The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy

Edited by
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We dedicate this volume to all our philosophical foremothers whose work and courage have informed and inspired us.

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Introduction

Defining Feminist Philosophy

Linda Martín Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay

[The] project of philosophy and that of feminist thinking have a fundamental structure in common, an art of fighting fire with fire and looks with looks, of objectifying and analyzing surrounding thought, of regarding beliefs as objects that must be scrutinized, when the supposedly normal attitude is to submit to what social life erects as doctrine. Nothing goes without saying, including what people think about the roles which have come down to men and women.

(Michele Le Doeuff 1989: 29)\(^1\)

Over the past thirty years, philosophy has become a vital arena for feminists. They have scrutinized social beliefs about gender, human nature, familial duties, sexual ethics, epistemic credibility, and even rationality. Philosophy has provided vital means, such as methods of conceptual analysis and traditions of critique that have allowed feminist scholars to subject cultural traditions and dogma about gender identity and gender relations to objective, fair, but uncompromising examination. In pursuing this work, feminist philosophers have also developed new methods of analysis and critique, defined new lines of inquiry, and reinvigorated some of the central areas of philosophy.

The growth and interest in feminist philosophy have been dramatic. At the end of the 1970s one could count the volumes in print on women and philosophy on two hands: there was the monumental Second Sex, by Simone de Beauvoir,\(^2\) a few books on women and philosophical topics written by women in previous centuries, a few works questioning the tradition of political philosophy, and five collections of essays specifically devoted to feminism and philosophy. Today, the volumes written by contemporary authors are too many to enumerate and rival those produced in other areas of philosophy. In a matter of a few decades, feminist philosophy has emerged as a distinctive field, with a distinct literature including a journal devoted exclusively to feminist philosophy. Essays in feminist philosophy appear, if still infrequently, in mainstream journals. Feminist philosophy is taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and has been the explicit (and implicit) focus of doctoral dissertations. Job descriptions now include it as an area of specialization.