**The Meaning of Partisanship** by **Jonathan White and Lea Ypi**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 272 pp., £55 (h/b), ISBN 9780199684175

Scholarship on parties often fixates on ‘decline’: their retreat from civil society and the indifference and disdain with which the public regards them. This book, thus provides a refreshing and welcome defence of partisanship as a ‘distinctive activity’ (p. 209) that is normatively desirable for a thriving democratic politics.

Through theoretical reflection on an impressive range of literature and empirical material, and drawing on an extensive knowledge of political theory, the authors draw the ‘normative presuppositions’ structuring the activities of practicing partisans (p. 4).

They approach the task over ten chapters and in three broad sections covering the relationships between the partisan and the political community at large, the party itself, and the wider political system. They construct a picture of partisanship as a distinctly *moral* enterprise, critically different from factions or interest groups in their purpose to harness power for the benefit of society as a whole rather than the interests of a section of it.

A key element, and perhaps the most convincing, is the middle section which discusses the *value* of political commitment and the ethical ties that underwrite it. Here the important developmental roles that parties can play in shaping engaged citizens are identified. Parties can do this because they provide a permanent organisational structure and a means of engendering, supporting and sustaining principled political commitment, guarding against disengagement and disaffection

This is underpinned by obligation, a key feature of the party’s moral order. Partisans hold obligations not just to present participants but to their predecessors (for example by means of a founding document or established traditions), and their successors too. This understanding of the party as an *ongoing*, intergenerational, collective project provides both meaning to participants and an important corrective against opportunistic elitism that focuses on power at all costs.

Whilst this implies a potential for organisational conservatism, at the same time, it is part of what makes parties capable of striking the balance between spontaneity and organisation essential to successful, sustainable revolutionary movements. This underlines the capacity to not only mobilise challenges to the existing order, but to shape and embed a new one.

The importance of this book is that it sets out in systematic fashion, an argument for partisanship which is couched in often deeply moral terms. It provides the tools with which to conduct a normative defence of partisanship at a time when parties need defending perhaps more than ever.