


justice in some cases, it seeks to undermine it in others. Simons makes the empirically unwarranted assumption that participants would simply share goals and value commitments “to justify how the system they build advances shared goals” (185). He does not flesh out his positive ideal of political equality nor explicate the standard by which to evaluate the success of “algorithms for the people,” what he calls a “flourishing democracy.” Simons might address these lacunae by developing the book’s incipient notion of a knowledge commons.

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Michael Freeden: *Concealed Silences and Inaudible Voices in Political Thinking*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. vii, 295.)

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Michael Freeden’s *Concealed Silences and Inaudible Voices in Political Thinking* offers a rich, panoramic overview of silence’s multiple valences, modalities, and conceptualizations. Building on insights from multiple disciplines and fields of research, the book is an academic tour de force, displaying a level of erudition and insight many can only aspire to. It introduces the readers to key debates in linguistics, religious studies, theology, philosophy, the methodology of social sciences, literary studies, psychoanalysis, neuroscience, and many other fields, on the basis of which the author builds a systematic and multipronged analysis of silence. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the nature and numerous functions of silence, not just for political theorists. One could argue that the book is indeed mistitled since, while the political is foregrounded, its ambition goes well beyond it, even on a broad understanding: the chapters turn to practices as varied as linguistic exchanges, religious worship, academic research, psychotherapy, theater performances, and musical composition, among others.

The book is structured in two sections. Part 1 is entitled “Interpreting and Mapping: Conceptualisations of Silence” and it offers several sets of rather technical and abstract distinctions and categorizations of silences. Freeden introduces the differences between detectable and hidden, agentic and non-agentic silences (chapter 1), and outlines for us the political elements of silence, relying on his earlier work on what it means to think politically (chapter 2). Chapter 3 proposes several “schemes” for exploring silence, distinguishing among a scheme that teases out its psychological or sociological roles, a second that foregrounds the various epistemologies one could rely on in

examining it, a third that builds several thematic clusters of inquiry about silence, and a fourth that focuses on concealed silences—the main concern of the book. This last group includes the unthinkable, the unspeakable/unsayable, the ineffable, the inarticulable, the unnoticeable, the unknowable and the unconceptualizable—categories that are developed in more detail in chapter 7. Silence is juxtaposed to logos, sound, and noise, and compared to stillness and solitude (chapter 4), but also to absence, lack, and removal (chapter 5). We learn how to listen for silence in chapter 6, while chapter 8 takes us on the territory of linguistics and communication theory to identify the discursive distribution and microstructures of silence.

While part 1 operates at a very high level of abstraction, part 2 is dedicated to decoding and investigating silences in the lived world. The temporality of silence in theology, history, and anthropology makes the object of chapter 9, while chapter 10 looks into silencing through the superimposition and invention of voice in politics, religious interpretation, and political theory. Chapter 11 offers a rigorous discussion of the concept of “tacit consent,” mostly focusing on John Locke’s work, but also tracing its reverberation in contemporary philosophical debates about custom, tradition, subjectification, and the political invocation of the “silent majority.” Freeden then turns to a discussion of the sociocultural filters of silence, analyzing examples from Buddhism, Christianity, various secular philosophical traditions, and national cultures of silence, as well as dramatic uses of silence in artistic performances and practices of ostracism. Chapter 13 explores silences by states and their transient governments—domestically and internationally—and reflects on gaps in constitutions, policymaking, political representation, and commemoration. The last chapter, chapter 14, takes the reader back on Freeden’s intellectual terrain—the study of ideology. After a brief general account of concealed silences in ideology, the author offers a few quick assessments of liberal, feminist, anarchist, conservative, reformist, radical, populist, nationalist, and illiberal silences.

From this brief reconstruction of the chapters’ coverage it should become patently clear how extensive the breadth of the inquiry is. Within the space of 271 pages, the readers travel across multiple disciplines and religious horizons, and get exposed to the work of artists (such as Tacita Dean, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Samuel Beckett, Virginia Woolf, Eugen Ionescu); philosophers (e.g., Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Paul Ricoeur, Slavoj Žižek, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan) and political theorists (Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Joseph de Maistre, Jeremy Bentham, among others). The master figure is, however, Pierre Bourdieu, to whose understanding of social practice, social order, and subjectification the text returns, over and over again—and predictably so, given Freeden’s general methodological outlook—to score argumentative points in relation to concealed silences in social life.

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A critic might take issue with this panoramic approach by pointing out how breadth leads to the sacrifice of depth: the detailed analyses contained in the chapters do not clearly build up towards a general argument or overarching point—beyond the obvious one, that silence needs to be explored in its multiple instantiations, spaces, and temporalities, and that concealed silences should be given special attention. One could alternatively decry the dilution of the meaning of silence, since in the book it covers anything from gaps in speech, to the marginalization of certain scientific methodologies, to omissions in legal regulation or the theological interpretation of sacred texts. One might also worry about structural choices and the coherence of the text, and in particular about the disconnect between the abstract distinctions and typologies introduced in the first half and the more problem-driven analyses in the second. Lastly, the lack of an engagement with recent work in social epistemology might irk some of its readers.

Instead, this review would like to suggest that Freeden's contribution in this book is akin to that of a knowledgeable cartographer, who provides a sophisticated yet incomplete map to the potential students of silence, urging them to press on with the work of exploration, offering the first, theoretical part of the book as a useful compass. Each chapter in the second half sketches a small part of the territory, inviting scholars to analyze it in more depth aided by the distinctions and typologies offered in the first half. Freeden himself suggests that much when he states that "a sub-specialization of 'comparative silences' might well lurk around the corner" (152). Developing the map further requires curiosity, a willingness to challenge conceptual boundaries and some hard methodological work, but the horizons opened by each and every subsection are all exciting and promising. In the process, Freeden's (sometimes aphoristic) nuggets of wisdom—scattered throughout the entire book—will serve as pointers: for example, his incisive remarks on the Miranda rights, on the right to oblivion via data protection regulations, on the anthropocentrism of politics, or on the relation between silence and freedom can be read as tips to interested scholars. Therefore, while some might criticize the book for overreaching or for being inconclusive, I propose to read it as a generous invite to others and to consider its lack of a specific "lesson to be learned" as its greatest virtue: the complexity of silence, its dynamism and protean forms allow for nothing else.

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