

# Book Reviews

Political Theory

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## Review Essay: Rawls's Untimely Meditations, or On the Use and Abuse of Rawlsianism for Life

*In the Shadow of Justice: Postwar Liberalism and the Remaking of Political Philosophy*, by Katrina Forrester, Princeton University Press, 2019, 432 pp.

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What on earth is there left to say about John Rawls? Now fifty years after the publication of *A Theory of Justice* and approaching the twentieth anniversary of his death, one could be forgiven for thinking political theorists and philosophers might have exhausted the topic. Instead, the opening of Rawls's archives has provided the opportunity for a new phase of reflections on Rawls's life and thought. Not only do we now have thoughtful works that historicize Rawls, but insightful research has already begun on the history of historicizing Rawls.<sup>1</sup>

At the forefront of this new phase of Rawls studies is Katrina Forrester's impressive *In the Shadow of Justice: Postwar Liberalism and the Remaking of Political Philosophy*, which details the genesis and reception of *A Theory of Justice* as well as the intellectual and political context of its publication and impact. Forrester's well-received book deservedly made a splash upon its publication in 2019, prompting another round of reckoning about the political legacy of Rawls and his egalitarian liberalism. This tradition of political thought tries to combine individual freedom and equality into a coherent conception of social justice that applies first and foremost to the institutions constituting the basic structure of society; Rawls aimed to elicit support for this view by using thought experiments like the original position to sharpen intuitions about equality we're already assumed to have.

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1. Sophie Smith, "Historicizing Rawls," *Modern Intellectual History*. FirstView, March 9, 2021: 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432000044X>

Forrester takes as a starting point that “[t]he period of flux that followed the crisis of 2008” made questions about the political efficacy of Rawlsianism inescapable (277); the financial crisis made vivid the failure to limit the growth of massive inequality whereas the election of Donald Trump seemed to eviscerate Rawls’s conviction that his egalitarian liberalism represented a widely (if implicitly) accepted American consensus. Of course, critics have questioned egalitarian liberalism since its inception; as Forrester notes, the identity of political theory as a subfield of political science—indeed, the founding identity of this journal itself—has been shaped partly by defining itself negatively “against Rawlsian political philosophy” (241). It might then seem obvious that a book that traces influences on Rawls so carefully as to note the specific sentences he read and underlined “with three different pens” would have little to offer to the many theorists who understand themselves as anti- or simply non-Rawlsians (13). Yet Forrester’s clear-eyed view of the limits of Rawlsianism doesn’t keep her from asserting that there is still something to gain from this tradition because “at moments liberal egalitarianism has provided the grounds for a radical indictment of injustices and inequalities, and . . . always had the potential to do so” (276). In the service of realizing this potential, her book seeks to establish Rawls’s theory as “a part of our usable past” (279) and unshackle its condemnation of inequality from the history of “moderate, reformist” uses to which it has been put (135). Committed Rawlsians might bridle at relegating his theory to the past, whereas skeptics might ask: Whose past? And usable for what?

In giving readers material with which to answer these questions, Forrester’s book does not focus narrowly on Rawls himself but considers the broader community of practitioners of liberal political philosophy, largely in elite universities. Forrester charts how these egalitarian liberals extended Rawlsianism to consider not just freedom and equality domestically but a host of political issues, including international inequality, environmental issues, and war crimes. As Forrester shows, Rawls didn’t invent Rawlsianism; it was the product of a collective effort—one in which Rawls’s particular views sometimes came to play second fiddle to the idea of “Rawls,” the symbol and synecdoche for egalitarian liberalism. Rawls’s own ideas were often stranger than his reputation as the twentieth century’s standard bearer for liberalism would suggest; Forrester describes *Theory* as “something of an encyclopedia of postwar Anglophone thought” (105), but it might also be described as a highly idiosyncratic pastiche. Part of Forrester’s strategy to “denaturalize and defamiliarize . . . the broader architecture of contemporary liberal philosophy” is to mine the archives to reveal these surprising and unexpected influences on Rawls that cut against the self-understanding of contemporary liberalism (275).

This defamiliarizing strategy stands in some narrative tension with Forrester's history of the development of "Rawls" the symbol. "No matter, in the end, what Rawls the man thought," she writes (126). "What shaped the coherence they [Rawlsians] arrived at was an outside challenge"—namely, the libertarianism of Robert Nozick. Forrester attributes a decisive influence to this encounter, writing, "It was in response to Nozick that Rawls's followers became 'Rawlsian' and established the contours of the new philosophy" (129).

Here and throughout, Forrester's book shows Rawlsians as political actors, trying to put the theory to work. This was true not just in their activism—as when Forrester highlights Rawls speaking alongside Noam Chomsky at an antiwar rally in 1968 (78)—but also in their theorizing itself. Forrester shows how frequently these philosophers understood themselves to be making arguments for political ends, not just abstractly pursuing truth in the seminar room. For example, she describes how Robert Goodin tried to defend the welfare state by using "the idea of 'family responsibility' to 'strategic advantage'" (229) and traces how G. A. Cohen "saw a strategic value in arguing from libertarian premises" (222).

We know now that those bets did not pay off. Despite the significance of their engagement with Nozick, Forrester writes, "Liberal philosophers underestimated how high the New Right would rise" (205); in hindsight, these strategic interventions look like "not so much a service to social democracy as a 'capitulation' to the right" (222). If we're to learn from this history, we need to judge why these strategies failed. Was it bad philosophy, bad politics, or just "bad timing" (222)?

Forrester certainly has her philosophical criticisms of egalitarian liberals. Discussing their approach to environmental problems, she unsparingly observes, "Liberal philosophers mastered the art of turning an ethical crisis into an anodyne puzzle" (174)—a tendency she attributes to taking such problems in isolation rather than employing "systematic social and political theory" (267–277).

But whereas Forrester highlights how this approach constrained the practice of political philosophy, judging Rawlsians not only as philosophers but as political actors leads her to highlight the constraints they themselves faced. She repeatedly draws attention to how Rawls and his contemporaries were more led by events than leading them. One of the book's illuminating contributions is to show the influence of postwar British political debates on Rawls, and here again, Forrester shows us philosophy following politics rather than the reverse. She writes, "As Labour thinkers swapped public ownership for a new priority of limiting inequality, philosophers followed" (20). Observations like these underwrite her conclusion that "the concerns of political philosophy were shaped by its ideological context, and its horizons were fixed by

what it was possible for its authors, like any historical actors, to understand about their political environment” (274).

So, why did egalitarian liberal political strategies fail to head off the rise of neoliberal inequality? Part of the story is the institutional location of egalitarian liberals, many of whom had won “prominence in elite institutions” and consequently influenced what other work was regarded as prestigious (242). These institutions benefited from neoliberal inequality as their endowments flourished, perhaps making it more difficult for faculty within them to discern the forces already transforming society. Ultimately, though, Forrester’s explanation is that they failed for the same reason so many others did: “like nearly everyone else, many misdiagnosed the changes they were living through” (238).

Rawlsians may have made the same political mistakes as nearly everyone else left of center, but their views thrived in the academy even as egalitarian liberalism took a beating in politics. Forrester captures this apparent paradox when she writes, “Without an account of interest, collective action, control, class, crisis—and with its assumption of potential value consensus, continued growth, and lasting stability—the Rawlsian vision looks no more capable of fully making sense of the current conjuncture than it did during the crises of the 1970s” (277). Yet Rawlsianism *did* flourish during those very crises of the 1970s it now looks ill-suited to understand—what are we to make of that?

Forrester’s answer here suggests a striking account of the relationship of political thinkers to their own time. The critical history of Rawlsianism told by detractors like Raymond Geuss is that Rawls’s theory offered an abstract deduction and defense of the welfare state at the moment of its eclipse by neoliberalism, rendering his approach outdated and politically irrelevant upon publication. Forrester tells a more complicated story, one in which Rawls’s work is not simply belated but untimely—and this untimeliness is the source of his theory’s appeal, its limits, and its possibilities. Through her archival research, Forrester argues that “Rawls’s theory was born in the 1940s and 1950s—a product of the Second World War, not the Great Society, as is often assumed” (xiii). Though he had largely developed his mature theory by 1959, Rawls continued tinkering with it and trying to address objections raised by colleagues and students until *Theory*’s publication in 1971. The result, Forrester argues, was that “a particular variety of postwar liberalism was preserved in philosophical amber for the duration of the 1960s” (xiv). A jaundiced eye might then see the popularity of *Theory* as part of a broader 1970s return to an idealized 1950s, like *Grease* or *Sha Na Na*, but Forrester sees the work’s incongruity with its time as generative.

Theorizing which stays too close to events can age as poorly as yesterday’s hot takes, failing to distinguish important developments from the daily

churn of happenings. But thought that is purely antiquarian generates no friction with the present. Forrester's books capture how Rawlsianism offered an ambiguous politics that could be brought into focus in a variety of ways, offering a vision familiar enough to be appealing and plausible while also different enough that it could guide aspirations for a better world. This ambiguity made it a readily shared discursive framework—and facilitated imagining the framework's author as a master thinker.

Perhaps we can clarify this dynamic if we understand “Rawls” the symbol on the model of what the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott called a transitional object.<sup>2</sup> According to Winnicott, a transitional object belongs to “an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute” (3). Transitional phenomena make their first appearance in infancy with “objects that are not part of the infant's body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality” (3), like particularly beloved blankets. Such an object serves as “a defense against anxiety, especially anxiety of depressive type” (5) because the infant experiences it as connected and under control in a way that fully external reality is not. But such an object is not fully interior; it can be “excitedly loved and mutilated” but nevertheless survives this “instinctual loving, and also hating and, if it be a feature, pure aggression” and thereby proves its reality as an enduring object (7).

Transitional phenomena are not limited to infancy. Winnicott argues that “the task of reality-acceptance is never completed,” but “relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience,” which in adulthood can be shared between “members of a group in art or religion or philosophy” (18). “Rawls” functioned in this manner for political philosophers and theorists, as a shared object of fantasy that made it possible to imagine a successful egalitarian liberalism. If Rawls didn't exist, liberals would have to invent him—and, in effect, they did. The persistence of “Rawls” helped alleviate anxiety that political philosophy and theory might not matter. Supporters could hail “Rawls” as a momentous and consequential thinker; critics could decry his hegemony. Supporters could excitedly love and mutilate “Rawls” to fit their topic; critics could direct aggression against “Rawls” and find in Rawlsianism's hegemony a reason that their own ideology failed to flourish. But they could be united in their assurance that “Rawls” mattered—the object survived their loving and aggression—and that their endeavor had real stakes.

Forrester's history of Rawlsianism largely ends in the late 1980s, when “Rawls” still loomed large. But are we still under his shadow? Winnicott says of the transitional object that, as the infant grows up, it isn't mourned but rather

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2. Donald W. Winnicott, “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,” in *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1–34.

“loses meaning” (7), becoming just a well-used blanket. Forrester’s book seeks to bring to a close this process of turning “Rawls” back into Rawls and Rawlsianism into “one doctrine among many” (279). In that sense, one might say the book’s aim is to give Rawlsianism a proper burial so that a genuinely egalitarian liberalism can live. Forrester is even sometimes able to position Rawls himself as the gravedigger; she highlights correspondence with H. L. A. Hart from 1985 in which Rawls wrote, “I am at the moment persuaded that the aims and methods of much current political philosophy are misconceived” (245).

What could egalitarian liberalism look like after Rawlsianism? What functions can Rawls serve if we treat him as a minor radical rather than a master thinker? Forrester offers a telling anecdote that captures both the radical bite of his principles and his inability to discern political currents. At the 1973 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Brian Barry accused Rawls of thinking that “nearly just” societies “actually exist,” “in the shape of the USA,” to which Rawls exasperatedly retorted, “Can anyone seriously believe that the inequalities of our society work out to the best advantage of the least favored, or that they nearly do so?” (126). After decades of neoliberalism, many do believe this, and in the service of defending this inequality, leaders of the US Republican Party and other economically conservative parties around the world are increasingly willing to avow explicitly antidemocratic views. Institutions of higher education have also been attacked, delegitimated, and transformed in this time. Tenure track positions are now an ever-shrinking proportion of a field in which two-thirds of instructors are adjuncts facing low pay and precarious employment.<sup>3</sup> With roughly \$1.7 trillion owed, student loans have become the second largest source of household debt in the United States, exceeding credit card payments and putting tremendous pressure on students to arrange their education in the service of meeting these financial demands.<sup>4</sup>

Since the publication of Forrester’s book, we have endured a global pandemic that has disproportionately exposed the poorest to harm and seen one of the most widespread protests in US history demanding police abolition and

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3. American Association of University Professors, *The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2020-21*, July 2021, [https://www.aaup.org/file/AAUP\\_ARES\\_2020-21.pdf](https://www.aaup.org/file/AAUP_ARES_2020-21.pdf).

4. Federal Reserve Bank of New York, *Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit*, August 2021, [https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/interactives/householdcredit/data/pdf/HHDC\\_2021Q2.pdf](https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/interactives/householdcredit/data/pdf/HHDC_2021Q2.pdf).

racial justice. Meanwhile, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has released increasingly dire predictions of the future as climate change has moved from expectation to reality. For some, returning to Rawls may feel like a warm blanket in such circumstances. After all, a good blanket is valuable, even if one's identity isn't wrapped up in it, and affirming the importance of justice remains worthwhile. But Forrester suggests we can do more with egalitarian liberalism today. If we take seriously the enormity of contemporary injustice, achieving freedom and equality together will require not only tremendous ambition and radical imagination but also real humility to reckon with how pervasive injustice has so far shaped egalitarian liberalism itself. Demanding equality in a society pervasively structured by white supremacy means something different than simply asking whether resources should be redistributed from policing to other public services. Similarly, we can and should consider the fair distribution of costs of adapting to a changing climate, but we also urgently need to begin a fundamental transformation of the unsustainable basic structure of global society. And while egalitarian liberals in elite schools arguably benefited from the inequality of the 1970s and 80s, the neoliberal hollowing out of universities may have reached the point that the continued viability of reading, writing, and teaching political theory and philosophy as a profession depends on making higher education genuinely available and accessible to all.

Such work can certainly be done in the spirit of Rawls, but it will require conceptual tools that go beyond his, and it will require political allies who are not themselves egalitarian liberals. Accordingly, against increasingly open defense of inequality and authoritarianism, we need new shared imaginaries that can help believers in human freedom and equality identify not with any one master thinker but with a broader coalition of those committed to justice for all.

*The Humanity of Universal Crime: Inclusion, Inequality, and Intervention in International Political Thought*, by Sinja Graf, New York: Oxford University Press, 261 pp.

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The expression “crimes against humanity” was used by Lloyd George to characterize the Kaiser's actions in initiating the Great War and figured again during the Nuremberg trials. In both cases, what was adverted to was

principally wars of aggression rather than atrocity and genocide. However, from the 1990s onward, the expression came to signify atrocity, including atrocities by governments and leaders against their own people, and it became a legal offense that could be tried, for instance, by the International Criminal Court.<sup>1</sup> The allegation of such a crime has been used as a justification for invasion of sovereign nation-states, and the expression circulates very widely in popular discourses. *The Humanity of Universal Crime* suggests that while “crimes against humanity” is a relatively recent invention, it has a much deeper genealogy in the form of the more elemental idea of “universal crime,” and it seeks to trace that genealogy through European international legal and political thought. Sinja Graf argues that in the past, as now, universal crime has invoked a collective and normatively integrated “humanity” in the very process of “dividing” it between those who uphold and those who offend against these norms and therefore are punishable. In her words, “notions of universal crime can provide for the uneven inclusion of foreign societies in ways that both subordinate them to the allegedly legitimate power of others and authorize imperial interventions as attempts to redress universal wrongs in the name of humanity” (77). She further seeks to show that the “political productivity” of invoking an idea of universal crime has been, more often than not, to position European states as the exemplars and enforcers of these human and thus universal norms against non-Europeans, who are frequently found to be in violation of them.

The introduction and the first chapter set out why the author thinks that universal crime, even though it has not yet been the subject of sustained inquiry, is of historical and intellectual importance: it has created “a distinctly political vision of humanity, one that combines inclusion with hierarchy and claims to justice with claims to legitimate coercion” (27). As with some other recent literature, Graf wishes to show that it was not that some were “excluded” from the definition of “humanity,” but rather that they were included not as equals but as lesser—as having violated normative bonds that must be reaffirmed and maintained through punishment of the offenders. Whether the mere fact of inclusion in humanity in this manner constitutes a

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1. For a good account of the shift in international law signaled by his title, see Samuel Moyn, “From Aggression to Atrocity: Rethinking the History of International Criminal Law,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Criminal Law*, edited by Kevin Jon Heller, Frédéric Mégret, Sarah Nouwen, et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp 341–360.



hierarchical ordering of humanity, or whether this is because the normative bonds that are held to constitute and characterize that collective subject are in fact the norms of Europeans rather than all humans, is not entirely clear—a point to which I will return.

Graf seeks to show that the notion of universal crime, and thus the invocation of a humanity bound together by shared and enforceable norms, has a long history. The second chapter seeks to show that this goes back all the way to John Locke. In the *Second Treatise of Government* Locke argues that, in the state of nature, the earth is given to all humankind by God, and that those who fail to cultivate it and make it fruitful “trespass against the whole species” and not merely against individuals. Thus the Indians of America, whom Locke took to be hunter-gatherers, were guilty of a “universal crime” that humankind—in the form of the European settler—was entitled, even obliged, to punish. Indigenous claims to property and sovereignty were thus erased, not because Locke failed to include the Native American equally within natural law, but because “the particular stipulations held as universal relegate her to the position of the universal criminal” (52). Graf offers an original and partly persuasive reading of Locke, although one almost wholly based upon chapter V of the *Second Treatise*, with little reference to other of his writings. Graf arrives at the important conclusion that while Locke did not invoke civilizational or racial differences, and in that sense was not, as David Armitage argues in his *Foundations of Modern International Thought*, an imperial theorist (oddly, this chapter is bookended by references to Armitage, as if the entire chapter was a disagreement with him), nonetheless, “The distinct kind of inclusion that the notion of universal crime enables allows Locke to set up hierarchies *internal* to his liberal universalism” (73).

If the notion of universal crime was one of the chief ways in which hierarchies between peoples—specifically, between European states and European settlers on the one hand and conquered and colonized peoples on the other—were established, then the nineteenth-century heyday of colonialism should have seen this category come into its own. In chapter three Graf concedes that it did not, and that this century *was* characterized by the “exclusion” of non-European states from the force of international law, which was held to be a European (and sometimes Christian) product rather than a natural law equally binding on all of humankind. Indeed, the notion of a universal crime was more often invoked by those seeking to abolish the slave trade and slavery than by those justifying these, or justifying conquest and colonial rule, thereby revealing “the malleability of political invocations of universal crime” and demonstrating that “Notions of universal crime are not by their

nature part and parcel of justificatory claims to imperial rule" (78, 107). However, even as she draws extensively upon the work of Jennifer Pitts, Graf disagrees with Pitts's characterization of the nineteenth century as one that saw a retreat from universality in the form of a "turn to empire." Graf argues that this "turn" simply replaced an "inclusionary Eurocentrism" with an "exclusionary" one, as international lawyers (this is the period when international law becomes professionalized) agreed that international law did not apply to or protect "barbarians," "savages," and the "uncivilized."

The final substantive chapter returns us to the present and to the idea of "crimes against humanity," which, the book has sought to show, is "the contemporary expression of the idea of a universal crime" (113). Graf offers a critique of those forms of liberal "cosmopolitanism" that invoke a normative universalism arising out of and anchored in "humanity" to justify "global policing" (i.e., military interventions) against those who violate these norms. Seyla Benhabib and (at greater length) Jürgen Habermas are her main targets. Against Benhabib, Graf persuasively argues that the deliberative democracy that is supposed to sanction criminal law and punishments arising out of the application of this law does not apply at the international level, where in the absence of a global polity, those punished (bombed, invaded, etc.) cannot be seen as the authors of the laws invoked against them. Moreover, "humanitarian interventions" (which are usually against individuals and states in the global South) often take the form of acts of war, with costs in human lives that are incompatible with the redefinition of these acts as "policing." Graf is also convincing in her refutation of Habermas, who supported the NATO intervention over the issue of Kosovo (and also the first Gulf War), but vehemently denounced the US-led war on Iraq, principally by making a distinction between the violation of human rights (by the Iraqi regime) and the (greater offense) of crimes against humanity (in Kosovo). In the absence of a global deliberative democracy that would allow us to say that the offenders were the authors of the laws they violated, Habermas argues that global moral outrage at the crimes committed in Kosovo functions as an adequate substitute. Graf has little trouble in showing that this is a weak argument, one at odds with the general thrust of Habermas's work and, moreover, one that reinforces the conclusion that Western states are the bearers and enforcers of cosmopolitan/universal legal principles and norms. This refutation is done well and is welcome, although it must be added that it requires no great ingenuity. Habermas's invocation of affect as a justification for redescribing acts of war as policing actions is a very weak argument indeed, and demonstrating that Habermas's thought is Eurocentric is almost redundant for someone who

has consistently held that the “unfinished” and historically progressive “project of modernity” originated in Europe, which remains its driving force.

Graf successfully demonstrates, as she puts it in her conclusion, that invoking man or “humanity” instead of the citizen in international contexts does not necessarily betoken “a morally improved world,” but rather often functions as a way “of articulating the hierarchies of humanity in a normative key” (173). *The Humanity of Universal Crime* ends by contrasting those who, in speaking of an Anthropocene, treat humanity as the agent responsible for climate change and those who—in parallel with her critique of universal crime, as she sees it—argue that this willfully overlooks the unequal positions and responsibilities of those gathered under this homogenizing rubric. I am unconvinced that there is a parallel here, and this very brief and sketchy treatment of a complex issue is an unfortunate note on which to end an otherwise interesting book.

Earlier I adverted to what I see as an ambiguity in the argument. At times Graf seems to suggest that the very fact of invoking “humanity” in the context of “universal crime” generates differentiation and hierarchy: “Once tied to a law that can be contravened, humanity spans a spectrum of normatively ranked positions ranging from the law-abiding to the law-breakers. . . . Such a vision of mankind therefore depends on treating the aberrant and the compliant unequally, which renders it markedly different from an ethical imagination of mankind as a unified community of free and equal members” (5). But I do not see that the second sentence follows from the first. Domestic or municipal criminal law also presupposes a normative community and by definition allows that there will be law breakers, but we do not thereby say this alone makes it unequal or hierarchical. This requires an additional argumentative step—one that has been taken, for instance, by those who show that American law effectively works to criminalize minorities—a step showing that the norms of this community are in fact the norms of those dominant within it. It is indeed a key argument of this book that invocations of universal crime articulate the norms and serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful (and mostly Western) nations, and it is a very important one, but it is not the same as suggesting that positing universal crimes against humanity in and of itself creates hierarchy and inequality.

There are also some omissions (apart from the inexplicable absence of a bibliography) that, while they would not necessarily have compromised the arguments advanced in *The Humanity of Universal Crime*, might have extended and complicated these in interesting ways. The Nuremberg trials

warranted detailed treatment, rather than the occasional cursory references offered here. Slavery and the slave trade are more-or-less coterminous with the beginnings of the notion of what Graf calls universal crime, and it would have been interesting to know how—apart from the use of this notion by abolitionists—invocations of humanity and universal crime intersected with the enslavement of humans. And greater acknowledgment and some engagement with those non-Western critics of the uses and misuses of “humanity” and “humanism”—Fanon and Césaire among them—would have added some range and depth to a book that is otherwise almost wholly concerned with Western thinkers and with the natural and positive international law traditions of Europe.

There is by now a substantial body of literature that shows that the social arrangements and normative standards often proclaimed to be universal are particular to Europe. The previously mentioned criticisms notwithstanding, this mostly well-argued and thought-provoking work is a welcome addition to this literature. It convincingly shows that current efforts to invoke “humanity” as a moral reference point do not always herald an expansion of our moral horizons and demonstrates that such efforts have a prehistory in which “human” all too often meant European, or white.

*In the Street: Democratic Action, Theatricality, and Political Friendship*, by Çiğdem Çidam. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021 (256 pages).

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How are we to make sense of the protest politics that currently spans both the globe and political orientation today? When asked by Çiğdem Çidam, this question has a twofold meaning, as *In the Street* interrogates the discourses that predominate interpretations of protest and the role of the intellectual in interpreting them. In doing so, Çidam reveals the tenacity of Rousseauian presumptions that mean some of the most famous advocates of protest politics—Antonio Negri, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Rancière—still truncate the nature and significance of protest in their accounts.

Çidam reveals a Rousseau who, for all his grounding of a modern democratic theory, remains pointedly antidemocratic when it comes to assembling in public. Rousseau's delimitation and careful orchestration of opportunities for spontaneous assembly make this clear, as does his account of them as both immediate and unified in their expression of popular will. For Çidam, to conceive of public assembly as Rousseau does fundamentally confuses the spontaneity of protests with lack of mediation, reducing the complexity and dynamism of the collective gathered, activity therein, and ultimate impact to a single note. Within such a reading, the interpreter hunts for what, to Çidam, is simply not present: a singular or unified set of group demands or identity, and a simple, binaric answer to the question of political efficacy based on institutional impacts beyond the event. And when these simple metrics are not forthcoming, intellectuals often conclude that such protests have failed and thus trivialize what occurs within, and because of, protest.

Scholars like Antonio Negri, Jürgen Habermas, and Jacques Rancière challenge Rousseau's estimation of spontaneous assembly. And yet Çidam rigorously demonstrates that even in these valorizing reconfigurations of protest, core tenets of Rousseau's account of protest persist. Specifically, though each challenges a key dimension of this position, they all continue to confuse spontaneity with immediacy, wherein the protesting community is reduced to a single, unified expression of political will. With an almost sculptural quality, Çidam traces an as-yet-unacknowledged through-line from Negri to Habermas to Rancière, each unpicking a key Rousseauian claim persisting in the critique of the prior and yet letting others remain.

For Negri, the people as *multitude* rather than unity of identity and interests in protest is not a weakness, and the political is not merely government or regime but rather a moment enacted. And yet the transience of these insurgent moments remains a failing for Negri as it was for Rousseau, one that must result in a newly organized political community to be successful and, by extension, requires the intellectual to harness this revolutionary energy to produce it. For Habermas, this *transience* is not a failing but a strength, protecting as it does against centralization, hierarchies, and professionalization within democratic social movements. And yet, to stave off concerns he shares with Rousseau regarding the unpredictability of such movements, he holds they should be accountable constitutional principles and thus led by intellectuals knowledgeable of them. For Rancière, *unpredictability* is not a fault like it is for Habermas, as it is what enables what is unperceived to stage their "forced-entry into the world of meaning and visibility" (qtd. 3), and this

highly theatrical act of rupture and reworking rather than its institutionalization is the enactment of politics. And yet, while acknowledging the complex, unfolding, and mediated nature of protest, Rancière stops short of exploring specific protests in such terms, perhaps because these dynamics necessarily share ground with the organization and bonds that characterize a police order.

Çidam illustrates how this longer and often latent Rousseauian legacy within Negri, Habermas, and Rancière results in “the limiting and limited nature” (190) of debates of democratic action that still prevail in both academic and mainstream interpretations of protest. Construing such moments “as the unmediated expressions of people’s will and/or instantaneous popular eruptions, they reduce spontaneity to immediacy and, in doing so, lose sight of the rich, creative, and varied practices of political actors who manage to create those events against all odds” (4).

For Çidam, protest is itself a site of mediated politics, where diverse actors congregate for various reasons and thus participate in ongoing processes of organization, contestation, and negotiation—what Çidam calls “the working existence of democracy” (185). In an unlikely yet generative turn, Çidam reads Aristotle as agonist to find in “political friendship” a depiction of this complexity of forging relations across difference and disagreement and creating a commons however fleeting. Contra Rousseau and those inheriting his frames, Aristotle did not presume this action “in the street” was unmediated and thus of single, unified meaning, claim, act, or effect, and these intermediating practices through which diverse groups relate and negotiate those differences need not become reconciled nor be permanent in order to be politically significant.

In what is perhaps the most compelling of its chapters, Çidam illustrates this reading of protest and what it opens to our analysis via the case of the Gezi Park protests. Putting aside reductive questions regarding its success or failure, Çidam asks instead what intermediating practices enabled such diverse actors—feminists and football fans, homeless youth and residents, LGBTQ activists and anticapitalist Muslims, far left political parties and anarchists—to sustain a “commons” that occupied Gezi Park for two weeks in the face of police suppression. She explores how the differences within this fleeting community meant complementarity as well as conflict and redress—football fans extended expertise in responding to tear gas and doctors cared for injured protesters, but feminists and LGBTQ activists ran workshops to generate alternatives to sexist and homophobic slogans and chants. She highlights how the protesters contended with nonrecognition and misinterpretation by the media. She investigates how the protests produce impacts far

more diffuse and multiform than institutional or legal changes: from shaking Erdoğan's sense of invulnerability to developing new political habits and imaginaries for those who experienced "a way of living without . . . any form of tyranny" (190), the protests made visible and sensible "the possibility of an alternative world" (184). And she explores how, because of how such direct actions change the conditions of possibility for future resistance, the protests did not "erupt" from nowhere but from "political practices, or habits, of various actors in struggles preceding the Gezi protests . . . that made it possible for thousands of protesters in Gezi to act . . . in such a swift and seamless manner" (165).

Çidam offers a beautiful, thorough, original, and important cartography of how Rousseauian inheritance wends its way even through some of those who would seem to hold protest close, and how this inheritance trivializes the complexity and significance of democratic action within social movements today. Against deeply held understandings of the nature and importance of a politics of representation, Çidam persuasively argues that constituent power need not be translated into either intellectual interpretation or institutional form to be meaningful or successful. Its messiness and impurity, its transience, its unpredictability—none of these things negates the instantiations of political action within such events, or their impacts beyond the event. By changing the terms of analysis of protest in these ways, Çidam's work speaks to praxis as much as theory. It challenges theorists to interrogate the long-held presumption of our role as privileged interpreters, as if our reading from a distanced vantage is both necessary and more comprehensive than those who are acting on the ground. It challenges the interpretive frames that predominate in such analysis, calling for an end to the hunt for simple, unified stories of group identity, claim, or impact. And in raising new and revitalizing questions for making sense of the politics of protest, this work also contributes to the praxis of protest, with implications for how we might enhance and hold accountable the unfolding relations and negotiations therein.

The significance of Çidam's intervention crystallized as protests "erupted" ("*as if*. . . out of nowhere" [165]) across Aotearoa New Zealand in early 2022 to protest the various COVID-19-related mandates. Here in the nation's capital, inspired by the truckers' protests in Canada, hundreds of people occupied the lawns facing Parliament for more than three weeks. Çidam's refreshing frames highlighted the absurdity of overly binaric narratives apparent in the media's scramble to cover unfolding events—protesters "are or are not" coordinated, "can or cannot" make claims, "do or do not" have lasting impacts—and the absurdity of privileging academic voices over and above

the community that was occupying the lawns in these accounts. They highlighted how these two habits of conventional interpretation, as Çidam argues, are connected. Çidam's work prompted me to urge journalists to take their questions instead down to the lawn and to tarry far more than I may have prior with the radically diverse, internally conflictual, and yet "communing" multitude over these weeks.

Here, as Çidam described Gezi Park, was a broad spectrum of political ideologies: libertarians and human rights advocates, white nationalists and Indigenous sovereignty activists, alternative health communities and conspiracy theorists. Coming together did not absorb these differences, either, as messages and atmospheres of "peace, love, unity" shared space with calls to "hang 'em high," swastikas, and harassment of mask wearers walking by. And yet protesters demonstrated remarkable coordination and collective action, from the rapid digging of trenches in response to torrential rain, to the organization of collective food, a school and medical tent, to the battlefield-like coordination to throw bricks at encroaching police and light fires in the final retreat. Internal differences remained even in these last clashes, when smoke and raging bodies cleared to reveal a few Māori elders still sitting peacefully in their camping chairs.

Çidam's analysis made undeniable that politics—of organization, contestation, and continual (re)negotiation—were at work within this protest. It raised an eyebrow at efforts to determine univocally either what the protesters wanted or whether it succeeded. Rather, Çidam presented salient new questions to make sense of this politics: How did these otherwise often radically opposed communities form and sustain relationships, make collective decisions, and maintain a community? And—an altogether new metric for analyzing such movements—in this case where alt-right and white supremacists were in the crowds, how did protesters contend with and hold accountable those internal differences that threaten others? Finally, how did these acts affect future terms and habits for subjectivity, communication, and enactment for these and other political actors? But just as importantly, Çidam tempers the intellectual's impulse to speak with authority on these events—indeed, she reveals how the depiction of protest's internal diversity, transience, and unpredictability as weakness may be linked to the intellectual desire to serve as full and final interpreter, for these features make such a vantage impossible. Çidam asks us, instead, to have a deeper faith in and commitment to praxis as lived theory, where actors on the ground organize and articulate for themselves, with these rhizomatic acts never fully traceable and yet no less significant.



Given its theorization of the democratic action within social movements, *In the Street* speaks to a broader scholarship that is not engaged in this book, but for which it already overlaps and will have a ready audience. Most relevant to this study is the social movements literature that theorizes protest as the enactment of both strategic and prefigurative forms of political action, creating “temporary autonomous zones” within these disruptive acts and changing social imaginaries as a result (for example, Chris Dixon or Mark and Paul Engler). Also connected, if only implicitly, is the current scholarship on protest’s politics of reception (such as José Medina, Deva Woodly, or Cristina Beltrán) that explores these dynamics in their complexity. Finally, this project connects with theorizations of horizontal practices of both individuation and “communing” across difference within popular assembly (such as Gilbert Simondon, Jeremy Gilbert, and Jason Frank). Engagement with such scholarship might further nuance this account of how protest continues to exercise strategic pressure and communicative aims, even as politics unfolds among those gathered and even as those demands and efforts to effect change beyond the event remain multiple and unruly.

*In the Street* sheds new light on how we read protest and some of its most influential proponents. It eloquently argues not only for the value of what is ephemeral, incohesive, and unpredictable in protest, but that our very notions of the temporality and lasting impacts are enriched when we consider the afterlives and intertextuality of such events over time. Finally, it problematizes the overinflation of the intellectual’s role in making sense of such events, even as it demonstrates the significant contribution they have to offer the theory and praxis of protest.