

former's sails. But Ahrensdorf argues that this is only half the story: Nietzsche's relationship to Plato and Homer is "ambiguous" (253). While Nietzsche praises Homer for freeing the ancient Greeks from traditional belief in the gods and giving them the carefree Olympians, Nietzsche does not fully grant Homer the honor of being a "philosopher" (277–78) because he "hid himself." More, the revival of a Homeric culture that Nietzsche appears to hold up as an ideal is impossible, a fact Nietzsche understands well (286–89). And though Nietzsche frequently dresses down Plato, ultimately Nietzsche is "sympathetic" (293) in his critique of Plato, because Plato combines a skeptical, independent streak along with "a moral and religious face or mask" (301). It is this latter component, even if "rhetorical" (301), that Nietzsche finds distasteful in Plato, equivalent as it is to "dogmatism" (297), which suffocates the truly philosophical work of questioning. In the final analysis, however, it is Plato's "open praise" of philosophy (304) that Nietzsche affirms, rather than the hiddenness of "Homer, Thucydides, and Machiavelli" (304). Like the interpretations sketched above, this is a challenging reimagining of the relationships between key thinkers in the tradition of political thought. Taken together, these interpretations make for a very good volume and one that will likely be a valued contribution to the field of political theory and literature.

—Seaver Holter

*University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, USA*



Jean-Yves Frégné: *To Live Is to Resist: The Life of Antonio Gramsci*. Translated by Laura Marris. Foreword by Nadia Urbinati. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. Pp. xxii, 306.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670523000402

Antonio Gramsci died over eighty years ago shortly after having been granted conditional release from Fascist Italy's prisons. In his influential *Prison Notebooks*, he notes that biography is a vital task, with particular difficulties when dealing with "a personality in whom theoretical and practical activity are indissolubly intertwined." This description obviously fits Gramsci himself.

The English translation of Jean-Yves Frégné, *To Live Is to Resist: The Life of Antonio Gramsci*, originally published in French in 2017, is particularly timely as recent transformations in capitalism and the current wave of nationalist populism have many looking once again to Gramsci's insights. Of course, there have been many biographies of Gramsci over the decades, and I

would place this one between Giuseppe Fiori's classic *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary* (1965; English trans. 1970), which uses personal accounts and interviews to bring to life Gramsci as a person, and works that focus more on intellectual biography, elucidating Gramsci's influential theory through an understanding of his historical circumstances, such as those by John Cammett and Alastair Davidson. Frétygné provides a rich account of Gramsci's political engagements with the Socialist Party of Italy (PSI), the creation of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I), his years as representative to the Comintern, and his illegal imprisonment by the Fascists. It also raises questions about the intertwining of biographical intrigue and theoretical import.

Frétygné leans into the various controversies in Gramsci's biography such as the vitally important letter he wrote to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party in October 1926, shortly before his arrest. The letter contained Gramsci's critical assessments of how Stalin was dealing with the dissident members Trotsky and Zinoviev, but was never delivered (171–77). Frétygné provides rich detail concerning the "infamous letter" that Ruggero Grieco sent to Gramsci in prison in 1928, from Basel but via Moscow. While the content of the letter was sympathetic to Gramsci and his situation, Gramsci became convinced that it contributed to scuttling his potential release. Gramsci had some knowledge of negotiations involving the Vatican, the Italian government, and the Soviet Union for a prisoner exchange that he felt were hampered by the letter's revelation to Mussolini of Gramsci's close contact with the PCd'I. Moreover, Gramsci found this to be not just a naive mistake, but a conscious attempt to keep him in prison (196–208). Many such issues are handled thoroughly by Frétygné, especially concerning the all-important relationship between Gramsci and his approach to politics as distinct from that of others in the PCd'I (such as Bordiga and Togliatti) and Stalin's increasingly authoritarian control over the Comintern.

In other cases, Frétygné's speculations are more questionable and their stakes unclear. For example, he conjectures that the September 1923 certificate of Gramsci and Julia Schucht's marriage may possibly be a forgery. He gives no evidence to support this possibility beyond suggesting a reason why the Soviet government may have forged it and noting that Julia did not mention their marriage in her biography submitted to the Comintern in 1938 (122–23). He makes other intriguing claims such as that Gramsci "never really understood" his wife (254).

Frétygné also tries to revive the old story that Gramsci was writing in code to avoid the Fascist censorship. He uses a comment Tatiana Schucht made in a letter to Julia that Gramsci used "Aesopian language" in the *Notebooks*. Tatiana did not explain what she meant, but Frétygné develops this to mean Gramsci was eluding his censors, for example by writing about the "philosophy of praxis" rather than "Marxism" (228–31). In an endnote Frétygné posits,

without explanation, a distinction between a “code” and a “cipher,” saying Gramsci was writing in the former not the latter (289n36). While Gramsci was certainly aware of the censorship he was under, the “censorship thesis,” including the claim that “philosophy of praxis” was code for Marxism, is textually unfounded and produces misunderstandings in interpreting Gramsci (see Marcus Green, “Rethinking the Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks,” *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 4 [2011]: 387–404). As my own work focuses on Gramsci’s writings on language and translation, I was surprised by Frétigné’s curt conclusion that Gramsci followed the approach to translation that sees as its goal to “transcribe the original faithfully into the target language.” He opposes this to Walter Benjamin’s insistence that translation ought “to make the original language heard” (230). Frétigné’s short discussion seems to run contrary to much detailed scholarship on Gramsci’s theory of translation (e.g., Peter Ives, *Gramsci’s Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* [University of Toronto Press, 2004], 97–133; Derek Boothman, *Traducibilità e Processi Traduttivi* [Guerra, 2004], 55–80; Rocco Lacorte, “Translatability, Language and Freedom in Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks,” in *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*, ed. Ives and Lacorte [Lexington Books, 2010], 213–26).

Such problems are likely to arise when a biography raises, understandably, issues of scholarly and intellectual complexity that cannot be thoroughly explicated in the format of that genre. However, I worry that more than this may be going on. The way Frétigné depicts Gramsci’s isolation, and his frequent reliance on the controversial and speculative work of Franco Lo Piparo, including claims of missing notebooks (228), bring his position too close to Lo Piparo’s contention that the sources of Gramsci’s originality lie outside of Marxism. Near the end of the work, Frétigné provides a discussion of “Gramsci’s break with the Communist world” (253) that to my mind goes well beyond his critique of Stalinism (often interpreted as his having broken from Marxism and Leninism) and his differences from other Italian communists like Bordiga and Togliatti. While it is vital and accepted by all but the most crass anti-Marxists that Gramsci was critical of Stalin and that his Marxism was not that of the Soviet dictator, Frétigné seems to overgeneralize this, adding to the misery and defeat of Gramsci’s final years with statements such as “Gramsci did not intend to renounce his political ideals, but the contemporary Communist world was, from then on, strange and hostile to him, and he wanted to free himself from it definitively” (254).

This tendency of speculation on Frétigné’s part reminds me of Gramsci’s comment in Notebook 1, note 26, about “Cuvier’s little bone”: “From the little bone of a mouse sometimes a sea serpent was reconstructed.” I am not suggesting that this biography is a sea serpent, but rather that, as Gramsci warned at the beginning of Notebook 4, in the passage with which I opened this review, precisely when biographical reconstruction is so

important, we need to pay heed to the difficulties presented by the intertwining of practical and theoretical legacy.

—Peter Ives

*University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*



Eric W. Cheng: *Hanging Together: Role-Based Constitutional Fellowship and the Challenge of Difference and Disagreement*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. vii, 182.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670523000360

“We must all hang together,” Benjamin Franklin jibed after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, “or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.” Franklin’s sentiments capture the essence of Eric Cheng’s *Hanging Together*, which muses over how to perpetuate liberal democracies in a modern world rife with what the author calls difference and disagreement. “Difference” here represents descriptive diversity (age, sex, race, etc.); “disagreement” means ideological competition (partisanship, religious belief, and so on). Liberal democratic theory promises to hold diverse, competing peoples together, but the threat of division and strife constantly looms over efforts at democratic unity. Cheng proposes a solution to this problem—the problem of difference and disagreement—called *role-based constitutional fellowship*. The goal of this fellowship is to create and sustain a “culture of trust” wherein citizens *trust* that their fellow citizens are committed to perpetuating liberal democratic political institutions, despite their disagreements (94).

Motivated by the rise of far-right political movements the world over, *Hanging Together* argues that we need to rethink how liberal democrats perpetuate their political systems. While theoretically not restricted to America, Cheng nonetheless focuses most of his analysis on the situation in the United States, post-January 6th, 2021 Capitol insurrection. Cheng’s intention is to create a framework for “how citizens who have differences and disagreements ought to relate to one another in a liberal democracy” to sustain their systems and remedy injustices (1). By “liberal democracy” (the correctness of which Cheng assumes a priori), Cheng means a political regime that takes seriously the rule of law, individual liberties, freedom of the press, fair elections, an independent judiciary, and “the legitimacy of political disagreement” (1).

Cheng’s framework first involves understanding the different roles citizens play in society before figuring out how to create a culture of trust between them. There are two main spheres in modern liberal democracies, one