

POLITICAL THEORY

Hanging Together: Role-Based Constitutional Fellowship and the Challenge of Difference and Disagreement.

By Eric W. Cheng. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

194p. \$99.00 cloth.

doi:10.1017/S1537592723001871

— Kevin J. Elliott , Yale University
k.elliott@yale.edu

Hanging Together tackles some of the defining questions of contemporary democratic theory and, indeed, of actual democratic politics. How should liberal democrats seek to preserve democracy in the face of emboldened autocratic forces? How can liberal democracy be saved from such forces without (unduly) quashing the difference and disagreement it is designed to accommodate? Eric W. Cheng's overarching response to the tangle of challenges the book engages is what he calls "role-based constitutional fellowship": a kind of civic friendship that helps citizens cultivate the trust necessary to successfully navigate contemporary threats to liberal democracy through functional role differentiation.

The book begins by outlining the problem(s) it is concerned with and sketching what Cheng takes to be the two main approaches to addressing them (chaps. 1 and 2). The central problem is, in the broadest sense, how democracy should deal with difference and disagreement. Today, some forms of difference and disagreement are threatening the foundations of liberal democracy as exclusionary nationalisms and antipluralistic populisms rise in established democracies across the globe. These remain Cheng's core concerns, though they are further specified in later chapters in interesting ways I discuss next.

Chapter 2 argues that the two primary approaches in political theory for dealing with difference and disagreement—deliberation and agonism—are insufficient to the task, requiring an alternative that can provide an adequate basis of unity. Chapters 3 and 4 explore civic friendship and liberal nationalism, respectively, as sources of unity, and Cheng adapts elements of both into his favored model of role-based constitutional fellowship. Chapters 5–9 form the core of the book, where Cheng uses his model of constitutional fellowship to address a series of challenges, all of which he constructs as deficits of trust. In these chapters, he theorizes ways that different kinds of democratic citizens can, through adopting complementary roles and associated political strategies, build conditions that are generative of the trust Cheng takes to be essential for navigating difference and disagreement in liberal democracies. A brief concluding chapter points to two remaining questions for future work: the boundary problem and what to do about true enemies of democracy.

A great strength of the book is its sophisticated conceptualization of the problems facing contemporary democracies and who the key players are in them. Three of the

book's core chapters address stylized versions of problems we are all increasingly concerned about today, using Cheng's role-based constitutional fellowship. Chapter 6 addresses "the institutionalized enmity problem," chapter 7 concerns "the social domination problem," and chapter 8 focuses on "the representative cynicism problem." Although readers may not immediately recognize these problems in the terms Cheng uses, they are undoubtedly familiar.

The institutionalized enmity problem is the tendency for political competition to degenerate into political warfare and the consequent transformation of political adversaries into political enemies. For Cheng, the challenge here is that this problem obstructs the development of trust between members of the political class. The social domination problem refers to the way that the persistence of "undue social hierarchies" undermines the ability of those on the lower end of those hierarchies to trust those who are more advantaged by them because they do not think advantaged groups take injustices seriously: it harms trust production between citizens in the general population. The representative cynicism problem stems from the belief among the general citizenry that members of the political class are in it for themselves, both individually and as a class, and are not interested in trying to further the common good. This blocks the generation of trust between citizens and members of the political class.

I detail these problems because they represent a more *political* approach to political theory than we often find in the literature tackling problems of difference and disagreement. It is not exactly the "political political theory" advanced by Jeremy Waldron, whose approach is decidedly more institutional than Cheng's, but is more realistic in helping itself to fewer idealizations from contemporary politics. Instead of trying to get around or transcend contemporary political challenges by ascending to sufficiently abstract ground, Cheng takes the approach of only modestly theorizing them—making them tractable, simplified models, not unrecognizable abstractions.

A key element of Cheng's approach is populating democracies with a diverse cast of characters whose interactions generate and reproduce these problems and among whom different relations might resolve them. The characters include principled purists, principled pragmatists, oppressors (who get broken out into four subtypes—proud oppressors, hard and soft complicit oppressors, and unwitting but well-intentioned oppressors), allies, and the underprivileged, among others. Cheng thus frames addressing the problems of democracy as largely about how to respond to what I call elsewhere the diversity of democratic citizen types and what he calls the "natural distribution of personality types" (p. 157).

Much democratic theory assumes a remarkable degree of uniformity among citizens regarding their duties and roles. Role-based constitutional fellowship instead focuses on

leveraging the diversity of citizen types into functional divisions of labor- and democracy-protective coalitions. For example, Cheng argues that a division of labor between principled pragmatists, who seek compromise out of a desire to interact fairly with their fellow citizens, and principled purists, who stick tenaciously to their principles, can generate trust among members of the political class and prevent the growth of enmity. Likewise, Cheng argues that addressing the social domination problem requires peeling off soft complicit and unwitting oppressors from “unholy alliances” with more committed and self-conscious oppressors. This approach cracks open democratic citizenship as a universal egalitarian status, recognizes functional and political diversity within it, and leverages that diversity to address actual political problems.

Institutions have a rather odd role and place in this book. Chapter 2 concludes that an institutional approach is not going to be sufficient to manage difference and disagreement, though the reasons why are left unclear. Despite this conclusion, chapter 9—which is perhaps the most interesting one in the book—is concerned precisely with institutional tools for executing Cheng’s key goals, many of which seem promising. One might have expected chapter 9’s discussion to be broken up and distributed across the relevant chapters or else extended to give the relevant institutional alternatives more thorough consideration. Institutions seem like a natural way to channel and build trust, as chapter 9 demonstrates, so it is curious that they do not occupy a more central place in the text. Their relegation to a single chapter may reflect the liminal status of institutions in much political theory today, as more theorists come to recognize their importance while still struggling to integrate them into the subdiscipline’s established approaches.

Institutions notwithstanding, Cheng’s book provides a valuable and politically sophisticated contribution to democratic theory on how to manage difference and disagreement. His role-based approach presents an extremely promising path that remains underused in democratic theory. *Hanging Together* illustrates the great dividends that this approach can yield in addressing some of democracy’s most dire challenges.

A Nation So Conceived: Abraham Lincoln and the Paradox of Democratic Sovereignty. By Michael P. Zuckert. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2023. 397p. \$34.95 cloth. doi:10.1017/S1537592723001573

— Steven Johnston, *University of Utah*
steven.johnston@utah.edu

Michael Zuckert has written an impressive book on Lincoln and what he calls “the paradox of democratic sovereignty.” Twenty years in the making, it is an exhaustive look at a “question that haunted Lincoln through the entire course of his political career” (p. 1). It is Zuckert’s

contention that Lincoln’s political thought was “directed to [this] one abiding question” (p. 1). What does Zuckert mean by this claim? Any nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal—in other words, that it is constituted by democratic sovereignty—is inherently vulnerable to self-destruction given the self-empowerment such sovereignty entails. Thus, the problem of perpetuation is a recurrent one, and it preoccupied Lincoln from the very beginning of his public life. It also informed his actions as a statesman, bringing his thought and deeds together into a coherent whole.

Given the problem of perpetuation, Lincoln’s 1838 *Young Men’s Lyceum Address* looms particularly large in Zuckert’s account of Lincoln. It was Lincoln’s first attempt to deal with the paradox (here in the form of mob law). More importantly, however, Lincoln effectively lays the theoretical groundwork for his own political career in this speech. Given Donald Trump’s relentless assaults on American democratic norms and institutions both in and out of office, the *Lyceum Address* has received a great deal of attention of late. In it Lincoln identified what he believed to be a persistent threat to the American polity: the rise of a man of ambition who would not be content to maintain the political gifts bequeathed by the founding generation but would seek to tear them down instead, thereby making his mark in history. Unfortunately, as Zuckert notes, the *Lyceum Address* did not offer a solution adequate to the threat it identified.

Not long afterward, however, Lincoln modified his thinking about the post-founding world and claimed there was another option, a third way to move forward. Spurning both mere maintenance of the founding legacy and the (noncreative) destruction of it, the man of great political ambition would look to extend what the founders had achieved in new directions. Zuckert places Lincoln in this camp: “the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle” (p. 14).

Lincoln himself, then, enacted the paradox of democratic sovereignty on Zuckert’s account, especially once he became president, insofar as he posed a threat to the very regime he was duty-bound to save—in his case from secession, which was also a manifestation of democratic sovereignty. This slavery-induced crisis raised the thorny question of what a constitutional democracy can do to defend itself and remain a democracy worth defending. This is familiar territory for Lincoln scholars, and Zuckert is determined to defend Lincoln against any accusation of tyranny.

Accordingly, Zuckert analyzes two Civil War episodes that put Lincoln to the test: his suspension of the writ of habeas corpus and his issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Regarding the former, “Lincoln claimed the power to suspend was his—period” (p. 283). It was not shared; nor did he need (or seek) ratification or subsequent authorization. Against the claim that he usurped a