

THEOLOGY, SCIENCE, AND GENDER: ADVANCES IN FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

The text for the session was Evelyn Fox Keller's *Reflections on Gender and Science* (Yale, 1984). The session opened with a viewing of a thirty-minute interview with Keller by two CTSA members, Lisa Cahill and Edward Vacek. Their questions in turn were based roughly on questions (see below) by Cathleen Going, O.P., Nancy Ring, Thomas Ryba, and Michael Vertin, all of whom (with the exception of Cathleen Going) also acted as panelists during the discussion. About fifty other members participated in the discussion chaired by Mary Gerhart.

Following are some of the questions prepared by the panel.

Cathleen M. Going

The boy's internal anxiety about both self and gender is . . . echoed by the cultural anxiety; together they can lead to postures of exaggerated and rigidified autonomy and masculinity that can—indeed may be designed to—defend against the anxiety and the longing that generates it. (GS,88-89)

It seems to me from this insight (above) that becoming a philosopher is twice as difficult for a man as for a woman!

Would you say something about what made your *philosophic* development possible? How were you able, given your scientist "socialization," to be interested in what most of your colleagues, you say, would think of as "meaningless questions"? Chiefly by the press of feminist concerns? Or by being steered away from naive realism by your scientific practice (knowing is *not* like taking a good look, etc.)? Or by both? Or?

(Because I see in Eric Voegelin's work on Plato that the matrix for philosophy is social disorder [not "ivory-tower" experiences], I wouldn't be surprised if the inspiration toward philosophy for you had been chiefly the feminist crises.)

What kind of person, would you guess, becomes a theologian? What kind of woman?

Some things to be taken into consideration:

- the theologian is thought to be, ideally, a believer—one for whom "the heart has its reasons";
- the God of many believers is *both* wise and loving;

*The Royal Society took nearly 300 years before admitting women, as you note. The Catholic Theological Society of America, founded about 1945, admitted its first two women in 1965. (Entirely by accident, one of those two is a questioner for this interview.) A photo of an early CTSA meeting shows a group clearly bent on securing that theology too should be a "truly masculine science"!

- theology is reflection on the function of religion within a culture (cf. Lonergan);
- in the "desert" contemplative tradition which colors the religious experience of the West, the exhortation stands: "Let the word descend into the heart."

Nancy Ring

Dr. Keller, several times in your essays in *Reflections on Gender and Science*, you critique the presuppositions of modern scientific methodology as well as the existential results it brings about, primarily the dichotomization of subjectivity and objectivity. Still, you recognize the "success" that has resulted from this methodology. "Given the success of modern science, defined in opposition to everything female, fears of both Nature and Woman could subside" (p. 64). What are your criteria for judging modern science successful, and could such success be maintained if modern science dissociated itself from the ideology out of which it presently operates.

In *Reflections on Gender and Science*, you articulate Plato's understanding of eros to the object of knowledge. If Plato's respect for eros is coupled with McClintock's eros for the organism in all its materiality, it seems we may have the better of their two worlds. Would you please comment on the possibility of putting their respective positions in dialogue, and if you consider that a possibility, what would you expect the results to be?

Thomas Ryba

Karl-Otto Apel, in his work *Understanding and Explanation* (p. 30), has characterized two approaches to the philosophy of the natural sciences as follows: "Irrespective of the difference between the transcendentalist-idealist and empirical-inductivist [approaches to science] . . . [they] agree that laws establishing necessity must be imposed upon . . . data 'from outside,' even though such hypothetical laws are to be verified empirically by observing the data. Put negatively, the sense data . . . do not involve phenomena that express 'meaning' or anything 'inner'." He goes on to point out that there is another tradition consisting of the likes of Telesio, Campanella, Bruno, Goethe, Herder, Husserl and—what has come to be known as—the *Verstehen* school which emphasizes the need for interpretive empathy and an "inner" approach to the study of nature and society. Do you see your own program as coinciding with the program of the latter school? If so, is there anything that you think we might learn from them, methodologically, which would be of use to your new paradigm of science?

Can an empathetic approach to scientific investigation be systematized and/or taught or is it a matter of intuition? (I realize that, according to Polanyi, this may be a false dichotomy.) If it can be systematized and taught, how does one go about it, and what are its methodological steps? If it is a matter of intuition, then won't the best science always be done by an aristocracy of the empathetic?

Michael Vertin

Even as a casual reader of *Reflections on Gender and Science* will see the book as arguing that natural science ought to be conceived not as the *conquest* of nature, an enterprise of coldly rational, unfeeling, stereotypically "male" subjectivity, but rather as an *interaction* with nature, an enterprise of empathetic, loving, au-

thetically "human" subjectivity. A diligent reader, however, will also see an important subsidiary theme in the book, important because it is so basic but understated because it is so obvious. This second theme is the inadequacy of conceiving natural science as *subservience* to nature, an enterprise of merely emotional, affective, stereotypically "female" subjectivity.

Do you accept this characterization? That is, would you agree that the number of fundamental methodological alternatives envisioned by your book is not two but three, and that the underlying thrust of your argument is not only against exaggeratedly "masculine" approaches but against exaggeratedly "feminine" ones as well?

Your work offers a splendid account of distortions in the enterprise of natural science that follow from basic presuppositions that are mistaken and fundamental values that are skewed. Suppose that it was correct to characterize "theology" as a discipline essentially concerned with promoting conversions, the radical changes-of-mind-and-heart that rectify mistaken basic presuppositions and skewed fundamental values. Would you find it plausible that theology (thus characterized) could contribute positively to the reclamation and advancement of the scientific enterprise in our age?

MARY GERHART

Hobart and William Smith Colleges