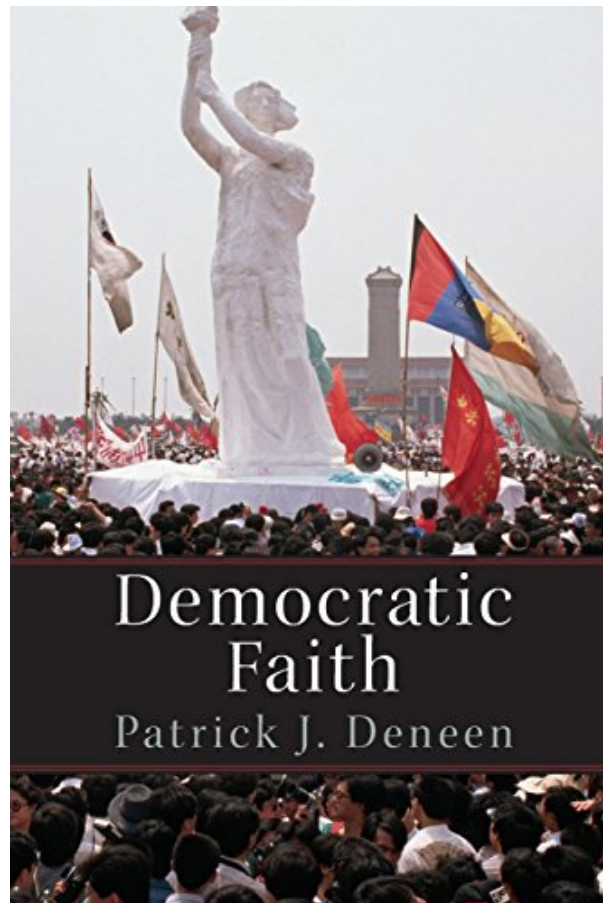
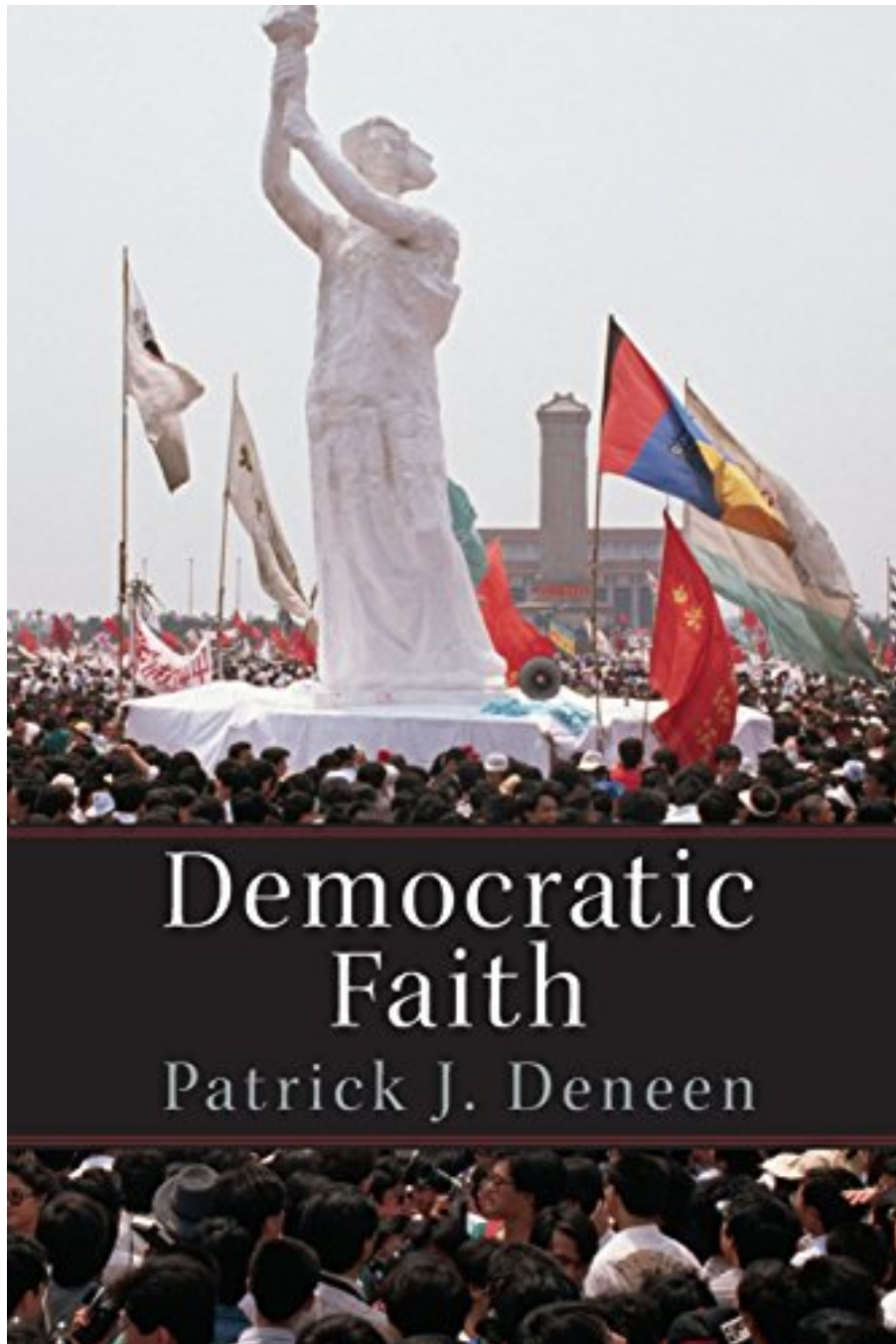


DEMOCRATIC FAITH (NEW FORUM BOOKS) BY PATRICK DENEEN



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The American political reformer Herbert Croly wrote, "For better or worse, democracy cannot be disentangled from an aspiration toward human perfectibility." Democratic Faith is at once a trenchant analysis and a powerful critique of this underlying assumption that informs democratic theory. Patrick Deneen argues that among democracy's most ardent supporters there is an oft-expressed belief in the need to "transform" human beings in order to reconcile the sometimes disappointing reality of human self-interest with the democratic ideal of selfless commitment. This "transformative impulse" is frequently couched in religious language, such as the need for political "redemption." This is all the more striking given the frequent accompanying condemnation of traditional religious belief that informs the "democratic faith."

At the same time, because so often this democratic ideal fails to materialize, democratic faith is often subject to a particularly intense form of disappointment. A mutually reinforcing cycle of faith and disillusionment is frequently exhibited by those who profess a democratic faith--in effect imperiling democratic commitments due to the cynicism of its most fervent erstwhile supporters.

Deneen argues that democracy is ill-served by such faith. Instead, he proposes a form of "democratic realism" that recognizes democracy not as a regime with aspirations to perfection, but that justifies democracy as the regime most appropriate for imperfect humans. If democratic faith aspires to transformation, democratic realism insists on the central importance of humility, hope, and charity.

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10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

If it's not obvious, the preceding review is not a review

By Elias F. Crim

Patrick Deneen has many remarkable insights about the illusory nature of democracy in this book, one another reviewer (not the dyspeptic Mr. Fuchs) mentions in the same breath with the work of Hannah Arendt. Deneen has the temerity to reflect critically on democracy as an ersatz religion, which is possibly what Amazon reviewer Mr. Fuchs is melting down about nearby here in his tizzy of ad hominem, faux-sophisticate sneering and exasperated atheism. Jeez, Cornel West liked the book. Mr. Fuchs comes across like one of those people you see manning a Lyndon Larouche table.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By Cyrus

Insightful commentary - contemporary application, timeless principles.

4 of 41 people found the following review helpful.

How Convenient: Rousseau Ex Machina!

By Peter P. Fuchs

First things first. What this book is really a great example of is the very brilliant and deft use of wiggle words and easy escape clauses like "if only implicitly". Now no one writing about large themes can escape such conveniences, but when they are used to couch the basic theme of the book, there is trouble. The book uses Rousseau's thought and life as a metaphor for a lot else in politics. But even with the central theme, it is "only implicitly". This is the big tip-off. The author has a deeper agenda snuggled next to his heart, which he wants to bring forth. In this case it is likely a sort of reactionary Catholicism, or reactionary thought per se. No amount of quoting Rorty is going to ameliorate this guy's presence on wildly reactionary sites like the Front Porch Republic (which has advocated return to Monarch no less-- I'm not kidding!) . It gets worse though. For somehow he wishes with this book to leave the purposively vague impression that a lot of decent instincts in democratic republics are at bottom somehow related to acceptance rather unappealing sides of Rousseau.....of course "if only implicitly". Well, real political freedom ain't very "implicit", as the Christians in the Middle East. He is so slippery on this, wielding his wiggle words and escape clauses like an craft show artiste, that it is often hard to find one sentence that is not answered by another that seems to couch it, designed for unclarity itself. In tragic irony, along the way he treats the Founders of real, decent democracies as utterly suspicious of the same, which is an irresponsible exaggeration for sure. (One good read of Walter Berns' Religion and the Founding Principle article will be like a good sherbert to cleanse the palate after a bad course.) But make no mistake he wants us to be suspicious of what most of us take for democracy, and are thankful for, because it is related somehow "if only implicitly" to Rousseau's ambitions.

Of course it is just propaganda of a sort ,and extremely tendentious, And once again shows the rather bought-and-paid for nature of University publishing anymore. Naturally it all completely predictably involves his proposing of his own view as some sort of "realism", against great "cynicism" and some sort of traditional view, which secretly means his own view without the grad school patina and rhetoric. You would scarcely know that a lot of the exquisite parsing between "perfectibility" and "men as they are" -- his extremely sound-bitey scattered polarities -- was admirably present in much more cogent ways in the very works of the Founders of democracies whom he wants to paint as suspicious of them! In the end, one can only guess that the whole thing is just a prolegomenon for the assumed need for some sort of Natural Law theory to undergird democracy. Just something Goldilocks- perfect like Thomism of some variety. Unsurprisingly, Robert George is even the editor here! How convenient.

The funny thing about this bad book is that the author seems at one point to diffusely criticize Rousseau's dislike of cities and cosmopolitanism. He want to sound with-it and trendy of course, and young people like cities of course. Again it is a little hard to tell, but that is the vibe. Now a few years later after living in DC and teaching kids at Georgetown, he announces on Front Porch Republic that he has had enough! He wants the small town, and the circle is closed; he is packin'up and moving to South Bend. He cannot buy a house in DC on a professor's salary, that's the unlikely excuse. Of course there are lots of fine people in the burbs. But as I have pointed out online, it is soooo strange that all these Catholic conservatives do not want to live right near "Little Rome" in the District. He could have afforded a house there probably. It all sounds like an excuse. There is an excess of democracy in the city, and too many men and women "as they are" and not as this self-indulgent and self-pitying fellow desires them to be.

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