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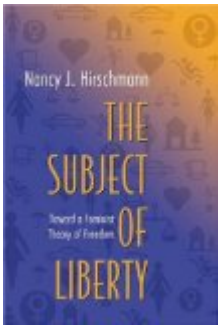

Reviewed by Robert Switzer (Philosophy Unit, Department of English and Comparative Literature, The American University in Cairo)
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Colonization of Desire and Will

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Few ideals are valued more highly in the discourses of the West than freedom. Although by and large they are more sensitive to cultural specificities than most, the focus on freedom as effectively an absolute good is common also among Western feminists. Very often, this finds expression in negative judgments concerning Islamic women in the Middle East who choose to take the veil. Is this a free choice, or rather itself a veiling, a covering over of subtle but pervasive coercion and domination by oppressive patriarchal values? Indeed, this question is compelling for many Arab and Islamic feminists as well. It is as a contribution to just this sort of debate, concerning freedom and the "subject" of choice–in North American contexts such as battered women and welfare, but also with a detailed and valuable focus on the issue of veiling–that Nancy Hirschmann's new book recommends itself.

This is an impressively rich work, full of careful, closely argued encounters with philosophers and feminists from a variety of "schools," and well worth reading from a number of perspectives. In what follows, I shall concentrate, first, on Hirschmann's contributions to the debates surrounding the philosophical problem of freedom, including, to borrow her phrase, "the paradox of social construction," and second, on the question of veiling, to which she gives a good deal of attention not only in the chapter devoted exclusively to the topic, but throughout the book. In fact, veiling is not simply a timely issue for Hirschmann, who wrote her book against the background of the "regime change" last year in Afghanistan, but also a central and concrete example which allows her core concern to emerge and brings it into sharper focus, namely, "a recognition of the need to conceptualize freedom in terms of the interaction and mutual constitution of the external structures of patriarchy and the inner selves of women" (p. 199). Thus, Hirschmann insists that her purpose is not to determine whether women who veil are free. Rather, the veil, as "discursive and social symbolization," is "used as a vehicle for developing a more complex understanding of freedom, agency, and subjectivity" (p. 175).

Hirschmann takes, as her point of departure, the basic distinction between negative and positive liberty, classically set out by Isaiah Berlin in his 1958 article, "Two Concepts of Liberty." A major aim of this book is to "complexify" the view of freedom which has arisen around this distinction in mainstream, analytically oriented philosophical circles and, by doing so, to make the understanding of freedom more conducive to feminist concerns. This means, in part, refocusing concern on internal as well as external barriers to choice, and moving, first, from a negative to a more positive or "empowering" conception of liberty and then, beyond the distinction altogether, towards a broadly Foucauldian understanding of the social construction of freedom, with a focus on diversity and equality. Thus, while Hirschmann devotes a great

deal of space early on to contrasting negative and positive restraints, by the end of her book she argues, following Amartya Sen, that the more useful distinction is "between equal and unequal restraint" (p. 232).

Hirschmann sets the stage in her introduction, arguing that negative liberty, which entails the absence of external constraints on the free exercise of rational choice, is not enough; what is also needed is the positive provision of conditions that make it possible to pursue one's liberty. Such a view recognizes that conditions such as disability or poverty are barriers that need positive action to be overcome, and also that there are internal barriers, such as fears, addictions, and compulsions that, as Hirschmann puts it, are "somehow at odds with my true self." But the issue, of course, then becomes: what is my true self, what are my heart's desires? And this, in turn, as Hirschmann sets out in detail, leads to a recognition of the centrality of context; the self, with its desires, is inevitably situated within and determined by a constellation of social relationships. Patriarchy, sexism, and male privilege are fundamental parts of this socially constituted reality–along with capitalism, class privilege, social norms and practices, and even language itself. As this brief overview makes clear, the thrust of Hirschmann's analysis is to bring recent feminist thought and mainstream efforts to analyze freedom into a proximity where they begin to challenge and, perhaps, inspire one another; out of this tensional encounter, new possibilities and directions really do begin to emerge in this book, however tentatively.

Like classic negative-liberty theorists, Hirschmann holds that the basic condition of freedom is being able to make independent decisions and act on them. It is not only available options and external barriers that determine choice, however; in drawing attention to the "inner" constraints on freedom, positive-liberty theorists have made important contributions. Hirschmann agrees with them that "free" choices can only be understood with reference to the subject of liberty itself, and its desires, preferences, and identity. She also sees, however, that these are not just "inner" psychological states, but intersubjective, socially constructed entities, structures, and forces. Hence she asks, for example, how feminists' concerns about patriarchy, and similar broad social formations or ideologies, can be integrated into our understanding of freedom, as importantly constraining the choices of women (and men).

It is easy to say, as some men do, that a woman is "free" to jog alone through Central Park at night. But such a claim ignores what Hirschmann, rightly, terms the "politics of the situation: supposedly neutral standards of reasonableness are stacked against women in a systematic way because of the background condition of patriarchy that provides men with greater power" (p. 26). The degree to which the barriers set up by such structures and differentials of power go unnoticed makes the task of explication and, in time, liberation from them all the more urgent. The author sees such liberation at the heart of the feminist project. According to Hirschmann, to uncover their true selves and authentic desires, women must first be "freed from the multiple, intersecting and overarching barriers that pervade patriarchal society" (p. 39). Tellingly, the example that she uses for the persistence of oppressive structures, even where actual prohibition and the overt threat of force is withdrawn, is the fact that women in Afghanistan have continued to wear the veil in their new, supposedly "liberated" post-Taliban circumstances (p. 27). She arrives at the position that not only the standards of choice, but the choosing subject and her self-understanding, are in crucial ways socially constructed–generally, as things now stand, by what she terms "a productive and oppressive externality" (p. 102).

The choices we make are constrained and constructed in such complex ways, for women even more than for men, "that the conventional understandings of liberty and of constraint found in the positive/negative debate are inadequate to address women's experiences" (p. 102). Social constructivism, she feels, "makes it possible to formulate a feminist theory of freedom by bringing together these two otherwise conflicting models of positive and negative liberty" (p. 137).

That social construction is fundamental to the concept of freedom remains far from obvious to most contemporary (analytic) liberty-theorists. Hirschmann tries to ease the introduction by uncovering traces of it in the canonical figures of the Enlightenment, such as Locke, Mill, Rousseau, and Kant. What she finds in all these thinkers is a "two-tiered" conception of freedom (p. 62); the subject of liberty is male, but there is also a recognition, even if only implicit, that the differentiated role allotted to women, and hence the broader question of freedom itself, is socially constructed. That is, even as freedom is defined theoretically as a universal concept, there is also a "political need" to "exclude most people, including laborers and women, from its expression and enactment" (p. 70). This involves constructing a special "nature" for those excluded. It also means that the celebrated affirmations found in these thinkers of (universal) natural freedom and equality are in fact simply a "ruse to

hide the masculinism of freedom" (p. 71).

The problem of course is that social constructivism subverts the whole idea of human nature, and therefore the "natural man" of social contract theory, as also any conception of natural freedom or natural rights, and therefore makes it very difficult to know from what frame of reference to approach the issue of choice. What had seemed "natural" is really just an expression of patriarchal, ideological power. The barriers that restrict women's freedom are imbedded in the fabric of the social world, and determine the limits of the possible.

Hirschmann presents us with three distinct levels of social construction. The first concerns surface socialization, the "ideological misrepresentation of reality" (p. 154) as an instrument of (male) power, through stereotypical norms and behaviors, "custom and practices" that foreclose some options and open others (p. 93). The concern is, at the first level, with social rules; yet rules can take on a life of their own in that they determine not just what people do (women especially), but what they are allowed to be. This she terms "materialization"; the way we interpret social phenomena produces material effects on the phenomena themselves. This is Hirschmann's second level of the social construction of reality, an intersection between ideological categories and actual, practical life. Where the first level assumes a kind of natural reality, the second, "materialization," involves the production of reality itself, and the construction of women's lives within it.

What positive-liberty theory has taught us, however, in Hirschmann's view, is that it is necessary to go deeper than material structures, to desires themselves and the basic parameters of (self)understanding–to go beyond the material conditions that determine how people are, to the social construction of meaning itself, and the interpretive frameworks within which it is constituted. This third level, which addresses how we define reality itself, Hirschmann calls the "discursive construction of social meaning" (p. 81); it is an issue she explores at some length, with reference to thinkers such as Spivak, Derrida, Lyotard, and, above all, Foucault–though I, for one, was left hungry for more.

In part, any sense of dissatisfaction is due to what Hirschmann identifies as the paradoxical nature of this aspect of social construction. Her third level, since it addresses the construction of wants and desires, "reveals the depth of women's unfreedom." At the same time, however, it also "yields a way to enhance women's freedom; by changing discourses we can affect material relations, the ways in which women's experience is materialized, which will in turn make misrepresentation and domination more difficult to enact and sustain" (p. 131).

Just as Hirschmann tries to find a middle ground between positive- and negative-liberty theorists, so here too she attempts to bring mainstream philosophical trends, as represented by that very debate, together with the more radical critical trends of recent Continental thought, which have had such a powerful influence on recent feminism. Clearly, the two do not always cohabit well. Hirschmann herself is uneasy about aspects of post-structuralist thought, particularly what she terms its "linguistic monism," which is that "what is" is interpretation, language, or text "all the way down." Her interest in resisting this move, she tells us, is to preserve materiality, the specificities of women's experience, and the harsh realities of oppression and violence, and ultimately feminism itself as situated in political action (pp. 85f).

Hirschmann's problem with post-modern thought is nicely summed up with reference to Judith Butler's position in *Bodies that Matter*. "That bodies exist in discourses, [Butler] suggests, does not mean they do not exist, only that such existence cannot have a 'reality' outside of discourse." Hirschmann strongly disagrees with this position, wanting to retain an extra-linguistic reality. But many thinkers–Butler included, I suspect–would respond that they do not want to eliminate such a "realm"; they are simply making skeptical inquiries concerning the possibility of any extra-linguistic access to it. Hirschmann's defense of what she terms, quoting Jean Grimshaw, "the material struggles or ordinary aspirations of women," or, in her own words, "the concrete and empirical consideration of women's lived experience as an important ingredient in political struggle" (p. 87), is laudable, but arguably unnecessary and, at worst, tilting at straw windmills.

Of course, readers from the "liberty-theorist" side of the fence have a great deal of skepticism of their own, which Hirschmann clearly shares, regarding what she terms the "relativism" of poststructuralist feminist thinkers. Indeed, it is not hard to make a case for reigning in some of their more extreme positions, particularly concerning the broad issue of identity. However, making the case for moderation is not the same as constructing a defensible, more accommodating philosophical position. As an example, Hirschmann wants to grant that men are also victims of patriarchy. She does not, however, want to go so far as to say that power is simply a discursive field where we are all constructors and constructed alike,

because this, she feels, denies or even excuses the very deliberate and coercive power used by many men against women, in situations of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and so on (p. 87).

Hirschmann believes that by including not one but three levels of social construction, she can provide depth of analysis as well as avoid the extreme relativism of much poststructuralist thought. Level three makes clear that women speak a language that is not their own, although presumably this is a general truth not only applicable to women, but level one and two "link discursive understandings to the physical, visceral reality of oppression." I think she is correct, here, to steer away from extreme "textual reductionism" in favor of a palpable resistance in the real, a materiality that is not wholly subsumed under or exhausted by our language games. There are times, however, when this effort to forge a middle way becomes mere fence-sitting. Hirschmann writes, for example, glossing a quote from Cavarero that woman "speaks and represents herself in a language not her own," that "[t]he language and categories of knowledge available to women are structured to express men's experiences and desires, and to obscure, ignore, and deny women's experiences and desires. 'Reality' for women becomes constructed as a specifically male reality; but it is, de facto, women's reality as well, because it is (the only possible) 'reality' " (p. 89).

Perhaps I am missing something, but this bracketed insistence on "the only possible reality" leaves me confused. Against this, are there not, in women's "real-life" situations, ample opportunities for contestation, subversion, and multiple reconfigurations of reality? "Reality" as such is never simply a given, and women (specifically) never simply victims, but also agents within linguistic (and social) practice. Even the "limits of the imaginable" can be, under specific circumstances, open to being redrawn.

While quotes like this–and they are many, particularly in chapter 3–seem to represent missed opportunities for radically liberating moves, it is clear that Hirschmann is acutely aware of the problematic of such possibilities. She writes, for example, that "feminists need the idea of social construction to deconstruct our identity within male-dominated cultures, to identify the ways in which patriarchy has limited not only our options and choices but our self-conceptions," and the ways women are "imbricated in what appear to be free choices" but in fact are constrained within "systems of power over which we have little control." At the same time, however, "social constructivism also appears to make such deconstruction impossible by taking away the politicalness of identity; it undermines the possibility of our existence as 'women,' let alone as 'feminists.' " In the face of this "paradox"–namely, that while "the argument that patriarchy involves an epistemology and language that pervade women's very being, their self-conceptions and desires, is powerful and persuasive," its "totalizing effects" also "allow women no possibility of seeing themselves in any other way" (p. 100)–we would appear to be deadlocked.

The theoretical quagmire to which we have been led by the "paradox of social construction" is not new, of course. What is new is the vigor with which Hirschmann has argued for the need for the social construction viewpoint to supplement and correct the views of mainstream liberty-theorists, which, as she has shown, are not adequate to feminist insights and the reality of constrained choice experienced by women in patriarchal societies. But she also sees that, on a purely theoretical ground, there seems little hope at present for a clear and unambiguous way forward; the imperative to subvert oppressive structures is seemingly undercut by the absence of a firm foundation from which to do so, and the critical tools available are seemingly undermined by the critique itself. In this context, Hirschmann makes reference to Derrida, who had suggested in his essay "The Ends of Man" that deconstructive strategies can be either internal or external. In the former, one attempts to use against the "edifice" itself "the instruments or stones available in the house, and, that is, equally in language," with the obvious risk of "ceaselessly confirming … that which one allegedly deconstructs." The external strategy, on the other hand, requires that one "decide to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside and by affirming an absolute break and difference," with the risk, in this case, that one ends up "inhabiting more naively and more strictly than ever the inside one declares one has deserted".[1] As Hirschmann adds, "the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the new terrain on the oldest ground" (p. 100).

Hirschmann does adumbrate some possible ways forward, for example in recognizing that patriarchy is not the only "structure that constructs us" (p. 101), or that "the reality that is limited and shaped by patriarchy can never be totally subsumed by it, so that women always interact with and in it to create a reality that is somewhat at odds with the ideology" (p. 100). But overall, her response is to turn instead and follow a broadly Foucauldian path of eschewing theory "as such" and, instead,

delving into the specificities of concrete examples and situations. This Hirschmann does as she turns, in three chapters, to practical issues of women's choice, including Islamic veiling. It is this latter that I shall now consider.

In the contexts of battered women, welfare, and veiling, Hirschmann discusses concrete choices that women make, including those which are apparently "free," but which occur within a contextual structure of forces that at the minimum restrict, and indeed help to construct, the range of possible choices. As Foucault taught, "social control works through the colonization of desire and will," which enacts its coercion all the more effectively as it "redefines such coercion as freedom and choice, thereby blinding individuals to the control they are subject to and making them the instruments of their own oppression" (p. 189). The obvious example is women who choose to return to the partners who batter them; but Arab women taking the veil would also be a likely candidate for most Western feminists. Throughout the book, Hirschmann repeatedly reinscribes the analogy between veiling and domestic violence. On this basis, one could well conclude, like "many Westerners" Hirschmann assumes "that any veiled Muslim woman is veiled because she is oppressed" (p. 95). Hirschmann's response is that "that would be incorrect, though the suspicion is not without justification." In fact, she recognizes that there is great diversity in the practice of veiling as well as that "many Muslim women not only participate voluntarily in it, but defend it," claiming it as "a mark of agency, cultural membership, and resistance." She nonetheless justifies the analogy, writing: "Veiling itself is not oppressive, but rather its deployment as a cultural symbol and practice may provide (and often has done so) a form and mode by which patriarchy oppresses women in specific contexts" (p. 171).

This sets the tone for Hirschmann's analysis of veiling, a complex, sometimes tortured effort to find a middle position, which is able to reflect the complex reality of veiling as somehow both freely chosen and imposed, although not always equally or in the same ways. Is taking the veil one of those choices that, although "apparently voluntary," in reality are not "choices at all" (p. 95)? Hirschmann is quick to oppose such an interpretive move, taken by many feminists, to effectively delegitimate or negate the agency of other women. As feminism attempts to move beyond Western borders, Hirschmann argues, it must strive to attain greater sensitivity, for example, to the subtleties of gender equity and women's power in other cultures. There is a need to avoid "cultural imperialism," while also not falling into a "cultural relativism" that "does nothing to change the oppression of women, because the 'culture' that is thereby acknowledged and respected is often one that preserves male privilege at women's expense" (p. 170).

For many feminists, veiling could be chosen only by those "brainwashed or coerced," with the veil "a key emblem of their oppression" (p. 176). For Hirschmann, "such hostility is self-defeating," for it ignores the complexity of the situation, and the possibility for such women to learn more about themselves through an open encounter with the other. After all, it is hard to gain a perspective on a context (or situation) when you are wholly, uncritically, within it, and, she adds somewhat blandly, "I believe it is important to have East-West interaction" (p. 197). Later, she expands on this, offering a vision of women's networks where "Eastern and Western women exchange perspectives, views, cultural critiques and ideological challenges in a way that avoids Western imperialism, and develop definitions of 'culture' in ways that include women's voices, experiences, and perspectives" (p. 223). Such dialogue is tied to Hirschmann's views on "changing contexts," to which I return below.

Hirschmann points out that veiling is not inextricably connected to Islam, but rather, "the social construction of veiling is historically and culturally constituted and variable" (p. 182). Indeed, nineteenth-century British imperialists saw veiling as the ultimate symbol of Eastern backwardness (p. 176), and "feminism" was a central part of "the colonialist effort to deligitimize Islam" (p. 181). Egyptian university women were the first to use the veil as a symbol of resistance, Hirschmann points out. Does this mean then that veiling is properly a mark not of oppression but of agency? Hirschmann believes not, "for the veil's symbolic and discursive value can also be seen to entail the subjugation of women"s subjectivity" (p. 177). As she adds:

"Within the context of veiling, the emphasis on cultural practices constitutes an excuse and rationalization for configurations of masculine power. Unveiled women are signifiers of masculine impotence in the face of the seemingly hegemonic (but in reality porous) power of the colonizing West; by coercing women to embrace particular practices and cultural forms, such as the veil, women's bodies become the physical spaces on which men construct their illusions of power and mastery over their own lives." (p. 179)

But what Hirschmann repeatedly stresses is the essential ambiguity of veiling in its present cultural contexts: "If veiling is a mark of women's oppression–and

that 'if' is important to maintain–women's choosing it presents a paradox" (p. 184). Later she adds, "if the veil enables women in Cairo to work for wages, it facilitates their choices and freedom, even as it signals how such choices operate within larger systems of gender inequality" (p. 204). Veiling "visibly manifests cultural identity, and so stands in opposition to Western cultural values and hegemony," and yet it "also exists within the parameters of patriarchy, such that women's choosing it simultaneously expresses their free agency and reinscribes the terms of their oppression" (p. 34).

Hirschmann explores this paradox in greater detail through two specific contexts in which women talk about the veil in terms of autonomous choice and which suggest, "in contrast to Western assumptions," that Muslim women have in some cases "been able to use the veil not only to establish identity and agency but to resist patriarchy as well" (p. 184). The two examples are women in Bedouin society and the women of Cairo in recent years. For the former group, since segregation is seen as a source of pride, the veil is indicative of social deference and modesty, but also autonomy, since it establishes a degree of emotional and psychological separateness and independence (p. 185). In the latter, Hirschmann, largely following Arlene MacLeod's analysis in *Accommodating Protest*, finds ambiguity and doubleness: the veil is part of a struggle against inequality, even as it inescapably marks an acceptance of subordination. Unable to define the parameters of their individual choices, women nonetheless "maneuver within these parameters to negotiate their preferences, make their choices, and assert their identity" (p. 189).

The most common form of veiling in Cairo, the *higab*, helps women express what Hirschmann terms their "dual location," as individuals, on the one hand, but situated in a communitarian context, on the other (p. 189). For MacLeod specifically, the *higab* is at once an indication of being a good Muslim and a protest, not so much against the West, she argues, as "against Islamic forms of patriarchy" (p. 191). Hirschmann, however, wants to further problematize the ambiguity. "To say that women veil in a way to reconcile work with traditional values, or independence with honor, or to express political solidarity, may recognize women's active agency but circumvent a larger question: is it a mark of women's agency to uphold values or codes that suppress women? " (p. 193). Hirschmann continues, "Whatever else veiling may achieve–and what it achieves may be significant–it nevertheless supports male dominance, and is at least in part a symbol of women's unfreedom" (p. 195). In thus reinforcing the underlying power structure, Hirschmann argues, veiling "may parallel domestic violence after all; not because veiling is inherently oppressive–the stereotypical Western assumption–but because of the duality and ambiguity both reveal about choice" (p. 195).

Positive-liberty theories, and their precursors in the thought of men such as Locke and Rousseau, have long advocated (through notions such as the general will) a superior, "we know better" vantage-point–the view that most people need to be protected from using their freedom to choose badly. Historically, this "sameness of will" has been "premised on and produced by women's exclusion from political participation, and their subordination to men." Today, Hirschmann argues, feminist thought would be much better served by Amartya Sen's distinction between "well-being freedom" and "agency freedom," since it too "highlights the tension between making our own choices and making the right choices" (p. 225), but in a far less paternalistic (or maternalistic) way. Many Western feminists would say, for example, that women who take the veil or who want to go back to abusive partners "abdicate their well-being" through "misguided" acts of agency. This helps one understand the stance taken, on the latter issue at least, by those who support mandatory arrest policies for violent husbands or even mandatory psychotherapy for women who return to them. Hirschmann believes, however, that "such a position is problematic for feminism," because it entails treating people, as Sen notes, as patients rather than agents (p. 225). We cannot decide for others. But what we can do is ask questions, encourage a questioning attitude, and perhaps demand of each other, not specific behaviors, but simply answers.

As we have seen, Hirschmann's position is that social construction determines the world as well as the conditions for self-definition and choice, for all of us, in a process in which everyone is both player and pawn. Yet that power is by no means evenly distributed, with the result that "some individuals" (for example, women) have less ability to define themselves, and so less freedom, than members of "dominant social groups." As though in response to my earlier criticism, however, Hirschmann does see that "excluded others" do participate in processes of social construction that, as she notes, conceptualize "our powers as well as our restrictions" (p. 204). She also rightly insists that there is no pristine ground, no final "truth" of "woman," that would enable women to seize the defining power from patriarchy and achieve the autonomy of self-definition; since even freedom itself is socially constructed, the only attitude to take toward

the "barrier" context presents is one of "self-critical ambivalence" (p. 205). Women must, nonetheless, engage in the struggle to change, if not "reality" as such, then, at least, "contexts," and, as she argues, the basis for doing so is equality. Hirschmann concludes her book with a discussion–which, following Foucault, is tentative and situation-specific, rather than theoretically totalizing–of how feminism today needs to engage in this process of changing contexts, moving towards a context which not only fosters equality, but also one that "allows and even encourages a broader diversity of views ... by constructing subjectivities that are able to think and see in different directions" (p. 238).

Hirschmann recognizes that there are always multiple discourses existing simultaneously, which "ensures that there is always some room for maneuver." This maneuvering, one senses, needs to be both situational and strategic, with the goal of re-contextualization and renewed self-understanding, through an embrace of dialogue and diversity. Context change does not merely have to respond to the experiences of women suffering oppression and engaged in choice, it should emerge from them. In Hirschmann's view, the continuing development of women's networks will be "key" to Muslim women's "abilities to change cultural practices that are restrictive or harmful to them, without rejecting their faith or culture" (p. 216).

Hirschmann refers to Layla Ahmed, who points out that the majority of both veiled and unveiled women in Egypt favor the return of *sharia*, or religious law, "without fully understanding how it would increase their subordination to men" (p. 193). Hirschmann believes that in any feminist theory of freedom, the act of choosing must be seen as necessary but not sufficient for freedom. But women must also be able to formulate choices, and this requires that they have meaningful power in the construction of contexts. As an example, she suggests "the development of a new religious code that would provide the moral security and certainty these women seek, without the gender oppression they fear and oppose" (p. 194). (She is quick to acknowledge, however, that many women see Islam as favoring equality.)

On my reading, the salient point that emerges in the latter part of Hirschmann's book is, at bottom, a reinvigorated Socratism: a philosophy of questions, more than of answers. As she writes, "a feminist notion of freedom requires that western feminists be allowed" to raise "challenges to non-western practices, like veiling, without being automatically dismissed as imperialists, just as Eastern feminists must be able to critique Western practices that westerners may consider benign or even liberatory" (p. 196). Freedom, Hirschmann writes, requires "that we continue a critical engagement with the foundation and meaning of desire and choice. If I disapprove of our answer, as a shelter worker might when a battered woman decides to return to her abuser, I cannot force or require you to act as I wish. I can persist in asking more questions, however. Indeed, in a sense I have an obligation to continue asking" (p. 236).

Nancy Hirschmann's project, in this important new book, is to offer a critique of existing conceptions of freedom, as "masculinist," and to adumbrate an alternative, feminist theory of freedom, one which, as she writes, "combines negative liberty's emphasis on the necessity of individuals to decide for themselves what they want with positive liberty's emphasis on the provision of enabling conditions," including the material conditions for choice. In addition, from feminists more influenced by poststructuralist thought, she has brought in the social construction of desire, and the recognition that options and choices "are themselves the product of restriction, of coercion, and force." As Hirschmann writes, "understanding the social construction of desire requires the discursive reconfiguration of the concept of choice," and a renewed understanding of women themselves, as " 'subjects' of liberty" (p. 202). In the end, her position on veiling is less than clear and her prognosis for a truly liberatory feminist theory of freedom also somewhat murky. Moreover her efforts to bridge the divide between analytically minded liberty-theorists and poststructuralist-inspired social constructivists are likely to please neither camp. Still, this book presents an articulate and well-informed, synoptic view of the broad problem of freedom, autonomy, and choice, and moves us firmly in the right direction. That is, in this carefully constructed and timely book, Hirschmann guides us towards a renewed interrogation of social norms and practices, including the construction of desire, and towards an enlivened celebration of diversity and dialogue.

Note

[1]. Jacques Derrida (1982), *The Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 135.

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