

Perhaps one solution could be found in an agonistic understanding of democracy, one in which we do not adjudicate between types of representation—and their corresponding groups—a priori, but instead focus on making sure that the political struggle is won by one's own group. This route has been taken by theorists of agonistic democracy before, and it could consistently fit Disch's theory too. But are there other options? We might assess the desirability of competing sorting practices by reference to the process that brings them into being, for example, whether it is inclusive and deliberative in character. This would shift the attention away from the clash between opposing groups and focus instead on the institutional and procedural mechanisms that make sorting possible and legitimate. And, in turn, it would also substantively strengthen what I believe to be Disch's most brilliant argument: her passionate defense of institutions as the foundation of democratic politics and of political theorizing.

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Kei Hiruta: *Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Berlin: Freedom, Politics and Humanity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. Pp. 288.)

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In *Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Berlin*, Kei Hiruta addresses the absence of any sustained comparison of two significant figures of modern political thought. He rectifies this by providing an account which is admirably contextualized, dialogical, and even-handed.

For context, Hiruta pulls together a breadth of secondary literatures—deriving strong insights from those (best followed by tracking the endnotes)—and draws on a wide range of primary sources, from the well-known, now basically canonical works to more intimate correspondence. On this vast material, Hiruta imposes an authoritative structure that is in part chronological, in part thematic. Chronologically, the chapters proceed across the middle to later decades of the twentieth century—which is a sensible approach, but Hiruta's achievement is to get the two authors' intellectual trajectories to coincide. This has the positive effect that the primary concerns which happened to have driven both authors at different times get linked together to serve the purposes of Hiruta's own reflections, though without his ever having to force the evidence. The book tracks the treatment of four topics, aligned with overlapping phases in the two thinkers' intellectual development: freedom, in the 1950s; totalitarianism, starting from the

1940s; evil, in the 1960s; and an ideal polity, in the mature work of Berlin and Arendt.

Hiruta incorporates an elegant framing device in each chapter, giving further shape to his own purposes, and also forestalling any trepidation that his discussions will be tired and predictable. Freedom is framed by the coincidental simultaneity of two public lectures; totalitarianism is framed by an act of imagining Berlin's timely receipt of Arendt's essay "We Refugees," in hard copy, inside the Jewish-American *Menorah Journal*; evil edges back in time, before the Eichmann trial, to set the scene in Israel's Kastner affair; and intimations of an ideal polity are framed by illegal publications of Arendt's and Berlin's books in late Communist-era Poland. This framing strategy yields interpretive payoffs, including highlighting intricate differences between Arendt's and Berlin's pluralisms, and separating Berlin's rejection of Arendt's philosophical work on totalitarianism from a keener appraisal of her empirical work on the same concept. In general, the achievements of contextualism in Hiruta's study are significant and free of any gleeful hammering home of points. There is a gentle rejoinder to Margaret Canovan, the closest thing to a doyen of Arendt studies, that Arendt's was *not* "the view from Auschwitz," because the records of her engagement with the meaning of the Nazi camp system suggest inferential reasoning not on the basis of extermination camps in the east, but of concentration camps from within Germany's borders where patterns of death and suffering were distinct (98). And there is a similar rejoinder to a near cliché in Arendt studies, that *The Human Condition* was Arendt's correction of the relative neglect of Marxian sources in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Hiruta tracks that self-assessment of intention to a funding application, and reminds readers that funding applications deceive (102).

The dialogical achievement rests upon comparison. It bears saying that not in the least does Hiruta's endeavor represent comparison for comparison's sake. An extension of the author's elegant prosaic framing is that he sets out a mystery to solve: Why the mutual dislike between his two protagonists, when there were ostensibly so many affinities that ought to have paired them in sympathy? This mystery is pursued under the organizational structure already described, and what the reader comes away with is the thought that they were most divided by the gulf in philosophical inheritances: German phenomenology and existentialism in Arendt's case, British empiricism in Berlin's. A dialogical dimension does seem such a prime aspiration: that is, the construction of an extended exchange between two different points of view. And yet, perhaps there is some reason to rue the swift efficiency with which methodological issues are dealt with. Comparative inquiry—actually more routine to political theory than is explicitly recognized—benefits from tight conceptualization of objects, idea-units, contexts, and tasks (see Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent, eds., *Comparative Political Thought: Theorising Practices* [Routledge, 2012]). On such considerations, the book is a bit sketchy. Its purpose is clear: not to enact a "sporting

competition" between Arendt and Berlin, but rather to "bring their ideas into conversation" (7). But units can sometimes appear loose. A pedant might count up casual mention, in rough sequence, of "experience" and "life story" (6), intellectual "style" and "engagement" (14), and "tone" and "tenor" (19)—and then consider each of these as missed occasions for closer definition. Relative uninterest in methodological issues inhibits an undistractedly *sideways* account—i.e., one that is *wholly* comparative—and gives the impression that, often, the author has an eye on something else, something more forward looking. Hiruta is fighting on two fronts already, doing his utmost to present Arendt and Berlin at their best, while also battling on a third front, defending Arendt and Berlin against conventions and preoccupations in today's mainstream Anglo-American political philosophy. Here, the author can lose the courage of his convictions: at times, he frets about the utility of *either* Arendt or Berlin, because of the "excessive mutual dependence between the normative and the empirical" in their thinking (203). His best reflections come when he is presenting Berlin and Arendt positively, enlisting them against a contemporary absence of "vocation," gluttony for jargon, or—more tacitly—denial of embodiment in authorial voice (3). This final issue is especially interesting. Hiruta raises the issue of his *own* "intellectual formation," the way in which sustained engagement with Arendt and Berlin "shaped" *his* outlook, and the intriguing implications of why "*my* intellectual heroes . . . failed disastrously to get along" (8, emphasis added).

*Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Berlin* is even-handed, fastidiously so. Is it fair to say it is even-handed to a fault? Not fair, inasmuch as even-handedness in one sense is simply what is faithful to comparative inquiry. But perhaps there exists another sense of even-handedness, from which fault *does* arise. That would concern comparison's scope. Why is more attention not given to the subjects' characters? And why no corresponding evaluative judgments? Quite entrenched objections to ad hominem arguments discourage political theorists from overclaiming for biography. But perhaps Hiruta underclaims for it. There are tantalizing hints throughout that what he really thinks is that, in studying political writing, there ought to be greater importance attached to tracking the processes by which the thinker makes him- or herself present on the page. And his use of more person-oriented source material, like private correspondence, can seem a gesture to contemporary themes like identity politics, performativity, and confessionalism.

At the prospect of such engagement, however, he backs away. For instance, commenting on *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hiruta opines that "it is foolish to speculate that Berlin might have admired the book if the author had been a male Zionist from somewhere outside Germany" (21). But why would that be foolish? Only, surely, in the respect in which speculation is perforce foolish; and not because inferring conclusions from "positionality"—on the basis of patterns of evidence about identifications on the page—is more foolish than anything else within the theorist's armory to pinpoint. It might also be considered that both his subjects gave importance to public personality: Arendt

thought “*persona*” was at stake in the reception of speech and deed in the public realm (66, 68); Berlin, in a self-aware way, carried a conversational nature into the cadences of a writing style. Withholding from analysis of character, or *ethos*, is one other occasion, then, where greater methodological self-reflectiveness might have offered up alternative routes. Hiruta writes at one point that “the personal, the political and the intellectual were hardly separable in both Arendt’s and Berlin’s lives and works” (4). The breeziness, as well as semi-tautology, of this thought betrays—whatever the outstanding virtues of the book—a certain closed-mindedness to one increasing important topic: style and substance in political thinking, and not their rivalry or detachment, but, rather, mutual dependence.

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Ben Laurence: *Agents of Change: Political Philosophy in Practice*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021. Pp. 256.)

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Ben Laurence defends the Rawlsian idea that political philosophers should proffer “realistically utopian” theories of justice. A theory of justice is *utopian* if it consists of principles of justice that are not “compromised by pragmatic considerations” (2) and “do not bend to accommodate people’s morally reprehensible motives and unjust dispositions” (168); it is *realistic* if it characterizes an end that is “possible to achieve” given “the facts of human psychology and biology, including our characteristic foibles and vulnerabilities,” and given “the material and historical conditions of our social world” (32). A successful defense aims to reconcile two apparently conflicting ideas: that a theory of justice characterizes an ideal social situation in which people are “freed from the evils of marginalization, exploitation, oppression, and domination” (32); and that a theory of justice presents a “practical good . . . that is meant to serve as a reference point for making political decisions” in the real world (31). Laurence is not the first to try to square this circle (he acknowledges John Simmons and Pablo Gilabert, among others). But his is a thorough discussion full of distinctive ideas that repay careful consideration. Personally, I found Laurence’s arguments in chapters 4–6 the most illuminating: chapter 4 shows why so-called nonideal theory (i.e., our theorizing about what to do amid injustice) must identify and be addressed to determinate agents able to mitigate or eliminate specific injustices and thereby achieve progress toward a just society; chapter 5 shows why any theory of justice must say something