonable, even if not the most reasonable in their preferences. Nevertheless, Rawls still states that the way this conception come about is through an *orderly contest*:

“ (...) public political culture is bound to contain different fundamental ideas that can be developed in different ways. An orderly contest between them over time is a reliable way to fin which one, if any, is most reasonable.” (Rawls, 1997: 223)

Public reason is the way of pursuing this orderly contest. It encourages citizens to reason from these shared values and from a political conception that orders and that creates measures to ensure them. Rawls believes that through public debate and public reasoning, a political conception of justice can be developed over time that is publicly justified and can form the basis for social unity.

“To engage in public reason is to appeal to one of these political conceptions-to their ideals and principles, standards and values-when debating fundamental political questions.” (Rawls, 1997: 775).

Public reason is then a way of reasoning about political values that are shared between citizens in constitutional liberal democracies, within political conceptions of justice that are ordered and provide a complete account to society's fundamental problems (Rawls, 1997: 777). But why debating through public reason on fundamental matters? First, because in this way we appeal only to shared political values that are freestanding from comprehensive doctrines and, hence, others might see them as reasonable. But, I think most importantly, because citizens in a liberal democratic society may have differing interpretations of political justice and hold different reasonable political conceptions such that a democratic process guided by public reason allows citizens to recognize a range of interpretations as providing acceptable justifications for exercising political power based on their reasonability. Rawls rests some hope on deliberative democracy, where deliberation, following public reason, within these conceptions, might lead citizens to understand what the most reasonable one is, or at least to see the political conception as reasonable even if it's not their own.

I hope to have shown until here how we can construct political conceptions of justice from within shared values implicit in constitutional democracies, and how the criterion of reciprocity, implicit in the idea of public reason, is essential to build a freestanding political conception of justice. I also hope to have shown how public reason allows a public debate through the many reasonable political conceptions and, thus, creates a legitimate structure for the basic structure of society from where citizens can reason and adhere. In the next chapter I will conclude Rawls reconstruction by elucidating how citizens relate their comprehensive doctrines with the political conception that is applied to the basic structure and thus allow for a *full justification*.

2.2.3) Establishing an Overlapping Consensus and Stability for the Right Reasons

Once we have established how to go from the shared basic political and moral values of a society to political conceptions of justice that are freestanding from comprehensive doctrines, and how a public debate through the use of public reason can help us understand the most reasonable political conception or, at least, a publicly justified one, we ought to ask how can individuals move from supporting political conceptions that are independent of their comprehensive doctrines to fully endorsing the political conception while maintaining their comprehensive doctrines? This relates to the problem of stability, where Rawls puts beside any type of provisional stability that comes from a *modus vivendi* but looks for stability for the right reasons. The questions are as it follows: considering the reality of reasonable pluralism in a liberal constitutional democracy, how can the stability of such a society be ensured? Or:

“Put another way, how can we affirm our comprehensive doctrine and yet hold that it would not be reasonable to use state power to gain everyone's allegiance to it?” (Rawls, 1996, 139).

The answer, for Rawls, relies in an *overlapping consensus*. The overlapping consensus is the idea that citizens can endorse a political conception of justice, and their related liberal political values, from within their own comprehensive doctrine and perspective (Rawls, 1996: 133-172). Unlike a *modus vivendi*, an overlapping consensus is not just a practical arrangement for coexistence that is dependent on the balance of forces of who's in charge at the moment, but rather a shared understanding of what is just or legitimate.

“(...) the problem of stability for a democratic society requires that its political conception can be the focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines that can support a constitutional regime.”

(Rawls, 1996: 65)

I see it as a deeper form of agreement that arises when people with different views and interests can agree on a set of principles, a political conception of justice that provide a basis for cooperation and mutual respect, from within the reasons related to citizens comprehensive doctrines and not derived from external or pragmatic reasons. In Rawls terms, “in an ideal overlapping consensus, each citizen affirms both a comprehensive doctrine and the focal political conception, somehow related.” (Rawls, 1996: xxi). I see it as stability for the right reasons because it rests on internal reasons related to the subject that support a robust democratic system, and not reasons related to external circumstances from games of interests or power.

The argument is that a political conception of justice that is publicly justified and affirmed by citizens through an overlapping consensus accurately reflects the normative self-understanding of a constitutional democracy and brings a type of allegiance to democratic values and a type of stability that is stronger and endures.

“So while a political conception of justice addresses the fact of reasonable pluralism, it is not political in the wrong way: that is, its form and content are not affected by the existing balance of political power between comprehensive doctrines. Nor do its principles strike a compromise between the more dominant ones” (Rawls, 1996: 142)

However, how can this overlapping consensus be established and sustained in a liberal democracy? To relate justification and the overlapping consensus, Rawls lays a scheme:

- a) first, a political conception should have a *pro tanto justification* which means that it takes only into consideration political values, it's freestanding from comprehensive doctrines, and it is complete.
- b) then the conception must be accepted by citizens by their understanding of how their comprehensive doctrine relate to this conception.
- c) we reach a full *tanto justification* when all the political society and all the individual embedded the political conception with its own comprehensive doctrine” (Rawls, 1996: 385-389).

This means that a full public justification depends on a reasonable overlapping consensus that happens not when we try to gain the support of a majority but, first, by laying out a freestanding political conception that can be justified by public reason without “looking to, or trying to fit, or even knowing what are, the existing comprehensive doctrines” (Rawls, 1996: 389). The result is that citizens recognize these different political conceptions of justice as reasonable, they reason and relate these conceptions to their own

worldview, maintaining the different comprehensive doctrines they defend but allowing a consensus on a reasonable basis of social unity.

“For Rawls, public justification thus depends on the fact that all reasonable persons can endorse a political conception of justice from within their non-public or comprehensive doctrines, but public reason itself makes no reference to the content of those nonpublic doctrines—it depends only on the shared political ideas found within the political conception of justice.” (Quong, 2013)¹⁶

Rawls thinks that a practice of exercising the use of political power while respecting such an idea of public reason and an ideal of public justification¹⁷ can help develop a reasonable overlapping consensus that citizens can then use as a reciprocally acceptable basis of public justification. This shows how is it possible to have a type of consensus and agreement on basic fundamental questions, while still respecting the many different comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions of justice. Through this way, Rawls thinks that a society is well-ordered when it is regulated by a political conception of justice that can be the focus of an overlapping consensus and where there exist a full justification carried out by individuals.

I aim to have demonstrated the progression from underlying and commonly held fundamental notions present in constitutional democratic societies, to political conceptualizations of justice, leading to an overlapping consensus and a robust maintenance of the democratic system. Public reason plays a crucial role in facilitating a publicly impartial discussion on shared values and ensuring that essential issues are resolved on the basis of these reasons.

“(…) three conditions seem to be sufficient for society to be a fair and stable system of cooperation between free and equal citizens who are deeply divided by the reasonable comprehensive doctrines they affirm. First, the basic structure of society is regulated by a political conception of justice; second, this political conception is the focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines; and third, public discussion, when constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice are at stake, is conducted in terms of the political conception of justice. (Rawls, 1996: 41)

¹⁶ <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/public-reason/>>.

¹⁷ In the subsequent chapters I will make clear the difference between the idea and the ideal of public reason.

2.3) Rawls' Normative Theory of Public Reason: Exploring its Conceptual Evolution and Boundaries

2.3.1) Defining Public Reason and the Criterion of Reciprocity

As I've said, public reason is the normative concept that political and legal impositions should be publicly justifiable to all citizens in order to have some degree of legitimacy. This means that public reason connects with the idea of public justification and the idea of political legitimacy. The term public reason lacks a clear and universally agreed-upon definition, and the individual parts of the term - "public" and "reason" - are themselves open to interpretation¹⁸. Public reason can denote a specific type of reasons or a specific type of reasoning or explanation. For instance, Rawls distinguishes between public reasons and nonpublic reasons (Rawls, 1997: 800), showing concern with the type of reasons presented in the justification of political power. However, this distinction encompasses not only the types of reasons that are being presented but also reflects a wider process of democratic deliberation and justification, wherein individuals engage in a collective process of reasoning with one another, and "Public reasoning aims to public justification" where "public justification is not simply valid reasoning, but argument addressed to others: it proceeds correctly from premises (...) to conclusions" (Rawls, 1997: 786). I see this as entailing a difference between accepting an *idea of public reason* - namely, the notion that political and legal decisions must be publicly justifiable - and recognizing that this principle of legitimacy confers a duty or *ideal of public reason* onto certain actors, who are tasked with ensuring that the exercise of collective power remains, during time or through a debate, being faithful to its guiding idea and, hence, the imposition of political and legal decisions continue to be justified publicly.

In this point, I'm only going to make clear the idea of public reason, as the ideal will be further explained in the next point of the chapter. In political philosophy, public reason can be understood in two main approaches: the consensus view and the convergence view¹⁹. The consensus view requires that public justification of political impositions must be based on reasons that are shared by the relevant public or constituency, either through a *full or strong consensus*, where citizens share the exact same reasons, or a *weaker consensus* that requires only reasonable agreement. Rawls falls under the weaker version, where citizens can agree on different, but shared, political-moral values and conceptions of justice as a basis for public justification of laws and political decisions.

¹⁸ For instance, other theorists developed theories of public reason and public justification differently from Rawls' theory, such as Jürgen Habermas (1995; 1996), Gerald Gaus (1996; 2011), Charles Larmore (1999; 2002), and many others.

¹⁹ The convergence view holds that legal impositions are justified if each person affected has a sufficient reason to accept them, even if the reasons are not shared by others in the public. It is associated with Gerald Gaus and Kevin Vallier. The scope of this thesis is to examine the relationship between Rawls' public reason and political parties. Therefore, I will not delve into other theories that propose a different understanding of public reason. However, I must briefly state that I reject these theories as they do not establish an adequate threshold for achieving stability, and in my opinion, they perpetuate a *modus vivendi*. They rely on a more minimalist approach to public justification, emphasizing the importance of accommodating diverse views but not reconciling them into a strong allegiance to democratic values and ideas shared in democratic constitutional systems.

Public reason, in a Rawlsian perspective, demands that the political power, on fundamental matters, be exercised in accordance with the criterion of reciprocity, which implies a type of reasonable acceptability and it means looking for a shared understanding of political values and political conceptions of justice that can be applied to the basic structure of society and from where we can reason, reframing from advocating reasons drawn from our comprehensive doctrines that not all share. As such, the principle of legitimacy, the idea of public reason, and the criterion of reciprocity, work hand in hand to ensure that political power is exercised in a manner that is properly justifiable and acceptable to all citizens. In Rawls own words:

“A conception of political legitimacy aims for a public basis of justification and appeals to public reason, and hence to free and equal citizens viewed as reasonable and rational.” (Rawls, 1996: 144)

Rawls’ approach is also referred as the *political liberal approach to public reason* (Langvatn et al. 2020: 19). It holds that political power can only be considered legitimate if it can be justified using reasons that meet the criterion of reciprocity, a criterion that states what is reasonably acceptable. What exactly means the criterion of reciprocity?

“Hence the idea of political legitimacy based on the criterion of reciprocity says: Our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions- were we to state them as government officials- are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons.” (Rawls, 1997: 771)

The criterion of reciprocity, the idea of reasonable acceptability, posits two thresholds for determining if a reason meets the test of public justifiability and legitimacy:

- (a) first, the reasons must be honestly deemed suitable and adequate, sufficient, by the individuals offering them, who should imagine themselves as government officials;
- (b) second, the reason must be regarded as reasonable by the citizens who receive it and possible to be accepted by them.

In the first threshold I see that Rawls is reminding us that citizens in a democratic society hold political power, whether it is through participation in elections or voting on fundamental issues. However, Rawls argues that citizens cannot exercise political power as private individuals, and must instead acknowledge their role as co-sovereigns and employ political practical reason commensurate with this responsibility. This requires citizens to reason in a similar manner as elected representatives and government officials,

especially when making decisions that concern the basic structure of society. I interpret that the reason for this obligation arises from the idea that, ideally, government officials must ensure that their decisions do not undermine the fundamental goals and values of liberal constitutionalism and democracy. Rawls further states that the exercise of political power is proper only when the reasons offered for political actions *are sincerely believed to be sufficient*. I interpret that citizens must have genuine convictions about the justifiability of their political decisions, and they cannot offer superficial or insincere justifications. Instead, the reasons must be good enough to justify the proposed political actions, and the concept of sufficiency highlights the quality of the reasons offered. The reasons must be strong enough to justify the proposed actions, and citizens must be guided by reasons consistent with the basic principles of liberal constitutionalism and democracy when exercising political power.

In the second threshold Rawls introduces the idea of reciprocity, by stating that we must also *reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept*. Citizens must hold the conviction that the reasons they present are not only satisfactory but also potentially acceptable to other citizens. This means that citizens should be capable of rationalizing their actions in a manner that other reasonable citizens would agree with. The standard emphasizes the significance of having reasons that are publicly defensible, rather than being based purely on personal beliefs or preferences, reasons that are reciprocal to each part. It necessitates citizens to partake in a process of public deliberation, where they contemplate and respond to the concerns and perspectives of others, with the aim of reaching a shared understanding of what is rational and justifiable.

It's important to stress that Rawls' theory does not rely on an actual and explicit consent to determine the legitimacy of the basic structure of society, and it also doesn't rely solely on an idea of acceptability.

The liberal principle of legitimacy does not demand that individuals must fully agree with the government's conception of justice before political power can be exercised over them. Instead, the principle only requires that the government's conception of justice is reasonable enough that a reasonable person could accept it and understand why the policies supports the shared political values of constitutional democracies. It's about deliberating and understanding "Is this reasonable for others to accept?" and not if they *de facto* accept it as they're own preferred choice or down to the last detail.

Moreover, in *Reply to Habermas*, Rawls dismisses theories of legitimacy that rely solely on an actual consent or acceptability of citizens, stating that acceptance alone “allows way too much” and there must be a benchmark of appropriate acceptability as it provides a standard against which to judge whether a political regime's claims to legitimacy are justified (Rawls, 1996: 429). The legitimacy is determined by the compatibility of the principles and rules that determine the basic structure of that society with what reasonable people could accept under a well-ordered democratic society. However, relying solely on hypothetical consent or on an idealized acceptance can also be problematic as it can lead to a situation where the actual perspective and beliefs of citizens don't really matter and where citizens don't recognize the political authority. To contravene this, we find the overlapping consensus where citizens will relate their comprehensive worldviews with the political conception of justice that is to be applied to the basic structure of society, while the political conception of justice remains independent from the comprehensive doctrines.

In summary, according to the criterion of reciprocity, the way in which government officials and citizens engage in public reason, and the extent to which other reasonable citizens support it, will determine the structure of their fundamental institutions and the relation between citizens and state. By employing public reason in the exercise of political power, individuals can promote the legitimacy of political decision-making in pluralistic societies, as it provides a shared basis for political decision-making that appeals to what all members of society can consider reasonable. Or, as Rawls put it:

“Since the idea of public reason specifies at the deepest level the basic political values and specifies how the political relation is to be understood, those who believe that fundamental political questions should be decided by what they regard as the best reasons according to their own idea of the whole truth (...) and not by reasons that might be shared by all citizens as free and equal, will of course reject the idea of public reason. Political liberalism views this insistence on the whole truth in politics as incompatible with democratic citizenship and the idea of legitimate law.” (Rawls, 1997: 771).

We can also ask what it means to be political, or what it means when we refer to political values. With this question, and the subsequent thought exercise, I will show how public reason can be interpreted in two ways. Political values are distinct from other social or associational values because they are realized in political institutions, and they characterize the basic structure of society. Rawls gives the example of the value of autonomy and how it can take different forms (Rawls, 1997: 778). We can advocate for

political autonomy, which refers to the legal independence and equal participation of citizens in the exercise of political power. We can also refer to a purely moral value of autonomy, which refers to a way of life and reflection that involves critically examining our deepest ends and ideals. The latter may be an important value, but it is not political as some citizens with certain religious beliefs may reject it. Political autonomy, on the other hand, is a political value as it is essential for ensuring the legal independence and equal participation of citizens in the exercise of political power, it is exercised in the political domain.

Since political values must also be reasonable values, values that are shared by reasonable citizens and realized in the political institutions, public reason can be formulated in two ways. In a negative formulation, it implies that political decisions cannot be justified by referring to one's own comprehensive doctrine, including religious or philosophical beliefs, or to contentious scientific theories. Instead, political decisions must be based on reasons and values that all citizens can accept, regardless of their comprehensive doctrines.

In another, way, that for me it's even more interesting and practical, public reason, formulated positively, means that individuals must provide justifications for their political decisions based on fundamental values that are already implicit and shared in the public political culture of a democratic constitutional society. These values and concepts are commonly accepted by most reasonable citizens and are not controversial or based on personal beliefs or theories that some citizens may reject.

Let us consider a concrete example to illustrate these formulations. Suppose that we are engaged in a discussion concerning the legality of abortion and the associated rights. If an individual argues that abortion is against God's plan or the plan of life for each person, they are relying on reasons that stem from a particular comprehensive doctrine, such as a religious, existentialist, or perfectionist perspective on human flourishing. According to the negative formulation of public reason, arguments that are based on and grounded in any comprehensive doctrine are not acceptable, and therefore, this reason does not meet the test of public reason, the reasonable acceptability, and cannot be used to justify this measure or confer legitimacy. In contrast, if an individual argues that abortion should be illegal because every individual has the right to life and liberty, and human fetuses already possess life and are entitled to this right, this reason is based on values that are implicit in the public culture of constitutional democracies. This argument exemplifies the positive formulation of public reason and passes the test of public reason since it appeals to what reasonable citizens can reasonably accept, as it is founded on values that are implicit in the public culture of society.

Public reason is, then, a dual concept that comprises both a constructive and positive aspect, consisting of an orientation towards the fundamental political concepts and values of a liberal constitutional society, and a restrictive aspect that prohibits the use of reasons stemming from comprehensive doctrines, in the justification of political power.

When we relate the criterion of reciprocity with the liberal principle of legitimacy we can see that it yields a criterion of legitimacy in two senses (Rawls, 1997: 771): as a criterion for the legitimacy of the general structure of political authority, such as when citizens need to work out the conception of justice that is to be applied to their basic structure and to work out their constitutional essentials, and a criterion for legitimate political action that needs to be exercised in accordance with that structure.

In the first sense, this means that the legitimacy of the constitution and the basic structure of society is shaped by the way political power is exercised, in a way that is consistent with the criterion of reciprocity and public reason. When citizens and public officials adhere to this criterion, the general structure of political authority is seen as an expression of the democratic will or as an expression of mutually acceptable terms of cooperation among free and equal citizens.

In a second sense, it means that when enacting particular laws, they need to be in accordance with those political conceptions that citizens see as reasonable and as expressing shared values implicit in their culture.

“A citizen engages in public reason, then, when he or she deliberates within a framework of what he or she sincerely regards as the most reasonable political conception of justice, a conception that expresses political values that others, as free and equal citizens might also reasonably be expected reasonably to endorse.” (Rawls, 1997: 773)

I read this last paragraph as Rawls further complementing that public reason is, not only the types of reasons, but also reasoning from within a reasonable liberal political conception. How can we reason from a political conception? Through what Rawls calls the *guidelines of inquiry*: establishing guidelines for citizens to evaluate whether these principles are being upheld and to identify the laws and policies that best promote them (Rawls, 1996: 223-226).

Above I've mentioned the features that any reasonable political conception should have (a list of certain rights and liberties, special priorities to those rights, and measures ensuring all citizens can effectively promote those rights). However, Rawls further supplements that, besides substantive principles of justice

that were developed from the features above mentioned, political conceptions should also have guidelines of inquiry that “specify ways of reasoning and criteria for the kinds of information relevant for political questions” (Rawls, 1996: 223).

Hence, Rawls addresses political values as values that pertain to political justice, such as equal liberty, social equality, and economic reciprocity, and values that specifically pertain to public reason, values that govern public inquiry and “make that inquiry free and public” (Rawls, 1996: 224) such as reasonableness and civility. These values are seen by Rawls as political virtues that help facilitate reasoned discussion and decision-making on political matters. This pertains to the question of the completeness of the political conception: it should provide a complete set of values and guidelines that can be reasonably balanced and applied to a wide range of questions relating to constitutional essentials and basic justice (Rawls, 1996: 225). In other words, the political values and the values of public inquiry, specified in the conception, should be able to provide a reasonable answer to nearly all questions related to these topics. When a political conception meets this condition, it can be considered complete, and it is a framework of thought under which discussion on fundamental matters can happen.

This means that, when reasoning from political conceptions of justice, we are virtuously reasoning from a framework of thought that can balance and order political values through guidelines of inquiry that are accessible to the public and that rest on “plain truths now widely accepted, or available, to citizens generally (Rawls, 1997: 225), and this reasoning can lead us to different conclusions.

“Accepting the idea of public reason and its principle of legitimacy emphatically does not mean, then, accepting a particular liberal conception of justice down to the last details of the principles defining its content. We may differ about these principles and still agree in accepting a conception's more general features.” (Rawls, 1997: 226)

Rawls, hence, argues that the content of public reason should be derived from a range of reasonable political conceptions of justice. As I have illustrated, the values underlying a constitutional democracy can be construed and weighed in diverse ways, leading to a plurality of reasonable, yet liberal, political conceptions of justice. These plurality results in the content of public reason being composed of two elements:

“(...) this content has two parts: substantive principles of justice for the basic structure (the political values of justice); and guidelines of inquiry and conceptions of virtue that make public reason possible (the political values of public reason)” (Rawls, 1996: 253)

In my own reading, this reasoning from a political conception, considering guidelines of inquiry, relates or resembles, albeit being different, to another concept developed by Rawls, that of the reflective equilibrium²⁰. The guidelines of inquiry help us access if any law or policy really upholds the fundamental principles within one political conception of justice, it allows us to do a critical examination using, for instance, scientific data that is not controversial and rests on plain truths, to understand if a certain policy satisfies those substantive principles.

Reflective equilibrium, on the other hand, seeks to reconcile our considered judgments about specific cases with more general principles of justice from differing political conceptions (Rawls, 2001: 41-43). It involves three steps: first, we begin by examining our intuitive judgments about particular cases or situations, such as whether a particular distribution of resources is just or unjust; second, we formulate different general principles or rules that could account for these judgments; finally, we compare these principles to our initial judgments and revise either our judgments or principles until they are mutually consistent and coherent.

“(…) how well the view as a whole articulates our more fir considered convictions of political justice, at all levels of generality, after due examination, once all adjustments and revisions that seem compelling have been made. A conception of justice that meets this criterion is the conception that, so far as we can now ascertain, is the one most reasonable for us.” (Rawls, 1996: 28)

When Rawls talked about an “orderly contest” between reasonable political conceptions, I assume he had in mind a process of public reasoning in mind and reflective equilibrium. Rawls addresses the importance of a wide and full equilibrium to arrive to the most reasonable political conception (Rawls, 1996: 384-385). It’s a process of carefully considering alternative conceptions of justice and the arguments for them, where one’s general convictions, first principles, and particular judgments are in line with those considerations. It implies that individuals, acting and reasoning with political virtues such as sincerity and good faith, possess the ability to comprehend and evaluate the arguments espoused by proponents of alternative political conceptions. With a disinterested perspective, individuals can assess the potency of such arguments and remain open to the possibility of changing their stance, if warranted. This results in the most reasonable and legitimate political conception that is mutually recognized and affirmed by all citizens in a full reflective equilibrium²¹.

²⁰ I don’t regard this concept as central or definitive to the idea of public reason, but I believe it is important to discuss because it pertains to the broader Rawlsian framework of public justification. Therefore, I feel it is necessary to address despite its peripheral nature.

²¹Rawls sees this wide and full reflective equilibrium as an ideal, something we should aim for, while being realistic it won’t happen, the point is just to arrive at more reasonable conclusions than before. He states that reflective equilibrium “is a point at infinity we can never reach, though we

I interpret that the guidelines of inquiry, specifying the values of public reason, allow us to critically examine if a specific law uphold the principles within one political conception of justice whereas a wide reflective equilibrium asks us to carefully consider “alternative conceptions of justice and the force of various arguments for them” (Rawls, 1996: 384).

In summary, Rawls asserts that when engaging in public reason, we must reason from basic political-moral ideas and principles that are commonly understood within our public political culture, in a way that is accessible for others to understand and reasonably acceptable to them. It is inappropriate to use ideas and principles from deep and comprehensive moral, religious, or philosophical doctrines. Instead, citizens should seek to justify the political conceptions in a way that is most persuasive within an overlapping consensus. The ultimate goal is to recognize and respect each other's interpretations of these ideas as politically reasonable within the context of our constitutional democracy. And, specially, to publicly justify the political conception of justice that applies to the basic structure by a process of reflective equilibrium where different political conceptions are tested out.

2.3.2) Earlier and Latest Formulations of Public Reason

Rawls' theoretical framework is characterized by an evolutionary trajectory, which is arguably influenced by the critique and opposition leveled against his ideas and the full consequences he takes from the fact of reasonable pluralism, drafting a more realistic theory on political legitimacy (Rawls, 1996: xix). Notably, the concept of public reason undergoes significant changes between Rawls' earlier works, such as *A Theory of Justice*, to *Political Liberalism*, and his later writings, including *The Paperback Edition*, included in a 1996 edition of *Political Liberalism*, *Reply to Habermas* and *Public Reason Revisited*. While Rawls explicitly acknowledges the differences between the first two books mentioned, I contend, alongside with Langvatn (2016), that he introduces another modification to the foundational underpinnings of public reason in his later texts. Although I have attempted to utilize Rawls' more recent perspectives throughout this chapter, and will continue to do so in the next ones, it is important to clarify this shift in Rawls' thinking at this juncture.

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls recasts the principles of *A Theory of Justice* as part of a political, not comprehensive, conception of justice, moving from the possibility of full consensus, to the possibility of

may get closer to it in the sense that through discussion, our ideals, principles, and judgments seem more reasonable to us, and we regard them as better founded than they were before.” (Rawls, 1996: 385).

overlapping consensus. He formulates the liberal principle of legitimacy in a way which states that the exercise of political power is legitimate if:

- (a) It is exercised in accordance with a constitution.
- (b) The essentials of the constitution are ideas and principles which all citizens, as free and equal persons, can reasonably be expected to support.
- (c) Citizens can reasonably accept these ideas and principles if they are acceptable to their common human reason (Rawls, 1996: 137).

We see that, in this reading, legitimacy arises when political power acts in accordance with a constitution that is reasonably acceptable to citizens, and citizens accept that constitution because its ideas and principles are acceptable in the light of their common human reason. But what exactly does Rawls mean? How to deduct the principles that are to be present in the constitution?

“A broader reading of Political Liberalism, however, reveals that what Rawls means is that the constitution must be such that it is acceptable to citizens “in light of what they regard as their reciprocal advantage”, and that this condition is best secured insofar as citizens can see the essentials of their constitution as reflecting the principles of justice they would choose in the original position.” (Langvatn, 2016: 14)

The liberal principle of legitimacy rests on the idea that the principles and ideas of a constitution must be accepted by individuals who are equal, free, rational, and reasonable, and who seek fair terms of cooperation that result in mutual benefits for all. To determine these terms, Rawls puts forth the principles of justice as fairness, which he derives from the original position and reformulates as part of a political conception of justice. These principles unfold through a four-stage sequence that culminates in the background culture.

The crucial difference between *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* is that Rawls adopts a constructivist perspective, wherein these principles are incorporated into a political liberal conception of justice that is independent of comprehensive doctrines, yet still supported by them within an overlapping consensus. Under this consensus, individuals accept the principles of Justice as Fairness as part of an independent political conception, while also subscribing to their own reasonable comprehensive doctrine. To reconcile a political conception of justice with comprehensive doctrines, Rawls introduces the concept

of public reason. Public reason enables the reconciliation of broad doctrines with the same political conception of justice, allowing for an overlapping consensus. Consequently, collective power is considered legitimate only when it derives from a process of public reason that adheres to a sufficiently just constitution, which is grounded in the principles of justice in the original position and detached from any comprehensive doctrine. When advocating for laws, it is imperative that we justify our policies based on the principles of justice as fairness, which we can anticipate will receive support from all rational and reasonable individuals due to their ability to foster mutual benefit and equitable conditions of cooperation for all.

The latter Rawls, present in *The Paperback Edition*, *Reply to Habermas* and *Public Reason Revisited*, seems to have become more realistic and to have incorporated other implications of reasonable pluralism, namely that there is also a reasonable pluralism of different liberal political conceptions of justice (and not just a reasonable pluralism of comprehensive doctrines of the good), and that people will not converge on just one political conception of justice that can provide the basis for the justifiability criterion of public reason. There is an evident transformation in the formulation of the principle of legitimacy between Political Liberalism and Rawls' subsequent works²².

Rawls posits in his later writings that the legitimacy of collective power is contingent upon the criterion of reciprocity, which he did not mention in the formulation of this principle in Political Liberalism. Conversely, he sets aside the idea of accordance with a constitution. Legitimacy, expressed through the criterion of reciprocity, is now founded on a practical, deliberative process where we exchange reasons, still as citizens of a constitutional democracy, but reasons that meet a certain threshold for us and for others, leaving behind the idea that what matters is the accordance of reasons with a constitution. By adopting a more intersubjective and participant perspective approach to the principle of legitimacy, Rawls seeks to ground the legitimacy of collective power on a deliberative process with two thresholds, where we think of reasons that are sufficient for us, and we reasonable think are acceptable for others. This displays the intersubjectivity and the participant perspective, turning public reason more responsive to the needs and interests of citizens in a pluralistic society, while still being oriented to the basic-political moral ideas and values of a democratic constitutional society.

²² Allow me to restate the liberal principle of legitimacy, which is articulated in *The Idea of Public Reason*, to facilitate a comparison with the formulation presented in Political Liberalism and cited in the last page: "Hence the idea of political legitimacy based on the criterion of reciprocity says: Our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions-were we to state them as government officials- are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons." (Rawls, 1997: 771).

2.3.3) Examining the Scope and Limitations of Public Reason

What is the scope of public reason²³? Does it apply to all political discussions? If not, what's its limits? In a Rawlsian perspective, the normative reasoned justification curtailed in public reason debate should apply to fundamental domains of the political life in a liberal democratic society, which I have mentioned throughout this thesis. More precisely, public reason normative standard applies "in political discussions on fundamental matters", but not to all of them, only those that are being debated in the "public political forum" (Rawls, 1997: 767). In contrast, public reason does not apply to the background culture.

Let's start by understanding what *fundamental matters* are.

"The first point is that the limits imposed by public reason do not apply to all political questions but only to those involving what we may call "constitutional essentials" and questions of basic justice" (Rawls, 1996: 214).

Fundamental matters are matters related to constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice. *Constitutional essentials* can be categorized into two types: "fundamental principles that specify the general structure of government and the political process" and "equal basic rights and liberties that legislative majorities must respect" (Rawls, 1996: 227). The former includes the powers of the legislature, executive, and judiciary, as well as the scope of majority rule. The latter involves the right to vote and participate in politics, freedom of thought and association, liberty of conscience, and protection under the rule of law. In essence, the first type specifies the structure of government and political process, while the second type specifies the basic rights and liberties of citizens. These constitutional essentials provide the framework for a liberal democratic society and must be respected by legislative majorities.

Differently from these constitutional essentials are *questions of basic justice*, although they relate²⁴. According to Rawls, there are principles of justice that specify the equal basic rights and freedoms, included in the constitutional essentials, and principles of justice that are more related to the regulation of "basic matters of distributive justice, such as freedom of movement and equality of opportunity, social and economic inequalities, and the social bases of self-respect" (Rawls, 1996: 228). The principles specifying the basic freedoms and those covering social and economic inequalities (the questions of basic justice) are distinct but coordinate roles of the basic structure of society (Rawls, 1996: 229). Both comprehend political values, but the former role concerns how political power is acquired and the limits

²³ E.g., I have demonstrated already the scope of a political conception of justice, namely the range of subjects to which it applies is to the basic structure of society, to the political, social and economic institutions, and not to the whole life or to comprehensive conceptions (Rawls, 1996: 11-13, 175).

²⁴ "Observe further an important distinction between the principles of justice specifying the equal basic rights and liberties and the principles regulating basic matters of distributive justice." (Rawls, 1996: 228).

of its exercise, while the latter sets up background institutions of social and economic justice appropriate to citizens as free and equal and need not be covered by a constitution (Rawls, 1997: 767 fn7).

Rawls adds that determining whether the principles governing social and economic inequalities are being realized is much more difficult than determining whether the principles governing basic rights and liberties are being realized. This is because the former requires complex assessments of social and economic information that are poorly understood and often subject to wide differences of reasonable opinion. As a result, there is likely to be more agreement about the realization of basic rights and liberties than about the realization of social and economic justice (Rawls, 1996: 229). Nonetheless, both the basic rights and liberties and the principles of justice should be justified using public reason. However, I interpret that when it comes to go beyond the enunciation the principles of justice and the institutions that cover them, and we are to resolve more specific economic or social issues or to understand if these general principles are being realized, it may be necessary to invoke nonpolitical values that are not covered by the political conception of justice. However, as long as there is agreement on constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice, and established political procedures are considered just and reasonable, political and social cooperation between citizens can be maintained (Rawls, 1996: 230).

In summary, the scope of public reason on the fundamental matters is limited to the values of a political conception of justice that covers constitutional essentials and basic justice²⁵, while acknowledging the need to invoke nonpolitical values in resolving more specific issues such as the concrete realization of the principles that cover the basic justice.

However, even on the questions to which public reason applies, its scope is limited to the debate on the public political forum. Rawls describes this forum as having 3 parts:

“(...) the discourse of judges in their decisions, and especially of the judges of a supreme court; the discourse of government officials, especially chief executives and legislators; and finally, the discourse of candidates for public office and their campaign managers, especially in their public oratory, party platforms, and political statements” (Rawls, 1997: 767)

²⁵ The proposal about the scope of public reason has been challenged on the grounds that it may not be possible to draw a clear line between constitutional essentials and basic justice, and ordinary political legislation. This is because almost everything the government chooses to do has an impact on the basic rights and liberties of citizens, or on the distribution of resources in society, so, why not apply public reason to all matters? Rawls emphasizes the significance of first be able to establish a publicly justifiable foundation for fundamental issues. rather than attempting to apply it right away to every single matter, as he recognizes the potential difficulties in achieving such a goal (Rawls, 1996: 215). This approach can be seen as more pragmatic and grounded in reality.

The requirements of public reason apply to different contexts and entities, including the legislative and executive branches of government, as they are closely connected to the law and its implementation.

“The public political forum is the arena where our fundamental political principles and institutions are shaped and debated—it is where collective political power is most directly exercised—and thus it is the most appropriate site for the application of individual duties of public reason.” (Quong, 2013)

Rawls also highlights that the requirements of public reason may apply more strongly to certain individuals than others, despite the requirements being the same for all. This is suggested by the use of the word *especially* when referring to the discourse of judges, implying that the standard of public reason may be particularly high in that context (Rawls, 1996: 768).

A notable absence I haven't yet addressed is the case of ordinary citizens, particularly when they exercise their right to vote. Furthermore, Rawls acknowledges that there is a degree of flexibility in public reason's wide view of the public political culture. Both of these concepts which will be expounded on in the following point of this chapter and connected with the ideal of public reason.

Thus far, it can be concluded that the standard of public reason only pertains to particular questions- fundamental matters which are constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice- in specific settings- in the public political forum. In the subsequent discussion of the ideal of public reason, the differential application of public reason across society will be further explicated.

2.4) Rawls' Ideal of Public Reason: Exploring Its Application and Flexibility

2.4.1) Distinguishing Rawls' Idea of Public Reason from his Ideal of Public Reason

Rawls' theory of public reason addresses the challenge of how a diverse group of citizens can work together as a sovereign entity in a constitutional democracy, without being driven solely by their personal interests or comprehensive beliefs. What are the moral or legal obligations that individuals must fulfill under public reason and in which areas of our lives do its demands apply? To complement this idea, Rawls proposes an *ideal of public reason*, which consists of a set of prescriptions that guide citizens' actions and deliberations in those fundamental political debates where public reason applies.

Rawls contends that a practice of exercising political power while adhering to an ideal of public justification can help foster a reasonable overlapping consensus among citizens, which they can then use as a mutually acceptable basis for public justification (Rawls, 1996: 218). Furthermore, it provides a standard

for evaluating the types of reasons and reasoning that are acceptable in public political and legal contexts, thus promoting greater coherence and consistency in the democratic decision-making process. Rawls wants to ensure that individuals who hold political power “act from and follow the idea of public reason” in a way that it “is continually shown in their speech and conduct on a daily basis.” (Rawls, 1997: 769).

To achieve so, Rawls stipulates a duty he calls the *duty of civility*. He sees it as a moral obligation that citizens have to “explain to other citizens their reasons for supporting fundamental political positions in terms of the political conception of justice they regard as the most reasonable” (Rawls, 1997: 769).

“(…) since the exercise of political power itself must be legitimate, the ideal of citizenship imposes a moral, not a legal, duty—the duty of civility - to be able to explain to one another on those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason. This duty also involves a willingness to listen to others and a fairmindedness in deciding when accommodations to their views should reasonably be made.” (Rawls, 1996: 217)

I read this duty as pertaining two prescriptions. The first one is that when citizens advocate for specific laws on fundamental issues, they should assess whether their interpretation is the most comprehensive and sufficient- using the guidelines of inquiry- and explain to others why their viewpoint aligns with the shared political values of their democratic constitutional society. This way, other citizens can perceive that reasoning as reasonable, even if they still disagree. The second prescription I identify as having more to do with the political virtues mentioned along Rawls’ texts: citizens should not only explain their own positions according to public reason, but also take the time to understand and consider the positions of others, particularly those with differing views. This requires a certain degree of empathy and open-mindedness, as well as a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue with those who hold opposing views. By doing so, citizens can demonstrate a “fair-mindedness in deciding when accommodations to others' views should reasonably be made”²⁶. This, in turn, can foster a more productive and collaborative political environment.

This ideal is also a crucial component of Rawls’ larger ideal of democratic citizenship (Rawls, 1996: 217-218). Democracy involves a political relationship between citizens, which includes an equal share in the coercive political power exercised over one another. One of the aspects I haven’t mentioned so far, but that is clearly implicit, is that Rawls also addresses public reason as being concerned with “how the

²⁶ As previously demonstrated, the capacity to detach oneself from one's own perspective and to actively listen to and comprehend the views of others, including those based on different political conceptions of justice or counterarguments to one's own view, is also a key requirement of the wide and general reflective equilibrium. Both this process and the ideal of public reason seem to require a methodical to reasoning and decision-making, where individuals continually assess and revise their beliefs and principles in light of new information, feedback, and critical scrutiny from others.

political relation is to be understood” (Rawls, 1997: 766), namely the relationship between a constitutional democratic government and its citizens, that can be understood as the way in which the government governs its citizens and how citizens interact with one another within the political system²⁷. I see the ideal of public reason as specially applying in this relation between citizens as, in order to maintain this relationship and ensure that citizens are governing themselves in ways that each thinks the others might reasonably be expected to accept, they must be ready to follow this ideal and explain the basis of their actions to one another in terms that each could reasonably expect others to endorse as consistent with their freedom and equality.

“(…) the disposition of citizens to view themselves as ideal legislators, and to repudiate government officials and candidates for public office who violate public reason, is one of the political and social roots of democracy, and is vital to its enduring strength and vigor.” (Rawls, 1997: 769)

In essence, Rawls' duty of civility plays a significant role in fostering a strong and enduring democracy, where citizens exercise their political power in ways that are consistent with public reason, with their freedom, equality, respect for the reasonable pluralism and the basic political moral values of their constitutional democratic society.

2.4.2) The Graduability and Flexibility of the Duty of Civility

Rawls proposes that this ideal must be differentiated and applied differently, it's a graduated ideal applied in varying degrees depending on the place of the reasoning, the individuals involved, the subject matter, and the purpose of the discourse (Rawls, 1997: 767). Rawls also recognizes that in less-than-ideal societal conditions, which he relates to the wide view of the public political culture, certain aspects of the ideal may need to be relaxed or more flexible to achieve the broader goal of a well-ordered constitutional democracy, governed by the principles of public reason (Rawls, 1997: 783-787).

Let's start to understand to whom this ideal applies. It applies primarily to government officials such as judges, legislators, and chief executives, as well as candidates for public office and their campaign managers (Rawls, 1997: 768-769). Rawls emphasizes that the ideal of public reason is an ideal for how to exercise political power in fundamental political cases and, hence, those who exercise more directly

²⁷ The concept of citizenship in a democratic society is characterized by Rawls as having two distinct features: it pertains to individuals who are born into the societal structure and leave it only through death, and second, it involves free and equal individuals who possess ultimate political power collectively (Rawls, 1997: 769-770). I read this as implicit in the idea of society as a system of social cooperation over generations between free and equal citizens.

political power, such as elected representatives or public officials, have a greater duty to follow the ideal of public reason.

He also states that this ideal applies “more strictly to judges than to others” (Rawls, 1997: 768), especially judges from the Supreme Court since he describes this court as the “Exemplar of Public Reason” (Rawls, 1996: 231). The Supreme Court serves as a model of public reason for the public, as it interprets the Constitution in a coherent manner based on its underlying principles. This function of the Court also has an important educational impact on society (Rawls, 1996: 239-240).

When addressing the executive and legislative branches, the ideal of public reason “always applies to public and government officials in public forums, in their debates and votes on the floor of the legislature” (Rawls, 1996: 252). It also applies to the executive branch in its public acts and statements, including especially the President (Rawls, 1996: 216; 382). Rawls believes that the ideal of public reason also encompasses the reasoning of candidates and their campaign managers during political elections (Rawls, 1997: 767), even if they are not yet public officials.

However, despite not holding government positions, in what ways should ordinary citizens fulfill the ideal of public reason, according to Rawls?

“In a representative government citizens vote for representatives-chief executives, legislators, and the like-and not for particular laws (except at a state or local level when they may vote directly on referenda questions, which are rarely fundamental questions). To answer this question, we say that ideally citizens are to think of themselves as if they were legislators and ask themselves what statutes, supported by what reasons satisfying the criterion of reciprocity, they would think it most reasonable to enact.”
(Rawls, 1997: 769)

This means that citizens should advocate and vote in a way that best advances the shared values of the political society, rather than their private or associational interest. Rawls' ideal of public reason rejects the common contemporary view that people may properly vote on the basis of their social and economic interests or comprehensive religious and moral doctrines (Rawls, 1996: 219-220). Although citizens seldom vote directly on matters of constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice, they exercise political power and should fulfill the duty of civility when they engage in political advocacy, participate in political campaigns, and support and vote for political candidates. Additionally, citizens are expected to fulfill this ideal and support the idea of public reason by doing what they can to hold government officials to it (Rawls, 1997: 769).

We can now ask in what matters does the duty of civility applies. As evidenced by the foregoing argument, the notion of public reason pertains exclusively to fundamental matters and is therefore incapable of extending beyond this domain. Consequently, its ideal cannot encroach upon other spheres.

It seems obvious that the duty of civility especially applies in situations where fundamental political decisions are being made and the outcome of such decisions will be legally binding policies or laws. As I've stated, Rawls asserts that there is a pressing need for citizens to come to a practical consensus regarding constitutional fundamentals. However, in the case of basic justice matters, it is reasonable to anticipate considerably less unanimity. Hence, even though we are not released from the public reason ideal when deliberating and resolving such issues, it is necessary for us to be prepared to acknowledge a broader spectrum of interpretations concerning social and economic justice as reasonably acceptable applications of what public reason demands.

We can now direct our attention to discerning the specific spaces or forums in which public reason ideal is deemed applicable. Rawls explicitly emphasizes that the concept of public reason solely pertains to the public political forum, that I've clarified earlier, including the judicial, legislative and executive branches, and does not extend to political debates conducted in other forums (Rawls, 1997: 767). Therefore, the ideal of public reason cannot be applied beyond the boundaries of this public political forum.

Rawls juxtaposes the concepts of the public political forum and the background culture, emphasizing their distinctness. The *background culture*, as defined by Rawls, is the culture of civil society that exists separately from the three-part public political forum in a democracy (Rawls, 1997: 768). It's where we find all type of groups and associations, whether they are religious like churches, educational like universities, scientific or professional, accompanied with their many comprehensive doctrines. The background culture of civil society is not guided by public reason or by some central principle of legitimacy because, for other reasons included, "they reside within a framework of law that ensures the familiar liberties of thought and speech" (Rawls, 1997: 768). The many associations and comprehensive doctrines might have their own way of reasoning using nonpublic reasons to make effective actions towards their goals. Furthermore, Rawls identifies the nonpublic political culture as a mediator between the public political culture and the background culture and public reason ideal also doesn't apply here. This culture encompasses all forms of media, including newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, and more. Rawls concords with a full and open discussion in the background culture of civil society.

In *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, Rawls displays a greater degree of flexibility with regard to the reasons that are permissible in the public political culture and the public political forum. This is evidenced

by his expansion of the public political culture to what he refers to as *the wide view* of the public political culture. Rawls introduces the *proviso*, which permits citizens to introduce their comprehensive doctrines into public discussion, even in cases that are fundamental, on the condition that they can provide a justification in public reason in due course, making the public political culture more open towards nonpublic reasons.

“(...) provided that in due course proper political reasons- and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrine- are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support.” (Rawls, 1997: 784).”

This renders the public political culture a domain where a broader range of reasons may be presented. This can make the case that the ideal of public reason also applies differently throughout time. The duty of citizens to provide a justification in public reason can be fulfilled at a later stage, indicated by the term *in due course*. Rawls recognizes that there exists a degree of uncertainty in defining this timetable, as well as in identifying who is accountable for fulfilling this responsibility. Nevertheless, he emphasizes the significance of acting in good faith when presenting comprehensive doctrines in the public political forum, where the ideal of public reason is in effect. He also adds that it is to be “determined by the nature of the public political culture and calls for good sense and understanding.” (Rawls, 1997: 784). It is my opinion that the precise conditions under which the proviso must be satisfied remain uncertain and depend on various factors, such as the degree of polarization in the political society, the level of acceptance of the ideal of public reason, and the identity and role of the individuals involved, as well on how disputed the matter is.

He argues that there might be positive reasons to introduce comprehensive doctrines into public political discussions:

“Citizens' mutual knowledge of one another's religious and nonreligious doctrines expressed in the wide view of public political culture recognizes that the roots of democratic citizens' allegiance to their political conceptions lie in their respective comprehensive doctrines” (Rawls, 1997: 783-784).

By bringing their comprehensive doctrines into public discussion and showing how they support basic democratic values, citizens can promote greater understanding, respect, and tolerance for different viewpoints. Rawls suggests that this can help to strengthen the social roots that support democratic values, leading to a more robust and resilient democratic society. He gives the example of the Civil Rights Movement, where the religious roots were severely emphasized but public justifiability was secured

because these doctrines supported the basic constitutional values of freedom and integrity (Rawls, 1997: 785-786).

It should be emphasized that while the proviso allows citizens to introduce their comprehensive doctrines at a later time, and hence the duty of civility delays in time, the requirements for justification in public reason remain unchanged. Eventually, these groups must present reasons that respect the criterion of reciprocity.

“It is important also to observe that the introduction into public political culture of religious and secular doctrines, provided the proviso is met, does not change the nature and content of justification in public reason itself. This justification is still given in terms of a family of reasonable political conceptions of justice.” (Rawls, 1997: 784)

To conclude, Rawls regards the concept of public reason as an obligation of civility, encompassing both political virtues and the type of reasoning employed. However, this ideal is applied differently depending on various factors such as the subject matter, the agent involved, the location, and the time. Consequently, it can be challenging to ascertain whether the ideal is applicable and to what degree. Nonetheless, it is crucial for democratic citizenship and for the promotion of public reason that citizens, whether in public office or not, honor it.

2.4.3) The Complexities of Modern Democratic Governance and Rawls' Ideal of Public Reason

The concept of public reason is a normative idea that aims to provide a framework for justifying the coercive power of the state on fundamental matters, while promoting civil deliberation and discussion that aims to find a reasonable basis of social unity within a plurality of different worldviews. As I've demonstrated, Rawls' theoretical framework commences from within a well-ordered democratic society that is predicated on shared fundamental political moral values and is contingent on the possession of psychological moral powers by citizens, such as rationality and reasonableness. Nevertheless, the practical implications of public reason become uncertain in non-ideal circumstances, where these conditions are not entirely met.

For instance, Rawls describes a well-ordered society as one where: (a) everyone accepts, and knows that others accept, the same conception of justice (or at least everyone accepts some member from the family of liberal conceptions); (b) the basic structure of society is publicly known to satisfy this conception and; (c) citizens have a normally effective sense of justice (Rawls, 1996: 35). However, as argued by Boettcher

(2012), in today's democratic societies these three conditions are arguably not fulfilled (Boettcher, 2012: 174-175). Given that the obligation of civility in political discourse was formulated for an ideal scenario, it is uncertain whether or how this obligation can be effectively applied in conditions that are not ideal or less than ideal. Hence, it remains unclear what public reason actually involves in non-ideal circumstances and how the concept can be meaningfully applied in such cases.

The challenges presented by non-ideal circumstances may call for alternative approaches to moral and political justification, beyond those associated with public reason. Such approaches could involve a greater focus on the practical consequences of policies, the need for negotiation between individuals and groups with different perspectives, or even the need to include epistemic virtues in the justificatory practices. Ultimately, while the idea of public reason remains relevant in non-ideal circumstances, its application may need to be adapted to suit the specific challenges and conditions of such situations.

In order to explore this issue, my approach has been to center on the role of political parties within the context of Rawlsian theory, and to investigate the extent to which they may either facilitate or impede the promotion of public reason as a normative ideal. Why to focus on political parties? Because they play a crucial role in the democratic process, as they are the primary agents through which citizens can participate in political decision-making and influence policy outcomes. As such, their actions and behaviors can significantly impact the realization of Rawls' vision of a well-ordered society founded on public reason. By examining the relationship between political parties and public reason, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that arise in attempting to promote public reason in a real-world political context.

3. THE EFFECT POLITICAL PARTIES MIGHT HAVE ON RAWLS' PUBLIC REASON

This chapter seeks to investigate the mechanisms and dynamics through which political parties can shape and impact the Rawlsian theory of public reason²⁸.

In the first sub-chapter, I will explore the place of political parties in Rawls' political liberalism, in general, and their relevance to the principle of liberal legitimacy and public justifiability. Rawls' political liberalism is an account of legitimacy in constitutional liberal democracies, a regime where political parties play a central role. However, Rawls' does not focus on political parties: he says very little about the relationship between political parties and public reason, hardly exploring the connection between the demands of public justifiability and the deliberative and aggregative functions of political parties.

Yet, in recent years, a debate has emerged about political parties, political partisanship, and their relation to political liberalism and/or public reason. Several democratic theorists after Rawls have assigned parties an important role in deliberative democratic models: White & Ypi (2016) see parties as agents of public justification in a Habermas model of public reason, Muirhead and Rosenblum (2006, 2020) have defended that parties are vital to Rawls' political liberalism, and Bonotti (2017) argued that exists an internal connection between the normative demands of a Rawlsian model of public reason and those of partisanship. These authors have contradicted empirical accounts of partisanship that look at political parties as a necessary evil of a democratic society and have shown that, ideally and *if properly constrained*, political parties can be more than instrumental, they can vital in the construction of a liberal democratic society that endorses both disagreement on comprehensive doctrines and an overlapping consensus on matters of justice. **(Rawls' Political Liberalism, Public Reason and Political Parties)**

However, I argue that to ask what, from a public reason perspective, is an appropriate set of constraints and orientations for political parties, we need first to understand the complex and multifaced relationship between political parties and the core idea of public reason. The inquiry at hand is structured as follows: political parties are vital to public reason if they follow a specific ideal, a specific set of restraints and orientations but, before understanding what these guidelines should be, we need to understand what these guidelines are trying to prevent or trying to accomplish, we need first to understand in what ways political parties can harm or strengthen an idea of public reason, to only then explore and identify what the guidelines should be in order to avoid or to virtue those specific dynamics that impact an idea of public reason.

²⁸ The terms "might" and "can" are employed to convey the notion that the dynamics in question have the potential to occur or not, contingent upon the specific set of orientations and guidelines that parties are expected to adhere to, among other factors..

In an attempt to better understand this relationship, I will use a dialectical approach, which involves contrasting the positive and negative effects political parties can have on the model of public reason developed by Rawls. By doing so, I argue, we can create an ideal of public reason that is truly in line with the realistic utopia that Rawls intended. A realistic utopia is a vision of a society that is better than the present but is also achievable through practical means that can be inserted in the present society. This concept emphasizes the need for a balance between idealistic aspirations and pragmatic solutions to real-world problems. By understanding how parties can be helpful to the idea of public reason by seeing them ideally, and how they can also undermine it, looking at how political parties are currently operating in liberal constitutional democracies, we can gain a deeper understanding of what an adequate ideal of public reason can look like.

In the second sub-chapter I will present the thesis that parties are vital in the construction of a shared public reason and try to summarize the main contributions they can have to public reason. My aim is not to provide a full list of how parties contribute to public reason, nor to talk about the value of political parties for other fields, such as the representation theory (even though some points connect), my aim is solely and mainly to understand the relevant contribution that parties can make to a Rawlsian model of public reason. I will argue that parties can be vital for public reason when they perform these five functions:

1. If they function as a bridge between the public political culture and the background culture;
2. If they identify and systematize division within the unstructured mass of worldviews;
3. If they help translate comprehensive doctrines into public values and contribute to the formation of an overlapping consensus;
4. If they present reasonable and reasonably complete political conceptions of justice;
5. If they are loyal to democratic values and operate in /express a spirit of dialogue;

(How can Political Parties concretely Contribute to Public Reason?)

I will then argue against the thesis that parties can be vital for public reason. I will conduct an examination of the present mechanisms and dynamics that political parties exhibit within our liberal constitutional democracies that obstruct or can pose significant harm to the Rawlsian model of public reason. By scrutinizing these dynamics, I intend to assess the extent to which political parties can compromise the idea of public reason, as well as the potential risks that arise from such a compromise. I argue that

political parties can be especially harmful to public reason when they exhibit the following traits or dynamics:

1. If their behaviour exhibits characteristics commonly associated with factions;
2. If they promote illiberal political values or conceptions of justice, or a political conception that is tied to a particular comprehensive doctrine;
3. If their actions or decisions are influenced by monetary incentives from private sources;
4. If they deliberately foster misinformation;
5. If they present a spirit of non-dialogue, non-revision, and non-cooperation;

(How can Political Parties Compromise and Harm Public Reason?)

With this dialectical contrast, I hope to show that political parties must strike a delicate balance between advancing their own agendas and respecting the values and principles of public reason and political legitimacy in a democratic liberal society. Understanding the complex relationship between political parties and public reason is essential for building an adequate framework of guidelines or restrictions that are effective to promote a more inclusive, deliberative, and just democratic system that reflects the diverse interests and perspectives of all citizens, one that is able to honor the principle of liberal legitimacy.

Based on the dialectical exposition presented, the final sub-chapter of this thesis will focus on a way to synthesize the mechanisms performed by political parties that are significant to public reason. Specifically, I will argue that we can cross-over these mechanisms with the aggregative and deliberative functions of political parties and the challenges inherent in reconciling these two aspects. The chapter will argue that, when confronted with a trade-off between these functions, political parties should prioritize the deliberative virtues of public reason over the sole objective of aggregating votes and winning elections. It contends that any conception of public reason, any justificatory guidelines or moral duties must duly consider these functions and prioritize the deliberative one. By examining the tensions and complexities surrounding the functions of political parties, this sub-chapter will contribute to a deeper understanding of how parties can align with the ideals of public reason and foster a more robust and democratic political discourse. **(A Brief Synthesis: The Aggregative and Deliberative Functions of Political Parties)**

Chapter 3 of this thesis will investigate and present the requisite guidelines for promoting and maintaining the ideal of public reason.

3.1) Rawls' Political Liberalism, Public Reason, and Political Parties

Political parties are at the heart of how modern constitutional democracies work. Today's democracy is generally and popularly understood as govern by the will of the people and its achievable through a representative system, where parties occupy a central place. Yet, normative theories of democracy have often neglected parties' significance or gave them an instrumental role, creating a gap between normative theories of democracy and the practices of political parties²⁹. In 1942 Elmer Schattschneider wrote in *Party Government* that political parties have been "the orphans of political philosophy" (Schattschneider, 2017: 16), while being the focus of modern political science. Parties had been seen, in normative democratic theory, as "corrupt and corrupting; as factions ambitious to exercise power; as unreasonable, unrepresentative and undemocratic" (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2020: 96). Even though work has been done on political philosophy that addresses theories of democracy and political parties, this work is incomplete (Katz, 2006: 34-44). Specially within the framework of deliberative democracy models, such as the one advocated by Rawls, political parties, when included, have traditionally been regarded as instrumental tools for facilitating the deliberative process. They are usually viewed with suspicion due to their partial nature, which may potentially compromise the quality of the deliberation. Deliberative theories of democracy see the vote as an expression of the "the duty, of democratic citizens, to express their impartial judgments of what conduces to the good of all people" (Freeman, 2000: 375) and strong partisan loyalty and identity as an obstacle to this type of impartiality and reflection. Despite the considerable disparity between normative democratic theories and the practical role of political parties in contemporary democracies, a closer examination of the relationship between political parties and democratic theory is crucial. This is particularly important in the context of Rawls' contributions to the field, as he is one of the foremost architects of the liberal tradition that underpins modern democratic societies.

I will first indagate whether Rawls' political liberal framework entails any form of antipartisan stance. I see as a given that Rawls acknowledges political parties but I still find it interesting to explore this presumption and start this chapter studying forms of antipartyism and clearing why Rawls' theory does not fit them, Secondly, I will analyze Rawls' limited and scattered references to political parties in his work to comprehend his perspective on their role and significance. Thirdly, by drawing upon the crucial insights of other prominent political theorists such as Muirhead and Rosenblum, I will demonstrate why political parties are indispensable and serve a purpose beyond mere instrumental value within the Rawlsian model

²⁹ For a brief historical study on this gap see Muirhead & Rosenblum (2020: 96-99); for a study on why deliberative theories of democracy neglected political parties see Johnson (2006: 47-50).

of political liberalism. Lastly, I will show that not all political parties are as valuable to Rawls' public reason. I will offer a taxonomy of political parties, one presented by Alexander Tocqueville and explored by Rosenblum, and identify the specific types of political parties that are crucial to Rawls' vision of a well-ordered constitutional democracy. The latter can be seen as preview of sub-chapter 2.2, which will identify and elaborate on the specific ways in which political parties concretely enhance or undermine Rawls' public reason.

3.1.1) Does Rawls' Political Liberalism Encompasses any Form of Antipartyism?

To what extent does Rawls' theory of political liberalism in general, and particularly its model of public reason, embrace or reject the role of political parties in the formation of public policy within a democratic framework? Initially, I will identify and analyze existing theories of anti-partyism to demonstrate that Rawls' theory of political liberalism does not align with any of these established perspectives. Secondly, I will do a throughout examination of the references Rawls makes to political parties in his work to understand how he conceives them.

Rosenblum (2008: 25-108) done a deep reflection on why parties were neglected, and identified two glorious traditions of antipartyism.

The first tradition is rooted in the concept of *holism* which “pictures divisions as hideous imperfections” (Rosenblum, 2008: 27): it sees all social and political groups as a threat to the unity and integrity of the political order. According to this view, parties, with their partiality and opposition, are especially problematic, “particularly anathema because division is their origin and aim” (Rosenblum, 2008: 28) and, therefore, must be abolished. This tradition has been espoused by theorists like Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau who sought to impose an ideal, undivided political order. In current democracies, Rosenblum argues we can see similar ideas in parties of virtue (Rosenblum, 2008: 37-42), one-partyism (Rosenblum, 2008: 42-48) and majoritarianism as shadow holism (Rosenblum, 2008: 48-61). *Parties of virtue* are those that present themselves as being a superior virtuous party that aims to create a “superior consciousness” (Rosenblum, 2008: 39) that reflects the general and holistic will of the people, a party that is here to “put an end to the whole rotten business” of politics (Rosenblum, 2008: 42), a party to end all parties and create a holistic undivided political order. On another example, parties present *one-partyism* when they “are committed to the permanence of their single party” (Rosenblum, 2008: 43), seeing their party as representing the whole. Finally, *majoritarianism when it takes the form of shadow holism* is to a form of antipartyism. It happens when parties take “the majority decision as if it

were the decision of the whole.” (Rosenblum, 2008: 51) These ideas are widely rejected today as anti-democratic and anti-pluralist, but there are still instances where parties claim moral ascendancy, claim to need to have a one-party system or invoke their majority as if they were representative of the whole.

Rawls' theory of political liberalism, political legitimacy, and public reason is clearly not an example of this version of anti-partyism. Rawls' theory is based on the idea that, in a pluralistic society, there will always be a diversity of reasonable comprehensive doctrines and even reasonable political conceptions of justice, and in his view, it is not the role of the state to impose a single worldview in its citizens or a single political conception. It's true that Rawls' theory has some elements of unity. For instance, public reason, as an essential component of Rawls' theory of political legitimacy, is aimed at identifying values that are shared by all reasonable citizens, regardless of their comprehensive doctrines. However, public reason is not aimed at imposing a single comprehensive doctrine or worldview that represents this type of holism but is instead focused on finding common political ground on fundamental matters, and, as I've demonstrated in chapter 1, public reason content comes from a family of reasonable political conceptions of justice, not just one. It's also true, as I've demonstrated, that Rawls argues that social unity is achieved (not solely, but also) through the implementation of a single political conception of justice to the basic structure of society that can be the focus of an overlapping consensus. However, this is not a form of antipartyism because it doesn't mean that other reasonable political conceptions cannot co-exist and even, as society evolves, other political conceptions be the focus of such overlapping consensus.

The second tradition of antipartyism (Rosenblum, 2008: 60-108) accepts social and political parties and partiality but sees parties as “fatally divisive” (Rosenblum, 2008: 60). According to this view, parties are not inherently problematic because of their partiality, but rather because they create unnecessary divisions and disrupt political equilibrium, they are seen as “willfully manufactured vehicles of arrant ambition” and they “will find any excuse for contesting for office” (Rosenblum, 2008: 76). One example Rosenblum gives of this tradition is the Federalists and Antifederalists in early American political thought, who both recognized the importance of political pluralism but disagreed on the role of parties (Rosenblum, 2008: 89-94). In European thought, Sieyès' theory of political representation and Hegel's corporatism also illustrate this tradition of antipartyism (Rosenblum, 2008: 94-102). While this tradition is more accepting of the idea of parties than the first tradition, it still views parties as problematic and seeks to manage political pluralism without them (Rosenblum, 2008: 106-107). Does Rawls' theory fit here?

Rawls' political liberalism seeks to protect and enhance the rights and freedoms of individuals while also acknowledging the reality of pluralism and political disagreement. As I've demonstrated, Rawls' theory

starts in the middle of constitutional liberal democracies, with all their conflicts, disagreements, and shared values, and tries to stipulate a suitable conception of legitimacy that can well-order this regime. Hence, because political parties exist in these regimes and are crucial to their functioning, it's presupposed that political parties are also a part of Rawls' project of a well-ordered constitutional democracy. In the following passage he doesn't specifically mention political parties, but we can see that it is implicit:

“We may begin by recalling certain elements of a constitutional regime. First of all, the authority to determine basic social policies resides in a representative body selected for limited terms by and ultimately accountable to the electorate.” (Rawls, 1999: 195)

It is implicit that Rawls acknowledges a pluralism within political governance and, hence, he doesn't present any form of normative antypartyism. But does he look at the empirical practices of political parties with suspicion or does he favor them ideally?

Before we go into detail on what Rawls wrote on political parties, it's intriguing and important to understand why his theory is presented as a *realistic utopia* that distances itself from ordinary party politics. I see a realistic utopia on matters of political philosophy as a political system that expands the practical limits of politics in a way that is compatible with our existing political and social circumstances. It's a marriage between ideal theory and non-ideal theory, a vision of a better world that is both practical and desirable, and which can be pursued through meaningful political action. For Rawls, this means we should be realistic by acknowledging and respecting the reality of reasonable pluralism, the inevitable presence of diverse and conflicting beliefs and values among people that is not just a product of bad faith or irrational thought, a pluralism that limits what is politically attainable (Rawls, 2001: 4). But we should also seek progress towards a more just or stable society, one marked by social unity, and that's why Rawls doesn't advocate for purely procedural theory and argues for substantive values that provide a vision of the overall direction of political action. Without this vision or ideal, there would be no rational basis for continually adjusting the social process to maintain background justice or to eliminate existing injustice (Rawls, 1996: 285). His theory is a “blueprint for a building that can, in fact, be built” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 99).

This feature means that Rawls distance himself from ordinary politics, from what is called *the great game of politics*. I see the great game of politics as a metaphorical phrase that refers to the complex and competitive nature of political maneuvering, negotiation, and strategy. It is often used to describe the dynamic and sometimes ruthless nature of politics, particularly in contexts where there are high stakes

and multiple actors competing for power and influence. In this context “partisan reasons, motivations, and strategies are major forces in ‘the great game of politics’ as it is actually played” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 100). I contend with Muirhead and Rosenblum: Rawls distances himself from this ordinary politics of partyism that is filled with intense feelings and popular sentiments, arguing that “questions of strategy are not to be confused with those of justice” (Rawls, 1999: 203). We shouldn’t derive what is just, or legitimate, from rivalrous relations or the intense feelings of politics.

This allows us to conclude that, even though Rawls mentions political parties and advocates for them in some passages, meaning he doesn’t present any form of antipartyism, his realistic utopia distance from the empirical practices of political parties and shows some type of awareness and disappointment at the actual and ordinary practice of democratic politics. It’s implicit in his construction of a well-ordered society that, at least on fundamental matters that refer to constitutional essentials and basic matters of justice, the ordinary politics of bargaining, negotiating and strategy have no role. As I’ve demonstrated, on these fundamental matters, he advocates for a stability that goes beyond a *modus vivendi* and games of power and strategy typically associated with ordinary politics.

3.1.2) What are Rawls’ References to the Role and Significance of Political Parties?

Now that I have established that Rawls theory doesn’t present any form of antypartism, even though there exists a discrepancy between Rawls’ theoretical framework and the actual conduct of political partisans, it is imperative to undertake a thorough analysis of Rawls’ explicit remarks about political parties.³⁰

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls speaks of political parties and public officials when he connects them with the kinds of questions and forums public reason applies, stating:

“The reader should be careful to note the kinds of questions and forums to which public reason applies (pp. 213 - 16, 252 ff.)-for example, the debates of political parties and those seeking public office when discussing constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice- and distinguish them from the many places in the background culture (p.14) where political matters are discussed, and often from within peoples’ comprehensive doctrines.” (Rawls, 1996: I)

³⁰ In regards to the influence of political parties on public reason, my focus is primarily on Rawls’ later works, particularly *Political Liberalism* (1993), utilizing the revised version of 1996 that includes subsequent writings, such as an *Introduction to the Paperback Edition* and *Reply to Habermas* (1995), and I will also focus on the article *Public Reason Revisited* (1997). Previously I’ve argued that, given that Rawls’ theory on public reason has evolved over time, as I’ve demonstrated in Chapter 1, I believe it is important to focus on his more recent perspectives. However, since in this sub-chapter I’m doing a throughout examination of the passages where Rawls mentions political parties, I find it important to also include certain passages from earlier texts like *A Theory of Justice* (1971), utilizing the revised edition of 1999, as well as *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001). Even though I’m drawing on different works, I will try to work out Rawls’ stances on political parties.

“But the ideal of public reason does hold for citizens when they engage in political advocacy in the public forum, and thus for members of political parties and for candidates in their campaigns and for other groups who support them. It holds equally for how citizens are to vote in elections when constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice are at stake.” (Rawls, 1996: 215).

These two passages demonstrate political parties' reasoning is a crucial component of public reason. Elected officials, who in most cases are partisans from different political parties, are the ones who typically create, debate and vote for specific policies on fundamental matters within the legislative or executive power³¹. However, as I've explained in Chapter 1, public reason applies differently depending on the subject that is being discussed, the forum of discussion, and the agent who is discussing, with more emphasis on certain subjects or agents than others.

What we can say is that, when it comes to political parties, and when it comes to constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice, public reason applies to the following agents:

- To the debates of members of political parties (I suppose Rawls specifically means to say elected officials from political parties who debate in legislative assemblies);
- To the debates of those seeking public offices and candidates of political parties when they are campaigning (I suppose that political parties that lack sufficient electoral support to secure representation in legislative assemblies may still be considered under this category when they are campaigning);
- To the debates of other groups who support political parties when they are campaigning;

However, since we have such a complex democratic system and complex hierarchical structures within political parties, it's hard to cross over all the specific combinations of agents/forums/matters related with political parties where public reason applies. For instance, Rawls mentions that public reason does not necessarily apply to debates in "the many places in the background culture where political matters are discussed, and often from within peoples' comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls, 1996: 1). I argue that political parties often operate in the background of political culture, engaging in activities such as interviews, social media use, and meetings with various professional, civil, or associational organizations,

³¹ One question arises, that was not put forward by Rawls, as to whether the government, solely when exercising its executive power, has the authority to make decisions on fundamental matters, such as constitutional issues. While the primary role of the executive is typically limited to executing policies determined by the legislative power, in many constitutional democracies governments also possess the power to create law through decree. Although such decrees are not typically intended to address constitutional essentials, recent examples, such as the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and changes to retirement age policies in France, have seen executive governments asserting greater authority to legislate on such matters. While the issue of whether they should exercise such power is not the focus of this thesis, it is clear that executive power, in practice, can influence policies on fundamental matters.

especially when they are campaigning. However, it remains unclear whether such activities fall under the purview of public reason, or whether public reason applies only to the horizontal process of deliberation between political parties or public officials and during official electoral campaigns. Similarly, it is unclear whether public reason applies when parties are debating in their own platforms, such as during the selection of party leaders or the drafting of party manifestoes. While some of these questions will be explored in Chapter 3, it is still important, within this complex structure, to note Rawls' references to political parties to understand their significance within his theory.

Rawls also mentions that there are certain matters that are “taken off the political agenda” that are “no longer regarded as appropriate subjects for political decision by majority or other plurality voting”, matters such as the equal liberty of conscience or the rejection of slavery, showing how he protects some substantial values from the ordinary politics and clearing that political parties “acknowledge these matters as settled” (Rawls, 1996: 151). In my reading, these matters are constitutional essentials but are not subject to political parties' debates and discussions such as other fundamental matters. It is my opinion that this relates to why, when addressing the features of a reasonable political conception of justice, he gives priority to a list of basic rights and liberties so that they are taken “off the political agenda of political parties” and “beyond the calculus of social interests” (Rawls, 2001: 115).

Specifically in favor of political parties, he acknowledges them as ways to guarantee the fair value of equal liberty and the principle of participation. He argues that “a just constitution sets up a form of fair rivalry for political office and authority” and rival parties “seek the citizens' approval in accordance with just procedural rules against a background (...) in which the fair value of political liberty is assured” (Rawls, 1999: 199).

Moreover, Rawls also suggests that political parties can play a crucial role in shaping the political sociology of a well-ordered constitutional regime that is not based on a purely procedural way but rather embraces substantial values. He argues that, in such a regime, citizens develop an understanding of the public political culture and its traditions of interpreting basic constitutional values through the way these values are interpreted by judges in important constitutional cases and reaffirmed by political parties (Rawls, 2001: 146). If disputed judicial decisions arise, they can call forth deliberative political discussion, in which their merits are reasonably debated in terms of constitutional principles. In this process, political parties can help to articulate fundamental political values and form a conception of the reasons relevant when the constitutional essentials are at stake. This suggests that, from a deliberative standpoint, parties can act as a vehicle for promoting a deeper understanding of constitutional principles and values and can

help to create a more educated and informed citizenry that is better equipped to participate in the democratic process.

However, Rawls also recognized some potential dangers of party politics. He states that when parties behave like mere interest groups, they prioritize their own interests over those of the broader society, “petitioning the government on their behalf” (Rawls, 1999: 195). He is also concerned with the tendency for parties to be influenced by monetary incentives if they don’t have public funds to support their demands (Rawls, 1996: 328; 1999: 198; 2001: 150). In another passage, that appears to contain a certain amount of disdain for the current practice of politics, Rawls noted that much of the current political debate betrays the marks of warfare where the political forum is divided into allies and opponents, creating an atmosphere that is more akin to warfare than reasoned debate (Rawls, 2001: 118). Furthermore, Rawls believed that the problem was not just with the leadership of political parties, but with the citizenry as well. He argued that even farsighted political leaders cannot convince a misinformed and cynical public to accept and follow them. Parties, in response, can then be uncompromising in their approach to policy issues, making it difficult for sensible proposals for social security reform, healthcare reform, foreign aid, and human rights policy to be accepted. He states that “Those who follow the ‘great game of politics’ know that none of these proposals will be accepted” (Rawls, 1997: 773).

In my reading, it’s possible that to counteract the tendencies listed above, Rawls’ also emphasized the importance of the principle of loyal opposition and the attachment to constitutional rules in the politics of democracy (Rawls, 1999: 196). I interpret the *principle of loyal opposition* as the recognition and acceptance of political differences and the idea that political parties can disagree with one another while remaining loyal to the democratic system and its institutions. Plainly speaking, an opposition that is not there to undermine or overthrow those in power at the moment but is there, in the first place, to be loyal and promote democratic values. Rawls argues that in a democratic society, the clash of political beliefs and interests is inevitable and should be accepted as a normal condition of human life. However, he suggests that the principle of loyal opposition allows for the peaceful coexistence of different viewpoints, as well as a healthy and productive exchange of ideas. Without this conception of loyal opposition, and the attachment to constitutional rules that express and protect it, the politics of democracy cannot be properly conducted or long endure.

I argue that Rawls’ political philosophy suggests that he did not believe that parties were inherently good or bad, but rather that they could contribute to or detract from achieving a just or legitimate society. While he did not explicitly state whether he supported or opposed political parties, his overall theory suggests

that he embraces political parties since they are present in our current liberal constitutional democracies, the starting point of Rawls' theory. I argue that he would support parties that engage in reasoned debate, that honor the principle of legitimacy and, for him especially, that promote policies that align with the principles of fairness and equal opportunity. If not, he was critical of political parties that were not attached to democratic values, that engaged in uncompromising deliberation, and are more concerned with rallying their base than with pursuing just or legitimate outcomes.

3.1.3) Are Political Parties Intrinsically Vital to Rawls' Political Liberalism?

As I've demonstrated, Rawls left many questions open regarding the relationship between public reason and political parties³². One central question was put forward by Muirhead and Rosenblum:

“If politics is to be insulated from disagreements of a comprehensive moral, philosophic, and religious nature, how much political contestation does public reason allow? Does it take the familiar political form of parties and partisanship?” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 100)

I interpret that they are questioning if public reason still allows the great game of politics, if it still allows ample space for opposition, negotiating, bargaining, and electoral strategies, all dynamics that are included in the familiar political form of parties and partisanship. The term *partisanship* emphasizes the concept of engaging in partisan practices rather than focusing solely on the formal structure of a specific political organization. By doing so, we recognize that partisanship encompasses a broader range of activities and behaviors associated with supporting and promoting certain political ideologies or agendas. This broader perspective allows us to explore the practice of partisanship in a more inclusive and comprehensive manner (White & Ypi: 2011: 382).

If we accept parties and partisanship, are they vital or instrumental for Rawls' theory on political legitimacy and public reason?

Rawls theory doesn't focus on political parties and their connection to legitimacy. It was only in the last decades that authors have filled the gap: Muirhead and Rosenblum (2006) show how the great game of politics is essential to the realistic utopia Rawls proposes in his general theory political liberalism. Matteo Bonotti (2017) and White & Ypi (2016) relate the political obligations of political parties with the circumstances of justification from a public reason perspective, specifically Bonotti (2017) argues that

³² Some other questions that might arise include: How should political parties be structured to ensure that they operate within the bounds of public reason? Can parties represent reasonable political conceptions of justice? How can political parties' advocate the point of view of the electorate they represent while encouraging the exchange of ideas across different perspectives and viewpoints?

the internal demands of partisanship are convergent with the demands of a Rawlsian model of public reason.

The present analysis of this sub-chapter will examine the work of Muirhead and Rosenblum (2006; 2020) as they have established a meaningful link between Rawls' political liberalism and practical politics, specifically in terms of political parties and related mechanisms such as votes and elections, contestation and representation. These scholars have challenged the view that political parties and partisanship are merely instrumental aspects of political life, contending instead that they are central to the very notion of political liberalism as an ideal. I interpret their central argument as stating that, if Rawls' theory of legitimacy and public reason allows for a wide space for discussion and dissent on matters that fall outside fundamental matters, then political parties are vital to his theory because they occupy this central place of discussion. Furthermore, on fundamental matters, political parties can reassure that the debate follows as according to the normative demands of public reason.

Muirhead and Rosenblum's initial premise is to demonstrate how Rawls' model of public reason and political legitimacy permits a wider range of contestation and justifiable disagreements than it appears at first glance. They argue that public reason should not be seen as a strict set of rules that limit all kinds of arguments and claims that can be made in the public sphere, nor should it dictate all acceptable political outcomes.

“At the extreme, a public culture guided by public reason might not need contestation and debate, for all would agree on the same reasons and all would favor the same outcomes. Rawls, however, clearly rejects this. Political liberalism does not posit a specific theory of justice capable of settling every controversial question.” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101)

As we have seen, public reason operates within a family of related political conceptions that are all committed to reciprocity, the priority of basic rights and opportunities, and the means to make effective use of freedoms. Therefore, public reason allows for a range of rival and different conceptions of political justice that are reasonable, and enables rival interpretations of principles of justice, within the limits of public reason. This means that there can be legitimate partisan differences based on these differing conceptions and interpretations. These differences can form the basis for political organization and debate, rather than being seen as obstacles to be avoided. Furthermore, it's clear that on debates that fall outside fundamental matters, public reason demands of reciprocity don't apply and we have more space for contestation and disagreement. I argue that the assertion made by these theorists is valid, as per Rawls, divergent viewpoints can give rise to discussion and even create a deadlock among varying

political conceptions where we have no other option than to cast a vote through organizational methods like party manifestoes or policy proposals. Rawls states that:

“(...) unanimity of views is not to be expected. Reasonable political conceptions of justice do not always lead to the same conclusion; nor do citizens holding the same conception always agree on particular issues.” (Rawls, 1997: 797).

The authors argue that Rawls' *Political Liberalism* allows ample space for partisan contestation and disagreement among reasonable people with different conceptions of justice than Rawls' earlier work, *A Theory of Justice*. As I've also stated on Chapter 1, this previous work from Rawls attempted to define the just ends for all political participants, leaving parties only as means to understand “what system will best secure the principles of justice as fairness” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 102). They argue that *Political Liberalism* recognizes that numerous social and economic issues give rise to significant variations in reasonable opinions. As I've demonstrated earlier, while a reasonable political conception of justice requires the inclusion of an equal opportunity principle and the establishment of social and economic justice institutions, ascertaining the effectiveness of specific measures remains a challenging task, leading to greater divergence of opinions and disagreement that can allow space for partisan contestation.

“(...) whether the aims of the principles covering social and economic inequalities are realized is far more difficult to ascertain. These matters are nearly always open to wide differences of reasonable opinion; they rest on complicated inferences and intuitive judgments that require us to assess complex social and economic information about topics poorly understood.” (Rawls, 1996: 219)

Moreover, Muirhead and Rosenblum also contend that the precise limits and substance of commonly accepted basic political values, rights and freedoms are susceptible to reasonable differences of opinion. Rawls, for instance, acknowledged that the principle of religious freedom did not provide an unequivocal answer regarding whether public funds could be granted to religious schools (Rawls, 1997: 778) or if some form of prayer in public schools was permissible (Rawls, 1997: 794). In essence, determining the exact contours and scope of such basic liberties involves complex issues, and reasonable individuals may legitimately disagree on their interpretation and implementation. This means that, even on fundamental matters where public reason applies, there is enough ground for contestation that can legitimize partisan differences. This underscores the importance of engaging in public reasoning and political debate to arrive at a just and equitable solution that reflects the values of the broader community while showing how even public reason leaves scope for disagreement.

As a result, the politics of *Political Liberalism* are motivated by reasonable disagreement over different conceptions of justice or different interpretations of those conceptions.

“Rival conceptions of political justice and rival interpretation of principles of justice are consistent with public reason. These rival conceptions can serve as the basis for political organization and legitimate partisan differences.” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101)

Muirhead and Rosenblum offer other several examples of how political liberalism and public reason require the involvement of political parties. Specifically, they argue that parties are also essential to the expression of public reason. Public reason, as a mode of reasoning that is appropriate for the public sphere and for fundamental matters, requires that citizens offer arguments that can be accepted by other reasonable citizens, and that they do so in a way that is informed by the most complete and reasonable view of political justice that they hold. Political parties, with their diverse membership and broad representation, are uniquely positioned to engage in this kind of deliberation, and to offer arguments that reflect a wide range of perspectives and interests that conduct citizens to these complete and reasonable political conceptions of justice (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 102-103). Furthermore, they highlight how parties contribute to the creation of an overlapping consensus: by engaging in public deliberation, parties help articulate these principles in a way that is accessible and appealing to a wide range of citizens, thereby building support for a common conception of justice (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 103-104). With all these arguments, it is clear that parties are not simply a pragmatic concession to the exigencies of politics, but rather an intrinsic component of Rawls’ conceptualization of political legitimacy and can indeed contribute to its realization.

For the present chapter, it is sufficient to recognize that political liberalism and public reason, within their limits, allow for ample space for disagreements that can form the basis of partisan differences. By acknowledging that there are different reasonable political conceptions of justice that interpret differently the basic political moral values of society, public reason allows for a variety of parties to represent this plurality of political conceptions of justice. By acknowledging that defining the contours and substance of basic political moral values, that issues of social and economic justice under fundamental matters are often fraught with reasonable disagreement, and even that public reason doesn’t apply to all matters, political liberalism recognizes the need for a democratic process that includes all voices and perspectives in an organized way through a political pluralism. The involvement of political parties can be seen as the embodiment of such reasonable pluralism and the assurance that all reasonable perspectives are taken into account.

3.1.4) Which Types of Political Parties Conform to Rawls' Public Reason?

What Muirhead and Rosenblum also argue is that, while political liberalism invites parties, it is not open to just any kind of party and any sort of partisanship, but only to parties who are within the limits of public reason. They draw on Tocqueville's distinction between great parties, quasi-great parties, and small parties, and argue that Rawls' theory only invites the quasi-great ones³³ (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101-102).

According to Tocqueville, *small parties* appeal to specific interests rather than general principles, and tend to be driven by the ambitions of office-seekers rather than genuine convictions to realize the state's interest. Muirhead and Rosenblum argue that public reason does not recognize the value of small parties and is hostile to small-party politics because they "foreclose particularist appeals to separate slivers of the electorate", while the aim of public reason "is to supply a counterweight to fragmentation and hyper-pluralism" (Muirhead and Rosenblum: 101). From this perspective, political parties should not be regarded simply as interest groups that advocate for particular interests to the government. Instead, as Rawls puts it "they must advance some conception of the public good in order to gain enough support to win office" (Rawls, 1999: 195). Muirhead and Rosenblum also include in this category of small parties "those amorphous coalitions lacking coherent political identity, as well as undifferentiated parties that converge on the same centrist point in a Downsian fashion". (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101). I argue that these parties do not meet the standards of public reason because they aren't a fully formed political conception capable of contributing to the public deliberation process in a meaningful way. They don't possess a distinct and coherent set of values and principles that guide their actions and are not an adequate framework of thought under which we can construct a systematic and complete political conception of justice capable of giving a coherent answer to society's problems.

They also argue that political liberalism is hostile to *great parties*, which throughout their readings I interpret they identify these parties as two types. The first type of great parties are those that arise from "rival fundamental claims about the best regime" (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101). These parties challenge the fundamental values of liberal constitutional democracies, whereas Rawls' political liberalism presupposes that questions about the best regime have been settled in favor of the fundamentals of constitutional democracy, political equality, and reciprocity. These great radical and reactionary parties,

³³ Although Muirhead and Rosenblum do not explicitly mention it, it is important to note that the lexicon employed to distinguish great, quasi-great, and small political parties is not necessarily indicative of their numerical size in terms of parliamentary seats, membership, or votes. Rather, this classification system is based on how parties present themselves, their views on the political system, and their behavior. It is worth noting that the only instance where numerical scale is referenced is within the category of small parties, which refers to enormous coalitions that are bound solely by a desire for power and lack any distinct political identity.

which usually exploit the electoral process in order to gain power and subvert democracy, are ruled out. Rawls theory is also dismissive of a second type of great parties, parties that are based on permanent cleavages of class or status- who stand for different social status within society, similar to what happened in the medieval ages where society was structured into different classes- or parties that exploit these cleavages in order to gain power. Rawls' theory understands society as a fair system of cooperation among free and equal persons and is therefore incompatible with parties based on presumptively permanent class or status divisions, especially when they are built into the structure of government or are fixed elements. Political liberalism also bars the sort of great parties that exploit social cleavages in order to gain electoral power, parties that solely advance religious, philosophical, or moral doctrines in public political arenas in the hope of gaining the votes of this electorate. According to Rawls, "The most intractable struggles, political liberalism assumes, are confessedly for the sake of the highest things: for religion, for philosophical views of the world, and for different moral conceptions of the good" (Rawls, 1996: 4), subjects that present deep cleavages within society.

In my interpretation, political parties must aim, fundamentally and at their core level, to be regulated by uniquely political values strong enough to normally outweigh whatever nonpolitical values may conflict. Therefore, Muirhead and Rosenblum argue that political liberalism embraces the *quasi-great parties* which are characterized as "parties of principle committed to constitutional democracy" (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101).

"These parties stand not for rival societies or regimes, but for rival interpretations of political freedom and equality. This is political liberalism's adversarial ground." (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101-102)

They do not aim to subvert liberal constitutional democracy or impose their own comprehensive doctrines on society but rather to interpret and apply the principles of constitutional democracy in different ways. In my view, these quasi-great parties can avoid the dangers of hyper-pluralism and factionalism while still allowing for meaningful political competition and debate. They can engage in meaningful dialogue and debate with each other while remaining committed to the basic principles of constitutional democracy. They can challenge each other's interpretations of those principles without undermining the legitimacy of the political system as a whole.

In conclusion, I hope I have demonstrated that Rawls' political liberalism and public reason not only invites and accommodates, but actually needs the existence of political parties, but there are only specific types of parties that are intrinsically crucial for the functioning of public reason. Rawls' work provides a

starting point for thinking about the relationship between political parties and political legitimacy, but much work remains to be done in order to develop a comprehensive and practical approach to integrating public reason into political parties and the broader political process. To fully understand the role that parties play in relation to public reason, it is necessary to delve deeper into their dynamics. Therefore, inspired by this taxonomy put forward by Tocqueville and presented in relation to public reason by Muirhead and Rosenblum, in the next chapters I will focus on exploring in greater detail the ways in which parties can either positively or negatively impact public reason.

3.2) How can Political Parties Promote to Public Reason?

In what specific ways can political parties be vital for realizing the Rawlsian idea of public reason and legitimacy in a constitutional liberal democracy? My aim is not to provide a full list on how parties may contribute to public reason, nor to talk about the value of political parties for other fields, such as the representation theory (even though some points connect). My aim is solely to understand and explore how parties, ideally, can contribute to the construction of a society's shared political liberal public reason. I argue that political parties can have 5 positive effects on this idea.

3.2.1) Parties as a Bridge Between the Public Political Culture and the Background Culture

Political parties can function as a mediators³⁴ between the state and various groups or individuals within civil society. They can serve to link the cultural and social background of citizens with political institutions, thus ensuring that their perspectives and concerns are considered when formulating public policies, especially on fundamental matters. (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 103-104). In Rawls' theory, how does the background culture encounter the public political culture?

As I've demonstrated, the background culture, for Rawls, is where we find all types of groups and associations, whether they are religious like churches, educational like universities, scientific or professional, it's the non-political aspects of people's lives (Rawls, 1997:768). The many civil or social groups have their own way of reasoning about their means and ends and are conducted by nonpublic reasons (Rawls, 1996: 220-222), such as their religious beliefs, their cultural traditions, or their personal values. In contrast, the public political culture comprises "the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation (including those of the judiciary), as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge" (Rawls, 1996: 13-14). For Rawls, the demands of

³⁴ This is sometimes referred as the "linkage" function of parties (Lawson, 1988) or as the "partisan connection" (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2012).

public reason do not apply in discussions in the background culture or in the internal life of the many associations or agencies (Rawls, 1997:768). This is the place where open and full discussion should happen because these many associations “reside within a framework of law that ensures the familiar liberties of thought and speech, and the right of free association” (Rawls, 1997: 768). In my opinion, it is not appropriate to use public reason to evaluate or criticize groups or individuals in the background culture of society, and their way of reasoning, as doing so would be intrusive and would violate principles of freedom of consciousness, speech, or association. Public reason applies to citizens when they express their vote (Rawls, 1997: 769) and to the public political forum (the discourse of judges, of public officials and candidates for public offices) when they discuss fundamental questions) (Rawls, 1997: 767). However, this does not mean that the political and non-political domains are separate or disconnected places: the public political culture imposes laws and regulations on the background culture of society (Rawls, 1997: 791), and, on the contrary, the civil associations can present their nonpublic reasons in the public political forum if they respect the proviso.

However, most groups, like the Catholic Church or professional associations, do not aim directly at exercising political influence. Because they don’t organize around political participation as that isn’t their primary purpose, even though occasionally they might participate, it can be very burdensome for them to know when the constraints of public reason are expected of them or how to use public reason correctly, and the proviso is not a sufficient mechanism in the bottom-up connection between the elements of civil society and the public political life. Political parties can be especially important in this connection:

“Partisanship is a bridge formed by identification with a political position and its public reasons, on the one hand, and identification with supporting interest or identity groups in the background culture, on the other.” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 104)

Political parties can serve as the intermediaries between the two poles. Because they need to mobilize voters, and therefore are connected in their purpose to civil society, and because they have legislative powers (or aim at them), parties stand between the background culture and the public political forum. This means that through parties, citizens can identify with both the social or civil groups they belong and with a platform that connects them to the public political sphere.

On one hand, political parties, especially in their own platforms and in their intra-party deliberation³⁵, can act as vehicles for individuals to express their views and preferences that are influenced by their background culture. On the other hand, political parties have a distinctive representative claim because they have legislative powers (or aim at them). Hence, they can organize beliefs and interests for political purposes, they “politicize private identities” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 104), and can use their platform and agency to promote policies and initiatives that align with the values and beliefs of these groups. As Giovanni Sartori (1976, p. ix) wrote almost half a century ago, “parties are the central intermediate and intermediary structure between society and government.”

3.2.2) Parties as Identifying and Systematizing Division within the Unstructured Mass of Worldviews

More than merely serving as mediators, who promote interests and values and provide a pathway between the political culture and the background culture of civil society, parties can discover and define relevant differences in the diverse array of opinions held by individuals, thereby clarifying the differences between the unstructured mass of diverse opinions (Rosenblum, 2008: 307-308). Moreover, I argue, by engaging and confronting in deliberation, parties can be able to identify and highlight the relevant distinctions between various political conceptions of justice, which helps in narrowing the range of interpretations to the most reasonable ones, simplifying and generalizing the disagreement.

Muirhead and Rosenblum's argument is based on Bernard Manin's *The Principles of Representative Government* (1997), in which Manin conducted a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between representative institutions, such as representatives from political parties, and the electorate. Manin contends that representatives are not passive conduits for the pre-existing preferences of the electorate: they don't simply reflect the worldviews of different citizens, but rather actively shape and mold political preferences through their political activities. He argues that these representatives can “take the initiative in proposing a line of division” (Manin, 1997: 226) and, in turn, influence citizens. Or, as Rosenblum puts it:

“Perhaps the clearest need for parties from the standpoint of deliberation is that the universe of considerations and perspectives is infinitely expandable, and, contrary to antiparty critics, the best positions and arguments parties can produce are a reasonable slice at it. Parties do the work

³⁵ Intra-party deliberation is the type of deliberation that happens inside the same political party, whether it is when the party is drafting its proposals for policies or debating who its leader should be. On a full study on the connection between intra-party deliberative mechanisms and their linkage function with civil society see Wolkenstein (2015).

philosophy cannot: determine the range of matters for discussion and decision.” (Rosenblum, 2008: 307)

This means that political parties have the ability to identify and systematize the pluralism present in modern societies in a reasonable way. Why is this significant to the process of public reason?

If political party representatives do not merely reflect the preferences of the electorate, but actively shape and influence those preferences, they have a significant impact on the deliberative process. I argue that, if this process is performed in good faith with regard the demands of political legitimacy, political parties can identify the different pieces of the Rawlsian puzzle such as different comprehensive doctrines, the shared political values in democratic societies, and differentiate between conceptions of justice that interpret those values differently. Comprehensive doctrines, shared political values, and conceptions of political justice, are all sub-unites necessary to construct the model of a well-ordered society envisioned by Rawls and political parties can help in the process of identifying and systematizing this existing pluralism. In subsequent sections, I will further explore how political parties can represent reasonable and complete political conceptions of justice. For now, it is sufficient to say that this process is critical to Rawls' theory of political legitimacy as political parties can identify and systematize the pluralism of comprehensive doctrines, shared values, and political conceptions of justice.

To take a specific example, ALDE - Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group- is a pan-European political party that is dedicated to promoting liberal values. The party has members from across Europe and is one of the major political forces in the European Parliament. The party has been influential in discovering and defining the differences between the diverse array of opinions held by individuals who identify as liberals or centrists, clarifying the differences between classical liberalism and social liberalism. Through a process of reflection and debate, ALDE has helped to create a more structured and coherent set of political beliefs on the center-right of the political spectrum in Europe.

Furthermore, I argue that this feature also favours public reason in another sense. Political parties can endeavour to demonstrate that a portion of the electorate is associated with a new and distinct social division that is deserving of protection or advocacy. This assertion highlights the capacity of political parties to shape and influence public discourse and, consequently, the evolution of political culture in a society.

“They [representatives] bring to public awareness this or that social division, drawing attention to a split in society that was not previously apparent.” (Manin, 1997: 226)

I argue this can also be helpful to public reason which, from a Rawlsian perspective, is dynamic:

“(...) the forms of permissible public reason are always several. Moreover, new variations may be proposed from time to time and older ones may cease to be represented” (Rawls, 1997: 775).

As society becomes more diverse and inclusive, the definition of what constitutes reasonable political justifications for exercising power over fundamental political matters may shift to include a different or wider range of perspectives and voices. For example, issues related to gender orientation may become more prominent in public discourse, leading to a redefinition of what counts as a reasonable discourse for fundamental matters. The right to change gender can be included in constitutional essentials because political parties presented the new cleavage found in society and were able to advocate for it following public reason demands³⁶.

3.2.3) Parties as Translators of Comprehensive Doctrines into Public Values and Contributors of the Formation of an Overlapping Consensus

In my point of view, the most important contribution parties can make to public reason is that they can translate comprehensive doctrines into public reasons, thereby contributing to a reasonable overlapping consensus on the political conception of justice that is applied to the basic structure of society (Bonotti, 2017: 99-123).

In a preceding subsection, it has been demonstrated that political parties function as intermediaries between the background culture and the public political culture as they have a foot in each domain: they possess the ability to represent the interests of the groups to which they are connected in the political arena. However, political parties have the potential to extend beyond this role. They can not only act as a bridge between those interests and the political domain but, more importantly, guarantee that the values of comprehensive doctrines, when introduced in the political forum, are connected with public reasons. They can translate and convert particular values into shared political values, which serve as the foundation of public reason.

As I've explained in Chapter 1, comprehensive doctrines are what individuals hold to be true and use to guide their lives. However, with the burdens of judgment comes the fact of reasonable pluralism on these

³⁶ I find it important to remember, in this point, that Rawls' later account of public reason, as discussed in Chapter 1, is more closely associated with the actual practice of deliberation. Through this process, individuals seek to understand what is mutually acceptable to all citizens, who are viewed as equal and free members of a society that operates as a system of social cooperation. It is not solely concerned with conformity to the constitutional essentials, as these may evolve over time. Consequently, political parties have the ability to propose new values or ideas through public reasoning that may not be explicitly covered by the Constitution.

doctrines and the fact of reasonable disagreement. Hence, in a society characterized by this pluralism, it is not feasible to establish a single comprehensive doctrine as the foundation for the basic structure of society, as well as the source of fundamental laws and public policy, without resorting to oppressive and coercive means- the fact of oppression. Political parties can help bridge the gap between comprehensive doctrines and the foundation for the basic structure of society by relating and connecting the moral, philosophical, or religious beliefs of individuals and the values of public reason that guide the basic structure and policy decisions. Muirhead and Rosenblum state the same:

“Parties (...) are “bilingual.” As shapers and articulators of public reason, parties speak to all citizens as citizens, not as socially situated in this or that social class or income group or as having a particular comprehensive doctrine. They refine and generalize particularist appeals by casting them in terms appropriate to public reason. As agents of a publicly recognized overlapping consensus, they connect particular interests with general principles.” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 104)

What guarantees that political parties can have the ability to translate the values of comprehensive doctrines into political values embraced by public reason?

I argue that political parties' constant presence in civil society enables them to be informed about different worldviews. Typically, they are closely connected with particular comprehensive doctrines- for instance, one political party can be more connected with the Catholic Church, while another can be more connected to professional associations present in their civil society. However, if parties want to win elections, they need to obtain votes and, therefore, they must accomplish one demand pointed out by Bonotti: “they must appeal both to their members and supporters, on the one hand, and to the broader public, on the other hand” (Bonotti, 2017: 100). This can motivate partisans to be committed to speaking to a wider and general public and, therefore, to relate the comprehensive groups they are most connected with public values all can share. I also argue that, since partisans are typically citizens with expertise in the political domain, or at least an inclination and interest to devote time to it, they enable parties to have this ability to interpret and translate reasons drawn from comprehensive doctrines into language and arguments that are accessible and relevant to a broad range of citizens. They can do so by emphasizing the aspects of the doctrines that are compatible with the basic moral and political values, such as liberty, equality, and fairness, and relying on commonly accepted principles and evidence-based arguments to support the group's positions. Therefore, political parties not only have the motivation but also the capability of relating comprehensive doctrines with public reasons.

Furthermore, as I've mentioned, the indeterminacy of Rawls' proviso can make it hard for citizens or groups to know when and how they should present public reasons as their participation in politics is occasional and they are not organized around it. Political parties hold a distinct advantage over individual citizens or groups in introducing comprehensive doctrines and, later, show why these support the shared political values of a constitutional society. This advantage is due to the increased presence of political parties in both the media and political debate, allowing them to reach a wider audience and showcase their views more effectively. With ample sites for public discussion and discourse, such as their own social media platforms, political parties can more readily engage with the background culture and demonstrate their fulfillment of the proviso. As I've stated, this has positive reasons as it makes citizens mutually aware of each other religious or moral doctrines and how their worldviews have "allegiance to the democratic ideal of public reason" (Rawls, 1997: 785), helping to build a more civic and comprehensive society.

A second part of the argument being put forward here is that, by relating comprehensive doctrines and political values, parties help in the construction of a reasonable overlapping consensus on the political conception of justice that is applied to the basic structure of society, thus allowing stability for the right reasons. I see this argument as unfolding in two ways.

Once political parties help in the translation of non-political values drawn from comprehensive doctrines into public political values shared by citizens of constitutional democracies, they implicitly, in a second-order consequence, help in the construction of the overlapping consensus because they allow citizens to understand how the doctrines they advocate for relate to their *preferred* reasonable political conception of justice.

However, as I've explained in Chapter 1, society reaches a more robust type of justifiability and stability once citizens relate their worldviews with the *prevalent* political conception of justice³⁷.

"Given a political society with such a reasonable consensus, political liberalism says that as citizens of this society we have achieved the deepest and most reasonable basis of social unity (...). This unity yields stability for the right reasons, explained as follows:

- a. The basic structure of society is effectively regulated by the most reasonable political conception of justice.

³⁷ While the term prevalent is not used in Rawls' writings, I think we can use it. Rawls states that, even though there are multiple reasonable political conceptions of justice, determining the most reasonable one involves a process of trial and error. This conception should be the one that effectively regulates society and should be the one that is most widely affirmed by other reasonable comprehensive doctrines. That's why I say that there are citizens' preferred political conceptions of justice, which should be part of a family of reasonable political conceptions of justice, and then there is the prevalent one that actually and effectively is applied to the basic structure of society.

b. This political conception of justice *is* endorsed by an overlapping consensus comprised of all the reasonable comprehensive doctrines in society and these are in an enduring majority with respect to those rejecting that conception. (...)” (Rawls, 1996: 391)

This implies that an overlapping consensus is not merely the result of arbitrary compromises or concessions, as a *modus vivendi*, or only the result of the consensus between citizens’ comprehensive doctrines and their preferred political conception. It is rather a product of a rigorous process of justification and critique between reasonable political conceptions that aims at a wide reflective equilibrium and at an overlapping consensus on the prevalent political conception. This process involves the articulation and testing of different conceptions of justice, as well as the identification of shared values and ideals that can serve as a basis for political cooperation. The implication of this is that, while citizens may not entirely agree with the specific political conception that governs the society, they may view it as reasonable for articulating shared political values, values that can align with their own comprehensive doctrines. The responsibility of making the connection between citizens’ worldviews and the political conception of justice falls solely on the individuals, and thus, it is their sole responsibility to ensure the establishment of an overlapping consensus.

“As I have stressed throughout, it is central to political liberalism that free and equal citizens affirm both a comprehensive doctrine and a political conception. (...) It is, of course, up to citizens themselves to affirm, revise, or change their comprehensive doctrines.” (Rawls, 1997: 801)

In what ways can political parties help citizens relate their comprehensive doctrines with the most reasonable prevalent political conception that effectively regulates the basic structure of society?

First, through inter-party deliberation³⁸, parties can distinguish and deliberate between different political conceptions of justice, leading to a more simplified and reasonable understanding of the disagreements and to the orderly contest between these conceptions that can give rise to the most reasonable interpretations. As Rawls mentions:

“(...) public political culture is bound to contain different fundamental ideas that can be developed in different ways. An orderly contest between them over time is a reliable way to find which one, if any, is most reasonable.” (Rawls, 1996: 227)

³⁸ Inter-party deliberation is the deliberation that occurs between different political parties, whether in Legislative Assemblies or when leaders and members of these parties debate with one another on other platforms.

Rawls' posits that a constitutional liberal democracy's public reason is established when its citizenry and public officials have engaged in a justificatory practice, guided by the basic and shared values of a liberal constitutional democracy, and through a discursive process between each other arrive at a set of guidelines and a range of conceptions of political justice that can be mutually acceptable as a basis for public justification when exercising power over fundamental political issues. However, social unity requires that the basic structure be guided by a single political conception of justice, which should be the most reasonable one. Parties can develop this "orderly contest" between different reasonable political conceptions because they're field is the adversarial ground Rosenblum argues that:

"Parties draw politically relevant lines of division, reject elements of the others' account of projects and promises, and articulate positions, and their antagonism is the engine of "trial by discussion."
(Rosenblum, 2008: 307).

I argue that this "trial by discussion", identified by Rosenblum, if motivated by the demands of public justifiability, can be seen as a rigorous and demanding process of justification that can aim at a wide reflective equilibrium and articulate well with the "orderly constest" proposed by Rawls. Thus, parties can help in the construction of the most reasonable political conception of justice.

Secondly, citizens need to relate their comprehensive doctrines with this conception to reach a full type of justifiability. When political parties engage in a process of mutual recognition and respect, they demonstrate an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of other comprehensive doctrines and other parties that present different, yet reasonable, political conceptions of justice, even if they do not entirely concur with them³⁹. By recognizing the prevailing political conception as reasonable, political parties set an example for citizens to cultivate a shared sense of purpose towards basic political and moral values. In such a scenario, inter-party deliberation plays a vital role in contributing to an overlapping consensus, as it can bridge the gap between different comprehensive doctrines and the dominant political conception in society.

3.2.4) Parties as Representing Reasonable and Complete Liberal Political Conceptions of Justice

When relating comprehensive doctrines to public reasons, parties can propose complete and full programs that satisfy the features of a reasonable and complete political conception of justice.

³⁹ It is worth acknowledging that the notion of parties contributing to an overlapping consensus on a political conception of justice through inter-party deliberation may face several challenges in practice. For instance, it may be unrealistic to expect parties to fully embrace this ideal due to various factors such as their own ideological commitments, political agendas, and the pressures of electoral competition. Nevertheless, this approach can be seen as an ideal theory that aims to identify how parties, under the best circumstances and ideal conditions, could contribute to the realization of a framework for justice based on public reason.

Rawls argues that public reason content comes from a family of reasonable political conceptions of justice and that, even though we might have one conception that has predominance in a period of time, political liberalism welcomes a range of reasonable political conceptions and “does not try to fix public reason once and for all in the form of one favored political conception of justice” (Rawls, 1997: 774). Therefore, Rawls acknowledges a reasonable pluralism even in political conceptions of justice.

As I’ve demonstrated in Chapter 1, he identifies three main elements that characterize these conceptions, namely, a list of the basic rights, liberties and opportunities, an ordering of these values so that they are protected from other claims, and principles, standards and guidelines of inquiry that guarantee citizens can enjoy these freedoms. Furthermore, these conceptions need to present a completeness, taking into account all the basic political moral values, and an ordering of those values so that it can give a reasonable answer to most of the matters of the basic structure (Rawls, 1997: 777).

Parties can provide these features because they have a wide-range agenda setting that distinguishes them from single-issue movements, where different values are linked and ordered in their broad manifestoes and party programs (Rosenblum 2008: 260). By presenting general and complete interpretations of political values parties are distinctive from factions that only represent partial interests or organizations that only target a single issue (White and Ypi 2010: 811). As Bonotti says:

“They provide heuristic tools which anticipate predictable patterns of policy-making and offer ‘packages’ of policies and measures which partisans intend to implement.” (Bonotti, 2014: 321)

Furthermore, parties, when engaging in inter-party deliberations, can also connect different policies to their underlying values and principles, and this process helps parties to prioritize and order their values in a reasonable way. For instance, a party that prioritizes economic growth might also support environmental protection, and through debate, it can order these values in a way that minimizes the trade-offs between them.

White & Ypi called parties the *discursive architects* because they can provide a deliberation between competing policy options that is oriented to the collective political good. Therefore, they can “modify what they stand for in accordance with public expectations of collective agency” (White & Ypi, 2010: 819). This can lead to the development of policies that reflect the values and concerns of different groups in society or that is in line with the current socioeconomic or historical situation of a nation, without privileging any one comprehensive doctrine over others. For instance, Bonotti argues that a party that is more connected to a religious group can realize that the economic support of religious schools, even if supported by public

values, might require diverting public funds from other important current issues, like the protection of the environment, and they can rethink their “more religiously grounded proposals in view of the common interest” (Bonotti, 2017: 121). The examples presented demonstrate how political parties can contribute to a process of reasonable value prioritization that is essential for addressing complex societal issues. This process of value prioritization can help to guide decision-making and provide a framework for addressing societal challenges in a manner that is reasonable.

The completeness and reasonability of a political conception of justice is of significance to Rawls (Rawls, 1997: 777) and I argue that parties can present them through their wide-range party programs and manifestoes. The ordering of values in a reasonable way is also a significant point and through inter-party debates, this feature can be satisfied.

3.2.5) Parties as Loyal to Democratic Values

In a last point, parties can play a crucial role in maintaining stability and reasonableness in a deliberative arena marked by an irreconcilable pluralism. The ways in which they can do so is by accepting the peaceful rotation of executive or legislative positions. (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2020: 99-100) and the idea of loyal opposition.

As I've demonstrated, Rosenblum identifies, historically, two forms of antipartyism: in one current, theorists have an aversion to pluralism and show a preference for holism, where parties are rejected because of their supposed partiality; in the other current, theorists accept pluralism but see parties as dangerously divisive (Rosenblum, 2008: 25-108). How can parties represent this pluralism and not be dangerously divisive?

Peaceful rotation of power is one of the means by which values like stability or unity can be upheld in the face of such pluralism. Parties represent some form of political pluralism and introduce division and fragmentation. But by respecting the results of elections and peacefully transitioning power, political parties can demonstrate to citizens the importance of accepting majority decisions and abiding by the rules of a legitimate democratic process.

“Rotation in office entails a method of determining winners and acceptance of the result by losers, including acceptance of policies they oppose” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2020: 100).

This signals to citizens that accepting majority rules⁴⁰ is part of their obligation towards democracy, and thus promotes trust in the political system and helps to maintain social stability.

⁴⁰ The laws should also come, of course, from a process of legitimacy that contains substantial values, like the reasoning found in public reason. Majoritarian decisions alone shouldn't make legitimate laws.

Furthermore, I argue that peaceful rotation of office also entails the idea of loyal opposition. Muirhead and Rosenblum talk about the idea of loyal opposition as an “opposition loyal to constitutional democracy and to the view that opponents are reasonable rivals and not enemies to be destroyed” (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101)⁴¹. It is a way for political parties to show that they value reasonableness and dialogue over conflict and self-interest and, as such, entails the idea that a party is loyal to the rules of fair play democratic competition and acknowledges the legitimacy of the other side in competing for power. If political partisans are committed to upholding the principles of a democratic system more than be swayed by their party's interests in winning at any cost, it will acknowledge the burdens of judgment and the existence of reasonable pluralism, treating other parties in a fair and reasonable way. This allows the construction of the deliberative arena necessary for Rawls' theory as it allows for a structure of conflict within a framework of peaceful coexistence and dialogue that pledges more allegiance in upholding the democratic values rather than conflicting for the sake of winning. This is essential to ensure the robustness of democracy in a pluralistic society where different comprehensive doctrines and perspectives coexist. By accepting the peaceful rotation of power, and the subsequent idea of loyal opposition, parties help to counteract tendencies towards authoritarianism, conspiracy, rebellion, or civil war, and promote a sense of openness towards political debate and collective responsibility towards democratic values. In this sense, parties can be helpful in constructing the deliberative arena necessary for public reason.

In summary, political parties can play an important role in the use of public reason because they can provide a means for citizens to organize and aggregate their political views and interests, to participate in the political process by joining together with others who share similar ideas, identifying and systematizing the divisions that give rise to pluralism. They provide a platform for presenting and advocating these views relating them with the basic political values through a complete reasonable political conception of justice, accepting the legitimacy of other groups to participate, and contributing to an overlapping consensus and to a stability that is not motivated by games of power but rather to a strong allegiance to the democratic values and processes.

⁴¹ The feasibility of this argument is dependent on whether the opposing parties actually possess a reasonable disposition. This arguments, along with the others in this section, are part of ideal theory, showing how parties can, in the best scenarios, promote public reason

3.3) How can Political Parties Undermine Public Reason?

I will contradict the essentiality of political parties in the Rawlsian model of public reason, presented in the last chapter, by outlining and discussing the possible dynamics that can make parties harmful to this model of public reason. I look at how political parties in current liberal democracies actually operate and function, and at how this may impact the legitimacy of liberal democracies from the point of view of Rawls' general theory of legitimacy and public reason. Political parties can hinder public reason if they prioritize particular interests over the shared political values, if they appeal to non-liberal values or fail in the justificatory practice demanded by public reason, if they are vehicles of deliberated misinformation or lack of transparency, if they are subverted by monetary incentives from private sources, or if they present a spirit of rigidity and non-dialogue. In these cases, political parties can obstruct rather than facilitate public reason, and undermine the democratic process.

3.3.1) Parties as Factions

In usual dictionaries the concept of a faction generally refers to a group within a larger organization, such as a political party within the large organization of the state, that has a particular interest or goal that opposes with the interests or goals of the larger organization. Pro party theorists that work on the realms of public reason try to distinguish political parties from factions, stating that a faction “addresses a partial constituency”, “exhibits no concern to justify its program to the community in toto” (White & Ypi, 2011: 383), and “pursues partial interests unrelated to the common interest of a community” (Bonotti, 2017: 10).

It's undeniable that parties are indeed partial organizations inside a community, they are representative of the different perspectives in society, but the difference between them and factions is that parties can “promote the interest of the whole political community rather than factional and partial interests” (Bonotti, 2017: 104). In this sense, parties can speak for the entire community, promote general principles and values, and present complete programs on how to link partial interests with the general principles.

However, when political parties become too closely identified with specific interest groups, they can prioritize these interests over other shared values and ignore the concerns and perspectives of other members of society or of other values, trying to maximize the interests of its members or the groups they support at the costs of the interests or values of the wider society. They are no longer concerned about giving justifications that all the electorate or other parties could reasonably agree with, and they focus on those groups who agree with them or whom they want to advance, ignoring or even demonizing those

who do not share their views. This can lead to a "friend/enemy" dynamic in which the opposition is viewed as an existential threat to the party's interests. This kind of dynamic can lead to a polarized setting and can make it difficult for citizens to engage in public debate and discourse.

This is especially important since public reason is "a way of reasoning about political values shared by free and equal citizens." (Rawls, 1997: 807). This requires that political justifications, on fundamental matters, be publicly sharable and, when parties stop concerning about giving justifications all can, at least in principle, reasonably accept, they violate the criterion of reciprocity on which political legitimacy is grounded (Rawls, 1997: 771). Political agents in institutional roles, like partisans invested with a legislative power, must be willing to provide reasons they sincerely believe might be shared with others as free and equal members of society. As Rawls says it:

"Since we seek a shareable public basis of justification for all citizens in society, giving justifications to particular persons and groups here and there until all are covered fails to do this". (Rawls, 1997: 800).

As I explored, Muirhead and Rosenblum (2006) picked the Tocqueville's discussion on small parties, quasi-great parties and great parties and argued that only quasi-great parties are the only ones admissible for public reason. The small parties would be those that resemble with factions and that "only appeal to particular interests rather than abstract principles" and try to maximize these partial interests at all costs for the sake of winning office, or those "amorphous coalitions lacking coherent political identity" (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2006: 101).

On another example, White & Ypi (2016) state the case of a farmer's party who only addresses agrarian interests. They try to maximize the interests of farmers and justify policies taking this interest into account, while not addressing the whole of the political community. This party behaves more like a faction unless "it integrates these interests into a wider normative vision involving claims that can be generalized" (White & Ypi, 2016: 384).

Bonotti takes the case of the environmentalist parties of Europe which grew in the 80's and 90's and whose main focus was solely the protection of the environment, but that have undergone a process of "programmatic generalization" and linked environmental policy with broad range policy issues like economic policies, foreign policies etc... (Bonotti, 2017: 121; 136). At first, these parties were not up to public reason demands but managed to change over time.

As Sartori puts it “Although a party only represents a part, this part must take a non-partial approach to the whole” (Sartori [1968] 1990, 26; cf. Muirhead and Rosenblum 2006), and this, in public reason, means presenting a complete and reasonable political conception of justice and presenting reasons we sincerely believe others, and not only our group, can share as free and equal members. When taking a public reason perspective, parties can’t be vehicles of single-issue movements or temporary issues.

3.3.2) Parties as not Representing Liberal Values or as Tied to a Comprehensive Doctrine

A political party, even if it advances a general or shareable view of the public interest, may not be based on shared basic constitutive liberal values of a constitutional liberal democracy (e.g.: libertarian or communist parties). Differently, a party could even adhere to these political values, such as autonomy or equality, but fail in its justificatory practice for not giving reasons rooted in a political conception of justice freestanding from comprehensive doctrines (e.g.: a perfectionist party). Both of these types of parties undermine the Rawlsian public reason justifiability demands.

According to Rawls, a political party that advances a general view of the public interest but is not based on a liberal political conception of justice, fails to meet the requirements of public reason (Rawls, 1997: 774). Rawls says the content of public reason is derived from a family of reasonable political conceptions of justice, and when talking about these conceptions, he states that there are many possible liberalisms, but they all have in common the idea of citizens as free and equal persons and of society as a fair scheme of social cooperation⁴², and they differ in the way they interpret these ideas. This suggests that for Rawls only political conceptions of justice that stand in the spectrum of liberalism are the ones compatible with public reason. For instance, in the case of libertarianism, it emphasizes individual freedom and individual autonomy to the exclusion of other values that are important for a just society of free and equal citizens. Libertarianism, for Rawls, “(...) does not combine liberty and equality in the way liberalism does; it lacks the criterion of reciprocity and allows excessive social economic inequalities as judged by that criterion.” (Rawls, 1996; lviii).

Since Rawls’ reasonable political conceptions of justice are those that ensure all citizens can make effective use of their basic freedoms (Rawls, 1997: 774), these conceptions must present means of decent distributions of wealth and income, and a libertarian party fails in that. Although these parties can represent the entire community and advance some conception of the common ground, they don’t present

⁴² They differ because they interpret and order these ideas in different ways.

shared political liberal values all can reasonably be expected to endorse or an ordering of these values that is reasonable and compatible with the criterion of reciprocity. In other extreme examples, parties that don't support or that undermine democratic ideals, by appealing to non-liberal or anti-democratic values, such as a fascist party or a dictatorial party, or even a party that boycotts the core values of democracy by not allowing peaceful rotation in office as the result of the election process, also harm public reason by undermining its connection to a constitutional democratic society (Rawls, 1997: 777).

In other cases, a political party that adheres to liberal values, such as equality of opportunities and individual autonomy, but fails to give reasons rooted in a political conception of justice freestanding from comprehensive doctrines, such as a perfectionist party, also fails to meet the requirements of public reason. This is because the party's justifications are part of a comprehensive doctrine that not everyone in the public sphere shares. In the case, a perfectionist party advocates for a comprehensive moral or philosophical doctrine as the basis for its political program. The party's political positions and policies are based on the idea that the state should promote a particular vision of the good life or pursue a specific moral or philosophical agenda. Unlike liberal political parties that are freestanding from comprehensive doctrines, which seek to establish and maintain a just and stable democratic society based on principles that can be acceptable to all citizens and that can be the focus of an overlapping consensus, a perfectionist party seeks to promote a particular vision of the good life or pursue a specific moral or philosophical agenda. Therefore, perfectionist parties can be problematic in a pluralistic society, where citizens hold a wide range of different moral and philosophical views. Rawls' second feature of a reasonable political conception of justice demands we give a special place to the basic rights, liberties, and opportunities, especially for them to be protected from perfectionist values (Rawls, 1997: 774). A political conception of justice shouldn't be presented or derived or be a part of any comprehensive doctrine (Rawls, 1996: 12) and, as a result, the perfectionist party's political platform cannot be publicly justified because it relies on values and principles that are not reasonably acceptable to everyone. Rawls' theory needs freestanding political conceptions in order to construct an overlapping consensus because they provide a framework that can be accepted by citizens with different comprehensive doctrines.⁴³

For instance, in the United States, many conservative politicians have used religious justifications to oppose abortion rights and same-sex marriage. Former Vice President Mike Pence has been a vocal

⁴³ This very point is sometimes mentioned as too limiting for party democratic pluralism. Some argue that we should not follow a Rawlsian framework on public reason because this interpretation closes the door to libertarian, progressive, or perfectionist parties and therefore violates pluralism of expression even when these parties are committed to democratic values. See Biale (2021: 19-21) and Destri (2021: 64)

opponent of abortion and has many times cited his Christian faith as the basis for his opposition⁴⁴⁴⁵. This type of argumentation fails the requirements of public justifiability and, if the parties' core program is based on reasons drawn from perfectionist or comprehensive doctrines, or from illiberal values, they fail to abide by public reason justifiability demands as proposed by Rawls, and even undermine it by making citizens distrust in the political process.

In order to meet the requirements of public reason, political parties must base their justifications on shared liberal political values that are reasonably acceptable to everyone in the public sphere and avoid relying on comprehensive doctrines. By doing so, they can contribute to a more just and stable democratic society where citizens can work together to achieve common goals.

3.3.3) Parties as Subverted by Monetary Incentives from Private Sources

The influence of powerful interest groups and wealthy donors on political parties can pose a serious threat to public reason and to democratic governance, as it may compromise partisans' ability to represent the views and interests of the general public. When political parties rely heavily on funding from these groups, they may feel pressured to prioritize their interests over those of the broader population. Moreover, the involvement of these groups can preclude public discussion, as their financial influence can drown out opposing voices and limit the range of viewpoints that are heard in the public sphere. This can undermine the quality of public deliberation, reduce the diversity of ideas, lead to a situation where important issues are not properly addressed, and, therefore, affect public reason.

Rawls states that public deliberation should be "set free from the curse of money" otherwise politics will be "dominated by corporate and other organized interests who through large contributions to campaigns distort if not preclude public discussion and deliberation" (Rawls, 1997: 772)⁴⁶. I interpret that this can be part of the reason Rawls argues that public reason should also apply to members of political parties in their political campaigns to win elections (Rawls, 1996; 215) as it is when campaigning that parties need and receive more private funds. Partisans, both when running for office or when in government, should see each citizen as free and equal, and draft or support policies on fundamental matters that

⁴⁴ E.g. Mike Pence in an interview with the NBC News. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PyRFloTgmA>. It may be worth noting that Rawls discusses the concept of "witnessing" and "reasoning from conjecture" as methods of discussion that help public reason even though they are not part of it. There are two other forms of discourse that can be used in political discussions. One is declaration, where individuals express their own comprehensive doctrine, religious or nonreligious, and show how it aligns with a reasonable political conception of justice. The second is conjecture, where individuals conjecture about other people's basic doctrines, to show that a reasonable political conception can provide a basis for those doctrines. However, Pence's argumentation does not constitute an example of these methods.

⁴⁵ It is important to note that not all Republicans or conservatives rely on religious reasons for their political positions. There are also Republicans who support their positions based on other justifications that can be suitable for public reasons.

⁴⁶ Rawls also talks about public funds when it comes to maintaining the fair value of the equal political liberties (Rawls, 1996: 357-358).

guarantee a fair scheme of social cooperation. Public reason entails this reciprocity between free and equal citizens and, I argue, private funding of political campaigns can harm these ideas.

As I've demonstrated, Rawls argues that the ideal of a democratic society is one in which citizens are free and equal. Citizens are free because they are not subject to the moral or political authority of others. This means that they have the right to act and think as they see fit, as long as they do not harm others or infringe on their rights. Rawls also argues that citizens must be equal in order for a democratic society to function properly. This means that they are equally situated with respect to this freedom from the natural authority of others (Rawls, 1996: 18-19) and, therefore, no group or individual should have more power or influence than others.

Rawls doesn't establish a direct connection between the concept of citizens as free and equal and his discussion on campaign financing. However, it is my interpretation that large donations from corporations or other organized interests to political parties can give some groups or individuals greater access to these platforms than others, leading to a concentration of power and influence that can undermine the status of citizens as equal persons. When wealthy donors have more influence over policy decisions than ordinary citizens, it can lead to policies that favour the interests of the few over the general citizens. This undermines the idea of citizens as equal persons because it gives some people more say in how society is run than others, based solely on their ability to donate money. This can create a situation in which some people are "more equal" than others, harming the grounds of public reason.

Moreover, these donations can debilitate the idea of society as a fair scheme of social cooperation because they can create a bias in favour of the interests of the donor, leading to policies that benefit them over the community's shared values. Rawls connects the idea of public reason with the criterion of reciprocity and with the fair terms of cooperation. Fair terms of cooperation are those that each participant may reasonably accept, even at the cost of their own personal interests, provided that everyone else likewise accepts them (Rawls, 1997: 770). In other words, fair terms of cooperation must be reasonably acceptable to all parties involved and should not unduly advantage or disadvantage any particular group. This means that all those "who are engaged in cooperation and who do their part as the rules and procedures require, are to benefit in an appropriate way, as assessed by a suitable benchmark of comparison" and that "the benefits produced by everyone's efforts are fairly distributed" (Rawls, 1996: 16). When corporations or other organized interests make large donations to political parties or candidates, it can undermine this idea of fair terms of cooperation and the subsequent criterion of reciprocity. This is because these donations can give the donors undue influence over policy decisions,

leading to policies that favor their interests over the interests of other members of society or of other shared values, undermining public reason by not showing terms all can reasonably accept.

For instance, take the case of the Cambridge Analytica Scandal. In 2016, the data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica used data harvested from millions of Facebook users without their consent to influence the outcome of the US presidential election. Even though the firm received funding from major donors of Republican political causes and not from the Republican party directly, the scandal highlighted the dangers of unregulated data collection and the potential for private interests to undermine one of the most important bases of democracy, elections.

This means that parties and partisans must be provided public fundings that are at least sufficient for their activities and campaigns and, when private fundings are allowed, they should be transparent to the public and efficiently supervised in order to assess the motivations behind policy decisions by political parties. As Rawls says:

“In constant pursuit of money to finance campaigns, the political system is simply unable to function. Its deliberative powers are paralyzed.” (Rawls, 1997: 773).

3.3.4) Parties as Deliberated Vehicles of Misinformation

In order to advance their political agenda or to discredit their opponents' views, political parties may engage in the spread of false or misleading information. They can deliberately misrepresent facts or statistics, choosing the metrics that benefit them while ignoring other important data or make false claims and use misleading or complex information to manipulate public opinion. By doing so, I argue, they can harm the guidelines of inquiry that are vital to a political conception of justice and to public reason.

As I've mentioned in Chapter 1, the guidelines of inquiry are what allow us to reason and weigh the shreds of evidence necessary to determine if our laws and policies are satisfying our substantive principles. Rawls states that to have this type of reasonable public discussion and inquiry citizens must have some civic political virtues, such as “reasonableness and a readiness to honor the (moral) duty of civility” (Rawls, 1996: 224). This means that partisans, when deciding what policies or laws satisfy their substantive values, should use guidelines of inquiry that are reasonable and that are able to explain and give reasons others can understand and reasonably accept, and they should act in good faith.

However, when partisans deliberately ignore important evidence or misrepresent facts to gain support for their policies, they violate these political virtues, act in bad faith, and harm public reason content. Take

the case of both the Trump and Bolsonaro administrations on their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the ways in which they undermined public reason was by appealing to controversial science and promoting unproven or ineffective treatments for the virus. For example, Trump promoted the use of hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for COVID-19, despite limited evidence of its effectiveness and warnings from public health officials. Bolsonaro similarly promoted unproven treatments, such as chloroquine and ivermectin, and downplayed the severity of the pandemic. Another way in which these administrations undermined public reason was by selectively choosing data that supported their positions, while disregarding or suppressing data that contradicted them. For example, the Trump administration reportedly pressured the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to downplay the severity of the pandemic and to provide data that supported the administration's agenda⁴⁷. In addition, both administrations used emotive language to appeal to their supporters and to discredit their critics. For example, Trump referred to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" and used divisive rhetoric to blame China for the pandemic. Bolsonaro similarly used divisive rhetoric to blame the media, opposition parties, and state governors for the pandemic. Even though emotional language is sometimes used as an empathic way to unite people, it can also be used to manipulate and trigger misinformation.

Another example is the case of the Iraq War where the US government claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and posed an imminent threat to the United States and its allies. This claim was used as the primary justification for launching the war, however, after the war began, it was revealed that the intelligence used to support the claim of these weapons in Iraq was inaccurate and misleading. The government had selectively presented evidence and ignored dissenting views, in order to build a case for war. In addition, in order to gain support for the war effort, some government officials made false statements to the public about the existence of these weapons in Iraq⁴⁸. Both these situations demonstrate how a government can deliberately misrepresent data and information to advance its agenda, turning to controversial data, using only the metrics that benefit them or appealing to emotive language.

In one passage, Rawls states that when it comes to the forums and issues where public reason applies, we are only to appeal to "presently accepted general beliefs and form of reasoning found in common sense, and the methods and conclusions of science when these are not controversial". (Rawls, 1996: 224). When talking about the primary goods and how the principles of justice should protect these, Rawls states that "desires and wants, however intense, are not by themselves reasons in matters of

⁴⁷ See Suran M., (2023).

⁴⁸ See US Senate Intelligence Committee (2004), *The Senate Intelligence Committee Report on the Use of Pre-war Intelligence* available in <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/108th-congress/senate-report/301/1>

constitutional essentials and basic justice.” (Rawls, 1996: 190). This means that, when engaging in public discourse on constitutional or basic matters, partisans should rely on information that is widely accepted or available to the general public⁴⁹. They should not use complex or esoteric arguments that are only accessible to a select few. They should use plain and simple language that is accessible to all citizens, and that is based on widely accepted principles and methods of science. And they should appeal to reasonableness rather than to the intense feelings or desires of citizens, as this in turn leads to more divisions between citizens who hold different views. This implies partisans ought to engage in good faith reasoning, being prepared to defend their political conception of justice and their policies using guidelines and principles that respect the values of public reason and that they think other citizens, as free and equal, may reasonably be expected to endorse (Rawls, 1996: 226).

By respecting the guidelines of inquiry and their related political virtues we can ensure that all citizens are able to engage in public discourse in a fair and reasonable manner and that we can arrive at just and reasonable solutions to the complex problems that our society faces.

3.3.5) Parties as Promoting a Spirit of Non-Dialogue, Non-Revision and Non-Cooperation

Political parties, often to dissociate themselves from the rest of the parties and present themselves as different, promote rigid and inflexible ideologies that are not open to a cooperative dialogue or revision, fostering a groupthink mentality where members are discouraged from considering cooperative or alternative perspectives, making it difficult to find common ground.

It's important for parties to have a cooperative dialogue because, while they may have different interpretations of justice, arriving at decisions based on a shared understanding of what is reasonable just requires sincere and open-minded dialogue. It will be normal for political parties to have and support different political conceptions of justice. However, to arrive at decisions that are based on a shared understanding of what is reasonable and just, Rawls requires that citizens “are to cooperate politically on a basis of mutual respect” (Rawls, 2001: 91). This, I argue, is to have a sincere and open-minded dialogue with other partisans, even when they disagree, seeing others as free and equal, accepting the burdens of judgment and, therefore, seeing other interpretations as reasonable and looking for fair terms of

⁴⁹ Rawls allows for the use of expert knowledge in decision-making processes, but when it comes to exercising power over fundamental issues, this exercise of power must be justifiable in public reason or based on reasons that are possible to justify with the proviso.

cooperation, instead of being closed behind the righteousness of their own political conception and presenting a spirit of non-dialogue.

For Rawls, a political system that is based on the principles of public reason encourages positive values and virtues such as reasonableness, compromise, and cooperation.

“These virtues underwrite the willingness if not the desire to cooperate with others on terms that all can publicly accept as fair on a footing of equality and mutual respect.” (Rawls, 2001: 116).

These values are essential for citizens to work together on political terms that are publicly acceptable to all. He assumes that when such a system is sustained over time, it can encourage citizens to adopt these virtues and improve political cooperation (Rawls, 1996; 163). I interpret here that the political institutions give an example of political cooperation that citizens can also follow.

But when political parties are too rigid in their ideology, especially because of the need to be re-elected, they can treat other parties' programs as unreasonable (even when they aren't), leading to a breakdown in respectful dialogue and a tendency to view opponents as enemies rather than as fellow citizens who hold different views. This undermines openness, the willingness to compromise, and to find solutions that are reasonably acceptable to all parties involved. Even though respect and openness in dialogue don't necessarily lead us to an agreement (Rawls, 2001: 36), partisans should still present these virtues.

Moreover, Rawls' public reason requires that citizens be willing to revise their views in light of new evidence or arguments. Public reason is the result of a deliberative process where “political opinions may be revised by discussion...these opinions are not simply a fixed outcome...” (Rawls, 1997: 772). When political parties are unable to have this open dialogue, they can lead to a tendency to hold onto fixed positions even in the face of new evidence or arguments. This can make it harder to arrive at decisions that are based on sound reasoning and evidence, leading to a fragmented public discourse where each party pulls in their own direction, not being willing to revise their views. For instance, in a highly contested issue, parties might even introduce the comprehensive doctrines they represent but only to open the deliberation, showing to others how their views support the basic political values (Rawls, 1997: 785). This implies that partisans ought to be able to change the way they look at other parties and revise their fair terms of cooperation through deliberation.

“Public justification is not simply valid reasoning, but argument addressed to others: it proceeds correctly from premises we accept and think others could reasonably accept to conclusions we think they could also reasonably accept.” (Rawls, 1997: 786).

Note that "reasonably" occurs at both ends in this formulation, and this jump from premises to conclusions depends on an open and honest dialogue, where a spirit of rigidity, non-revision, always demonizing the other side and not seeing it as reasonable, undermines public reason.

One example of a cooperative scheme can be found in the Climate Solution Caucus. In the United States the two major political parties decided to make a bridge in their divisiveness and try to find common ground on the issue of climate change. In 2019 a group of Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives formed the Climate Solutions Caucus, which aimed to bring Republicans and Democrats together to find solutions to climate change. The caucus was made up of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats and required members to join in pairs. This ensured that each member had a partner from the other party with whom they could work closely and develop a working relationship. These examples show that, despite the differences between political parties, there can be successful efforts to find common ground and work together on important issues. It requires a willingness to engage in open and honest dialogue, to respect the views of others, and to be willing to compromise and find solutions that are acceptable to all parties involved. And although this deliberation is not necessarily about fundamental and constitutional matters, where public reason applies, it can open doors for new values or changes in a constitution and can be an example of the kind of debate we should have on fundamental political issues.

One another example, take the case on the current political climate in Spain, where the country has been facing significant challenges in recent years due to a deepening political polarization between the two main political parties, the conservative People's Party (PP) and the center-left Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). The two parties have been unable to find common ground on a range of issues, including Catalonia's independence movement, economic reforms, and social policies. In particular, the issue of Catalonia's independence has been a major point of contention between the two parties, with the PP taking a hardline stance against any form of secession and the PSOE advocating for a more conciliatory approach that recognizes the region's cultural and linguistic identity. This has led to a situation where both parties have been unwilling to compromise, resulting in a prolonged stalemate that has exacerbated tensions and deepened divisions within the country. Furthermore, both parties have also been criticized for their lack of dialogue with smaller parties and for their failure to engage in meaningful cooperation and compromise with their opponents⁵⁰. This has led to a situation where the political discourse in the country has become increasingly polarized and divisive, with little room for consensus-building or

⁵⁰ https://en.ara.cat/misc/will-spain-learn-to-agreement_1_1749842.html

compromise. This lack of dialogue and compromise between the PP and PSOE in Spain's legislative assembly has had significant consequences for the country, leading to a gridlocked parliament, deepening polarization, and a growing sense of political instability. It highlights the importance of fostering a spirit of cooperation and dialogue in politics, even in the face of significant disagreements and differences of opinion.

To conclude this section; political parties can harm public reason in various ways. Firstly, parties can function as factions, prioritizing sectarian interests over generally shared ones. Secondly, parties may not represent liberal values or freestanding political conceptions, undermining the possibility of an overlapping consensus. Thirdly, parties may be subverted by monetary incentives from private sources, leading to decisions that violate the equal status of citizens and that don't support a just cooperation. Fourthly, parties can deliberately promote misinformation, which can negatively impact public discourse and decision-making. Finally, parties can promote a spirit of non-dialogue, non-cooperation and non-revision, hindering the ability of different groups to come together and find reasonable solutions to complex problems that all can see as reasonable. It is important for political parties to consider these issues and strive to promote open and constructive dialogue that prioritizes the values and the process of public reason.

3.4) A Brief Synthesis: The Aggregative and Deliberative Functions of Political Parties

In previous chapters, I have examined the potential benefits and drawbacks of political parties in relation to public reason. Now, I must move forward in the dialectical process by identifying the contradictions between the thesis that parties can help public reason, and the antithesis that they can hinder it. By analyzing these opposing ideas, we can arrive at a new understanding of what drives parties in either direction⁵¹.

Upon examining all the various dynamics, I argue that it is possible to identify an underlying unifying factor that affects political parties' impact to public reason. Specifically, this factor pertains to the party's

⁵¹The aim of this thesis is to understand what guidelines, duties or restrictions, be they legal or moral, are required for political parties to make a positive contribution to a Rawlsian model of public reason. While I have already identified several scattered dynamics that influence this impact, it is crucial to establish a framework that brings together these individual factors. Only in Chapter 3 will I discuss the potential ideal of public reason for political parties.

focus on either deliberation or aggregation of interests. When political parties prioritize deliberative processes, have a genuine motivation to comply with the criterion of reciprocity and arrive at a shared basis of what can be reasonably acceptable for citizens, they are more likely to contribute positively to public reason. Conversely, when parties prioritize the aggregation of votes over the deliberative virtues demanded by public reason, they often fail to uphold or even obstruct public reason.

The concepts of aggregation and deliberation in democracy are not new and have given rise to different models of democracy, ones more focused on deliberation, others on aggregation⁵².

“We conceptually contrast deliberative democracy to aggregative democracy, which is normally based on the counting of votes. That deliberative and aggregative democracy contrast conceptually does not make them antithetical in practice. At least in established liberal democratic states, both deliberation (talking) and aggregation (voting) are usually important for democratic decision-making at different stages.” (Bächtiger, A. et al., 2018: Introduction, 2)

What we see is that, in practice, any model of democracy will contain the two elements, even though it can differ on where the core of legitimacy or democracy relies. This fact also purports to political parties.

I see the *aggregative function* of political parties as their ability to aggregate the interests and preferences of individuals and groups into policy platforms. In this sense, parties can collect the policy preferences of their members and supporters and use that information to develop a set of policy proposals that they can offer to the electorate. By doing so, parties help to simplify the political process and provide voters with a clear choice between competing policy alternatives.

The *deliberative function* of political parties, on the other hand, refers to their ability to serve as a forum for deliberation and debate. Parties allow citizens to discuss and shape policy ideas within a broader political community. This function helps to foster democratic participation and engagement and ensures that policies are responsive, just, or legitimate, to the needs and preferences of citizens. By engaging in political discourse and debate, parties can help to educate the public on important issues and provide a platform for the expression of diverse viewpoints who should deliberate to arrive at decisions that are in the best interests of all citizens.

However, how to link these two functions was always problematic:

⁵² These concepts are intertwined with the historical, complex, and still very alive, debate on deliberative or aggregative models of democracy. For proponents of deliberative democracy see Manin (1987); Elster (1986); Elster, J., & Przeworski, A. (1998); Cohen (1989). For proponents of aggregative democracy see Black (1948; 1958); Arrow (1963, 1967).

“Since the primary function of parties is to win office rather than to reflect on public questions, parties are potential problems for the deliberative enterprise.” (Muirhead, 2010: 129).

Theorists like Muirhead talk of a paradox between deliberation and aggregation that arises because the two goals can sometimes conflict with each other. For example, the aggregation of preferences through voting can lead to a situation where the majority dominates the minority, potentially limiting the ability of minority views to be heard and considered. Similarly, the pursuit of inclusive deliberation can lead to a situation where decisions are made too slowly, or where the outcomes are not reflective of the preferences of the majority of citizens.

In the context of exploring how political parties' dynamics impact public reason, it is important to consider now how these dynamics align with either the deliberative or aggregative functions of parties. In the following discussion, I will analyze each of the points that were previously identified as contributing to public reason and connect them with their corresponding function⁵³.

- The first point, which focuses on parties serving as a bridge between the public political culture and background culture, aligns more with a motivation of aggregating interests as it relates to the ability of parties to organize and promote interests or comprehensive doctrines.
- The second point, which involves identifying and systematizing divisions within a diverse range of worldviews, can involve both deliberative and aggregative motivations. While aggregating different views may be necessary to identify divisions, systematizing these divisions may require a more deliberative process that leads to a shared understanding of these divisions.
- The third point, which involves helping translate comprehensive doctrines into public values, aligns more with the deliberative function of parties. It is through a genuine and sincere dialogue and deliberation, parties can help translate complex doctrines into shared public values that are more widely accepted and understood.
- The fourth point, which involves presenting reasonable and complete political conceptions of justice, can involve both deliberative and aggregative motivations. While aggregating different views or values may be necessary to present a complete conception of justice, ensuring that the conception is reasonable and just may require a more deliberative process that leads to a shared understanding of justice.

⁵³ I see the relationship between deliberation and aggregation as inherent, as deliberation involves the consideration of diverse viewpoints and the synthesis of conflicting perspectives. Conversely, aggregation necessitates deliberation in order to arrive at a notion of what are the collective decisions that are going to be debated or elected. However, within this framework, certain dynamics exhibit a stronger motivation, connection or inclination towards either deliberation or aggregation.

- Finally, the fifth point, which involves promoting democratic values and operating in a spirit of dialogue, aligns more with a deliberative motivation. By fostering greater understanding and communication between different groups, parties can contribute positively to public reason.

When it comes to the dynamics that parties perform that hinder public reason, I see them as more motivated by a desire to accumulate and aggregate support from specific groups or interests in order to win elections:

- The first point, the promotion of faction-like behavior, is an aggregative motivation as it involves parties prioritizing, promoting and maximizing their own sectarian interests over those of the broader public.
- The second point, promoting illiberal values or a particular comprehensive doctrine, can have an aggregative or deliberative motivation, as it can be just to gain electorate support from other citizens who dislike the current democratic system, or it can be because of a genuine conviction that will lead to a better democratic deliberation, as in the case of a perfectionist party.
- The third point, fostering misinformation, can be seen as an aggregative motivation insofar as it involves parties manipulating information to gain an electoral advantage.
- The fourth point, being influenced by monetary incentives from private sources, is again an aggregative function as parties prioritize their aggregation of financial interests over the broader public interest.
- Finally, the fifth point, presenting a spirit of non-dialogue and non-revision, is a clear example of an aggregative motivation as parties betray deliberations virtues in order to prioritize their ideological purity or aggregate the interests of their base over the broader public interest.

Based in this thorough examination of the dynamics exhibited by political parties, it becomes unmistakably evident that the dynamics that obstruct or hinder public reason are frequently driven by the parties' relentless pursuit of securing additional votes to emerge victorious in elections. Consequently, I posit that an ideal of public reason necessitates to put emphasis on prioritizing thoughtful deliberation over the mere amalgamation of self-serving interests within political parties. More precisely, I posit that when parties are confronted with trade-offs between these two different functions, they should prioritize the deliberative virtues necessary for a process of public reasoning and public justification, and their electoral support should come as a second-order consequence of their ability to uphold the shared political moral values of a constitutional democracy. By adopting such measures, we can effectively ensure that political

parties make positive contributions to the realm of public reason and actively foster a more deliberative approach to political decision-making.

However, let me make clear that I argue that neither pure aggregation nor pure deliberation is sufficient for arriving at political decisions within a democratic framework. Deliberative democracy requires an element of aggregation, which political parties can help provide. Conversely, aggregative democracy should aspire to a quality deliberation that prioritizes the interpretation and realization of the basic political moral values of society. Any normative theory of democracy, or any normative theory of partisanship, must incorporate some element of deliberation, as reducing democracy to fair counting procedures gives up on any attempt to connect the numerical majority with what is sensible, prudent, or decent. However, even authentic deliberative processes will leave some residue of disagreement, and disagreement will need to give way to a process of counting. The aggregation of preferences is a necessary and decent way of recognizing the equality of citizens who inevitably disagree under conditions of freedom.

Let me give two examples of the interconnectedness between the deliberative and the aggregative functions. In contemporary literature, scholars such as Joshua Cohen and Bernard Manin have emphasized the role of political parties in the deliberative process. Cohen, in his case, argues that independent, publicly funded political parties can contribute to democratic deliberation by providing organizational resources and keeping the focus of political debate on matters of general concern (Cohen, 1991: 31-32). Similarly, Manin contends that political parties are crucial in overcoming the 'bounded' nature of deliberative processes by focusing discussion and debate on a subset of possible solutions to political disagreements (Manin, 1987: 356-357).

This means that the aggregative and deliberative functions of political parties models are not antagonists, but complementary. Parties can admit the possibility of better and worse judgment but need to make room for a sincere and genuine deliberative element, and even though they can deliberate, citizens need to understand that the ineradicability of reasonable disagreement needs to include an aggregative component. Thus, political parties are not only necessary for modern electoral democracy but should also be an important part of deliberative democracy.

To achieve a balance between the deliberative and aggregative functions of political parties and promote public reason, it is important to recognize the interdependence between these two functions. On the one hand, the aggregative function of parties involves mobilizing support from voters or forming a winning coalition to govern or limits the choices to be made by aggregating and organizing them. On the other hand, the deliberative function of parties involves engaging in constructive dialogue, a justificatory

practice, and debate to arrive at well-informed policy decisions that reflect the values of constitutional democracies. For instance, to aggregate votes, political parties need to appeal to a broad audience and convince them to support their platform. However, this doesn't necessarily entail they advocate through shared reasons, they may resort to tactics that are detrimental to public reason, such as turning to emotional language and engaging in demagoguery to appeal to the masses.

To reconcile these functions and promote public reason, I argue that political parties must prioritize the quality of deliberation in their decision-making processes. This involves promoting transparency, open dialogue, and a willingness to consider diverse perspectives, while also remaining mindful of the need to build coalitions and achieve political goals. Political parties must also strive to avoid engaging in misinformation and divisive rhetoric that can undermine public trust in the political process and lead to polarizing and harmful outcomes. Moreover, political parties must prioritize the pursuit of policies that reflect liberal values and freestanding political conceptions, ensuring that their decision-making is rooted in a commitment to public reason and sharable values. This requires parties to be mindful of the influence of monetary incentives and other factors that can distort decision-making and compromise public reason.

To give more concrete examples, one trade-off between the deliberative and aggregative function is witnessed in party discipline, where members are expected to always conform to the party line, compromising the opportunity for robust deliberation, being more open to revision and the expression of diverse opinions. Another trade-off occurs during candidate selection processes, where prioritizing electoral viability through the choice of a candidate that is popular or a good strategist can overshadow the deliberative function, potentially marginalizing candidates with valuable expertise or innovative ideas. Additionally, reliance on campaign messaging and sound bites simplifies complex issues, detracting from substantive deliberation and limiting the exploration of important connected issues. These trade-offs illustrate how the aggregative function, aimed at securing votes and maximizing electoral success, can sometimes hinder the deliberative function, impeding meaningful discourse and inclusive decision-making within political parties.

Ultimately, parties have a responsibility to ensure that their methods of aggregating votes do not come at the expense of public reason. While aggregative functions such as campaigning to a broader audience may be necessary for successful vote aggregation, they also run the risk of undermining public reason if, by doing so, they promote polarization or misleading messages. It is essential to consider the potential negative consequences of privileging one function over the other. Political obligations must be crafted with the aim of ensuring that the parties' deliberative and aggregative functions operate in a manner that

is compatible with public reason. This requires an understanding of the complex trade-offs between the benefits of reaching a broader audience and the risks of promoting a message that may be incompatible with public reason.

Political parties should prioritize virtuous, transparent, informed, and reasonable deliberation over mere aggregation of votes through dynamics that hinder public reason. This implies that the aggregation of votes, while important for party success, should be regarded as a secondary outcome. The primary focus must be on unwavering commitment to democratic principles and upholding public justification. Political parties have a broader role beyond electoral victories, as they represent and advocate for citizens' interests, propose reasonable conceptions of justice, and help translate comprehensive doctrines into public values, thus ensuring the overlapping consensus. By prioritizing public justification, parties prioritize the collective welfare and broader public interest over short-term electoral gains. They engage with citizens, foster meaningful dialogue, and transparently justify their policy proposals. This approach ensures that their actions are grounded in democratic ideals and contribute to a healthy democracy. While vote aggregation remains important, it should be seen as a byproduct of parties' commitment to democratic principles and to public justification.

In summary, I contend that, in the context of trade-offs, parties ought to prioritize deliberative values and processes that promote Rawls' principle of legitimacy and justifiability as their primary focus. The aggregation of votes necessary for their success should be regarded as a secondary outcome resulting from their commitment to democratic principles and their ability to uphold public justification. Any ideal, set of duties or guidelines for a Rawlsian model of public reason, to be effective, while maintaining its aspirations, needs to relate to political parties deliberative and aggregational functions, relating to their antagonism and deliberative practices.

In the upcoming chapter, I will analyze Bonotti's theory, which links the Rawlsian model of public reason with the practicalities of political parties. I will scrutinize how he constructs the ideal of public reason, which comprises a set of constraints, orientations, and guidelines to ensure that political parties adhere to public reason. I will assess whether his theory can address the issue identified in this context of balancing the aggregative and deliberative functions of parties and, thus, truly ensuring public reason.

4. BONOTTI'S IDEAL: IS IT WELL ADAPTED TO PRIORITIZE DELIBERATION AND PROTECT PUBLIC REASON?

The intricate relationship between public reason and political partisanship has been a topic of scholarly inquiry within the context of political liberalism. This study delves into the thought-provoking work of Matteo Bonotti, who presents a normative theory of partisanship within the work of Rawls. By examining Bonotti's theory, this research aims to unveil if his method of conceiving an ideal of public reason and to evaluate the effectiveness of Bonotti's proposed justificatory practices in addressing party mechanisms that may undermine public reason. With a focus on the delicate balance between deliberation and aggregation, this study further investigates how Bonotti's framework aligns with the broader objectives of political parties in fostering an informed and inclusive democratic process that's upholds public reason.

In the first subchapter, the focus is on Bonotti's normative theory of partisanship within the framework of political liberalism. Bonotti proposes a theory of partisanship that gives priority to general interests and common goods. In this perspective, an inherent relationship between public reason and partisanship is examined, distinguishing it from the viewpoint that sees the demands of public reason as external limitations imposed on political parties. The interpretation of Rawls' criterion of reciprocity is also examined, with Bonotti dividing it into the accessibility criterion and the weak shareability criterion, shedding new light on how to interpret Rawls' conception of public reason. Additionally, the duty of civility is also applied as an ideal of public reason. However, Bonotti exempts ordinary citizens from this duty and introduces mechanisms to ensure parties adhere to public reason while remaining responsive to their constituents, such as the division of justificatory labour between elected and non-elected partisans and the concepts of vertical and horizontal accountability. This subchapter provides a comprehensive analysis of Bonotti's theory, presenting its implications for political parties and their alignment with the demands of public reason. **(How Bonotti connects Public Reason and Political Partisanship?)**

In the second sub-chapter, I examine whether Bonotti's scheme can protect the Rawlsian model of public reason from being undermined by political parties. The goal is to determine if Bonotti's justificatory practices address party mechanisms that hinder public reason. While acknowledging that public reason alone cannot guarantee the functioning of political parties, the focus is on whether these practices ensure public justifiability in the face of party mechanisms that may undermine it. Bonotti's scheme offers potential mechanisms to address factionalism, uphold public justification, ensure independence from private monetary incentives, combat misinformation, and foster dialogue and cooperation. However, further clarification and exploration of interparty engagement with the citizenry and rules for fair

cooperation are necessary to fully realize the potential of Bonotti's framework. **(Applying Bonotti's Framework to Partisan Practices Detrimental to Public Reason)**

In the final sub-chapter, I will align Bonotti's justificatory practices with the argument presented in Chapter 2, which emphasizes prioritizing the deliberative function of political parties necessary for upholding public justification over their aggregative function. I present two main arguments to support this alignment. Firstly, I endorse Bonotti's conceptualization of partisanship, which highlights the importance of political parties presenting comprehensive and reasonable political conceptions of justice that reflect a commitment to a type of common good within a liberal constitutional democracy. This perspective suggests that parties should prioritize deliberation within a framework of shared political values rather than solely focusing on maximizing interest aggregation on specific issues. However, a contrasting argument emerges regarding the exemption of citizens from the justificatory pool. Bonotti opposes placing constraints of public reason on citizens' voting behavior due to potential electoral pressure and social disapproval. I argue that voting based solely on nonpublic reasons undermines the perceived legitimacy of democratic decisions and weakens the epistemic commons of a constitutional democracy, resulting in a lack of informed decision-making and a fragmented public sphere. In summary, I explore the merits of Bonotti's theory in conceptualizing partisanship and the division of justificatory labour, while also acknowledging my disagreement with exempting citizens from the duty of civility. **(Balancing Deliberation and Aggregation: The Role of Partisanship and Bonotti's Division of Justificatory Labour)**

4.1) How Bonotti connects Public Reason and Political Partisanship?

4.1.1) The Intrinsic Connection between Public Reason and Bonotti's Normative Theory of Partisanship

Bonotti posits that there exist two distinct approaches to the interplay between a normative theory of political parties and the Rawlsian normative theory of public reason. According to one approach, which he refers to the *extrinsic view*, public reason is as a framework within which political parties operate. This view asserts that the goals and methods of a party are fundamentally different from the ideal of public reason and, as a result, the framework imposes external constraints upon them. It dictates how political parties ought to operate, which can be at odds with their preferred ways of functioning.

“This is the view that the Rawlsian ideal of public reason, and the kind of public deliberation it demands, should be seen as a ‘container’ within which political parties operate, and which imposes upon them constraints that are external to their goals and to their way of advancing political proposals.”

(Bonotti, 2017: 63)

For political scientists and philosophers, the term "party" encompasses a wide variety of political groups. However, if we look at the predominant normative theories of partisanship, we can see that the common denominator that normatively characterizes parties, and their goals, is their desire to win office and compete in elections (White & Ypi, 2016: 12). According to Leon Epstein (1980), one prominent political scientist, a political party can be defined as "any group, however loosely organized, seeking to elect government officeholders under a given label" (p. 9). In this context, the duty of civility, which involves providing reasons that adhere to the criterion of reciprocity, can be regarded as an external obligation that is not directly tied to a party's normative description and objective of winning or participating in elections⁵⁴.

Bonotti argues that this view is incorrect because we shouldn't conceive parties "solely as real-world organizations that contest elections, with no reference made to any normative ideal establishing how they ought to behave" (Bonotti, 2017: 105). He contends that a normative concept of partisanship must be based on a tradition of thought⁵⁵ that emphasizes parties' commitment to principles. It is not enough for parties to merely pursue their sectarian interests or aim to win office. Rather, any defensible concept of

⁵⁴ While it is true that political parties may seek to gain votes by appealing to a broader audience and, for that, they provide reasons shareable to all, this does not necessarily mean that the duty of civility is not an external imposition. The duty of civility goes beyond simply providing shareable reasons and instead requires a type of conduct, a justificatory deliberative practice continued in time. This means that parties must consider the reasons of others and engage in a respectful dialogue, even if it may not directly benefit their electoral goals. Therefore, the duty of civility is still distinct from the goals of political parties when they are characterized this way, even if they may overlap in some points.

⁵⁵ Bonotti situates his theory of partisanship within the tradition of thought represented by scholars such as Edmund Burke and White & Ypi, who also emphasize the importance of a normative ideal grounded in principle commitment.

partisanship must privilege a set of ideas that ground the group in a principled commitment irreducible to the self-centered aims of sectoral groups or personal interests. Subsequently, he adds:

“Presenting partial values and demands in a way that takes into account general ends and the common good, therefore, is the distinctive normative attribute of partisanship. This, however, is just the kind of commitment that underlies Rawls’ political liberalism and his idea of public reason.” (Bonotti, 2017: 105)

Although Bonotti does not formulate a complete theory of partisanship on his own, it is possible to understand his position as similar to that of Sartori. According to both scholars, a party is, along other aspects, a partial aggregation of citizens that takes a “non-partial approach to the whole” (Sartori, 1976: 26). If we look at parties from this point of view, he argues there exists an *intrinsic approach* between partisanship and public reason that reveals a correspondence between the demands of Rawls’ ideal of public reason and those of partisanship when viewed as a normative ideal. Bonotti argues that both public reason and partisanship require “policies and laws to be defended on the basis of public reasons” and both reject a mere reflection of the “interests and conceptions of the good of a specific group of citizens” (Bonotti, 2017: 11). Thus, the demands of public reason are internal to the very definition of a party, making these demands and the normative ideal of partisanship mutually reinforcing and not conflicting. Political parties can now operate within the framework of public reason and still uphold their own values and goals.

4.1.2) Understanding Bonotti's Interpretation of Rawls' Public Reason in the context of Political Partisanship

Bonotti proceeds to provide an interpretation of what public justifiability should demand from political parties. He draws upon Kevin Vallier's taxonomy of three types of justifiability, namely shareability, accessibility, and intelligibility (Vallier, 2014). Bonotti contends that a Rawlsian conception of public reason, which he advocates, prioritizes the criteria of accessibility and weak shareability⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Shareability is the idea that for a reason to be used for public justification, every member of the public must accept it as their own. For example, let's say a city council is deciding whether to install a new bike lane. According to the criterion of shareability, every citizen in the community must agree that the reason for installing the bike lane is valid and reasonable, based on their subjective beliefs, loyalties, and desires. If any citizen disagrees with the reason, then it cannot be used for public justification. This idea relates to the idea of a full consensus, on which citizens all agree on the same set of reasons for a policy. However, this type of shareability is undesirable because it would require all citizens to share the exact same reason for a policy, which is unlikely to happen in diverse liberal democratic societies. Bonotti also adds adopting this form of public justification as a criterion for political legitimacy would imply that the existence of multiple political parties is unnecessary. If political parties are required to share justificatory reasons, it seems counterintuitive to argue that having multiple competitive and uncoordinated parties would be more effective at providing such reasons than a single cohesive body of partisans (Bonotti, 2017: 112). Bonotti contends that Rawls endorses a weak shareability criterion, which I will explore. When it comes to the intelligibility criterion, it's the same found in any public reason model based on convergence and I won't explore it as it isn't in line with a Rawlsian model and it isn't the purpose of this thesis.

Accessibility is the idea a reason can offer a suitable public justification if it is accessible to all citizens at the right level of idealization, according to common evaluative standards. For Vallier, these common evaluative standards have two conditions; the person asserting the reason must commit no gross epistemic error in their use of common standards, and they have intersubjective recognition (Vallier, 2014: 106-108). Bonotti contends that Rawls endorses this criterion when he grounds public justifiability in the guidelines of inquiry because these guidelines are “principles of reasoning and rules of evidence that citizens can use to decide whether substantive principles properly apply and to identify laws and policies that best satisfy them.” (Rawls, 1996: 224).

What is the implication of the accessibility criterion for political parties? Political parties have more space for partisan contestation and can introduce comprehensive doctrines into all public discussions where public reason applies⁵⁷. This idea of accessibility allows for greater partisan contestation than the idea of full shareability because it recognizes that different political parties may have different reasons for their policies and rules, the only condition is that those reasons are drawn from common evaluative standards. For example, a libertarian and a marxist may both agree on the validity of economic data, but have different views on the importance of rising unemployment (Bonotti, 2017: 114). They can advocate for a variety of different policies based only on the interpretation of the economic data. Moreover, the idea of accessibility allows for the introduction of comprehensive doctrines into public discussion exactly because it doesn't demand any shareability of reasons. For example, a political party that places importance on the well-being of future generations on the basis of religious arguments can use accessible reasons to publicly justify policies aimed at combating climate change. They could argue that reducing carbon emissions and investing in renewable energy sources are necessary to ensure a habitable planet for future generations and these generations need protection because they are “already in God's plan”. Comprehensive doctrines and controversial conceptions of the good can be introduced at any political discussion so as long as they “appeal to widely shared economic data or methods of analysis to demonstrate how certain policies are likely to achieve desired outcomes, such as reducing unemployment or increasing per capita GDP.” (Bonotti, 2017: 114).

However, Bonotti points out that accessibility alone may not be enough to ensure that proposed policies are consistent with broadly shared liberal political values such as freedom and equality. He argues that

⁵⁷ Henceforth, for the sake of methodological clarity and efficiency in communication, it is understood that whenever I refer to the application or demands of public reason, it is implicitly limited to constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice, as conceptualized by Rawls. I think it is unnecessary to explicitly state this every time public reason is mentioned, as it is a fundamental assumption underlying the discussion.

without shareability, accessibility might allow illiberal arguments to enter public deliberation, which could be detrimental to liberal societies.

“Without those values [referring to the shared values of a constitutional democracy], therefore, accessibility would be blind, that is, it would somehow lack direction.” (Bonotti, 2017: 115).

He suggests, very correctly, that Rawls endorses also a *weak form of shareability* in addition to accessibility because Rawls' guidelines of inquiry contain substantive principles that are aimed at preserving the basic political moral values shared by a constitutional democracy (Bonotti, 2017: 115). Therefore, he interprets Rawls' demands of public reason as containing both a criterion of accessibility and another of shareability. He connects them in the following way:

“It is therefore important to stress that accessibility is a necessary but not sufficient condition for public justification (Vallier 2011, p. 372; see also Vallier 2014, p. 50). Accessible reasons, that is, can enter the ‘justificatory pool’ (Vallier 2011, p. 372), and be discussed by citizens during the process of public reasoning. However, in liberal societies they can only contribute to public justification (and thus exit that ‘pool’) if they respect the limits imposed by shared political liberal values.” (Bonotti, 2017: 115)

In this context, Bonotti suggests that parties and partisans have a duty not only to provide accessible reasons in support of their proposed policies but also to ensure that those policies respect the limits imposed by shared political liberal values. Parties should “refrain from advancing illiberal arguments” and instead interpret and rank those shared liberal political values in more specific accessible ways, “so they can render those indeterminate values relevant to real political issues” (Bonotti, 2017: 115). Therefore, a reason is justified when its accessible, when it comes from common evaluative standards, and, simultaneously, when it presents, promotes or respects shared political liberal values (Bonotti, 2017: 111-117).

As per my analysis of Bonotti's interpretation of Rawls' theory, I agree that political parties must present policy proposals grounded in easily understandable reasons drawn from not controversial methods of science that demonstrate how these measures will contribute to achieving widely shared political values.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Even though I have already explored the Rawlsian normative demands of the idea of public reason, I thought it would be valuable to comprehend Bonotti's interpretation of them. I think that the inclusion of a discourse on the criterion of accessibility and weak shareability is conducive to comprehending the correlation between Rawls' criterion of reciprocity, which necessitates weaker shareability, and the guidelines of inquiry, which primarily integrate the notion of accessibility. This interpretation facilitated by Bonotti can elucidate the aforementioned connection.

4.1.3) The Division of Justificatory Labour in Partisan Politics: Bonotti's Model for Applying the Ideal of Public Reason

I have arrived at what I consider to be the most pivotal aspect of Bonotti's theory: his conceptualization of how the ideal of public reason, specifically the duty of civility, ought to be implemented regarding political parties. In his exposition two critical elements deviate from Rawls' framework: firstly, he exempts regular citizens from the duty of civility and, secondly, he devises a scheme called "the division of justificatory labour" to elucidate how this duty ought to be applied to elected and non-elected members of political parties, as well as to the interactions between political parties and the interactions between a political party and their constituents or electorate. To gain a comprehensive understanding of Bonotti's theory regarding the division of justificatory labour, it is crucial to first analyze his reasoning for relieving regular citizens from the obligation to adhere to the duty of civility.

One of the key arguments put forth by Bonotti is that the duty of civility is too burdensome for partisans specially when it is extended to citizens' voting (Bonotti, 2014)⁵⁹. He constructs a comprehensive argument using four key points.

Firstly, he contends that the obligations of public reason extend to both elected and non-elected partisans whenever they endeavor to persuade citizens to vote for their respective parties⁶⁰. This is because Rawls includes in the ideal of public reason not only the discourse of legislators, who are mostly elected partisans, but also the candidates for public office and their respective campaign managers (Rawls, 1997: 766) and the discourse of members of political parties and other groups who support them (Rawls, 1996: 215). Bonotti (2014: 316-318) argues that public reason applies universally to all partisans, irrespective of their higher or lower status within the political party. He suggests that while Rawls stated that public reason applies during political campaigns, but not to personal reflections, confusion arises due to the uncertainty of whether elected officials are always in a campaign mode, as every decision can be motivated by the need for re-election. Thus, according to Bonotti, public reason always applies to partisans when they engage in debates with other partisans, regardless of whether they are mere party members without any legal representative obligations. He further states that determining whether an individual acts

⁵⁹ Other authors, including Habermas (2006) and Vallier (2014), also employ this idea which is referred to as an indirect method of justification, wherein the demands of justifiability are restricted to public officials. Bonotti builds upon this distinction but proposes a distinct theory of justification by advocating for the division of justificatory labour. (Bonotti, 2017: 124-126).

⁶⁰ "I'll remember that when it comes to the partisan agents where public reason applies, Rawls says in *Political Liberalism* that this ideal applies to "legislators when they speak on the floor of parliament" (Rawls, 1996: 216), to "members of political parties and their candidates in their campaigns and for other groups who support them" (Rawls, 1996: 215). In *The Idea of Public Reason*, Rawls refines this account, stating that it applies to "the discourse of government officials" and "the discourse of candidates for public office and their campaign managers, especially in their public oratory, party platforms and political statements" (Rawls, 1997: 766). When it comes to citizens, it applies when they advocate on the public political forum on fundamental matters and when they cast their vote on fundamental matters, otherwise, the public discourse can end up being hypocritical and inefficient as "citizens talk before one another one way and vote another." (Rawls, 1996: 215).

as a partisan or a non-partisan citizen depends on their intentions rather than the effects. For instance, if an active member of a political party discusses fundamental issues with relatives, friends, or other associations without the intention of persuading them to vote for the policies of the party they support, they act as a non-partisan. However, if the objective of the discussion is to convince others to vote for their party based on the proposals under consideration, then they are acting as a partisan, and the constraints of public reason apply. With these interpretations, Bonotti concludes that the forums and agents where public reason apply are “somehow more fluid and less clearly demarcated than other public forums” while partisans bring with them a “portable public realm” that encompasses any time and place they engage in partisan discourse (Bonotti, 2014: 319).

Secondly, Bonotti argues that the application of public reason to fundamental matters but not to ordinary legislation is of no use for parties since their party programs and manifestoes encompass both types of issues. He argues that “parties and partisans do not normally offer proposals on single issues but present instead broad political platforms” where “Party platforms and manifestoes reduce the information costs that voters have to bear when choosing who to vote for” (Bonotti, 2014: 320). This relates to the party ability to identify predictable patterns and formulate packages of policies and measures that they plan to implement if they gain control of the government. Consequently “the various proposals become deeply entangled and interdependent” making “the requirement to appeal to public reason more pressing for partisans” as they have to “justify their party’s programme in its comprehensiveness” (Bonotti, 2014: 321). The argument is that, since voters usually have to choose between complete policy packages offered by political parties, rather than selecting specific policies from different parties, partisan politicians need to justify their programs in their entirety, as they cannot simply cherry-pick individual policies and justifying them differently to the public. While elected legislators have the flexibility to present and justify policies one by one in parliamentary or cabinet discussions, this approach is less feasible during electoral campaigns when they need to justify their party's program as a whole to gain support from ordinary citizens. As such, the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental matters is not practical for partisans, especially when they are campaigning, and thus they have more pressure to answer to public reason justifiability demands⁶¹.

⁶¹ Bonotti’s argument emphasizes the pressure that public reason places on political parties, specifically in relation to their campaign manifestos. These manifestos typically cover a wide range of subjects and adopt a general and comprehensive approach, thereby requiring public justification in their totality. Bonotti’s intention is to offer a measure of relief to political parties without absolving them of their obligation to justify their programs in a general context. He alleviates the pressure on partisans by exempting ordinary citizens from the duty of civility, thereby lessening the burden on citizens to constantly monitor the application of public reason by partisan actors and alleviating the fear of electoral withdrawals. While I agree with Bonotti regarding the importance of political parties providing general explanations in their manifestos and adhering to the demands of public reason, it is worth noting that legislative assemblies engage in extensive debates where a clear distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental issues becomes evident. However, I differ with Bonotti on the issue of exempting citizens from the duty of civility, and I will address this matter in the subsequent sub-chapters.

Thirdly, Bonotti asserts that even the proviso, which allows for a greater flexibility from public reason in certain debates, is not applicable to partisans. This is because their goal of (re-)election requires them to promptly justify their programs to a broader audience. As a result, they need to quickly establish connections between public reasons that are shared and comprehensive doctrines. Partisans cannot rely on the flexibility granted by the proviso, they must swiftly align their policies with widely accepted public reasons to gain support and secure re-election. (Bonotti, 2014: 323-323).

Finally, Bonotti argues that, despite the duty of civility being a moral rather than a legal duty, it implies that the disregard for this obligation results in social disapproval, which usually leads to the withdrawal of electoral support—a consequence Bonotti finds too severe. He provides an example of an incident relating the former British prime minister, Tony Blair. Blair concluded a speech addressed to the nation during a crisis saying "God bless the British people." However, this expression caused consternation and led to emergency meetings being held. Blair was confronted by a senior civil servant who expressed disdain, stating, "Really, Prime Minister, this is not America, you know." (Bonotti, 2014: 325). This example highlights the existence of certain expectations and norms that govern public discourse. In this case, invoking religious language in a political context was met with moral and social disapproval. The broader point being made is that the fear of moral disapproval and social stigma can create a type of chilling effect on individuals who might otherwise want to bring comprehensive doctrines into their political deliberations. For Bonotti, the duty of civility places additional restrictions on partisans extending beyond moral considerations to social stigma and the withdrawal of electoral support, consequences that can curtail their freedom of speech.

In my interpretation, one common aspect among these arguments is the significant need for election or re-election faced by partisans. As a result, Bonotti argues that partisans are subjected to heightened demands of justifiability, especially when they are campaigning and in direct contact with the background culture. Therefore, Bonotti concludes that citizens should not scrutinize or judge the use of public reason by partisans. The rationale behind this viewpoint is that the demands of public reason already exist within the framework of partisanship and exert considerable pressure on partisans. By relieving citizens from the duty of civility we relieve them of their need to constantly monitor the use of public reason by public officials, and the aim is to create an environment where partisans can engage in genuine public reasoning without the fear of constant judgment and electoral consequences. This perspective suggests that citizens should recognize and respect the internal pressures faced by partisans in their pursuit of electoral success, thus allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges they encounter.

However, how does Bonotti ensure that the absence of citizens scrutinizing partisans' adherence to public reason does not result in the degradation of public reason into a shallow and superficial discourse? As we have seen, to be elected, partisan can use other tactics that are detrimental to public reason. In other words, how do we assure political accountability to public reason if citizens are exempted from their duty of civility?

In his work, Bonotti (2017: 126-151) proposes a division of justificatory labour through two distinct accountability processes: vertical accountability and horizontal accountability. *Vertical accountability* refers to the relationship between partisans and their constituents or electorate. It emphasizes the need for partisans to be responsive to the non-public reasons presented and advocated by citizens. On the other hand, *horizontal accountability* focuses on the answerability between different political parties. It involves the exchange of justifications and critical evaluation of competing party platforms, fostering a more robust and substantive political discourse⁶².

“First, political representatives ought to hold each other accountable with regard to their use of public reasons, without the need for direct scrutiny by ordinary citizens. Second, political representatives ought to be responsive to citizens’ non-public (including religious) reasons, and endeavour to find an internal connection between those and public reasons. This would allow ordinary citizens to appeal to non-public reasons without abandoning the justificatory ideal of public reason.” (Bonotti, 2014: 151)

Horizontal accountability pertains to the accountability of political representatives across different parties, where they are responsible for holding “each other accountable with regard to their use of public reasons” (Bonotti, 2017: 128). Bonotti argues this process ensures that partisans maintain the standards of public reason within their own parties and during interactions with representatives from opposing parties. Notably, elected partisans are given particular importance in this accountability mechanism.

Ordinary citizens, or other partisans who are not elected or don’t want to run for elections, may lack the time and expertise required to actively engage in the ongoing process of public reasoning (Bonotti, 2017: 129). Hence, horizontal accountability recognizes that citizens often rely on their elected representatives to participate in this process on their behalf. Elected partisans, on the other hand, have a heightened incentive, compared to other non-elected partisans, to adhere to the constraints of public reason. They should view these constraints as essential to their role as elected representatives, rather than burdensome

⁶² Bonotti aligns with Hanna Pitkin's (1967) perspective, which defines accountability as the responsibility of a representative to explain their actions and decisions and the need to be attentive and responsive to the needs and demands of their constituents. Building on this understanding, Bonotti proposes the division of justificatory labour. This concept recognizes that accountability involves both the obligation to provide reasons for one's actions- using public reasons- and the duty to actively address the concerns and expectations of the citizens being represented- using nonpublic reasons (Bonotti, 2017: 127).

to their integrity or demands. Therefore, evaluating whether a reason given by a partisan aligns with public reason or reflects their personal comprehensive views is a task entrusted to other elected partisans and public officials (Bonotti, 2017: 131).

In contrast, vertical accountability pertains to the obligation of political representatives to be responsive to the comprehensive doctrines held by their constituents. This form of accountability ensures that citizens' values and demands are duly considered, and it fosters a sense of responsiveness from representatives towards their constituents' concerns (Bonotti, 2017: 133)

Bonotti posits that vertical accountability also serves as a platform for exploring new conceptions of public reason and incorporating evolving social perspectives into the process of justifying legislation. By being attuned to the comprehensive worldviews of their constituents, partisans are better equipped to comprehend emerging variations or shifts within the background culture, which can subsequently be translated into novel forms of public reason (Bonotti, 2017: 134).

According to Bonotti, non-elected partisans play a crucial role in this process of engaging in ongoing deliberation and exchanging non-public reasons with citizens (Bonotti, 2017: 141-143). Unlike elected partisans, non-elected partisans do not have the immediate duty of justifying legislation. Instead, they act as intermediaries, bridging the gap between citizens and elected representatives. They are responsible for listening to the concerns, perspectives, and non-public reasons put forward by citizens. By engaging in non-public reasoning with their constituents, non-elected partisans contribute to the shaping of public reason, allowing citizens to actively participate in the political process⁶³.

As such, the justificatory process is ensured with a division of justificatory labour where elected partisans comply with public reason constraints and oversight their fellow elected partisans compliance, while non-elected partisans engage in nonpublic reasoning with their constituents. The hope is that the collaborative effort between elected and non-elected partisans facilitates a more inclusive and responsive political system, where citizens' comprehensive doctrines and non-public reasons are acknowledged and incorporated into the decision-making process.

⁶³ Bonotti still argues that elected partisans are subject to significant constraints imposed by public reason. However, by this mechanism of justificatory labour, he suggests that these could potentially alleviate some of these constraints for non-elected partisans. By relieving ordinary citizens of the duty of civility, elected partisans and aspiring political candidates face reduced electoral pressure, as citizens are not actively evaluating their adherence to public reason. However, it is crucial to note that the use of public reason remains essential and inherent to the normative concept of partisanship.

4.2) Applying Bonotti's Framework to Partisan Practices Detrimental to Public Reason

My goal is to understand whether the scheme that Bonotti developed can ensure that political parties, in a very minimum, do not undermine the Rawlsian model of public reason. Being aware that the ideal of public reason should not, and cannot, be the only institutional mechanism that guarantees the proper functioning of political parties according to their normative ideal, my purpose is only to see if the justificatory practices proposed by Bonotti are able to deal with party mechanisms, identified in Chapter 3, that are detrimental to the Rawlsian public reason. I contend that this embodies the minimum requirement we can impose upon political parties.

To be fair I should also state that Bonotti's theory operates within the realm of well-ordered liberal societies, and he admits that these practices should be different in less well-ordered situations or in illiberal polities (Bonotti, 2017: 110). In my analysis, I will relate these practices with empirical mechanisms that are typical of less-than-ideal situations. The purpose is to determine whether this mechanism, when implemented within a well-ordered society, remains coherent with sustaining the established state of orderliness. In this development, I hope to discern the strengths and weaknesses in Bonotti's redefinition.

4.2.1) Addressing Factionalism

Bonotti's theory places significant emphasis on this aspect. Firstly, he argues that the normative ideal of a political party lies in its ability to promote the general interest instead of serving narrow interests. Promoting the general interest, Bonotti states, necessitates a commitment to public reasoning (Bonotti, 2017: 105). Secondly, Bonotti proposes a mechanism of horizontal accountability, where elected partisans hold each other responsible for upholding the demands of public reason (Bonotti, 2017: 132). These aspects of the overall theory aim to prevent parties from presenting themselves as mere factions or pursuing self-serving objectives. However, it is important to acknowledge that certain concerns may arise in relation to these propositions.

An aspect I find it important to consider is that, since the duty of civility does not apply to ordinary citizens, but rather to elected partisans who are responsible for ensuring that their fellow partisans adhere to the requirements of public reason, there is a possibility that in their discussions and deliberations, elected partisans may fail to hold each other accountable and instead resort to presenting comprehensive doctrines or advancing their own partial interests in defense of legislation. This potential lack of motivation

to comply with the duty of civility among themselves could lead to the factionalization of the public political culture.

In such a scenario, the question arises as to how citizens should respond. Since citizens are not tasked with assessing whether their representatives comply with public reason, it implies that they are free to vote based on their own comprehensive doctrines. This raises the issue of what should happen if elected partisans become unaccountable to each other, and a party starts behaving as a faction. While citizens have the option to withdraw their vote and support, according to Bonotti's framework they are not required to do so.

Even though the commitment to public reason is internal to the definition of a party, the possibility remains that even elected partisans may prioritize single-issue policies at an unreasonable expense of other shared values in order to maximize their chances of re-election, particularly if citizens are allowed to vote based on partial interests or comprehensive doctrines. Therefore, it is crucial to highlight the relationship between partisans and voters to ensure that parties do not devolve into mere factions, compromising the broader objectives of public reasoning and the general or shareable interest.

Bonotti discusses the potential option of legally enforcing the duty of civility on elected partisans (Bonotti, 2017: 81-99). In this scenario, if such enforcement were in place, the concerns mentioned earlier would likely be alleviated, even if citizens were dispensed from the duty of civility. The horizontal accountability between partisans would be strengthened by the force of law, extending beyond moral obligation alone and allowing for judicial oversight. This legal framework would provide an additional layer of supervision and ensure that elected partisans are held accountable to each other in upholding public reason. By introducing legal measures, the potential for factionalization and the disregard of public reasoning demands could be mitigated, promoting a more robust and accountable political system.

4.2.2) Upholding Public Justification in the face of Non-Liberal Values and Comprehensive Doctrines

Some parties can undermine public justifiability by presenting non liberal values or by presenting liberal values but in a way that is not freestanding from a comprehensive doctrine. Bonotti states that, in liberal states, the commitment to the common good that defines partisanship and the one that characterizes public reason can have a discrepancy since the promotion of the common good might not necessarily involve a commitment to a political conception of the common good as found in Rawls' theory. (Bonotti, 2017: 106). Therefore, "the commitment to the common good that characterizes partisanship as a

normative ideal may be consistent with the advancement by political parties of political platforms that would be considered unreasonable in liberal democracies” (Bonotti, 2017: 106). However, since the general interest of a constitutional liberal society is the promotion of these shared basic political moral values, liberal values, the theory of partisanship, proposed by Bonotti, within these societies, will need to uphold liberal values.

The introduction of the weak shareability criterion for public justification, alongside the accessibility criterion, seem coherent to prohibit the use of illiberal policies or comprehensive doctrines. As Bonotti states “parties and partisans ought to refrain from advancing illiberal arguments which, even if accessible, contravene those basic liberal political values that are widely shared in liberal democracies” (Bonotti: 115).

Destri (2021) contests this point and says Bonotti account of political parties is too demanding because it restricts parties that adhere to political liberalism but reject its justificatory form by allowing reasons rooted in a political conception of justice that is not freestanding from comprehensive doctrines (Destri, 2021: 64-65). I stand with Bonotti that parties shouldn’t advance illiberal arguments, or arguments rooted in a political conception not freestanding from comprehensive doctrines, for that would undermine public justifiability, and Bonotti scheme seems well-constructed to not allow this type of damaging. However, he states, since political parties evolve and public reason content changes over time, perfectionist parties can “de-factionalize their political agendas”, or they can enrich their terms and show how their seeming perfectionist side actually contributes to public reason⁶⁴.

However, regardless of the integration of the weak shareability, as elucidated by Bonotti's interpretation of Rawls' idea of public reason, the adherence of political parties to these demands will ultimately hinge upon the extent of justificatory effort invested and the ideal of public reason itself, which provides the necessary orientations and directions to ensure parties uphold those demands. As demonstrated, it will heavily rely on the efficacy of horizontal accountability mechanisms to fulfill their rightful role.

4.2.3) Ensuring Independence from Private Monetary Incentives

Ypi stressed that Bonotti’s account of partisanship is too idealized because it takes for granted the existence of just societies where, empirically, almost all societies in the existing world bend to power elites

⁶⁴ This was the case of the Green Parties that arose in Europe some decades ago and that, even though at first were considered perfectionists, managed to change over time, de-factualize their interests making them more general, and coming up with concepts like “sustainability” that proves to share liberal values and enriches the terms of Public Reason (Bonotti, 2017:135-138; 2021: 137-138).

and, therefore, an interpretation of public reason should be aware of this economic bias (Ypi, 2019:463-470). She argues that “under conditions of private ownership of the means of production most existing political parties represent de facto factions” (Ypi, 2019: 467). Is Bonotti’s framework for political justifiability biased so that parties inevitably represent the interests of small powerful groups and not general interests of the people? This is the same as to ask whether we need to withdraw from the realm of democratic contestation the socioeconomic issues so that we have a constitutionalized account of egalitarianism?

I argue that, along the lines of Rawls, public reason and politics shouldn’t depend on a particular economic doctrine or a particular type of egalitarian economics so as long as those doctrines are embedded in a reasonable political conception of justice that respect the criterion of reciprocity. Rather, we should focus to guarantee that politics and political parties are not insulated by economics, by, for instance, providing public funding for parties or other forms of campaign finance regulation. This means that the model presented by Bonotti doesn’t necessarily entails that public reason will be undermined by partisan monetary incentives. It only means that these practices need to be complemented by other types of institutional devices, and that public financing should be a pre-requisite for a proper model of public reason.

4.2.4) Transparency and Misinformation

When parties deliberately misrepresent facts or statistics, choosing the metrics that benefit them while ignoring other important data, they end up eroding the guidelines of inquiry presented by Rawls, embedded in the accessibility criterion proposed by Bonotti. For instance, parties can present a method of analysis of GDP in bad faith, choosing only the metrics that favour the policies they want to implement, for instance, present the GDP in the specific length of time that best serves them. It’s important to stress that it will be natural for parties to rank, weigh, and interpret values in different ways since even accessible reasons allow disagreement, even in science we can agree on the methods and reach different conclusions (Bonotti, 2017: 114-115), and “different policies can be publicly justified on the basis of the different accessible reasons” (Bonotti:114). However, the key point here is when parties deliberately make these guidelines of inquiry, these accessible reasons, their “puppets” viewing them separately or detached from a reasonable and complete ordering of values. Is Bonotti’s justificatory scheme theoretically equipped to address these problems?

I contend that this mechanism is more likely to occur when partisans lack the appropriate motivational framework, prioritizing winning over making decisions that reflect thorough deliberation.

In Bonotti's theory, partisans generally have greater freedom to act as impartial deliberators from their party own interests, and the conflicting dimension that drives elected partisans to prioritize aggregative functions over deliberative functions is diminished. This is because the division of justificatory labour allows non-elected partisans to engage with the electorate and constituents, while elected partisans are responsible for adhering to the deliberative demands of public reason in their internal policy and decision-making deliberations. This arrangement could alleviate the pressure on elected partisans to focus on re-election and enable them to prioritize high-quality deliberation that remains unbiased, unaltered, and genuinely representative.

4.2.5) Fostering Dialogue, Cooperation and Revision

Political parties undermine the latest version of Rawls' public reason when they adopt a non-dialogue approach or a rigid ideology that prevents them from revising or accommodating their terms of cooperation with other parties, as they perceive them as unreasonable. This raises questions about the obligations partisans have toward members of other political parties, such as engaging in cooperative dialogue and revising their terms after a process of deliberation. Bonotti argues that interparty politics should be a cooperative endeavor with special duties, namely the duties of fair play. Partisans hold special privileges in politics, including influencing legislation and accessing the media, which arise from just procedures like elections, facilitated by a political system like political liberalism. Consequently, they have a duty to act fairly and avoid undermining the liberal institutions that grant them these privileges (Bonotti, 2017: 15-21).

According to Bonotti, acting fairly within the framework of political liberalism entails democratic loyalty and recognizing others as free and equal individuals, acknowledging that one's own perspective is not the sole reasonable perspective. He suggests a cooperative nature of party politics, involving "legal and non-legal duties, both general and specific to parties, as well as the rules of conduct that characterize the partisan ethos" (Bonotti, 2017:16). However, Bonotti focuses more on why partisans have a moral duty to adhere to rules of fair cooperation rather than exploring the content of these rules themselves. His cooperative venture primarily rests on the idea of legitimate opposition and the rule of law derived from that opposition (Bonotti, 2017: 20). While these duties reinforce legitimate opposition and prevent the

kind of riots witnessed in Brazil or the USA following electoral defeats, they do not explicitly state that partisans should engage in open and respectful dialogue to seek fair terms of cooperation.

Nevertheless, Bonotti's concept of horizontal accountability appears compatible with the notion of having a cooperative dialogue and revising terms. It argues that, for partisans to meet the requirements of public reason, they must justify their proposals to other partisans and demonstrate how they align with shared accessible reasons—reasons that others can accept as free and equal individuals. If this is not the case, partisans should hold each other accountable. This can alleviate the issue of parties perceiving each other as unreasonable, as partisans provide justifications and are therefore more inclined to treat as reasonable the pluralism that comes from the burdens of judgment. Additionally, if partisans are accountable to each other regarding their use of public reason, they should be willing to adopt a more detached deliberative style and revise their terms if flaws or insufficiencies in public reasoning are pointed out by their counterparts (Bonotti, 2017: 130).

However, Bonotti does not elaborate on interparty deliberation or explicitly outline the rules for interparty competition. He merely suggests that partisans should hold each other accountable without specifying the implications of this accountability, such as fostering a willingness and sincerity to listen to others. This entails recognizing that the purpose of interparty engagement extends beyond mere legitimate opposition and antagonistic practices, but also involves collaborating to construct the idea of public reason through flexibility and adaptability.

4.3) Balancing Deliberation and Aggregation: The Role of Partisanship and Bonotti's Division of Justificatory Labour

Upon careful examination of the preceding chapter, it becomes evident that two pivotal elements in Bonotti's theory serve as safeguards for the preservation and promotion of public reason. Firstly, Bonotti's perception of partisanship which aligns its demands with those intrinsic to public reason. These demands encompass the capacity to engage with the entire electorate and uphold the shared values of a liberal democracy. Secondly, Bonotti places the responsibility on elected officials to scrutinize each other's adherence to public reason, relieving ordinary citizens of the obligation to fulfill the demands of public reason, in order for partisans to be better equipped to connect with citizens non-public reasons. The question I would like to do now is how do the elements of Bonotti's reformulation of Rawls' theory align with the argument in Chapter 2 that partisans should prioritize their deliberative function over their

aggregative function? Do the requirements proposed by Bonotti effectively enable political parties to prioritize deliberation in a manner consistent with their overall goal of (re) election?

I would like to summarize two arguments I make, before delving into them. Firstly, I wholeheartedly endorse and champion Bonotti's conceptualization of partisanship. His framework serves as a solid and healthy foundation for the interplay between political parties and public reason. Secondly, while horizontal accountability among partisans is essential, I maintain that citizens should not be exempted from the duty of civility when casting their final vote during legislative elections. Despite the role of non-elected partisans in addressing non-public reasons put forward by citizens, it is imperative to recognize that citizens themselves are the foremost guardians and driving force behind constitutional democracies. These arguments stem from the extensive examination of the relationship between political parties and public reason, and I hope that these conclusions are the product of a rigorous dialectical process.

I will address my first argument: defending the normative theory of legitimacy proposed by Rawls necessitates that any normative theory of partisanship applied within that framework is in accordance with the principles of public reason. This means that such a theory should recognize as inherent requirements the party's obligation to engage with the entire citizenry and acknowledge the pursuit of general interests through shared and accessible reasons.

I therefore argue in favor of a normative theory of partisanship as proposed by Bonotti (2017: 103-111), one that takes into account that a party “ought to present their claims as publicly acceptable reasons that reflect a commitment to the common good” (Bonotti, 2017: 109), where this common good, within a liberal constitutional democracy, is understood as the shared political values organized into a reasonable and political conception of justice.

For Rawls, public officials who behave solely as party-interested maximizing agents in order to dominate public offices will lead to a democracy that ceases to be sufficiently just and stable because the criterion of reciprocity imposes that those proposing policies do so with reasons they expect others will reasonably agree as free and equal citizens “and not as dominated or manipulated, or under the pressure of an inferior political or social position” (Rawls, 1997: 770). Any normative description of political parties that seeks to align with the Rawlsian theory of legitimacy should claim parties as deliberative bodies that should present complete legislation, policies and programs for governing for all its citizens. Parties that deliberate and arrive at solutions that are in the best interests of all and in accordance with the basic values and ideas of a constitutional democracy.

This does not imply that parties cannot address specific single-issue movements that gain prominence in a society. Rather, it emphasizes that parties should incorporate these interests within a broader political framework. They should not be solely an environmental party, labour party, or farmers' party, but instead strive to represent the entirety of society. Failing to do so would undermine Rawls' broader project of legitimacy, which necessitates that the fundamental structure of society is guided by a complete and reasonable political conception of justice. Parties aspiring to govern such society should align their objectives accordingly.

Otherwise, a scenario may arise where an "environmental party" perpetually clashes with an "economics party." Instead of seeking reasonable solutions through a reasonable and complete political conception of justice, the parties constantly clash, resulting in laws that primarily serve the party's single-issue platform that could maximize the votes at the expense of exacerbating problems in other areas. When parties target single-issue movements and decisions in legislative assemblies are more likely to be driven by vote maximization, several consequences emerge.

Firstly, the focus on maximizing votes based on single issues can lead to a fragmented and polarized political landscape. This fragmentation undermines the ability to address complex societal problems holistically, as parties prioritize their narrow interests over complete or balanced solutions, just as I've demonstrated above. Secondly, decision-making becomes driven by short-term gains and electoral calculations rather than long-term considerations for general interest and for respect for shared values found in constitutional democracies. The absence of a broader political conception of justice neglects the need for sustainable and equitable policies that address the interests and welfare of all citizens. Additionally, the absence of a deliberative approach deprives society of constructive debates and compromises necessary for robust legislation. Instead of engaging in reasoned dialogue and finding common ground, parties engage in adversarial tactics, hindering the development of effective and inclusive policies. Overall, prioritizing single-issue platforms in legislative assemblies based solely on vote maximization undermines the pursuit of reasonable solutions, perpetuates polarization, hampers long-term planning, and diminishes the quality of democratic deliberation.

In Chapter 3, it has been previously established the significance of parties presenting reasonable and complete political conceptions of justice within a Rawlsian theory of legitimacy and public reason. Furthermore, it has been emphasized why it is crucial for parties to refrain from exhibiting factional behavior only pursuing the interest of a partial constituency. However, I will complement my point by stating that when parties prioritize single-issue platforms and engage in vote maximization of this issues,

the quality of public reason is compromised. Instead of engaging in open and inclusive deliberation that takes into account diverse perspectives and seeks common ground possible to acceptable by all, parties resort to narrow reasoning. This undermines the spirit of public reason, as decisions become driven by electoral interests rather than a commitment to reasoned and fair deliberation.

Moreover, the guidelines of inquiry in Rawls' theory are designed to ensure that political actors consider a broad range of relevant factors when formulating policies and legislation. These guidelines aim to promote a complete and reasonable political conception of justice that addresses the interests of all citizens and reflects the order of the fundamental values of a constitutional democracy. However, when parties prioritize single-issue movements, they may neglect or overlook the broader considerations outlined in the guidelines of inquiry. The focus on maximizing votes for specific issues may lead to a myopic and fragmented approach to policymaking, where the inquiries and interconnections between different social and political concerns are not adequately addressed. As a result, the policies that emerge may lack the coherence and comprehensive perspective necessary for a just and well-functioning society.

In summary, the prioritization of single-issue platforms and vote maximization on these issues can undermine the principles of public reason and the guidelines of inquiry outlined in Rawls' theory. It diminishes the quality of deliberation, limits the scope of considerations, and hampers the development of complete and just policies.

Bonotti's concept of partisanship, which posits that parties should advance a conception of the general interest, aligns coherently with the notion that political parties should prioritize deliberation within broad shared political values instead of the maximization of aggregation of interest on single specific issues. This approach to framing partisanship incorporates the demands of public reason within the framework of a political party, thereby offering significant support for a theory of legitimacy grounded in public reason.

My second main thought of line regards Bonotti's justificatory scheme and its compatibility with Rawls' framework, particularly concerning the importance of prioritizing deliberation over mere aggregation of interests.

Firstly, I argue that the concept of justificatory labour between partisans presents a compelling notion. This approach eases the burden of engaging in public reasoning, as elected partisans have an obligation to adhere to public reason, while non-elected partisans have greater leeway to connect with their constituents and address non-public reasons. By doing so, they non-elected partisans become more

responsive of citizens claim and can better contribute to the formation of an overlapping consensus by helping citizens reconcile their comprehensive doctrines with public reasons.

I argue that it is essential to emphasize that citizens should vote on legislative matters in accordance with the principles of public reason⁶⁵. However, Bonotti argues against placing constraints of public reason on citizens' voting behavior. The rationale behind this perspective is that imposing such constraints would exert excessive electoral pressure on partisans. Instances like Prime Minister Blair facing social disapproval regarding his use of public reason exemplify the potential consequences for partisans who fail to comply. The concern here is that electoral withdrawal and social stigma may occur as a response to any perceived failures in upholding public reason.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to consider the potential ramifications of citizens voting based on private reasons, on nonpublic reasons as Rawls would say, instead of a process of public reason. I argue this as, at least, two consequences: the ability of a minority to see the result of an election as legitimate and the quality of the epistemic commons unto which any model of deliberative democracy relies. The trade-off at stake is significant.

Rawls firmly rejects any minimalist perspective of democracy, which reduces it to a mere tool for managing power struggles among elites through electoral competitions (Rawls, 1993: 229). Instead, he contends that the political legitimacy of a democratic constitutional regime hinges on the consent of the people and their perception of the state's exercise of political power as reasonable. Furthermore, Rawls emphasizes the importance of citizens being able to establish a meaningful connection between their own worldviews and the governance of the state by defending the overlapping consensus and reaching a full, and not only pro-tanto, justification. In this regard, the latter Rawls, as I have demonstrated in the conceptual evolution he makes of public reason, asserts that the laws to which individuals subject themselves should not solely be based on principles that they could hypothetically agree to in an idealized scenario. Rather, these laws should be ones that citizens can identify as products of their own collective will, as active participants in the processes of constitution-making and legislation. In essence, Rawls underscores the significance of citizens perceiving the laws that govern them as reflective of their shared choices and collective decision-making.

⁶⁵ According to Rawls, the concept of public reason applies to both fundamental issues and the act of casting one's vote. It is worth considering whether the principle of public reason places an equal level of demand on citizens when they cast a vote in legislative elections compared to when they cast a vote on a direct and fundamental question, such as the right to euthanasia. In our modern liberal constitutional democracies, it is infrequent for citizens to directly vote on proposals concerning fundamental matters, as evidenced by the limited occurrence of referendums. Instead, ordinary citizens primarily participate in the governing process when they vote in electoral legislative elections. Therefore, I argue that this act of voting holds equal significance to that of deciding on fundamental matters.

When citizens vote based on their private or nonpublic reasons, that is, on their personal interests, the interests of specific associations or groups, or their adherence to particular comprehensive doctrines, the consequence is a potential loss of legitimacy. Such voting behavior undermines the ability of the losing minority to view the outcome as a result of collective reasoning or as serving the common fundamental interest of all citizens and seeing all citizens as free and equal.

The legitimacy of democratic decisions is closely tied to the idea of a social contract, where citizens voluntarily agree to abide by the laws and decisions made through fair and inclusive processes. If the losing minority perceives that their reasoning and will have not been considered or respected in the decision-making process, they may question the validity and fairness of the outcome. This lack of perceived legitimacy can erode trust in democratic institutions and lead to feelings of disenfranchisement.

If we only vote on legislative elections on political parties that best serve the interest of our social condition or our comprehensive worldview, such a democratic system consistently fails to accommodate the concerns and interests of minority groups and it risks perpetuating structural inequalities and injustice. The legitimacy of a democracy is contingent on its ability to address the needs and aspirations of all citizens, regardless of their numerical strength. By disregarding the voices of the losing minority, because the electoral won was perceived as just a reflection of private or nonpublic values and interests, a democratic system runs the risk of becoming exclusive, favoring the majority and reinforcing existing power imbalances. For democracy to thrive, it must ensure that decisions reflect the diverse range of opinions and concerns within society. When a minority consistently finds itself on the losing side of decisions, it can lead to a sense of exclusion, alienation, and disengagement from the democratic process. This, in turn, undermines the legitimacy of the outcome and the democratic system as a whole.

It is argued that for democracy to maintain its legitimacy, citizens should instead vote based on public reason, considering the shared interests and values that underpin the common good for all individuals, even in the face of reasonable pluralism regarding comprehensive doctrines. This means that citizens should incorporate on their vote a deliberative element as to what they reasonable think is acceptable for other citizens, as free and equal citizens, and not only try to maximize their interests.

Furthermore, I contend that when citizens vote based on nonpublic reasons, it can undermine the *epistemic commons* of a constitutional democracy. The term “epistemic” generally refers to the ways in which we gain knowledge, evaluate claims, and justify beliefs. It encompasses the methods, processes, and standards we employ to discern what is true or justified, and to differentiate between knowledge and mere opinion. The term “commons” in the English language functions as a noun indicating something

that is collectively owned, used, or shared within a community. While the combination of both terms has not been extensively examined by many theorists⁶⁶, I contend that its fundamental concept is highly intuitive and resonates with our common understanding and basic ideas found in democracy, especially in any model of deliberative democracy, as the one Rawls proposes.

Let me clarify: a functioning democracy relies on a robust epistemic public sphere where citizens have access to accurate information, transparent decision-making processes, and a sense of shared identity with their society. Just as individuals need reliable knowledge to make informed decisions for themselves, a democracy requires an informed public to identify critical societal issues, select appropriate solutions, and implement effective policies that benefit both the system itself and its citizens, it needs a healthy epistemic commons. This includes not only healthy epistemic institutions, just as Legislative Assemblies who make collective decisions, and healthy epistemic citizens. To achieve so, it is crucial that citizens vote on terms of their practical public reason, their way of thinking and orienting themselves towards the shared political values that underpin a constitutional democratic system,

It is crucial to elect capable representatives who possess integrity and are capable of implementing sound policies. When public leaders or policies fail, it becomes the responsibility of citizens to hold them accountable through the electoral process. Similarly, successes should be acknowledged and rewarded, fostering a culture of responsible governance. While elected officials bear significant responsibility, as suggested by Bonotti, the ultimate duty of ensuring good governance cannot rest solely on their shoulders—it must also lie with the voting citizenry. How public officials come into power? The answer is through elections and the vote of citizens. And, if elected officials begin to disregard public reason and if such behavior becomes ingrained in our political culture, who should intervene? Political officials may form alliances and allow references to religious or comprehensive doctrines to go unchecked, using them as justifications for their actions or legislation. To deal with this, the answer lies with the citizens who must be diligent in voting based on public reasons and rejecting government officials who fail to uphold these standards, particularly during elections.

However, citizens can only fulfill this duty effectively when they have access to accurate information, transparent decision-making processes, and a genuine sense of shared identity and connection with their community. The vitality of a society's healthy epistemic sphere rests upon the citizens' capacity to access technical information concerning the world they inhabit, the accessible reasons put forth by Bonotti, and their ability to comprehend how these reasons can be employed to safeguard or enhance the shared

⁶⁶ A further study on how this concept was prevalent in European political history see Nieminen (2014).

political values of their society, the weak shareability demand. In other words, citizens must not only have access to factual knowledge, but also possess the skills to evaluate and utilize these reasons effectively in order to protect and promote the fundamental principles and ideals upon which their society is built. This multifaceted understanding and engagement with information and public reasons is crucial for the maintenance and flourishing of a robust epistemic commons within a democracy. It is imperative then that citizens make informed choices based on public reasons. Failing to do so can lead to a degradation of the democratic system, with public officials neglecting their commitment to public reason without facing consequences.

The fragility of this argument lies in the possibility that citizens may be also swayed by personal interests, biases, or affiliations, resulting in a deviation from the shared values of public reason. This can weaken the epistemic commons and open the door for misinformation, manipulation, and the erosion of democratic values. Therefore, safeguarding the epistemic commons of democracy requires constant vigilance, critical thinking, and a commitment to the principles of public reason by both citizens and elected officials.

The maintenance of a vibrant epistemic commons is indispensable to the survival and prosperity of democracy and for this to happen we need citizens to think and vote through public reasons, through a justificatory practice that can identify and create policies to uphold the shared political moral values of constitutional democracies. This process fosters an environment where citizens can critically evaluate information, engage in informed deliberation, and arrive at a collective understanding of reality. By nurturing this shared foundation of knowledge and of public justification we uphold the tenets of democracy, prevent the erosion of its institutions, and safeguard against the dangers of unchecked power.

In conclusion of this argument, while partisans may experience electoral withdrawal due to undermining public reason, the potential loss for democracy when citizens vote based on private reasons is far more consequential. In this regard, it is preferable for partisans to endure electoral consequences if they undermine public reason, rather than allowing citizens to cast their votes solely based on private motivations.

I also want to mention that, in advocating for horizontal accountability, where political parties scrutinize each other's use of public reason, it is important to emphasize the value of a cooperative deliberative style. For what is the point of parties' vigilance to the use of public reason by other parties if they are unable to change their terms? Parties should be willing to engage in a genuine exchange of ideas and be open to revising their positions if more reasonable answers are discovered. The latest version of public

reason put forward by Rawls relies heavily on the ability of those in power to actively participate in a sincere debate aimed at understanding what is mutually acceptable. Therefore, it is essential that parties do not adopt a rigid and uncooperative stance. With horizontal accountability, parties can use this mechanism in good faith to cultivate a more cooperative and receptive attitude, fostering an environment conducive to constructive revisions and cooperation. By promoting a culture of openness and willingness to engage with opposing viewpoints, horizontal accountability can facilitate meaningful dialogue and enhance the democratic decision-making process.

Therefore, the duty of civility, as applied to political parties' practices should encompass horizontal accountability among partisans, combined with the allowance for non-elected partisans to be more responsive and connected with citizens based on nonpublic reasons. This can contribute to the preservation of public reason and the legitimacy of democratic processes because such practices are oriented towards fostering a robust deliberative practice. By engaging in horizontal accountability, political actors can hold each other responsible for adhering to public reason and promote a cooperative approach to decision-making. At the same time, allowing non-elected partisans some flexibility to address non-public reasons enables them to establish meaningful connections with citizens and better understand their perspectives. Vertical accountability, exercised through citizens' votes, further reinforces the importance of public reason and legitimacy. Together, these mechanisms increase the likelihood of protecting public reason and maintaining the legitimacy of democratic governance by promoting a deliberative culture that values open dialogue, responsible decision-making, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis embarked on a fundamental inquiry addressed by John Rawls: the challenge of securing political legitimacy in a democratic constitutional state inhabited by free and equal citizens who hold divergent and often irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines. How can citizens perceive the coercive power of the state as legitimate given the fact of reasonable pluralism? Moreover, how can we assure that citizens relate the laws and policies with their own worldviews, thereby rendering a strong stability to the democratic system? The complexity of this challenge is magnified by the substantial influence wielded by political parties, which serve as the representatives of citizens and their diverse doctrines within the legislative arena. These parties play a pivotal role in proposing, debating, and voting on decisions pertaining to fundamental matters, making them crucial actors in the realm of public reason within a sovereign state.

However, I have demonstrated how a notable tension arises when considering how political parties can effectively uphold the demands of public reason while simultaneously being attuned to the worldviews of their constituents and engaging in electoral competition. The inherent need for parties to appeal to their voters and emerge victorious in elections raises concerns about their ability to engage in the deliberative style that public reason necessitates. This predicament prompts a thought-provoking question: How can political parties reconcile their dual role of representing citizens' diverse perspectives and adhering to the impartial deliberation of shared democratic values, as demanded by the ideal of public reason? The criterion of reciprocity requires that we justify use of political power over fundamental issues with reasons that other citizens can reasonably accept, but when the "other" is a different party competing for government with our own party, how can partisans assure this accessibility and reciprocity of reasons?

The first thing I argue is that Rawls' broader project of political liberalism, with its emphasis on public reason, provides a framework that accommodates and even encourages partisan contestation within democratic societies. Rather than seeking to suppress or eliminate the existence of political parties and their competing interests, political liberalism recognizes the inevitability of diverse and conflicting worldviews held by citizens. Public reason, as a guiding principle, establishes a common ground for discourse by requiring political parties to ground their arguments, on fundamental matters, in broadly shared political values rather than relying solely on their own comprehensive doctrines. This still allows for a robust exchange of ideas as different interpretations of these values and different reasonable political conceptions of justice can arise, fostering a dynamic environment in which partisan contestation can take place within the boundaries of reasoned and respectful deliberation. By providing a space for partisan

contestation within the realm of public reason, political liberalism upholds the ideals of democratic pluralism while safeguarding the legitimacy of political decision-making processes.

Within Rawls' theory of political legitimacy, political parties are indeed afforded a space to develop and engage in debates. However, it is essential to delineate the boundaries of public reason within which parties must operate to be deemed acceptable. I contend that parties should represent reasonable political conceptions of justice, differing interpretations of the core political moral values intrinsic to a constitutional democratic society. In essence, parties must adhere to principles of justice while offering distinct perspectives on how these values should be applied. This implies that parties solely driven by particular interest groups, lacking coherence in their goals, aiming to undermine democracy by appealing to non-liberal values, or exploiting societal divisions solely for the pursuit of power, fall outside the bounds of public reason. In a Rawlsian model of political liberalism, such parties should not be deemed acceptable in the light of the ideal of public reason. By establishing these criteria, we can foster a clearer, more cohesive, and morally grounded political landscape that upholds the ideals of public reason and advances the principles of justice within a constitutional liberal and democratic framework.

Within the realm of public reason, the role of political parties extends beyond mere adherence to its boundaries; their impact on the promotion or undermining of its essence becomes a critical concern. Recognizing the intersection between ideal theory and non-ideal theory, I adopted a dialectical approach to analyze the intricate relationship between political parties and public reason. Extensive discourse has centered around the indispensable role of political parties in ideal theory, particularly concerning their significance to public reason and the broader framework of political liberalism. Conversely, the empirical examination of parties often portrays a chaotic and imperfect picture, leading some scholars to overlook their relevance. Either hyper idealization or neglect of parties within the context of existing societies fails to acknowledge their complexities and challenges and the way they can uphold democratic values when they are properly constrained. Therefore, I posit a departure from both hyper-idealization and pure empiricism, emphasizing the need for a balanced and nuanced approach. Rather than solely engaging in the lofty ideals of political parties or solely focusing on their messy operational aspects, I argue for a comprehensive analysis that acknowledges and reconciles both the theoretical underpinnings and practical manifestations of these parties.

By employing this dialectical method, the examination unfolded in two directions. Firstly, the intrinsic and ideal significance of parties as vital components of public reason was explored. Political parties play a vital role in promoting and sustaining public reason through a set of ideal dynamics. Parties serve as a

crucial bridge between the public political culture and the underlying background culture. By engaging with diverse constituencies and reflecting their values and concerns, parties establish a necessary connection that connects and includes the comprehensive worldviews with the democratic framework. In addition to representing this pluralism, parties have the capacity to identify and systematize the multitude of worldviews and perspectives that exist within society. They play a critical role in organizing and structuring these divisions, providing a framework for constructive engagement and debate. Through this process, parties contribute to the articulation of differing opinions and viewpoints, fostering a more informed public discourse. Furthermore, political parties possess the unique ability to translate comprehensive doctrines into public values. They navigate the complex terrain of competing ideologies and beliefs, distilling them into coherent, accessible and shareable political platforms. In doing so, parties enable the overlapping consensus necessary for a stability for the right reasons where citizens adhere to a freestanding political conception of justice from within their own perspective, promoting a shared understanding of the principles and values that underpin public life. Moreover, parties should be expected to present reasonable and complete political conceptions of justice. By developing well-thought-out policy agendas and articulating a vision for the common good, parties provide a framework for evaluating and assessing the impact of their decisions on society. Through the presentation of complete political platforms, parties offer citizens a meaningful choice and enable the guidelines of inquiry as to understand how, within one political conception of justice, trade-offs between different basic political moral values should occur, therefore helping informed participation in the democratic process while honoring. Lastly, parties are required to demonstrate loyalty to democratic values and operate in a spirit of dialogue. They must actively foster an environment where there is an idea of legitimate opposition and an environment that is conducive to respectful and constructive engagement, promoting open debate, and facilitating the exchange of ideas. By upholding democratic principles and embracing dialogue, parties contribute the wide reflective equilibrium between competing political conceptions of justice and to the cultivation of a vibrant and robust public sphere.

Secondly, drawing from contemporary examples of party operations in modern democracies, an assessment was made of how parties can potentially subvert the principles of public reason. Political parties can undermine public reason when their behavior exhibits characteristics commonly associated with factions. Instead of engaging in open dialogue and shared common ground, factions within parties tend to prioritize their own narrow and particular interests, creating divisions and hindering the collaborative pursuit of public reason that incorporates all the basic political moral values of a constitutional democratic society. Furthermore, parties can undermine public reason when they promote

illiberal political values or conceptions of justice that are inconsistent with the principles of a democratic society. When parties advocate for political ideologies that are tied to specific comprehensive doctrines and aren't able to present freestanding political conceptions, they risk excluding and marginalizing alternative perspectives, impeding the inclusive and rational deliberation necessary for public reason to thrive. Another way parties can undermine public reason is by fostering misinformation. When parties disseminate false or misleading information, they undermine the shared knowledge and facts that form the basis of informed decision-making and they undermine the guidelines of inquiry. This erodes the trust and rationality required for a robust public sphere and undermines the capacity of citizens to engage in meaningful deliberation. Moreover, parties can undermine public reason when their actions or decisions are influenced by monetary incentives from private sources. If parties prioritize the interests of wealthy donors or special interest groups over the public good, they compromise the integrity and impartiality of their decision-making processes, leading to policies that may not respect the conception of persons as free and equal citizens and, therefore, policies that don't align with the basic political moral values of constitutional liberal democracies. Lastly, parties that demonstrate a spirit of non-dialogue, non-revision, and non-cooperation can also undermine public reason. When parties refuse to engage in constructive dialogue, reject the possibility of revising their positions in light of new evidence or arguments, and display a lack of willingness to cooperate with others, they hinder the collective pursuit of public reason. This stifles the exchange of ideas, limits the exploration of alternative viewpoints, and undermines the capacity to reach rational and justifiable decisions.

In examining the dynamics that impede public reason, a central factor emerges as especially important: the relentless pursuit of electoral victory and the aggregation of votes, which serves as a synthesis of the motivations driving these hindering dynamics. I posit that, when confronted with trade-offs or challenging decisions, political parties ought to prioritize the deliberative values embedded in public reason and the deliberative processes necessary for public justification over the temptations to solely focus on maximizing their electoral support and winning elections. It is important to acknowledge that the aggregative function of political parties is essential in representing the diverse perspectives and interests of their constituents, thereby rendering a type of sociological mobilization that connects civil society with the state. However, it is crucial to strike a balance and recognize that the exclusive focus on electoral success, or its prioritization in relation to an honest and more impartial deliberation, can undermine the idea of fair cooperation and hinder the deliberative function necessary for public reason to flourish. Parties should not differentiate themselves from their opponents by demonizing other parties and present themselves as the only reasonable option. By cultivating genuine honesty in articulating their reasonable political

conceptions of justice and fostering an empathetic understanding of opposing viewpoints, parties can uphold the values of public reason while effectively pursuing electoral success. Ideally, the electoral victory should be seen, for parties, as a second order consequence of their process of public justifiability and the virtuousness of their political actions, and not as guiding force that is imperative and above all other aspects of a healthy democratic society. Contrary to the assumption that parties, in their pursuit of a broader voter base, inherently align with the requirements of public reason, my analysis reveals that this is not necessarily the case. Parties can demonize their opponents, foster polarization to make themselves appear as different, propagate misinformation by selectively manipulate data that favors them, and engage in other strategies that appeal to a wider audience while disregarding the principles of public reason. It is through this delicate equilibrium between their deliberative function and their aggregative one, that parties can fully engage with a practice of public reason, thereby enriching democratic discourse and strengthening the foundations of a legitimate democratic society.

The core objective of this research has been to discern duties and guidelines that political parties must adhere to in order to effectively fulfill the requirements of public reason. While recognizing the significance of both the aggregative and deliberative functions of political parties in relation to public reason, this study emphasizes the need to prioritize the deliberative function. In pursuit of a deeper exploration of this topic, the work of Matteo Bonotti has been selected for examination. Noteworthy among other scholars working on public reason and general political liberalism, Bonotti specifically operates within a Rawlsian framework of public reason, focusing on the practicalities associated with political parties and partisanship.

Bonotti presents a theory of partisanship that I also argue in favor, where he aligns the demands of political parties with the imperatives of public reason, emphasizing their intrinsic obligation to adhere to public reason. From a normative standpoint, political parties ought to be regarded as political entities driven by a pursuit of common or shared goals and dedicated to formulating policies that serve the interests of the entire citizenry. Political parties must recognize their inherent nature as partial associations, that they are part of a whole while acknowledging that they do not garner support from all citizens. Nevertheless, it is crucial for parties to align their goals and policies towards the welfare and interests of the entire citizenry, despite their limited constituency, they speak to the whole. This aligns with Rawls' theory of legitimacy, which requires parties to engage with the entire citizenry and pursue general interests through shared and accessible reasons. Prioritizing single-issue platforms and vote maximization on these issues can lead to a fragmented and polarized political landscape, driven by short-term gains and electoral calculations rather than long-term considerations for the general interest. This

undermines the pursuit of reasonable solutions, perpetuates polarization, hampers long-term planning, and diminishes the quality of democratic deliberation. Perceiving the role of partisanship in a way where they should represent general interests and take into account all citizens is a way to allow complete reasonable political conceptions of justice to appear and creates a conducive space for the practical application of public reason within a constitutional democracy, allowing for its flourishing in practice.

Furthermore, Bonotti's method of justificatory labour provides a means for parties to effectively represent and connect with the diverse worldviews held by their constituents while maintaining the same level of justifiability advocated by Rawls. It suggests that elected partisans have a greater duty to adhere to public reason and engage in robust deliberation, checking if other elected partisans respect the use of this type of reasoning when demanded, while non-elected partisans have more leeway to connect with their constituents and address nonpublic reasons. I argue in favor of this division as it eases the burden of engaging in public reasoning for elected partisans because it allows non-elected partisans to be more responsive to citizens worldviews and contribute to the formation of an overlapping consensus by helping citizens reconcile their comprehensive worldviews with public reasons.

While Bonotti's theory offers valuable insights and addresses some of the challenges that political parties face in upholding public reason, it is essential to recognize that his exemption of ordinary citizens from the duty of civility is not without its drawbacks. I argue that exempting citizens from the duty of civility, allowing them to vote, on fundamental matters or elections, primarily or merely on the basis of their private or nonpublic reasons can have negative consequences for democracy. Firstly, it can undermine the legitimacy of democratic decisions. When citizens vote solely based on personal interests or affiliations, the losing minority may perceive the outcome as disregarding their reasoning and will. This creates the perceptions that the resulting laws and policies lack legitimacy, erodes trust in democratic institutions and can lead to disenfranchisement. Secondly, voting based on nonpublic reasons weakens the epistemic commons of a constitutional democracy. A healthy epistemic public sphere relies on citizens having access to accurate information, transparent decision-making processes, and a shared identity with their society. By ensuring that the vote can be justified using public reasons, citizens can protect and promote the fundamental principles and values of their society, aiding in the construction of a healthy sphere of common epistemology that helps in the complex challenges our societies face today. However, when personal interests and biases prevail in voting behavior, it can open the door for misinformation, manipulation, and the erosion of democratic values, thereby paralyzing the deliberative processes necessary for the effectiveness of our actions in the face of complex challenges.

In summary, the division of justificatory labour recognizes the role of elected partisans in upholding public reason and engaging in deliberation, while non-elected partisans can connect with constituents and address non-public reasons. However, exempting citizens from the duty of civility by allowing them to vote on election and fundamental matters based on nonpublic reasons undermines the legitimacy of democratic decisions and weakens the epistemic commons necessary for a thriving democracy. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage citizens to vote through public reasons and through a practice of public reasoning, promoting accountability and fostering a deliberative culture that values open dialogue, responsible decision-making, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

In conclusion, the intricate dance between political parties and the principles of public reason is a constant reminder of the challenges and opportunities that lie at the heart of democratic governance. As we navigate the complex landscape of diverse perspectives and competing interests, it becomes increasingly evident that political parties hold a pivotal role in shaping our collective democratic destiny. They are not mere vessels of power but vessels of possibility, capable of steering us towards a future defined by reason, shared values, dialogue, and progress. To fulfill this transformative potential, political parties must rise above the narrow confines of partisanship and embrace the profound responsibility bestowed upon them. They aren't just mere vehicles of representing the people and contesting elections, they must transcend the pursuit of short-term gains and engage in the courageous act of genuine deliberation, anchored in principles that extend beyond the confines of their immediate constituencies. It is through this unwavering commitment to public reason that parties can bridge the divides that plague our societies, fostering a sense of shared purpose and forging pathways towards a more inclusive, legitimate and just future.

Yet, we must not overlook the inherent tensions that pervade the realm of politics. The delicate balance between representing the will of the people, trying to reach power to provide the best for their constituents while upholding the tenets of public reason is an ongoing struggle. Political parties must navigate this terrain with wisdom and integrity, mindful of the immense power they wield and the impact their choices have on the lives of countless individuals.

Let us envision a political landscape where parties transcend the limitations of ideology, where they can still represent different groups, but engage in substantive and honest debates that elevate our collective understanding and reflect our shared values. Let us imagine a society where parties embrace diversity as a wellspring of strength rather than a source of division, where dissent is cherished as a catalyst for progress, and where public reason serves as the guiding light illuminating the path to a better future. The responsibility rests not only with political parties but with each of us as citizens of a democratic society.

We must demand more from our parties, recognizing their crucial role while holding them accountable for their adherence to public reason and their commitment to the shared values that form the basis of our constitutional democracies. We must actively participate in the democratic process, fostering a culture of dialogue, empathy, and critical thinking that permeates every facet of our political discourse.

In the end, the relationship between political parties and public reason is not a static equation but a dynamic interplay that shapes the very fabric of our democratic societies. It is an ever-evolving journey that requires constant vigilance and unwavering dedication. Let us embark on this journey together, defending the practical reason of a constitutional democracy to orientate the fundamental structure of society towards the basic shared political moral values, reimagining the role of political parties as catalysts of change and guardians of our democratic ideals. For in their ability to embody the principles of public reason, lies the promise of a more just, inclusive, and enlightened democratic world.

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