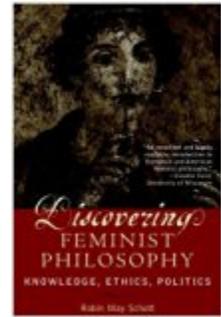


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Robin May Schott. *Discovering Feminist Philosophy: Knowledge, Ethics, Politics*. New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003. x + 157 pp. \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-1455-3; \$83.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-1454-6.

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Pointing in New Directions

Robin Schott's *Discovering Feminist Philosophy: Knowledge, Ethics, Politics* provides an eminently accessible introduction and analysis of Continental and Anglo-America feminist theory while at the same time developing new insights in feminist ethics. The goals of this text are quite explicit: to consider and counter standard criticisms of feminist theory as a philosophical enterprise, to make clear the trends, issues, and approaches that are part of contemporary feminist thought, and to provide new work in feminist ethics of conflict. Schott, whose academic home is now in Denmark, fulfills each of these goals with startling clarity and detail.

The text begins with an introductory chapter that addresses a series of standard objections to feminist philosophy as a legitimate philosophical project. Schott informs the reader that though these objections are ones that she hears frequently, the inspiration for the chapter came from a talk she gave on feminist epistemology to Danish philosophy students. Schott constructs the bulk of this introductory chapter as a series of objections, development of each objection, and a thorough, detailed reply to each objection. The utility of this method becomes obvious as one reads subsequent chapters. This early work helps to disarm claims that may be made against arguments developed later in the text as well as introduces the reader to the problems encountered by actual feminists doing actual philosophy in an actual context. In other words, they provide a substantial, lived, situated context for the experience of doing feminist philosophy.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the complexity of feminist approaches to the history of philosophy. Feminist philosophers have convincingly argued that the canon of western philosophy is sexist, is not gender-neutral, and is masculinist. Philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, and Kant were sexist and their views on women substantially influenced their overall philosophical views that had been taken to be free from sexism. Feminist philosophers have pointed to specific concepts and terms within philosophy that are loaded with gendered meaning. Among these are those as seemingly benign as the term/label "philosopher" or the properties of "rational" and "matter" to those more overt, such as "man of reason." Other feminist approaches to the history of philosophy are projects that question the "missing women" in philosophy and those that recover women who have been left out of the western philosophical canon. Feminists have also worked to utilize the work of male canonical figures to develop distinctly feminist philosophical work. Schott's treatment of feminist work in history of philosophy is clear, interesting, detailed, and critical.

In "Feminist Epistemology," the second chapter of *Discovering Feminist Philosophy*, Schott provides an overview of trends in feminist epistemology and makes a crucial connection between theories of knowledge and ethical, metaphysical, and political claims. The author works carefully through the main approaches in feminist epistemology—feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, poststructuralist feminist theory—making clear

the alternatives and the contributions these provide to more traditional epistemological approaches and to non-traditional, but non-feminist, approaches, such as social epistemology. This chapter does a particularly good job at showing the significant amount of borrowing that feminists do from the main approaches in feminist epistemology, thus showing that the positions held are much more intricate and insightful than any of the three above approaches on their own can be. For example Schott points to the work of Latina philosopher Linda Martin Alcoff as pulling the concept of situated knowledges from standpoint theory, while rejecting other parts of standpoint theory, linking this with insights from poststructuralist theory and coherentist epistemology to develop her version of coherence theory.

The introductory chapter and the first two chapters of the text are extremely useful for those without a background in feminist philosophy. Schott's third chapter on feminist ethics of conflict is where the text really comes into its own. Early on in the chapter Schott informs the reader that this chapter will be distinctly different from the other overview-oriented chapters. In "Feminist Ethics of Conflict" Schott argues that ethics needs to be approached from the perspective of real, lived ethical experiences, not the abstract considerations of mainstream ethics. She starts her immersed ethical analysis from lived experiences of human violence and conflict and the ethical questions these force us to raise. Schott critically utilizes Simone de Beauvoir's argument that considerations of moral subjectivity, conflict, and failure are necessary parts of ethical analysis to investigate institutional structures that lead to racial and gender oppression and to understand the phenomenological experience of oppression.

The chapter becomes particularly powerful in its discussion of the ethics of conflict and violence in the ethnic genocide in the former Yugoslavia. First-person survivor accounts, first-person rapist accounts, and narratives of racial hatred are linked to the background conditions that led to sexual violence and rape, as well as the conditions at the time that sustained and legitimated sexual violence and rape. These are examined through Schott's construction of a feminist ethics of conflict. Schott moves on to consider the ethical dimension of recovery from this sort of violence. She argues that responsibility, recognition, and witnessing are all important for ethical recovery, but unlike witnessing, which is fraught with false and incomplete testimony, and recognition, which is inherently asymmetrical in the burden it puts upon the survivor, responsibility provides a means for the survivor to look outside herself to demand responsibility from a perpetrator, understanding perpetrators to be both individuals and institutions.

Robin May Schott's *Discovering Feminist Philosophy* certainly attains its stated goal of providing an accessible and informative overview of feminist philosophy. At times the text felt repetitive. For example, the introduction and conclusion addressed some of the same problems in Denmark's educational system without necessarily developing a deeper analysis of these problems aside from relating them to other similar problems. The few repetitive instances do not take away from Schott's excellent overall analysis. The chapter on ethics of conflict particularly excited me. Schott demonstrates how immersed in the actual world feminist philosophy can be. In doing so she shows that feminist philosophy can be and should be used to analyze, rethink, and reform institutional and social structures that lead to oppression in a variety of contexts.

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