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On: 11 September 2012, At: 12:04

Publisher: Routledge

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## Australian Journal of Political Science

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cajp20>

### Patricia Vieira and Michael Marder (eds), *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought*

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Version of record first published: 11 Sep 2012.

To cite this article: Vincent Geoghegan (2012): Patricia Vieira and Michael Marder (eds), *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought*, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 47:3, 528-529

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2012.704896>

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denominator; it cannot be indemnified theoretically, only sustained actively' (Arendt 1958 quoted in Buckler, p. 7).

Buckler suggests that identifiable mediations 'save appearances' of the political at both the epistemological and temporal level, giving the political a 'tentative character' (p. 8). By examining totalitarianism as a form of anti-politics, exploring the nature of authentic political freedom in *The Human Condition* (1958) and new beginnings in *On Revolution* (1961), Buckler argues that Arendt's political theory has 'a preoccupation with the present' (p. 9). Exploring these themes allows Arendt's distinctive contribution to political theory to emerge. The two dominant ways of reading Arendt as using a method based upon narrative and the tendency to read her work as a type of thinking that seeks foundational principles are rejected. Buckler argues that they 'fail to capture the innovative and challenging character of Arendt's thinking and constitute attempts to "normalize" her work' (p. 9). Chapters 7 and 8 further draw out the implications of Arendt's distinctive approach to political theory. Buckler argues that Arendt's apparent failure to provide an ethical roadmap for politics 'is in no way an oversight' (p. 12). Importantly, Buckler recognises that Arendt's work provides 'potentially important correctives' to the way modern political theory is practised in terms of resolving political questions either as questions of moral philosophy or questions of cultural convention (p. 13).

Overall, Buckler's book on the political theory of Hannah Arendt, and the challenge it poses to the tradition of political theory, is a must-read for all those Arendtian scholars and political theorists more generally wanting to articulate what makes her political theory so unique and relevant to political theory today. Buckler should be congratulated for this original and insightful book.

## References

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2012.704895>

Patricia Vieira and Michael Marder (eds), *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought* (New York and London: Continuum, 2012), xv + 172 pp., £17.99, ISBN 9781441169211 (pbk)

The title of this book, *Existential Utopia*, is not a good guide to the contents of the volume. The existential utopianism championed by the editors of this collection, with its roots in the work of Heidegger and Husserl (as expounded in chapter 4) does not characterise most of the other contributions, despite the best efforts of Vieira and Marder to press its claim in the introduction. The work's subtitle, *New Perspectives on Utopian Thought*, is a more accurate description of the constituent essays which seek to develop the concept of utopia in new creative ways (though 'new' is not entirely appropriate since most of the essays were originally published in a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Thought* in 2010).

The two opening pieces have an older provenance and are by two distinguished contemporary European philosophers – Jean-Luc Nancy's *In Place of Utopia* (2000) and Gianni Vattimo's *Utopia, Counter-Utopia, Irony* (1989). Nancy produces a rich meditation on the ambiguities of Thomas More's concept of utopia, building on the initial 'good place'/'no place' distinction in the word 'utopia' to reflect on the nature of representation in the contemporary world. Unfortunately, in a rather splenetic response to the editors' attempt to probe his current views on utopia, Nancy asserts 'that we need to reject all utopia and focus instead on the here-and-

now!' (p. 11). Vattimo explores what he takes to be the rationalist agenda of the early modern utopias, and drawing on the critiques of the Enlightenment developed by Horkheimer and Adorno, and Heidegger, speculates about the positive function of modern 'counter-utopias' and 'post-apocalyptic utopias' as the genre reinvents itself. It thus speaks to current thinking about post-humanist utopianism.

Among the contemporary contributions there is much to grab the attention. Ruth Levitas provides one of two essays that dwell on the subtle analyses of utopia developed by Ernst Bloch. In the context of recent claims about a turn to religion in philosophy and political theory, Levitas explores the use of religion in Bloch and Roberto Unger and probes the credentials of the category 'post-secular' before using the two theorists to help mount a withering attack on the 'stupid materialism' of the 'new atheism' (notably Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens). Douglas Kellner focuses on Bloch's development of a utopian 'ideology critique', one that wishes to combine a class analysis of ideology without descending into reductionism. He follows Bloch's development of the concept of 'cultural surplus' with its notion of an unfulfilled heritage that survives the age that produced it, and can be accessed by later generations in their pursuit of its utopian promise. Both essays attest to the continuing and growing importance of Bloch's work.

In terms of political activism there are the essays by Laurence Davis and Robert Albritton. Davis distinguishes between 'transcendent utopias' ('utopias associated with the imagination of and/or quest for perfection in some impossible future') and 'grounded utopias' which are concerned with 'qualitatively better forms of living latent in the present' (p. 136). Leaving to one side the issue of the tenability of this distinction, Davis makes a good case for the vitality of the anarchist tradition as an inspiration for contemporary grass-roots utopian political practice. Albritton's contribution owes more to Marxism than to anarchism. His 'practical utopia for the twenty-first century' (p. 141) is an exhilarating indictment of the waste and irrationality of contemporary capitalism, and he outlines four principles that should underpin the alternative: the principle of human and environmental flourishing, the egalitarian principle, the cooperative principle and the democratic principle. In Davis' terms Albritton is claiming that his is a grounded utopia, 'a utopia that in principle is achievable in this world' (p. 144).

Other essays feature a spirited piece on the dangers of indifference by Ramoneda, a reflection on the relationship between utopia and uchronia by da Sá, Baracchi's reading of the complexities of Deleuze and the theatre of utopia, and Cavalcante-Schuback's close reading of T.S. Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday'. In the essay of the editors, Patricia Vieira and Michael Marder, there is a statement that speaks of the scope and power of the utopian: 'utopian hope without memory is senseless; utopian memory bereft of hope is empty' (p. 49). The essays in this book help to illuminate this contention; they also speak of the vitality of contemporary theorising of the utopian.

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