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Citation for published version

Ackerman, John Wolfe (2011) Review of Andreas Kalyvas, Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 326 pp. Review of: Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt by Kalyvas, Andreas. The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture,

DOI

<http://doi.org/10.1080/00168890.2011.618441>

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Document Version

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This is an electronic version of an article published in *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 86.4 (Fall 2011). *The Germanic Review* is available online at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/vger20/current>.

Book Review: Andreas Kalyvas. *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 326 pp.

John Wolfe Ackerman

Andreas Kalyvas's *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary* entails a wide-ranging effort to generate "a new theory of democracy with a radical intent" by arraying Hannah Arendt with Max Weber and Carl Schmitt in the framework of extraordinary foundings of political orders, or instances of what Kalyvas calls, following Cornelius Castoriadis, the "lucid and deliberate self-institution of society" (292-93).¹ Kalyvas focuses on a certain aspect of each of their respective bodies of work—"Weber's theory of *charisma*, Schmitt's conception of the *constituent power*, and Arendt's notion of *new beginnings*" (10)—using these "three distinct variations on a single theme" as historical building blocks in the construction of his own contemporary theory of collective, political foundings, toward which Arendt's work in particular would provide the key, final component. The readings of Weber and Schmitt Kalyvas produces along the way have distinct merits: he takes seriously the political character of Weber's sociology of religion, from which he excavates an account of "charisma" that is not bound up with personal traits of individual leaders, refusing to relegate this popular political phenomenon to an archaic, premodern past. Kalyvas compellingly counters readings of Schmitt that see in his critiques of Weimar German democracy attacks on all democracy, and he attends to Schmitt's own positive account of democracy, especially as it is laid out in his major, late-Weimar *Verfassungslehre*. From reading Schmitt with Weber, Kalyvas concludes that "a comprehensive theory of the extraordinary, unlike Weber's but like Schmitt's, must take into account not only the first moment of the original founding

¹ Page numbers in the text refer to Kalyvas's volume under review.

but also the second one, that of the stabilization and conservation of the constituent compact” (255), and it must (contra Weber’s own ultimate rejection of popular, charismatic, political foundings) with Schmitt recover the founding creativity of the popular “constituent power” (in Schmitt’s rendering, *verfassunggebende Gewalt*) for politics. Arendt, finally, unlike Weber, “thought that radical changes [are not] incompatible with legality, and contrary to Schmitt, she rejected the idea of total breaks and absolute foundings” (192). Counter to popular representations of Arendt as all too ruptural, which reflect insufficient attention to her *On Revolution* and its theory of constitutionalism, Arendt’s work, when read against Weber and Schmitt, would offer a corrective to their shortcomings while also being supplemented by their strengths, thereby producing a suitably considered—“tamed”—version of extraordinary beginnings.

Kalyvas has written a piece of political theory, not intellectual history: his aim is to selectively mine the resources offered by a series of thinkers who just happen to share a common historical context in order to theorize a novel alternative to a false, present-day choice between legalistic liberal theories of constitutionalism and “postmodern” rejections of law and stability. Kalyvas extracts the three authors’ works from their historical context to build his own theory, and when they do not readily supply what he is looking for, he supplements them with the arguments of thinkers from Castoriadis to Habermas. For those unfamiliar with ongoing debates in political science, the book might make frustrating reading at times. Above all, the instrumentalist character of Kalyvas’s construction makes for an odd underestimation of the commonalities between Weber, Schmitt, and Arendt: “. . . certain interesting similarities among them cannot be totally overlooked. For example, they were all Germans marked by the decisive experience of the Weimar Republic” (9). But given Kalyvas’s critical project, it seems fair to ask whether his general neglect of the Weimar context, which acted as a crucible for the thought-constellation formed by the three of them,

does not perhaps pose problems for his theoretical construction that go beyond historical details.

“Where and when men succeed in keeping intact the power which sprang up between them during the course of any particular act or deed, they are already in the process of foundation [. . .],” Arendt wrote four decades later in *On Revolution*, in the midst of her unorthodox account of the constitution of political freedom and perpetuation of “new beginning” prospectively enacted by the American “founders” at the time of the Revolution.² This book serves as the key text in Kalyvas’s new reading of Arendt, but he only remarks this particular formulation in passing. It might, however, have merited a more central consideration: it is one of the many places where Arendt’s temporality of political founding disturbs his organization of “the extraordinary” and “normal politics” according to temporal “moments.” This is a challenge for Kalyvas’s study, for Arendt’s distinctive temporality operates in the interest of what leads him to present her work as a corrective to Schmitt’s, capable of actualizing the democratic potential in Schmitt’s thought—namely, that “Arendt held onto the possibility of reconciling extraordinary politics with a lasting constitutional government” (192). But whereas Arendt seeks to elucidate an ongoing—and thus durable—political foundation, one that cannot be separated, especially not temporally, from the everyday “any particular act or deed” out of which what she calls “power” springs and through which this power is kept alive, Kalyvas’s insistent temporal separation of extraordinary from normal politics replays the split—“the very fact that . . . the concern with stability and the spirit of the new, have become opposites in political thought and terminology”—that Arendt sought to remedy in *On Revolution*.³ Arendt’s “already”—which marks the surprisingly “ordinary” character of “the extraordinary”—fundamentally troubles

² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, 1965 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 175.

³ *Ibid.*, 223.

Kalyvas's presentation of the insights to be gleaned from reading Arendt with Schmitt and Weber.

Kalyvas's interest in doing so lies in the potential to thereby find "a proper balance between the first and second moment" of democratic politics, the extraordinary moment of establishing the constitution and the subsequent normal politics which proceeds within its parameters (8, 14). In Kalyvas's understanding, "normal politics" is "utilitarian" and "statist," "characterized by civic privatism, depoliticization, and passivity and carried out by political elites, professional bureaucrats, and social technicians" (6). For there to be novelty, change, and continuing popular control over any constitution, normal politics must therefore be semi-regularly interrupted by the extraordinary. Kalyvas proposes that the balance between the first and second moments of democracy can be achieved via a "third moment" that would "allow for the emulation of the founding experience alongside the restrictions imposed by" the constitutional order (193). Although he finds hints of this in Schmitt, it is Arendt, namely, who preserved Weber's and Schmitt's invocations of constituent power while correcting their "overemphasis on the legitimate origins of political domination" through her focus on political freedom (192). Moreover, attuned to "the subterranean threat of an abysmal, groundless freedom," Arendt's "figuration of normal power takes a legal, procedural form" (257-58). Kalyvas, thus, offers a depiction of Arendt's "mature version of freedom" as "dual": the extraordinary, revolutionary freedom of "the constituent power as the power to constitute," which involves "the genuine generation of power," lays down "the boundaries that delineate the proper frontiers of the political" within which the "normal freedom of disclosure" occurs during nonrevolutionary times (202-04). But since Arendt perceived that this solution to the "vicious circle" of foundings threatened to tilt the balance too far in the direction of normal politics, she explored modes for keeping the constituent power alive, first, through popular councils and, then, in civil disobedience. In the latter, in particular,

Kalyvas finds a convincing vision of a third political moment that could mediate between extraordinary and normal politics, providing the key, “semi-extraordinary” element in his “new theory of democracy as three-dimensional” (295-300).

Thanks to this depiction of Arendt, Kalyvas is able to read her as supplementing and correcting, in a democratic direction, the politics of the extraordinary prepared, in his telling, by Weber and Schmitt. But does this depiction of Arendt, and the rapprochement among her and Schmitt and Weber that it enables, capture the spirit of the account of new beginnings that Arendt puts forth in *On Revolution* and elsewhere? Is it attentive to her critique of rule (*Herrschaft*, i.e., the same word as Weberian “domination”) or, for that matter, to her specific hesitations about the term *democracy*, which is terminologically and genealogically bound up with rule and thus shadowed by the threat rule poses to politics? Is this a plausible account of Arendt’s relationship to Schmitt and Weber, who after all were hardly unknown to her as key figures in the Weimar intellectual environment in which she attended university and produced her first publications?

Kalyvas, despite grouping them together, is poorly positioned to grasp the extent of Arendt’s critical engagement with Weimar thought. He is not alone; although there have been numerous attempts to draw connections between Arendt and Schmitt, none have seriously considered the possibility of such links stemming from the years of the Weimar Republic. Arendt’s major Weimar-era publication, her 1929 doctoral dissertation, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, does not appear in Kalyvas’s bibliography.⁴ Yet, at several key points in this study of “the relevance of the neighbor” to Augustine’s conception of love, Arendt asserts, in unmistakable reference to Schmitt, that experiencing the neighbor in “concrete, worldly encounters” means encountering the neighbor “as friend or enemy”—while arguing simultaneously, contra Schmitt, that the recourse to a unitary, sovereign order with the power

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin: Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation* (Berlin: Springer, 1929).

of decision—an order which, in Augustine’s depiction, “decides on love” (*über die Liebe entscheidet*)—blocks the very encounter with the neighbor in which any judgment about him or her or it, that is, “etwa als Freund oder Feind,” could be made.⁵ Although there is space here only to signal it, attention to Arendt’s extended engagement with Schmitt, of which her dissertation was only the beginning, makes it difficult to see her work as loosely compatible with Schmitt’s in the way that Kalyvas’s account suggests. It also illuminates the distinctiveness of her project in *On Revolution* by bringing forth a different understanding of her “politics of the extraordinary”: a more ordinary one, located always in the midst of everyday life, in which the always new, plural encounters necessary for politics, and the new beginnings they provoke, are possible to the extent that no unitary, sovereign order, even a popularly constituted one, has precluded them.

This alternate Arendtian account of a politics of the (extra)ordinary—of a, or various, politics that are shot through with infinite instances of the entirely new everyday—thus has little in common with Kalyvas’s normal politics. These Arendtian politics emerge out of political acts and experiences that depend on constitution and constitutions to endure but are never preconstituted by them. Kalyvas appeals to a decisively different “democratic” extraordinary, one that is located in the distinct moments of the sovereign constituent power’s self-instituting activity. But because the extraordinary, in Arendt’s imagination, does not take this Schmittian form, it also does not need to be tamed by “a new principle of legality that put[s] an end to extraordinary politics,” as Kalyvas would have it (258). Kalyvas notes only the “extraordinary,” ruptural character of action and beginnings in Arendt’s account—but (like others before him) is distinctly insensitive to Arendt’s insistence on the *regularity* of “miracles”; “every act,” she declares in *Between Past and Future*, “is a ‘miracle’—that is, something which could not be expected,” and in history it is because “the miracle of accident

⁵ Ibid., 28, 69, 79.

and infinite improbability occurs so frequently that it seems strange to speak of miracles at all.”⁶ The promising novelty in Arendt’s account is her insistence that to separate ordinary and extraordinary, to see them as opposed, is to misunderstand both, and also revolution and everyday politics, beginning, freedom, and political action. This misunderstanding, insinuating itself into contemporary democratic theory, is likely to inaugurate the slide into the mistaken conception of politics in terms of *Herrschaft*, in which stable institutions would be secured only at the price of new beginnings, and of politics and political freedom, themselves.

Kalyvas is not unaware of this problem. He acknowledges that “the theory of dualist democracy . . . is confronted with a critical obstacle: the dichotomization and compartmentalization of politics into two distinct, unrelated temporal moments” (172). It thus “cuts off the possible links between normal and extraordinary politics [and] occludes the various forms in which the sovereign constituent power can survive within constituted politics” (174). This is the problem that his three-level model is supposed to solve: for Kalyvas, Arendt’s observation that the perceived opposition between the two elements of revolution, “the concern with stability and the spirit of the new, [. . .] must be recognized to be among the symptoms of our loss” of the revolutionary spirit, would simply restate the paradoxical character of revolution that demands a difficult reconciliation of its two moments.⁷ This is a paradox of Kalyvas’s own making, however (and of other advocates of a deliberative constitutionalism), which then requires his “solution”: his “normal politics” has become so thoroughly normalized that it requires a separate and distinct extraordinary to interrupt it—which is, as such, potentially too interruptive and must be reined in by norms. As a result, the specter of normalization looms again, and so a third moment is summoned:

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 1968, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 169–70.

⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 223; Kalyvas 262.

the kind of less ruly, everyday political practices that his overly normalized normal politics had expunged now return in the guise of the saving “semi-extraordinary.” Arendt, in contrast, eludes this paradox—through an account of the interrelationship of ordinary and extraordinary in which these, and other related binaries, are not opposites. Hers is an account not of *the* politics of the extraordinary (in its opposition to the ordinary), but of multiple, ongoing times of extraordinary beginning(s) occurring in the midst of ordinary life. Arendt’s political thought emerged out of her critical engagement with Weimar debates at the intersection of philosophy, theology, and politics, out of which Schmitt would remain one of her key interlocutors. Kalyvas’s effort to place Arendt, through a partial realignment with Schmitt, in the service of a politics of extraordinary popular (quasi-)sovereign foundings indeed makes evident the need to attend newly to Arendt’s encounter with Schmitt—a task that despite the publication of this venturesome study remains outstanding.