

movement? The centerpiece of Beltrán's concluding chapter is the immigrants' rights demonstrations of 2006, where, she says, these demonstrations contested unequal forms of power and created new forms of commonality. But it seems nearly inevitable that some people will want to translate these moments into a movement, or even that these moments are the products of a movement. Widespread demonstrations, after all, rarely just happen. They are the result of organization, networks, and planning. When they succeed, the organizers will want to build on their success to organize their community to tackle the next issue of common concern. The visible political moments are often the result of nearly hidden political organization. Robert Michels wrote long ago about the iron law of oligarchy—all political movements must have leaders. It is hard to imagine that these leaders will avoid trying to turn these political movements into something solid, with a core identity that can affect politics. But perhaps this shows the importance of *The Trouble with Unity*, since the interest and aspirations of these leaders may undermine the democratic moments and processes that Beltrán correctly wants to protect.

Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals. By Joshua Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 208p. \$74.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Rousseau, Law and the Sovereignty of the People. By Ethan Putterman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 200p. \$95.00.
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— Dennis C. Rasmussen, *Tufts University*

For much of the twentieth century, political theorists tended to focus on what we might call the idealistic Rousseau. This was the Rousseau of *The Social Contract*, the radical democrat who advocated a return to ancient republican virtue and its attendant public spiritedness, solidarity, and direct self-government. Given that Rousseau admitted to himself that such a return is all but impossible in the modern world, he was often seen as a purveyor of utopian fantasies or even an unwitting source of totalitarian ideas—a dreamer or a despot. In recent decades, however, scholars have given us a more realistic and pragmatic Rousseau. In part by combining *The Social Contract* with his more “practical” works on Poland, Corsica, and Geneva, recent interpreters have emphasized Rousseau's call to take a nation's customs and circumstances into account in devising political institutions, his insistence on piecemeal reform rather than attempting to wipe the political or social slate clean, and his efforts to guide rather than transform human nature. In other words, this realistic Rousseau genuinely sought to “take men as they are,” as he famously put it at the outset of *The Social Contract*, rather than to convert them into modern-day Spartans.

In *Rousseau, Law, and the Sovereignty of the People*, as in his previous work on Rousseau (some of which is incorporated into this book), Ethan Putterman stands squarely in the latter interpretive camp. Putterman sets out to counter the idea that *The Social Contract* is “a fantastically idealistic treatise on the nature of legitimate government” (p. 1), and instead to demonstrate that Rousseau was “a hard-headed political scientist who carefully decompresses the complexities of republican institutions and constitutional government in an effort to enhance, rather than to debilitate, democratic liberty” (p. 5). Thus, he shifts the interpretive emphasis from Rousseau's abstract “principles of political right” (the subtitle of *The Social Contract*) to his practical, concrete proposals for how laws should be drafted, ratified, executed, and—in some cases—judged. Putterman seeks to show that these proposals are not only more realistic and more authentically democratic than is often supposed, but also that they are relevant for debates in contemporary politics and political science.

Each chapter of Putterman's book addresses a different aspect of the broad legislative process that Rousseau envisioned, including issues such as agenda setting, the preconditions for voting, the feasibility of a large legislative assembly, the role of public opinion, the proper extent and function of the judicial power, and the temporary suspension of law during an emergency situation. Although one could question Putterman's textual interpretations in a few instances, he sheds valuable light on some areas of Rousseau's political thought that have been underexplored in the scholarly literature. Putterman's broader reading of Rousseau as a pragmatic realist, however, is perhaps not quite as novel as he sometimes suggests (pp. 1–2, 5). In part, this is because, like Joshua Cohen in *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals*, he does not engage much with the most recent scholarship on Rousseau; neither author so much as cites the important books by Laurence Cooper, Jonathan Marks, Frederick Neuhouser, Joseph Reiser, Matthew Simpson, or David Lay Williams, for example.

Cohen, for his part, aims to convince his readers that, in effect, the idealistic Rousseau was actually realistic. He argues that the normative ideal of *The Social Contract*—which Cohen alternately calls “a free community of equals” or “the society of the general will”—was “not an unrealistic utopia beyond human reach, but a genuine human possibility, compatible with our human complexities, and with the demands of social cooperation” (pp. 10, cf. 14, 132). Whereas Putterman explores the specific ways in which Rousseau envisioned a just state actually operating, Cohen starts by taking nearly the opposite tack: at the outset of the book, he distinguishes sharply between Rousseau's normative ideal and the specific institutional implications that he drew from that ideal, in hopes of showing “how that ideal might be realized or approximated under modern conditions, in which Rousseauan direct democracy is implausible” (p. 20). The first half of the book

outlines what Cohen sees as the “fundamental problem” that Rousseau addressed in his political works, namely how to combine security with autonomy—that is, how to combine the restraints on individual action necessary for the protection of others with a form of self-legislation that leaves each individual “as free as before” (pp. 24–32). Rousseau’s solution to this problem, of course, is a society in which law is based on the general will. As Cohen explains, Rousseau’s vision was one of “a *free community of equals*: free, because it ensures the full political autonomy of each member; a *community*, because it is organized around a shared understanding of and supreme allegiance to the common good; and a *community of equals*—a democratic society—because the content of that understanding reflects the good of each member” (p. 16, emphasis in original; cf. 59).

The second half of the book—chapters 4 and 5—considers how realistic such a community is. Cohen addresses two broad obstacles to realizing a free community of equals: first, the question of whether the demands it would place on its citizens are compatible with human nature, and second, the question of whether it is institutionally possible, or whether a stable, workable, and ongoing society could live up to the ideals it sets. (He ignores issues of “accessibility,” or whether it is possible to actually get to such a community from our present circumstances [p. 14].) In response to the first potential obstacle, that of human nature, Cohen summarizes Rousseau’s “genealogy of vice” in the *Discourse on Inequality* and suggests that it is not necessary to *suppress* human nature in order to realize the general will, only to find positive ways to express it. In particular, Cohen follows Nicholas Dent in interpreting Rousseau as holding that *amour-propre*, the comparative form of self-love to which he attributes so many evils, can (given the right social and institutional conditions) be expressed in a positive or egalitarian form as the desire for equal respect, rather than the harmful and prideful desire to be superior to others, which Cohen calls “inflamed” *amour-propre* (pp. 101–4). While this reading has gained a considerable following of late (see especially Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau’s Theodicy of Self-Love* [2008]), it is difficult to reconcile with Rousseau’s explicit definition of *amour-propre* as a “relative sentiment . . . which inclines every individual to set greater store by himself than by anyone else” (*Discourse on Inequality*, footnote 15). It is true that Rousseau deemed it necessary to manage or channel this passion properly in order to realize a just society, since he did not think it could be eliminated altogether outside of the “pure” state of nature. Yet in the *Discourse on Political Economy* (cf. paragraphs 30, 36) he suggests that in the citizen—as opposed to, say, Emile or Rousseau the solitary dreamer—*amour-propre* must somehow be extended to include the community as a whole, so that the citizen’s *amour-propre* is satisfied by the glory

of the fatherland, rather than tamed so as to take the liberal or egalitarian form posited by Cohen.

In response to the second potential obstacle to realizing a free community of equals, the question of whether it is institutionally possible, Cohen argues in the fifth and final chapter that scholars have focused too exclusively on Rousseau’s call for direct democracy—his claim in *The Social Contract* that in a legitimate state, the people as a whole must legislate on all matters collectively—and not enough on the other features of the “institutional design” that he recommends. Thus, after having drawn a sharp divide earlier in the book between Rousseau’s normative ideal and the institutional implications that he drew from it, in the concluding chapter Cohen brings to the fore the Rousseauian institutions that he finds most feasible and/or desirable. On this score, he mentions Rousseau’s advocacy of rule through general and public laws, universal suffrage, the right to assembly, limitations on economic inequalities, the delegation of executive power to an individual or group that is strictly accountable to the people, and his apparent allowances for a representative legislature (on the “delegate” rather than “trustee” model) in his essay on Poland (pp. 135–40).

While Cohen and Putterman focus on different features of Rousseau’s proposed institutional framework, then, they agree that his proposals are more realistic than scholars have often supposed. In making this case, however, they are forced to overlook or play down certain elements in Rousseau’s political thought. For instance, both authors ignore the series of chapters in which Rousseau outlines what types of peoples are capable of receiving good laws, where he insists that the society cannot be too young or too old, too small or (especially) too big, too densely or too thinly populated, too rich or too poor (*The Social Contract*, book 2, chapters 8–10—hereafter SC 2.8–10). Rousseau himself stresses the stringency of these restrictions: “It is true that it is difficult to find all of these conditions together. This is one reason why one sees few well-constituted States” (SC 2.10). A further reason Rousseau offers for the scarcity of well-constituted states in the modern world is another one that Cohen and Putterman neglect: the baleful effects of Christianity and universal religion more generally (SC 4.8). These authors also devote less attention than might be expected, as part of a demonstration of Rousseau’s political realism, to his persistent and devastating attacks on commerce and its attendant inequalities, dependence, and corruption. Finally, while Cohen and Putterman do mention Rousseau’s notorious claim that to form a healthy state people must be “denatured” by a great Lawgiver who drives self-interest out of their souls and transforms them into citizens (SC 2.7), they both ultimately dismiss this claim as unimportant. Cohen proclaims that Rousseau exaggerated his own views in these “rhapsodic” passages (pp. 35–39), and Putterman simply chooses to emphasize “the institutional aspects of

voting above will-formation” (p. 5, cf. 175) on the grounds that such will-formation will not determine entirely the outcome of any given vote (p. 77).

Those who regard Rousseau as a moderate democratic reformer will find much in these books to corroborate their views and to stimulate reflection on some largely overlooked aspects of his political thought. This reviewer remains convinced, however, that Rousseau’s thought is more foreign to the modern liberal outlook, and for that very reason more valuable and interesting, than these authors allow.

Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics. By Jodi Dean. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. 232p. \$74.94 cloth, \$21.95 paper.
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In *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, Jodi Dean deploys a version of psychoanalytic Marxism influenced by Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek to offer an intriguing, though rather idealist, account of the hegemony of neoliberalism. Dean blames left intellectuals’ embrace of identity politics and the “politics of victimhood” for the left’s failure to offer a “solidaristic” political alternative to neoliberalism. According to Dean, the “academic and typing left’s” celebration of “consumption as creativity” reinforced neoliberalism’s or (what Dean terms) “communicative capitalism’s” project of “inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify capitalism” (p. 2).

By embracing the individualistic lifestyle liberation of the 1960s and the “marketing of images” of communicative capitalism, left intellectuals (here Dean means some cultural studies scholars) abandoned their “historical solidarity with workers and the poor” (p. 35). By embracing a nonconflictual “ethical” critique of the powerful rather than a “conflictual” politics aimed at altering sovereign power, “the left,” in Dean’s view, has “retreated from the state” and no longer believes in “collective solutions to large-scale systematic inequalities” (pp. 11, 35). The left’s obsession with Foucauldian forms of governance through nonstate institutions leads it to ignore the neoliberal state’s use of the violence of militarism and the criminal justice system to enhance sovereignty.

In chapter 1, on “technology,” Dean holds that by celebrating the democratic potential of the Internet and social media, the left is complicit in neoliberalism’s masking of its own repressive sovereign power. The infotainment industry’s ideological claim is that all voices are equal, but Dean convincingly shows that “nodes of power” exist within the Internet and that the proliferation of voices serves, in part, to provide “niche” consumers for global corporate

marketers. Drawing on the work of Žižek, Dean argues that it is not the left that benefits from postmodern capitalism, but the right, which has become the master of “packaging, marketing and representation” (p. 7).

Dean contends that the left must break with communicative capitalism’s individualization of politics into niche “tribal communities” who commodify their lifestyles via social media. Instead, the left must reengage in the arduous tasks of face-to-face argument with others and contestation for power. In the Lacanian psychoanalytic language that pervades her work, Dean contends that the left’s fetish of the Internet reflects a “condensation” of politics into “democratic participation”; a “displacement” of politics into everyday activities, such as surfing the web; and a “denial” that democracy in practice is the rule of the wealthy (pp. 38–40). Dean succeeds in offering a productive counterweight to the naive celebration of the Internet as a democratic leveler of power. Yet only a Luddite would reject using the organizing tools provided by the Internet.

Who constitutes Dean’s actual “left” and what constituencies would constitute the “solidaristic left” of her imagination are questions of agency about which the text is peculiarly silent. Dean frequently cites “the academic and typing left” (with Judith Butler, cultural studies theorists, and “deliberative democrats” as her most explicit interlocutors); at other times, she criticizes moderate Democrats and Third Way European social democrats. Self-defined leftists active in trade unions, the global justice movement, or struggles against federal and state budget cuts are explicitly critical of neoliberalism. Older white males of the “social democratic left”—among others, Todd Gitlin in *Twilight of Common Dreams* (1996), Richard Rorty in *Achieving Our Country* (1999), and Walter Benn Michaels in *The Trouble with Identity* (2007)—long ago advanced a critique of identity politics similar to Dean’s, while imploring the left to embrace a politics of social solidarity. I’m not sure Dean would embrace their “labor metaphysic,” as it downplays the relatively autonomous role race, gender, sexuality, and nationality play in identity formation and social oppression. But Dean is not the first theorist to call for the left to build a politics of solidarity and equality across difference.

Her second chapter, “Free Trade,” argues that while the Keynesian welfare state “interpellated” subjects into stable symbolic identities of worker, student, citizen, and housewife, neoliberalism creates imaginary identities whose variability promotes the faith that human freedom is achieved through the marketing of the self. Dean contends that this “fantasy of free trade” (p. 56) promotes a doublet of the “consumer/criminal” (p. 67). The neoliberal subject frees the self from dependence on the state by endlessly consuming, but if we can’t afford to do so, the state coerces us into a permanent criminal identity. She believes that the fleeting and unstable consumer identities of neoliberalism preclude the left from uniting human beings behind the