

## **Vlasta Jalušič and Wolfgang Heuer (Eds.): What Kind of Government? Rethinking Contemporary Forms of Government after the Break in Tradition.**

Review: Vlasta Jalušič and Wolfgang Heuer (Eds.): *What Kind of Government? Rethinking Contemporary Forms of Government after the Break in Tradition*. (Cham: Springer, 2024), 216pp., open access.

Vlasta Jalušič and Wolfgang Heuer's edited volume succeeds in delivering a compellingly different way of doing political theory. The volume's contributors cover a broad range of topics—Bonapartism, bureaucracy, courage, and the climate, to name a few—and yet each chapter manages to speak to our current political situation while drawing on the political thought of Hannah Arendt. These are the volume's central achievements – to demonstrate the pressing relevance of Arendt's work today, and to show how political theory can address problems in the here and now.

A central theme in the book is crisis – or should that be crises? Not only is there the resurgence of authoritarianism and racism to contend with, but also the climate crisis, as well as political and bureaucratic systems that stymie democratic rule. As Roger Berkowitz writes in his chapter, political disempowerment is at the root of the crisis:

“Every people, both citizens and non-citizens, have lost confidence that they can meaningfully impact government, that their voices matter in collective self-government, and that they have the power to participate meaningfully in the core human activity of politics.” (p. 143)

*What Kind of Government?* aims to better understand the nature and causes of this disempowerment. As Jalušič and Heuer explain in the opening chapter of the volume, the question that serves as the book's title points us in the direction of changes in forms of government that may explain this disempowerment, such as the growth of bureaucracy (whose anonymous domination of individuals is highlighted in Anait Akopyan's chapter) and the emergence of populist figures like Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán. Tomaž Mastnak's chapter on Bonapartism is particularly helpful for understanding the latter phenomenon. Mastnak fleshes out the concept of Bonapartism beyond what one finds in Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire, arguing that this peculiar combination of dictatorship and democracy remains especially relevant for understanding politics today. Mastnak suggests that Bonapartism's appearance in the nineteenth century prefigures the break in tradition identified by Arendt with the emergence of totalitarianism, but this intriguing idea is not developed further - a deeper engagement with Arendt's work could have enhanced an already excellent chapter. Gorazd Kovačič's chapter on Janez Janša's government in Slovenia gives us a detailed account of how authoritarianism takes hold in

reality, and gives a summary of how its emergence can be stopped. Kovačič explains how the Covid-19 pandemic was seized upon by Janša as an excuse for his assault on democracy, eroding checks and balances, attacking civil society, and taking over Slovenia's public broadcaster; protests by civil society organisations helped to push back against Janša's policies, and contributed to his election defeat in 2022.

While the seven chapters in the first part of the book ('Between Past and Present') are more historical and diagnostic, the second part ('New Beginnings') is forward-looking with five chapters that set out some potential solutions to the current crisis of disempowerment. Berkowitz's chapter proposes greater use of citizen assemblies, with participants chosen by lottery, to reduce (though not remove) the influence of elites over politics. The continuing role of elites in facilitating citizen assemblies leads Berkowitz to argue that they are more closely tied to republicanism than to democracy, but nevertheless offer greater opportunity for people to take part in politics than is the case with electoral politics. In the following chapter, Laura Degaspere Monte Mascaro takes an alternative approach, favouring federalism as an approach to overcoming the hierarchy between the self and the other in politics; Mascaro rightly points out the inadequacy that comes from dividing the world into nation states. In Wolfgang Heuer's chapter on the place of plurality in Arendt's thinking, he stresses the optimistic nature of Arendt's thought—her *Amor Mundi*—asking us to “just think of her trust not in the philosopher-king, but in the power of a diverse civil society” (p.174). This love of the world extends, Heuer argues, to humanity's relationship with nature, a topic that is central in Thiago Dias' chapter as well. Dias outlines an Arendtian critique of capitalism and its impact on our planet, highlighting the huge burden of capitalist production for both the planet and its inhabitants. This second part of the book ends on a hopeful note, with Dušan Rebolj arguing for the importance of courage in republican thought; Rebolj stresses the need to cultivate courage as a civic virtue in order to further protect democratic institutions.

Crucially, in dealing with the myriad crises facing us today, *What Kind of Government?* avoids an uncritical defence of liberal democracy; rather than seeking to protect liberal democracy against malevolent populists and demagogues, the contributors to this volume are eager to face up to the flaws in democracy as it is practiced in the twentieth century. If anything unites the various solutions offered in this volume, it is a commitment to democracy as meaningful self-government and the capacity for collective political action. In this sense, one might say that the solution presented here is republican democracy, not less democracy.

The measures put forward in the second part of the book may seem impractical to some, and unlikely to be implemented. Still, the contribution this volume makes is to offer a glimpse of how politics could be done differently at a time when the status quo is serving fewer and fewer people. In this context, *What Kind of Government?* offers something vital – a commitment to offering an alternative, and to practicing a better kind of politics.

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