

Chapter III

Gendered Philosophy of Science: Science is Male, Nature is Female

OBJECTIVES

This chapter aims to help you understand the following:

- How the historical philosophy of science, especially gendering science as male and nature as female, has influenced both how we think about science and who participates in science and technology today.
- How the “myth of objectivity” influences how we think about science, the knowledge we produce, and who participates in science and technology.
- How an emphasis on science and technology as purely “rational” (gendered male) domains devoid of “emotion” (gendered female) influences both how we create scientific and technical knowledge and who participates in its creation.
- How a new philosophy of science informed by the values of a partnership society might reshape scientific and technical knowledge and facilitate greater and more diverse participation in its creation.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the ways in which the dualistic notion of gender is at the core of many fundamental ideas in the philosophy of science. The ways in which we have learned to perceive, think about, teach/learn, and conduct research in science and IT are deeply informed by a dualistic, gendered framework: science is associated with maleness, and nature with femaleness. This primary split supports a philosophy of science that envisions “good science” as purely rational and objective (male), devoid of emotion and subjectivity (female). These core values of a dominator society contribute to a climate that is not likely to be hospitable to those who are gender-socialized as women. In the end, I call for a new perspective on our philosophy of science and technology that embodies partnership values and ask: How might we proceed to reexamine our assumptions about science and technology to make the shift from a dominator to a partnership perspective? These ideas are explored in the following sections: (1) science is male; nature is female; (2) the myth of objectivity; (3) there’s no crying in science; and (4) envisioning a partnership philosophy of science (democratizing science and technology, redefining what makes good science, and examples of partnership science and IT).

SCIENCE IS MALE, NATURE IS FEMALE

One could identify any number of points in previous centuries of patriarchal thought that explicitly and implicitly excluded women from the knowledge tradition. However, in relation to science and technology, one historic moment takes on a particular significance due to its emphasis on dualistic, “either/or” thinking, of which gender is one primary manifestation. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is often referred to as the father of modern science, as “the originator of the concept of the modern research institute, a philosopher of industrial science . . . and as the founder of the inductive method” (Merchant, 2001, p. 68). Bacon’s thinking helped reify the definition of science as male, and nature as female.

Many feminist science studies scholars have discussed the ways in which this particular dualism has influenced both the perception of science in society and our images of who participates in the world of science and technology (Bleier, 1991; Merchant, 1980; Schiebinger, 1993; Wajcman, 1995). In her now classic book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, Carolyn Merchant (1980) recounts the history of the Scientific Revolution and outlines ideas that have contributed to shaping science into a domain that privileges social definitions of “maleness”: the notion of science gaining increasing domination over nature, the rise of mechanistic thinking, and power as the “mechanism.” Historically, one of

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