



Sacred Heart
UNIVERSITY

Sacred Heart University
DigitalCommons@SHU

Political Science & Global Affairs Faculty
Publications

Political Science & Global Affairs

1-2009

Challenging Diversity: Rethinking Equality and the Value of Difference (Book Review)

Steven Michels
Sacred Heart University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/gov_fac



Part of the [Political Theory Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Michels, Steven, "Challenging Diversity: Rethinking Equality and the Value of Difference (Book Review)" (2009). *Political Science & Global Affairs Faculty Publications*. 36.
https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/gov_fac/36

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science & Global Affairs at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science & Global Affairs Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact santoro-dillond@sacredheart.edu.

**ROMAN CATHOLIC POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY**

by **James V. Schall**

Lexington MA: Lexington, 2004. 209,
£50.00, ISBN 0 7391 0745 3

Readership: Postgraduates,
academic/research, professional

Rating: ****

Reviewer: LUCIAN N. LEUSTEAN
(*London School of
Economics*)

James V. Schall's book offers an innovative analysis on the relationship between political philosophy and Roman Catholicism. Schall argues that Christian revelation has to be taken into account in order to fully comprehend political philosophy. The author is aware that the New Testament is not a philosophical or political book. However, as Schall suggests, Christianity appeared in a specific temporal and geographical space and the revelation expressed in the act of Christ's incarnation has to be perceived as having had a major impact on the study of political philosophy.

**CHALLENGING DIVERSITY:
rethinking equality and the value
of difference**

by **Davina Cooper**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2004. 235, £16.99, ISBN 0 521 53954 4

Reviewer: STEVEN MICHELS
(*Sacred Heart University,
USA*)

Davina Cooper is Professor of Law and Political Theory in the School of Law at

Schall states that political philosophy 'leaves us with an opening to the transcendent' (p. 95), while 'revelation claims to have an effect on the inner and exterior lives of those who practice it' (p. 126). Researching the validity of philosophical questions advanced by political philosophy in the light of Catholic theology, Schall proposes 'Roman Catholic Political Philosophy' as the best term to indicate the connection between politics and Christian revelation. In Schall's opinion, Roman Catholicism and political philosophy complement each other in the quest to decipher human nature and the relationship between human beings, the world and transcendence.

The author examines major theoretical approaches to the study of political philosophy from classic philosophy, such as Aristotle and Plato, to leading Christian theologians, indicating contemporary research in the field. The book is written as a non-polemical essay aimed at a specialised readership familiar with Roman Catholic theology and political philosophy. Schall's study contributes to the under-researched field of religion and political philosophy, and his originality lies in his enquiry into the interdependency between political philosophy and Roman Catholicism.

the University of Kent. Her book examines the link between diversity and equality in liberal societies. The introduction begins, quite compellingly, with accounts of three contemporary areas of contention (bans on smoking, religion in the public square and same-sex marriage), which also comprise large portions of the main text. For Cooper, 'diversity politics is not a single, unified perspective but a discursive terrain organised around particular questions, premises and concerns' (p. 35). Society produces certain values and

favours some actions over others, so we must be mindful of how this affects others, given that identity itself is a product of the self, society and its institutions. In other words, diversity politics is more than mere power relations.

While some identities are problematic, mere toleration is not enough, Cooper argues. Equality, a 'social virtue', implies difference, and principles of inequality should be altered to allow greater forms of collective difference and individual diversity (p. 88).

Notwithstanding her penchant for inclusiveness, Cooper operates from a narrow and unapologetic, not to say unfounded, theoretical foundation. In her treatment

of gender, for example, she uses radical feminists and transgender activists as her counterpoints, neglecting to consider as legitimate other less radical positions. And despite her innumerable references to normative thought, she fails to present a clear vision of the good society and how it operates. Worse yet, Cooper's 'radical equality politics' reduces democratic pluralism to a soft despotism. She even manages to muddle the harm principle, the bedrock of functional liberalism, calling it a 'discursive framework' (p. 133). Cooper is remarkably unhelpful in the challenges she treats. Her language and method confound more than clarify, and she goes to great lengths to avoid taking sides or proposing remedies.

**RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY, AND
FULFILMENT IN THE ERA OF
IDENTITY POLITICS: principled
compromises in a compromised
world**

by **David Ingram**

Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield,
2004. 267, \$27.95, ISBN 0 7425 3348 4

Readership: Postgraduates

Rating: ****

Reviewer: **ANDREW SHORTEN**
(*University of Manchester*)

Critical theorist David Ingram worries about the problematic intersection of identity politics and deliberative democracy, and especially about the parasitic potential of the former upon the latter. Drawing upon Lyotard, he criticises liberal – or 'separatist preservative' – forms of identity politics, emphasising both their exclusionary potential and the difficulties they encounter in conceptualising actual political and cultural struggles, illustrating his case with innovative and enlight-

ening discussions of black and 'pure blood' Seminoles, the morality of a 'white cultural identity', and of disability and deafness, amongst other cases. Instead, he turns towards a 'syncretist-transformative' form of identity politics that has its origins in discourse ethics and consists in a mode of democratic interaction marked by the fusion of identities through mutual criticism. This approach leads Ingram to defend, for example, a Foucauldian-inspired account of white racial identity, a feminist paradigm of disability and caring, and a pragmatic-perfectionist theory of rights. One of the defining features of this work, as the title indicates, is a recurrent call for principled compromises (between, for instance, eudaimonism and deontology; preservation and transformation; discourse and dialogue; aggregation and deliberation; and perfectionism and pragmatism), and it is this that constitutes the greatest strength and weakness of the argument. On the one hand, Ingram usefully illuminates the complementary nature of many of these ostensibly opposing ideas, finding points