

The second main argument against Rousseau addressed by Cohen is related to a famous passage about the total alienation of rights to the sovereign. Rousseau's critics interpret this passage as the former's abandonment of natural rights and the complete subordination of the individual to the collective will. However, Cohen disagrees with this approach. He accepts that natural rights are abandoned when citizens enter civil society. However, he argues that individual rights will be preserved in the society of the general will. Rights will be conferred to the individual by the general will, and rights can only be claimed with reference to the content of the general will. Thus, the right to property will be protected, not because it is natural, but because the owner is the trustee of the general will. Cohen adds that, because of the particular interest condition, a considerable bundle of rights will be granted to the citizen.

A weakness of this argument derives from Cohen's underestimation of Rousseau's claim about the sovereignty of the general will. Rousseau maintains that individuals will alienate their rights to the community only insofar as necessary for the community's wellbeing. However, the sovereign community is the judge to what is necessary. Thus, Cohen fails to see that the complete subordination to the community can occur if a majority of citizens decides so.

Overall, Cohen's attempt to justify Rousseau's ideas, leads to innovative understandings of the *Social Contract* and other works. The language of analytical philosophy is well employed. Clear and precise, the book is addressed to not only experts on Rousseau but also to those interested in philosophy in general.

Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized. Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010)

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Alongside theories of democracy and the evolution of its forms from the 5th century B.C. there is a rich tradition of political reflection. The latter aims to reveal the functioning of such a regime at the often ignored level of common citizens. In the political theory of democracy, researchers distinguish between normative and empirical approaches. However, the above mentioned tradition seems to be less characterised by a methodological approach (be it normative or empirical), theoretical-political in nature, and more anthropologically oriented. In this direction, the most meaningful example seems to be Alexis de Tocqueville's who, although seen as an outstanding theorist of democracy, may also be described as an "excursionist" in search of real, palpable democracy, of a democracy that is being

built every day, and whose main promoters are not politicians and government decision-makers but common people.

Jeffrey Stout's *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* subscribes to this tradition of thought on democracy. The book focuses on the ways in which simple citizens build their own organizations, how they understand the relations of power within the social space, how they choose their leaders, treat their allies and opponents, and try and sometimes succeed in accomplishing their goals. Without pretending to configure a discourse able to perfectly cover all the aspects involved in the democratic practices of the contemporary societies, Stout claims that grassroots democracy is a democracy built in the context of daily reality. This process is enhanced by common people able to get organised based on a culture of association. Through these associations, they are most likely to become a force no longer ignored either by the governmental factors in a community or by the politicians who represent them formally in legislative structures. Such an approach starts precisely from the observation that democratic theory is too abstract to express the current realities threatening democratic organisation and that a credible alternative of explaining how democracy works supposes coming back to experience.

The excursion proposed by Stout into the world of "democratic experience" is neither normative nor empirical methodologically. More likely, it is a story of democracy told by its leading actors, the citizens. Nevertheless, the journey is special, as stressed in the title of the book, and here again we notice de Tocqueville's mark since it deals with grassroots democracy in America. The story develops "on the field" and extracts its elements from the testimonies of common people met on a road that begins in Katrina-stricken New Orleans, goes on to the Houston Astrodome, reaches the borders of Texas, moves to Arizona and California and ends in a synagogue in Marin County. Therefore, it is a story of democratic life in all these communities and, from this perspective, it is likely to be a magnet for readers who are the common citizens the book talks about as well as theorists of democracy, be they teachers, students or political decision-makers.

Stout's book recalls the anthropological journeys from the second half of the 19th century, but it remains perfectly grounded in the coordinates of current American society. The aspect that is particularly interesting is that Jeffrey Stout, the political "excursionist", included communities in crisis in his journey into grassroots democracy. Thus, the approach is contextualised and is perspectivist as the author himself reckons in the introductory part of the book (p. xvi). He is not interested in issuing a neutral theory complying with epistemological positivism's sense of objectivity but in observing, experiencing directly the reality of these communities, how common people manage to get organised under circumstances that represent real challenges. Of course, the elements of American associative culture have been

noticed since the early stages of democratic organisation in that country and explanations based on empirical measurements were provided by both democratic theorists and political scientists throughout the last century. But what Stout brings to our attention is that, beyond the measurable elements of that which, since Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, bears the name of "civic culture", there is a certain dimension of citizenship that needs to be rediscovered. And this dimension virtually points out to the initial signification of the term, which tells us that the citizen is the one who gets involved in the life of the community so that, along with others, they can pursue a common good.

Thus, the limited understanding of citizenship, the purely administrative one, is abandoned and the political meaning of the term is forged. Stout illustrates very well this reality when he explains, for instance, how a Hispanic immigrant can be a citizen politically by getting involved in solving and managing community issues and by becoming an authority acknowledged within it, all the while lacking the legal and administrative papers of a US citizen. Subsequently, it may be said that, to the extent to which it attempts to highlight the political role of active citizenship and to reveal the forms of democratic organisation at the level of small communities, the book achieves its goal. In the same context, I believe it is important to mention that this study puts back to good use the anthropological method, materialised in an interpretative formula of understanding the relationships within the community framework and of explaining how common people can impose, owing to their organised activism, the authorities' political accountability. The stress on this side of the approach becomes visible, for instance, when the author notes that "grassroots democracy is an evolving collection of practices intended to perfect the exercise of political responsibility by citizens in a republic that officially aspires to be democratic. As such, grassroots democracy is essentially social, as well as essentially embodied in action".

As the excursion proposed by the author is assumed, in the book's subtitle, as one focussing exclusively on American society, it is difficult to say to what extent his observations are extendable to the level of a generally applicable theory. Of course, Jeffrey Stout does not proclaim this goal as one of the book's objectives, his arguments in favour of democratic organisation focussing on the communities that, through the organisation of their citizens, are able to provide practical solutions to the issues of daily reality. Also highlighting the critical points of American society, the endeavour portrayed by the author in this study is an intellectually honest one and belongs to the line of research on the specific political culture of a given country, without aiming at configuring a comparative dimension. However, it can be a starting point for research that could eventually reveal the existence of various models of grassroots democracy belonging to different cultural spaces. Written in a dynamic style and insisting on the characters' profiles, Stout's book is a useful

supplement, with data specific to contemporary society, to the political anthropology studies whose main theme is how democratic communities function.

Richard Ned Lebow. *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

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International relations, as a discipline, is concerned with the many and varied questions that arise through inter-state engagement. Some are trivial and fleeting, specific to a certain space and time and destined to only ever emerge as a sub-specialty, perhaps with a small group of committed yet marginalised scholars pursuing answers to questions that most in the field will only ever consider of secondary or tertiary appeal. Some questions, though, are central to what this social science is about, perhaps none more so than questions of war and peace in international politics. International politics, so said John Mearsheimer, is a ruthless and dangerous business and there is no sector of that business more ruthless or dangerous than war. As a result, understanding why states enter into wars that have, in the last century alone, led to the collapse of empires, the subjugation of great powers and the destruction of man and his environment is essential, if only to mitigate the ruthlessness and danger and not solve it. In this disciplinary and historical context, Richard Ned Lebow's *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* offers an argument that, if heeded, should teach theorists and practitioners of international affairs just how and why they continue to find themselves embroiled in conflict year after year.

Lebow's book is presented in seven chapters, including an introduction to his work and a thoughtful and reflective conclusion. The body of his work begins with an assessment of existing explanations for the occurrence of war (Chapter 2: Theories of War) followed by his key research findings on historical wars (Chapter 3: Theory and Propositions and Chapter 4: Data Set and Findings). Lebow follows his historical assessment of the causes of war with an assessment of the probable future causes and incidence of war in international politics. The fifth chapter (Interest and Security) clearly avoids specific prediction and instead engages in what Lebow terms "informed speculation" (p.132) about the likely continuation of the historical causal trends he has previously established, beginning with interest and security. The following chapter (Chapter 6: Standing and Revenge) considers the other two historical motives for war which between them are implicated in contributing to almost 70% of the wars in Lebow's data set. A conclusion follows, summarising the research but also carefully limiting the study and warning against social scientists giving too much weight to proximate causes when theorising war. The volume is