



particular his defence of the modern state as an institution indispensable to individual freedom and social justice (pp. 151–152). Yet *Reclaiming the Enlightenment* is disappointing for two reasons, the first concerning Bronner's overly enthusiastic rehabilitation of the Enlightenment, the second his arguable enervation of its radical heritage. While certainly cognizant of the link between Enlightenment thought and modern capitalism, and calling for a decisive break with classical liberalism, Bronner fails to excavate that link in sufficient depth and thus suppresses the invidious role 'contract' and other liberal ideals played in justifying, for instance, the brutal expropriation of indigenous peoples in the New World and the lower classes in the Old. The same, too, with his overly sanguine reading of 'progress,' which, as he admits (p. 24), proved a key ideological prop to imperialism and the excesses of modern science. Bronner's claim that this represented a perversion of Enlightenment ideals hardly suffices, for the same can surely be said of crimes committed in the name of the great religions, which he condemns in the harshest of tones. Thus, although Bronner properly lambastes the one-sidedness of Adorno and Horkheimer, zealotry leads him to a narrative that is almost the mirror image of theirs, an Enlightenment that is questionable precisely because of its shining rectitude. Moreover, his Enlightenment is self-consciously reformist, content with liberal constitutionalism and at odds with the utopianism of the young Marx. Yet in important respects this utopianism expresses the fundamental spirit of Enlightenment thought, the promise and realization of 'human' emancipation. Such, at least, was the view of Bloch, whose work Bronner praises, but which was explicitly conceived in terms of the early Marx's 'left Aristotelianism.' Thus, not only does *Reclaiming the Enlightenment* offer a largely sanitized vision of the Enlightenment, but that vision fails to capture the radical import of Enlightenment thinking.

Keith Breen  
Queen's University Belfast, UK.

**Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction (2nd edn)**

Valerie Bryson

*Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke & New York, 2003, ix + 281pp.*

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In this expanded second edition Valerie Bryson charts the development of Western feminist thought from the emergence of the first recognizable feminist



political agenda in the 17th century to contemporary debates surrounding postmodern feminist perspectives. The book draws upon a broad range of sources and offers admirably clear and accessible accounts of a variety of feminist theories, which reflect the great diversity of feminist thought and the profound disagreements amongst feminists as to the 'causes and potential cures for women's subordination, inequality or oppression' (p. 226). Here, Bryson is not content merely to cover well-known contributions to feminist thought, but introduces the reader to a number of often-neglected feminist thinkers and activists. Her sympathetic accounts of individual theorists are both instructive and engaging, while the book's chronological approach allows Bryson to explore the historical roots of modern feminist thought. Thus, for example, modern debates regarding domestic labour and the politics of the personal sphere are shown to echo earlier concerns expressed by writers such as Mary Inman, whereas the work of Christabel Pankhurst is seen to anticipate the thought of radical feminists of the second wave and their analysis of women's subjection by men as a 'fundamental determinant of all other aspects of social life' (p. 79). In this regard this is a rich book.

Bryson adopts the conventional strategy of classifying feminist thought in terms of liberal, Marxist-socialist and radical feminism and sets out to explore the tensions within and debates between these schools of thought. While she acknowledges that the liberal language of equal rights historically has provided feminism with a powerful conceptual tool, she argues that liberal feminism ultimately remains marred by 'Wollstonecraft's dilemma': that is the demand for equal rights 'simultaneously denies the relevance of sex differences and affirms the existence of women as a sexually differentiated group' (p. 148). Marxist-socialist feminism, on the other hand, is shown to have persistently struggled with the tensions between the typically Marxist-socialist preoccupation with class and feminist concerns with the primacy of gender. While radical feminism seeks to transcend the divisions of class and race in an attempt to build a 'common sisterhood', Bryson highlights the extent to which this idea of a common woman's perspective has been increasingly challenged by the rise of black and postmodern feminism. Bryson concludes her analysis with a plea for a constructive engagement between modern and postmodern feminism. Here her robust rejection of the idea that we live in a postfeminist era and her qualified defence of key feminist concepts such as patriarchy provide a welcome reminder of the continued relevance of feminist thought.

Although the book offers readers who are not yet familiar with feminist political theory a clear introduction to the key debates that have shaped modern feminism, it unfortunately fails to explore the limitations inherent in any attempt to classify feminist thought as liberal, Marxist-socialist or radical. While Bryson acknowledges that the tendency of contemporary feminism to 'move beyond' its 'origin in malestream thought' has given rise to increasingly



sophisticated approaches that challenge the old categories, these developments are not discussed in any detail (p. 202). As a consequence, the book glosses over some of the complexities of contemporary feminist thought and at times underestimates the impact that feminism has had upon wider debates regarding equality. Bryson's quite conventional account of liberalism, for example, does not reflect debates among modern liberals regarding individualism, the role of reason, and the public/private distinction. Not only are self-proclaimed liberal feminists such as Susan Okin (1994) keenly aware of the impact of power relations in the private sphere of family and personal life upon the world of politics and paid employment, but modern liberal thought in general has been characterized by an increasingly complex analysis of the public/private distinction that takes on board many feminist concerns. Thus, for instance, prominent contemporary liberal theorists like Jürgen Habermas (1996) not only acknowledge the fluidity of the public/private distinction, but also recognize the complex interrelationship between the public and the private sphere. Further recent challenges to the traditional classification of feminist theory have come from non-Western feminists, many of whom have thought to highlight the cultural particularism of traditional European and North American feminist thought. While these concerns have given rise to an increasingly sophisticated debate regarding the relationship between feminist demands for gender equality and claims for greater cultural justice that has begun to raise complex questions about the very definition of gender equality, contemporary non-Western feminist voices are absent from Bryson's account. Not only does the book fail to discuss concerns regarding the position of women in the developing world, which underpin attempts by Western feminists like Martha Nussbaum (1999) to formulate a defence of women's rights as fundamental human rights, it also does not engage with distinctive schools of feminist thought such as Islamic feminism. In spite of these omissions, Bryson undoubtedly succeeds in providing an accessible and engaging introduction to key debates in feminist political theory, which will be particularly welcomed by undergraduate students who wish to learn about the origins and hallmarks of feminist thought.

## References

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Andrea Baumeister  
University of Stirling, UK.