

democratic polity” (p. 8). However, the ambitions of this book go well beyond the historical account of what happened in Athens. Rather, the author argues “there is a congruence between the Athenian version of freedom of speech, of philosophy, and democracy, all exhibiting a common hostility to hierarchy and to history or the past” (p. 36).

The analysis of free speech in the first chapter contrasts our contemporary understanding of free speech as a right, or a means of thwarting the power of the government, with the Athenian version, which “is the affirmation of the equality of participation and self-rule” (p. 24). The author then is able to connect this, the Athenian conception of democracy, to Socratic philosophy, thereby providing the central comparison on which the book turns: “To rule themselves, the people must liberate themselves from what has been, just as the interlocutors in the Platonic dialogues must shed the chains of past opinions to engage in the pursuit of what is true” (p. 40). For the rest of the book, democracy and philosophy are portrayed as disciplines that allow individuals to engage in the common enterprise of releasing themselves from the past through a shameless exposure of their opinions, in pursuit of the city’s good or in pursuit of the truth (p. 159).

Although she does not make this same comparison, think of the boldness of the Athenians in the Melian dialogue of Thucydides and Thrasymachus’s speech, which she does examine, in the *Republic*. Both are shocking in their frankness, in their *parrhêsia*. Yet both fail. The Athenians so horrify the Melians with their frankness that a peaceful surrender is not achieved, and Thrasymachus is silenced by Socrates for the remainder of a very long dialogue when the philosopher makes him blush.

Shame, it turns out, cannot so easily be overcome by free speech. The love of the old ways and the hiding of certain acts serve to bind people together in a political community. The central question of the book then becomes: “[I]s democracy grounded on the communitarian individual who experiences shame in a historical context or on the liberal individual who is free from both history and shame?” (p. 77). The lesson the author draws from Thucydides’s account of Athenian democracy seems to be that democracy is grounded in neither but exists in a precarious balance between the two. On the one hand, democracy demands that citizens expose themselves to others through their shameless *parrhêsia*, looking forward and never backward, never being held to tradition or custom. On the other, the most successful democratic leaders often speak no more frankly than the ironic Socrates, appealing to shared beliefs such as the praise for *parrhêsia* rather than practicing it (p. 157). In a central example, Diodotus shames the Athenians into changing their mind in regards to the Mytileneans (p. 160).

Free speech in the assembly is also supposed to be true speech, not deceptive speech. The ideal of *parrhêsia* demands that the speaker reveal his—or her (p. 134f)—

most deeply held, authentic views on the subject, which gives it an ambiguous role in a representative system (p. 24). Rhetoric is a perversion of *parrhêsia* because it is intentionally deceptive (p. 92), even when such deception is necessary for the good of the city, as Nicias failed to understand (p. 171). Thus, despite the many ways in which democracy does not and may not ever succeed in living up to the goal it shares with philosophy (pp. 171–73), the two share more than might at first appear to be the case.

There is a great deal more to this book than I have been able to mention, especially as regards the role of *parrhêsia* in philosophy. Nevertheless, the true accomplishment of this book is to reveal the connection between democracy and philosophy through their common dependence on *parrhêsia*. Each relies on frankness in speech and a willingness on the part of the speaker to expose his or her self to the criticism and, at its best, the instruction of others. However, democratic polities must rely on more than *parrhêsia* to preserve themselves: They also rely on its opposite, on shame. Because “*parrhêsia* cultivate[s] its own abuses” (p. 209), we learn that the philosophic pretenses of democracy will and can never be met.

The question that this book—like all the best books on democracy—leads us to ask is whether democracy can achieve even its political ambitions through its own practices. The author only motions toward an answer. At a time when philosophical liberalism and deliberative democracy compete for supremacy in the academy, the great regret in reading this book is that, out of philosophic irony or concern for the city, she is not more frank about providing an answer.

**Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique.** By Lisa H. Schwartzman. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2006. 224p. \$45.00.  
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—Emily R. Gill, *Bradley University*

In this book, Schwartzman argues that liberalism’s methodological individualism and its neutrality through abstraction from social contexts and relations of power render it a questionable approach for those who would challenge the oppression of women or, by extension, of other traditionally subordinated groups. She instead advocates a feminist methodology based on ways that individuals are often embedded in a social context characterized by power and domination. She would not have us jettison concepts such as rights, equality, liberty, and autonomy, but would have us reformulate them by attending to perspectives and contexts that help us to avoid the pitfalls of liberalism.

To this end, Schwartzman in seven chapters brings to bear her approach on the work of theorists whose ideas contribute to the rejection of domination but are also in the end found wanting. Among liberal theorists, Ronald Dworkin’s emphasis on equality of concern and respect

tends to focus too narrowly on negative liberty, or the violation that occurs when the state acts to *deprive* an individual of rights, rather than on positive liberty, or the state action that may be required to ensure that individuals have rights at the outset and the social conditions to make use of them. Schwartzman compares Catherine MacKinnon favorably to Dworkin, as MacKinnon understands that equality does not simply mean neutral treatment of expressed preferences, but also requires attention to the concrete social context that structures those preferences at the starting line. Additionally, Dworkin's point that inequality of circumstance should be compensated for as a matter of justice, while inequality of ambition or taste is a matter of individual responsibility, ignores the broader role of social, political, and economic circumstance in the process of preference formation. Similarly, John Rawls focuses too narrowly on economic equality and slides from endorsing the existence of reasonable pluralism to assuming that respect for the "current pluralism of beliefs" about gender in our own society is mandated (p. 66).

Moving on to other moral theorists, Schwartzman argues that Nora O'Neill's rejection of idealization but retention of abstraction still privileges a particular ideal of personhood that centers on agency and rationality. O'Neill's assumption that rational agents would not make choices undercutting their own agency is problematic, and she oversimplifies this difficulty by assuming that victims of oppression are either coerced or are not truly victims, as their status is shaped by social context. Martha Nussbaum is correct to maintain that liberalism can accommodate feminist critiques of abstraction, but fails to realize that liberalism's respect for "differences" cannot identify deep sources of oppression in domination and hierarchy. If the liberal approach requires that people be the same before they deserve equality, "men are the ones who set the standard to which women need to be 'similar' in order to deserve equal treatment" (p. 101).

Schwartzman finishes her survey by considering postmodern feminists Wendy Brown and Judith Butler. Brown is wary of focusing on the particularities of women's oppression because this practice may categorize and redefine women essentially as victims, thereby reinforcing this oppression. For Schwartzman, however, "Without their having access to other women's experience, it would be extremely difficult for individual women to begin to see that male dominance is a *system* of abuse" (p. 122). She also disagrees with Brown's contention that feminists should not attempt to redefine moral concepts such as rights or justice. Where Brown views these categories as static, Schwartzman maintains that collective action can and does instigate social change. Butler, on the other hand, is wary of classifying practices like hate speech as injurious, because this requires pinning down a social context that then appears static and resistant to

possible change. For Schwartzman, however, legal action calls attention to "the structures of oppression that give the perpetrator's speech its injurious force" (p. 150).

In her concluding chapter, Schwartzman uses the controversy over pornography to exemplify "an approach that begins with a reconstructed ideal of equality, understood not as abstract sameness, but as a feminist principle of nondomination grounded in the concrete experiences of women" (p. 163). Rather than asking if individuals, whether as participants in the making of or as consumers of pornography, consent to it, she begins by understanding equality to mean that no one should be oppressed based on membership in a particular social group, and then asks, "Do particular social institutions and practices (such as pornography) reinforce, perpetuate, or contribute to women's inequality?" (p. 165). While this approach need not mean banning or censoring all pornography, it probably means a reduction in its production and distribution if we think critically about its effects on women's equality. Where liberals typically ask what kind of society *individuals* would form, Schwartzman begins with groups, which require analysis of actual power structures. Where Dworkin asks if we have a right to pornography, feminists should analyze the effects of pornography on the lives of women as a group and recognize male dominance as a form of social power.

This book constitutes a fine analysis of liberal, feminist, and postmodern theories and is persuasive in its argument that maximizing individuals' equality and freedom requires an analysis of social power, or of what Will Kymlicka would call the context of (individual) choice. Schwartzman anticipates possible liberal objections that liberalism can itself accommodate her criticisms. She points out, however, that this accommodation by itself cannot guide us in rooting out systems of oppression, and that liberalism is unlikely to endorse her critique "without radically altering its theoretical priorities" (p. 162). As a liberal, however, I believe that greater attention to systems of social power would mean a shift in emphasis, rather than an alteration of priorities. Liberals certainly address the concepts of equality or liberty in themselves, but they also often attend to what may be necessary to maximize the *worth* of equality, liberty, formal rights, and so forth. It is here that analyses of social context and power may pay dividends, and it is also here that Schwartzman has much to teach.

**The Liberal Conscience: Politics and Principle in a World of Religious Pluralism.** By Lucas Swaine. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 240p. \$35.00.  
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— Patrick J. Deneen, *Georgetown University*

In this book, Lucas Swaine argues that modern liberalism has failed in its efforts to provide adequate justification of