postmodern feminist views of the subject—has been attempted elsewhere. Shildrick’s aim is in many ways the opposite: to stress the unbridgeable divide between them. But this requires her to create a straw man where medical ethics ought to stand, and to present one principal strand of feminism—the French-influenced différence [sic] school—as representative of all feminisms.

There are some interesting byways in this book, and an admirable level of ambition. But in the end I was left with the impression that the mountain had laboured to bring forth a mouse. Medical ethics is a far more vibrant and contested field than Shildrick realises, and other bioethicists have already made many of the sceptical points about autonomy which she reaches only after considerable ferreting around: for example, when she says (page 75) that “what I am suggesting is that the injunction to respect autonomy can simply act as a prohibition or limit on certain actions rather than as a positive move to embrace the interests of the other in mutual determination”. We know that already, I think, from the work of Howard Brody and others, and it has been said better elsewhere.

References

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Feminist Approaches to Bioethics: Theoretical Reflections and Practical Applications


Rosemarie Tong invites readers to throw caution to the wind. In doing so she asks non-feminist and feminist bioethicists to join in a collaborative effort to create a moral environment in which truly good medicine can be practised. This book, in its open and challenging analysis of ethical theory goes a long way towards providing a foundation for the sort of dialogue needed for such an environment to be realised.

The work is remarkably crafted and clear in its descriptive accounts of predominant feminist and non-feminist approaches to ethics and bioethics. Non-feminist theory includes short descriptions and analyses of various perspectives including virtue-focused ethics, utility-orientated approaches, duty-centred themes, law and sentiment-orientated ethics. This provides a valuable context within, and against, which the author presents feminist interpretations and analyses. As such it would make an ideal introductory text and a helpful coursebook for teachers of undergraduate ethics. The author challenges the diversity of interpretation in mainstream ethics theory. She confronts those who would dismiss feminist ethics as simply a gender-based inversion of a more traditional and commonly patriarchal ethic. Tong demonstrates through reasoned argument, ways in which central tenets of traditional theory are important in an ethics process and then she takes the reader skilfully forward to a reinterpretation of such themes. Her work calls for the reader, no matter how sceptical, to ask the essential “woman-question”. What might be the impact of a decision or direction on women’s lives? How might a situation be articulated with a woman’s voice? How are women’s experiences to be understood and differentiated one from another? What does a situation “say” about relationships in which decisions are conceived, and from which they are derived and ultimately lived out? The book brings a vitality to such questions. It gives a comprehensive account of the plurality of feminist ethics, rich in philosophical and practical insight.

Tong sets out to show what makes feminist ethics distinctive but in her presentation of alternating non-feminist and feminist perspectives it is not clear that this goal is achieved fully. The approach invites significant questions about possible overlapping concepts. The somewhat false dichotomy that the style presents detracts from the author’s contention that although feminists are keen to distinguish their approaches from those of non-feminists, they do not wish to reject all those principles, concepts and virtues inherent in a more traditionally Western approach to ethics. Nevertheless, Tong provides, I suggest, one of the most readable, reasoned and clear accounts of feminist ethics available.

The practical applications provided in part two of the book, including reflections on contraception, sterilisation, abortion, surrogacy, reproductive technologies and genetics are insightful. These chapters are written in such a way that at once challenges our applications of theory to practice, highlights significant misconceptions, suggests a possible transversal of feminist theory to a whole spectrum of experience and provides a very helpful basis for a practitioner grappling with difficult issues in contemporary social life and health care. An excellent text, not to be missed by all those interested in or working in the field of ethics and bioethics today.

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At Odds with AIDS: Thinking and Talking about a Virus


This is a short philosophical presentation in four chapters about the impact of AIDS both positive and negative on the gay male, in relation to the individual and his place amongst his peers as well as in society in which he lives. The discussion involves consideration of coming out, dying before one’s time, and grief both for the infected and their associates, as well as...