# SEXUALITY, RATIONALITY, AND SPIRITUALITY

## by Winnifred A. Tomm

*Abstract.* Historical progress has largely been described in terms of the power to order social and ecological realities according to the interests of a few. Their concepts, images, and metaphors have transmitted knowledge (both explicit and tacit) that has come to be regarded as received wisdom. This kind of power, which has shaped (as well as described) history, has belonged primarily to men; whereas women's nature and, accordingly, their power have been defined primarily in terms of sexuality. Men's control of women's sexuality is therefore the source of the disqualification of women as free agents—that is, as significant participants in, say, scientific and religious meaning-giving processes. Thus morality requires reevaluation of our assumptions about human nature. Most importantly, it demands that female sexuality be considered within the context of rationality and spirituality.

*Keywords:* mitigated relativism; moral agency; power; rationality; sexuality; spirituality.

The aim of this paper is to (1) sketch historical underpinnings that have contributed to the symbolic constructions associated with men and women and (2) relate sexuality, rationality, and spirituality to self-expression.

Our understanding of who we are has usually revolved around the notions of sexuality, rationality, and spirituality, so that the metaphors, images, and ideas associated with these foundational concepts have provided us the context by which we describe our origins, natures, and destinies. In Western civilization, the origins, natures,

Winnifred A. Tomm is Coordinator and Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada T6G 2E2. She presented a version of this paper at the Thirty-fourth Annual Conference ("Gender in Science and Religion") of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, Star Island, New Hampshire. in July 1987.

and destinies of women have been defined differently than those of men. According to Gerda Lerner (1986) and Riane Eisler (1987), patriarchy was established by the time the symbol systems of history began to take shape, thereby associating human nature with male nature.[1]

Following Lerner, I take patriarchy to be the control by men of three major dimensions of social life: the economic and legal systems and female sexuality. A strong argument can be made that sexuality is the most fundamental of the three. Indeed sexuality forms the cornerstone for the legal and economic systems.

Lerner claims that control of female sexuality originated with the establishment of the family. The wife's sexuality was defined in terms of production of children to aid in production of goods on the family's land, owned by the master—that is, the husband as head of household. Inheritance of property by sons was an important factor in the emphasis on bearing sons. Class structure is seen as modeled after the hierarchical structure of the family, based on ownership of the means of production. Gender domination, followed by class domination, was exacerbated through militarism.

A consequence of militarism was slavery. Conquered adult males were usually slain because they posed too great a threat to the conquerors. Females, on the other hand, were taken as slaves to (1) work for the family, (2) supply sexual and recreational services for the master, and (3) provide procreational duties when a wife failed to produce a son. The most distinctive or decisive factor about slaves, whether male or female, is that they have no power, except through another (Patterson 1982).

Many wives today realize that their position, in relation to their husband's, bears some resemblance to ancient slavery. The recent Canadian National Film Board production *Change of Heart*, which depicts this relationship, portrays a woman in a small town who, after thirty years of marriage, leaves her husband. She soon discovers that she is financially bereft, and no longer acceptable company for another woman who, she believed, was her friend since before her marriage. She thereby learns that her ''legitimacy,'' or acceptance by others, depended on her status as wife. This is not to say that a wife is (or has been) equivalent to a slave; however, the similarity between the two positions is that a wife's power, like that of a slave, is largely obtained through another.

## SEXUALITY

As Lerner points out, the two major symbol systems of Western civilization concerned with sexuality are the Bible and classical Greek

philosophy. A pair of major themes emerged from these two sources: (1) the activity of males and passivity of females, and (2) the evil of sexuality in general, and particularly female sexuality.

*Activity and Passivity*

The idea that the active principle of procreation is the male seed is implicit in the biblical covenant between Yahweh and Abraham (Gen. 17). The later covenants between Yahweh, Moses, and the sons of Israel—as well as between Yahweh, David, and his sons—ensure the establishment of the nation Israel and continuation of the male descendants of Abraham. These covenants are between a male God and the sons of Israel. Inheritance through the seed of the male underscored the importance of bearing sons.

This is not to say that women's roles in the Hebrew Bible are not complex. There are examples of females as active agents, such as Jael, Judith, and especially Deborah—to mention only a few. When women played significant roles in overthrowing enemies of Abraham's descendants, they were acknowledged. The most prominent females figures, however, are the matriarchs: Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel—the wives and mothers of patriarchs—whose significance was their role as connecting female links between generations of patriarchs.

The idea of the female as the passive vessel for the active seed was developed by Aristotle who in *Generation of Animals* (1953) says: ''We may safely set down as the chief principles of generation the male [factor] and the female [factor]; the male as possessing the principle of movement and of generation, the female as possessing that of matter'' (bk. 1, sec. II, 716a). He likens the female to the wood from which a sculptor carves his creation (1953, bk. 1, sec. XXI, 729b). The male is characterized by his ability to activate, whereas the female is defined by her lack of that virtue. Inability is the female's distinguishing feature (1953, bk. IV, sec. 1, 766a). When nature departs from its normal course, ''the first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male'' (1953, bk. IV, sec. III, 767b).

Aristotle's highly questionable view of the nature of females and males stems from his identification of the female with the passive, material aspect of human nature and the male with the formal creative principle. Although Aristotle's assumption is without foundation, this misidentification still forms the basis for ''arguments from nature'' defining the roles of women and men in society. (More will be said about this in the section on rationality.)

Issues surrounding reproductive technology today involve the

alleged passivity of women's participation in procreation. The judge
on the well-known Baby M case ruled that the infant be awarded to
the man whose seed was planted in the "surrogate" mother's womb.
A contract had been made in which the biological mother agreed to
produce a baby (for $10,000) and the judge's decision upheld this
agreement (though it was later revised). As a legal arrangement the
decision was straightforward, but when one looks at its implications,
the situation becomes very complex.

To make such an agreement, both parties must see the woman's
womb as a passive vessel through which the male's seed is actualized.
Besides, the woman's being must be perceived as fragmented, so that
her womb is not an integral aspect of her ontology—of her very
existence. There must also be a separation of her mental and physi-
ological processes. At the end of her pregnancy, the new mother
apparently experienced herself in a more integrated way. She wanted
to keep the baby, but she was required to fulfill the legal contract—a
contract devised on the assumption that women's bodies are passive
in the process of reproduction.

Indeed, women's bodies have long been used by scientists who
have never seriously questioned the ethics of their socially sanctioned
research. All forms of reproductive technology (i.e., artificial means
of human reproduction) rely on this mechanistic view of women's
reproductive organs. Similar issues arise even in gynecology, where
women's wombs have often been considered disposable, without
much consideration.

This theme of the passivity of women's bodies in the reproductive
process has always been counterbalanced by "arguments from
nature" that women are tied to their offspring in a way that men are
not and, therefore, that women should be the primary caretakers of
children. The close connection between mother and child is denied by
those who view women's bodies as passive vessels, but is used for
prescribing female roles on the basis of "natural dispositions." For
many women, the reality that has materialized from these inconsis-
tent positions is existential trivialization and exclusion. They have
been trivialized vis-à-vis their part in reproduction at home and often
excluded from socially valued production in the public, or paid
workforce. Indeed, their social recognition comes from accepting this
reality.

Mothers and wives are rewarded for unquestioning support of
their marginalization in both reproduction and production. This
kind of *alienated consciousness* involves ignoring one's creative power in
exchange for approval by the powerful—the definers of social
prescriptions as well as the organizers of social structures that support

the ideology of male activity and female passivity. (Female creative power [i.e., spirituality] will be addressed in the last section of this paper.)

## Evil

The other dominant theme, that sexuality is evil, has perpetuated negative attitudes toward the sexuality of men as well as women. However, it has greater repercussions for women than for men. The connection between female sexuality and evil is endemic in Western literature, beginning with ancient mythologies. For example, in Hesiod's *Theogony* we find the myth of the first mortal woman, Pandora, whose external appearance was beautiful, although she was full of deceitfulness and lies. She was designed as a curse for mankind: to attract man and, at the same time, bring about his defeat. She was given a box and told not to open it. Because of her lack of moral integrity (which is associated with her beauty), she opened the box and released evil into the world. Her sexuality is seen as a snare for men. Thus this Greek patriarchal myth is the reversal of the pre-Hellenic, nonpatriarchal myth in which Pandora is the giver of such gifts as wisdom, justice with mercy, courage, strength, and endurance—as described by Charlene Spretnak (1984: 51–65).

The major theme of woman as a source of evil (other major themes were Satan and the Serpent) was further developed by Christian church fathers, based on interpretations of Gen. 2 and 3 (the creation and fall stories). Woman is second to man because she was created after and out of man, and she is to be dominated by man because of her lack of moral strength. This view became almost canonical on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:13–15: "[Women in the assembly] ought not to speak, because Adam was formed first and Eve afterwards, and it was not Adam who was led astray but the woman who was led astray and fell into sin" (Jerusalem Bible). Augustine incorporated the view of 1 Timothy into his explanation of original sin, and negativity toward woman's sexuality was incorporated into canon law, which prohibits women from conducting the Eucharist or baptizing, activities that were lawful for them in the early stages of Christianity. Attacks on female sexuality reached their peak during witchcraft persecutions sanctioned by the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the handbook written by Dominican inquisitors in 1486.

Biblical sources for these negative attitudes are critiqued today by such feminist scholars as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Ruether, and Susan Thistlethwaite in an attempt to depatriarchalize the Bible. Feminist hermeneutics in biblical study provides alter-

native images of women, which these scholars believe are in the texts. Feminist scholars begin with a critical hermeneutics (or a hermeneutics of suspicion), rather than a hermeneutics of acceptance, that questions the presuppositions in interpretation that have dominated traditional biblical studies.

Some feminist scholars (e.g., Phyllis Trible 1978 and Ann Belford Ulanov 1981) claim that the creation story is about the complementariness of the two sexes. Creation of the female was necessary before it was possible to identify the male; through difference, identity is discovered. Thus woman is seen as the culmination of human creation. Infact, the greatest sin was the polarization of male and female, away from the connected polarities of femaleness and maleness in each person.

Rosemary Ruether believes that the greatest evil is the association of evil with female sexuality, because it has led to sexism, which she defines as "gender privilege of males over females" (Reuther 1983, 165). "It is males *primarily* who have originated this form of oppression, benefited from it, and perpetuated it, legally and ideologically" (Reuther 1983, 165). Women have benefited from their conformity to sexism because they gain power through association with men who have set the stage, written the play, defined the roles, and evaluated the players.

There are many reasons why women have cooperated with sexism, and Gerda Lerner mentions seven (1986, 217): (1) gender indoctrination, (2) educational deprivation, (3) denial to women of knowledge of their history, (4) dividing women according to sexual activities (seemingly respectable or otherwise deviant), (5) restraints and coercion, (6) discrimination in access to economic resources and political power, and (7) class privileges for conforming women.

The effect on women of conformity has been alienation from themselves. Women learned to be apologetic about their bodies and, accordingly, themselves. Society has reinforced this form of self-negation through advertising women's bodies alongside merchandise, by restricting opportunities to express personal authority, and by using "arguments from nature" that assume an unfounded gender hierarchy. It is the latter to which I wish to turn attention: "arguments from nature," which are generally thought of as rational arguments.

## RATIONALITY

We have been trained to believe "that our ideas of rationality are neutral and apply to everyone" (Hanen 1989, 2). However, philosopher Genevieve Lloyd points out that "the maleness of the Man of

Reason . . . is no superficial linguistic bias'' (1984, ix). Rationality has been separated from emotionality along the lines of activity and passivity described by Aristotle, who in his *Politics* claims that women are naturally subordinate to men because they lack rational authority. ''The relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled'' (Aristotle 1984, sec. 1254b1, 12). Aristotle's view of human nature in his *Nicomachean Ethics, De Anima,* and *Politics* is that it is natural for the rational part of the soul to rule the nonrational; conversely, it is unnatural for the nonrational aspect to rule the rational. His view of women is that they require male rationality to rule them. Thus it is unnatural for a woman to rule herself, let alone a man, and thus it follows that what is natural for human nature is natural only for men. Aristotle's view of human nature is inconsistent with his view of woman: man is normative of the human species, but woman is a deviation. Accordingly, as Lloyd points out, it is not merely linguistic to speak of ''the Man of Reason.''

The notion of ''the feminine'' has been constructed within the framework of ''the Man of Reason.'' Femininity has therefore been associated with emotive caring, attention to small occurrences of daily life, small people (i.e., children), and adherence to the niceties of life, which provide comfort and a pleasant refuge for men, who struggle in the competitive workforce. Sometimes women combine their femininity with masculine reason and competitiveness; however, we often read about women who resign their high-ranking positions in order to ''stand by'' their husbands, who are running for political office. Loss of the woman's contribution to the welfare of the nation, the waste of her training and expertise is apparently more than compensated for by the gain she brings her husband as his wife by his side.

Ultimately, the rational man is viewed as more valuable than the rational woman. Her feminine aspect is not incompatible with her rational quality, but woman's rationality is most highly rewarded when it is used in her feminine role.

Notions of femininity have been formulated in conjunction with the exclusion of women from positions of authority in which such formulations are made. These kinds of positions are occupied by male politicians, churchmen, men of letters, and university professors (who study in *semin*aries or *semin*ars) who dis*semin*ate *seminal* ideas that shape our education and our psychology. It is assumed that when women occupy these positions, there is latent tension between their femininity and rationality.

Because of their feminine attributes (which are defined for women

in their enforced absence), women are not granted authority in the way that men often are. The cogency of a woman's argument may be acknowledged, but the argument may not have influence because it is not listened to. Men of authority have traditionally determined who is to be listened to and who is not. Because rationality has been unambiguously associated with men, men's arguments have more authority than women's. Women's femininity—again, as defined by men of authority—has contributed to the skepticism with which their rationality is regarded. It is not surprising, therefore, that women who wish to be accepted into the authoritative domains of men of reason have distanced themselves from femininity and femaleness in general (Cross 1981).[2]

Women's psychology has been greatly influenced by the notion of the feminine, which has been perpetuated by the dictum that the sexes are different but equal. Immanuel Kant, for example, saw the natural differences between men and women to be complementary, without imbalance. In Kant's view, woman's function is not only procreation but also, and more importantly, as a suitable partner for her husband. She should be pleasant, in addition to being an environmental decoration. In "Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and Sublime in the Interrelations of the Two Sexes" (1983), Kant extols the virtue of "the lady," which is lacking in "the gentleman."[3]

Before spelling out the virtues of ladies as Kant described them, I shall indicate what, for Kant, constitutes *human* virtue. In his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant locates human virtue in the autonomous, rational will: "The idea of the will of every rational being as a will that legislates universal law" (1981, sec. 431). Universal laws are laws of nature; that is, they determine the existence of things as they are. Duty is determined by universal moral laws and therefore becomes an imperative. One's ultimate duty is to shape one's will so that it is identical with the universal categorical imperative, which is to "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 1981, sec. 421).

The autonomous person has a free, unconditioned will that is based not on interests but on principle. It is clear that, in Kant's account of autonomy, reason occupies the central position. Autonomy is tied to independence; and one determines one's freedom through rational means. Compassion toward others derives from respecting them as autonomous persons, as ends in themselves and not as means to another's ends.

This is what Kant says about human nature. If one read only his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, one would think that he was

referring to men *and* women. That, however, is not the case. For Kant, as for many individuals today (both philosphers and non-philosophers), rationality is tied to sexuality. In his discussion of the relation between the sexes in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1983), Kant claims that the ''fair sex'' does not have the ability to act according to universal principles; that is the task of the ''sublime'' sex:

The fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a *beautiful understanding*, whereas ours should be a deep understanding, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime.

Deep meditation and a long-sustained reflection are noble but difficult, and do not well befit a person in whom unconstrained charms should show nothing else than a beautiful nature. Laborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroy the merits that are proper to her sex, and because of their rarity they can make her an object of cold admiration; but at the same time they will weaken the charms with which she exercises her great power over the other sex.

[Women know] nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation. . . . I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles, and I hope by that not to offend, for these are also extremely rare in the male. But in place of it Providence has put in their breast kind and benevolent sensations, a fine feeling for propriety, and a complaisant soul [1983, 194–96].

Because of Kant's separation of reason and emotion in human nature, he gave no moral value to felt or subjective experience and did not provide different theories of ethics for men and women: the autonomous male has rational power whereas the dependent female has sensual power. The consequence, as we continue to experience it, is the attempt by some men to dominate women through rational argument and by some women to control men through feminine charms. Often, it is still the case that, as Kant says, a woman's mere glance has more power to pursuade than any amount of rational argument.

Kant was not referring to the kind of charm that is appreciated in normal situations. Indeed, all else being equal, we are more likely to submit to another's charm than to intimidation through argument. However, the issue is not the same with regard to men and women: no one is applauded for using charm (in Kant's sense) to further one's career, and women are often accused of achieving advancement through their seductive powers. A ''serious'' woman, therefore, cannot permit herself to be charming. Women are expected (again, in Kant's view) to use their powers of seduction to secure a man who has a position. Securing a man with a position, rather than establishing a position of one's own, is what Kant and many others are

talking about in reference to feminine charms. Therefore, one cannot disregard the different meaning that charm has vis-à-vis men and women.

When women "act like men" to become "one of the boys," they are not generally considered charming, but intimidating. Women's intimidation is often worse than men's because if women display charm, they are accused of being "womanly" and soft. When Kant says that a single sly glance from a woman has greater power than any amount of rational persuasion, he is speaking about feminine charm—the kind that men do not cultivate because they already have the power, which women are allowed to share if they are sufficiently charming. The consequences of charm for men do not compare with the consequences for women. For men, charm is often viewed as a matter of fun; for women charm is generally considered a matter of lifestyle.

This discussion of feminine charm illustrates how the notion of feminine has been constructed dualistically, so that masculine rationality and feminine charm are taken to be complementary. Both terms, masculine rationality and feminine charm, are intended to reflect what the other is not. Although feminine and masculine qualities are often described as complementary, the relation of the sexes, as Kant acknowledges, has been characterized by a power struggle. However, as we have pointed out, this is inconsistent with Kant's theory that one should treat others as ends in themselves rather than as means to one's own ends.

Because the superiority of rationality in Kant's moral theory overrides the emotive, it is not true (by Kant's own standards) that the sexes are different but equal. The difference of the female is associated with inferiority, just as in Aristotle's view, in which female difference is associated with deficiency. Rationality and emotionality have been separated along the lines of sexuality. Theories of objectivity and high moral principles have been taught to us by men such as Kant and Aristotle (among others), who neglected to examine the biased assumptions on which their theories are founded.

A book in which the author integrates autobiography and scholarship in an attempt to move from scholarly pretensions to objectivity is Carol Christ's *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess*, in which she says that "incorporating personal reflection into our work does not mean that our work becomes solipsistic [relevant only to oneself]" (1987, xvi). In her view, empathy allows each individual to enter the perspective of the other. Objective reality incorporates personal, subjective experience as well as abstractions from concrete experiences. A so-called objective theory of reality that omits

personal experience excludes an intrinsic aspect of reality and is thereby a truncated account.

Theory building consists of selecting ideas, things, and events; interpreting them according to suppositions; and communicating their significance according to a perspective that dictates what is important and what is trivial. Evelyn Fox Keller suggest that "science is the name we give to a set of practices and a body of knowledge delineated by a community. . . . Similarly, masculine and feminine are categories defined by a culture . . . women, men, and science are created together, out of a complex dynamic of inter-woven cognitive, emotional, and social forces" (1985, 4).

Historically, the dynamic process of creation resulted in the link between science and men and the (nonscientific) world of the feminine. Consequently, attempts to elevate the status of the feminine meet great resistance.

Genevieve Lloyd points out:

What has been valued—whether it is reason as against passion, the public as against the private, the universal as against the particular—has been identi-fied with maleness. Within this tradition of association of maleness with preferred traits, it is not just incidental to femaleness that it has been down-graded. Femaleness has been constituted in relation to a male norm—as its opposite or complement. The mere affirmation of feminine cannot now be expected of itself to shake the older structure of asymmetrical complementa-tion (1986, 5).

In an attempt to move toward a rationality that includes both analytic knowledge and nonanalyzable, nonreflected experience, it is impor-tant to overcome the historical dualities that have maintained separate male and female spheres.

At the same time it is necessary, for equal recognition for women and men, to ensure that biological differences are acknowledged. For example, menstruation and childbirth must be included in our accounts of humanity. The workplace must be oriented toward all adults—those with children as well as those without. Child care must be seen as a social, not only a woman's, issue. In short, we must no longer accept a view of humanity that is skewed by biased selection, interpretation, and communication. Knowledge of humanity and the environment requires knowledge *of* and *by* women, as well as of and by men, in order to extirpate the gender bias that has dominated history. As Jean Grimshaw observes, "It is not surprising that one of the most consistent themes of feminism has been the need of women for autonomy and independence, and their need to pursue their own interest and say for themselves what it is they need or want" (1986, 140).

A good example of research to discover more about women is *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al. 1986), a study by four psychologists who interviewed 135 women from different socioeconomic classes. The authors describe five ways of knowing: (1) silence (a form of *not* knowing), (2) knowing through information received from an external authority, (3) knowing intuitively (a feeling state), (4) knowing analytically/intellectually, and (5) knowing in a contextualized way. Emphasis on *ways* of knowing, rather than on having knowledge, focuses on the close association between knowing and being. Our way of being in the world is largely determined by the way in which we know about ourselves and the world.

Women in the first category (knowledge through silence) had no clear form of self-expression and lacked self-confidence. Those who based their knowledge on external authorities, the second way of knowing, gained confidence through their association with those authorities (in most cases their father or husband).The third way of knowing, subjectively (usually referred to as intuition or ''gut reactions''), elicits a prereflective response in the knower. It inclines one toward or away from an object of awareness, without the intuitor questioning the validity of the response. Women who knew intuitively were skeptical of any analysis of their reactions; their self-confidence was based solely on the strength of their intuitive reactions. Women in the fourth category, on the other hand, based their knowledge on analytic reasoning alone and rejected intuition as a way of knowing.

The fifth category of women believed that all knowledge is constructed from these various ways of knowing—except for knowing through silence, which they saw as a form of not knowing. The fifth category is constructed, integrated knowledge. Held up as the ideal way of knowing, it combines listening to others, considering one's immediate response, and placing the response into a larger context, in which it can be related to perceptions derived from prior experiences. There is a reflexive relation between the content of knowledge and the knower: each affects the other and both are mutually informing.

Contextualized knowledge, as formulated in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, is attractive but problematic. It does not include evaluation of different ways of knowing. It is completely relativistic, which does not help the authors' argument for a more adequate way of knowing. They provide a good beginning for a description of contextualized knowledge, but do not go far enough on integrating subjectivity and objectivity to provide a reasonable description of a preferred way of knowing. In a society such as ours, where men are listened to more

than women, it is important to have an objective criterion for knowledge; otherwise men's subjectivity will continue to be preferred over women's. It is necessary to reformulate the criteria for objectivity in a theory of contextualized knowledge to include women's as well as men's subjectivity.

The idea of contextualized knowledge did not orginate with feminist thought, nor is it restricted to feminist thinking; however, determination to take women's experiences seriously is specifically feminist. This view of knowledge locates the knower in the context and thereby helps us understand how the process of knowing and the content of knowledge exist in a reflexive relation. It also points to the reality that the knower and that which is known cannot be separated completely, thereby declaring that purely objective knowledge is impossible.

Such an epistemology is compatible with several philosophical systems. Three examples with which I am familiar are Spinoza's *Ethics*, Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, and a Yogācāra Buddhist text, the *Triṁśikā*, by Vasubandhu (Tomm 1984, 1987). Feminists are working not only for greater awareness of gender bias (which has pervaded scholarship) but are shedding light on aspects of thought that have been overlooked by most interpreters. It is becoming clearer how subjective the notion of objectivity has been. We are redefining the relation between subjectivity and objectivity as we develop a new understanding of rationality.

When we speak of having knowledge, we must ask, "Whose knowledge are we speaking about?"[4] This challenges postpositivist, empiricist epistemology, which assumes that the knowing process, the process of justification, is independent of the person doing the justification. We must ask why we think that the knowing process is similar from knower to knower, or that we can speak of a detached observer. In assuming the objective rationality of knowing, we overlook relevant aspects of cognitive location. We do not take into account the conditions that bear on the purpose of knowledge. If we regard knowledge—that is, the process of knowing—as a context of discovery rather than justification, we would probably include different ways of knowing in what we call rationality. Rationality would not be so closely identified with self-sufficiency, control over emotions, or conquest of the environment. It would, instead, include the effects of shared interactions, emotive motivation, and concern for the ecological system.

Such rationality would involve a different account of the relation between knowledge and power in that wide expanses of learning would no longer be excluded. This is not to say that complete

relativism would prevail or that subjectivity would replace objectivity; rather, a form of mitigated relativism would emerge that would be compatible with realism. As we have said, the process of knowing is relative to the knower; it is affected by the sex, class, race, and many other qualities of the knower. Although knowing and being are not distinct, many diverse knowers can know the same reality; that is, they can share in the same knowledge through consensus and coherence. To avoid reinforcing dominant ideologies, it is necessary to listen to voices from "territories" that previously have been excluded.

It helps to remember the different voices in our account of rationality if we reflect on the question, "Whose knowledge are we talking about?" If we take into account the different knowers in the process of developing knowledge, we have to include important dimensions of knowers. The ultimate dimension is that of spirituality.

## SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality has been closely associated with rationality and separated from materiality, especially female sexuality. Teaching at one of the first Western universities, Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century adopted Aristotle's view of a female as a misbegotten male whose only function is procreation. In his view, there was very little to be gained by talking to women about spiritual matters. This was a reason for excluding almost all women from the educational possibilities open to many men. Like Augustine of the fourth and fifth centuries, Aquinas believed that because a woman's body was allegedly formed from corporeal matter (Gen. 2), it is not the direct responsibility of God.[5] Woman's relation to God must therefore be mediated by man. Social order consists in *inequality* between genders (as well as among classes and races). In his view, woman sinned through pride and self-conceit. However, she is helpful as a source of evil because she contributes to a larger good: the universe would have been less "perfect" without the occasion of evil.

This negative attitude toward woman's nature permeated the schools and went out into the populace through the churches, so that female spirituality was considered of less significance than male spirituality. (The Canadian National Film Board production *Behind the Veil: Nuns* depicts attitudes toward female spirituality throughout the history of the Catholic church, to the 1980s.) The authority of bishops and priests was felt by the congregations, and maintained in the homes, by the authority of the father. The Reformation, alas,

provided no assistance to women. Although Luther, Calvin, and others struggled to break away from the authority of the medieval church, they maintained the strict hierarchy between the sexes in the home, where the husband substituted for the priest as father confessor.

What can women do if they wish to develop their spirituality free from the restrictions of tradition? Mary Daly says that if you choose the God of the Fathers, the Bible supplies models for your sub- servience; and if you choose the God (Goddess) of Sisterhood, you must reject the Christian tradition (Daly 1979). Some women are renouncing their traditions and developing new expressions for their spirituality, for example, Carol Christ (1987), Naomi Goldenberg (1979), and Starhawk (1979)—to name a few. Others wish to remain "inside" and transform the tradition—such scholars as Rosemary Ruether (1985), Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (1984), and Susan Thistlethwaite (1983).

One of the difficulties women have when they leave their tradition (just as when they leave their marriage after many years) is total disqualification, often followed by a form of existential nothingness. They fall into what has been termed the dark night of the soul. There are no adequate metaphors, images, or ideas to give meaning to their existence. This happens, however, whenever one no longer esteems what one was taught to value. There are degrees of rejection of tradi- tional values. When rejection is by a woman of most of the patriarchal values, she runs a very high risk of experiencing existential nothing- ness. More and more, however, this feeling is relieved through greater support.

The spiritual dimension of one's existence may be described as the aspect that is rooted in an external process of creativity. It may be regarded as the source of one's strength and the anchor of one's being. When a person meditates, prays, or goes into the depths of his or her being, the fundamental reality of oneself is experienced, according to reports of religious experience. Or, in the spirit of Alice Walker (1982), all truth comes from silence. This is not the kind of silence discussed earlier, as one of the five ways of women's knowing; rather, Alice Walker's silence entails knowing confidently through reflection on one's power, as well as trust in that power. With respect to women, Rosemary Ruether refers to such awareness as "feminist consciousness." In contrast, "false consciousness" means conformity to values that are detrimental to one's nature but expedient (1983, 185).

As women who live in a patriarchal society, we often conform to patterns that do not contribute to or actualize our potentialities but

instead inhibit our growth. We conform for the reasons mentioned earlier, but mostly for survival.

Spirituality is about living in a "good consciousness"—centering oneself in one's power or centering oneself within a larger power. (Most religious accounts of human nature include both kinds of centeredness.) Feminist spirituality aims at overcoming the division between sexuality and spirituality by reforming traditional values from within or by establishing frameworks in which women can develop (or reinstate) female images that represent all aspects of the female. As Jean Bolen demonstrates in *Goddesses in Everywoman* (1984), the archetypal female figures of Greek mythology have been used to depict various kinds of females, rather than different qualities of each woman's nature. An integrated woman, in Bolen's view, acknowledges and receives all her qualities as her own, without defining some as masculine and others as feminine. Of course the same idea, acceptance of all one's traits holds true for men as well as women.

Another aim of feminist research is new approaches to understanding human nature, approaches that begin with nondualistic assumptions. This requires orientation to oneself and to others as persons in relationships of mutual empowerment. Our notion of the autonomous person must be redefined to include both self-determination and dependency. Autonomy is inseparable from knowing and is connected with emergence of self through receptivity of another.

Carol Christ (1980, 13–26) says that goddess imagery is required for women to identify with the spiritual powers within them. A woman's awakening to great internal powers grounds her in a new sense of self and a new orientation in the world. Through awakening to new powers, women overcome self-negation and fragmentation of body and spirit. Also, they refuse to be less than they are. The awakening is followed by a new naming of self and reality that reflects wholeness. It is a movement toward overcoming the dualisms of self and world, body and soul, nature and spirit, rational and emotional. "For me," Christ summarizes (1987, ix), "spirituality is experiencing connectedness to the life force within all living things."

The wholeness described by Christ characterizes one's consciousness when one is centered in deep powers within oneself. This form of consciousness is not unique to women. It characterizes religious experiences for men and women alike. For women, the difference is that their consciousness generally includes some aspect of inferiority in a patriarchal framework, a lack of personal power (i.e., power of

self-determination). Therefore, the creation of nonpatriarchal con-
texts is required in order for women to empower each other. Such
contexts provide women with the strength to go forth in other
contexts that are less conducive to women's self-expression.

Through female imagery of the divine, female power is acknowl-
edged as beneficent and independent rather than inferior and
dangerous. The female body and the life cycle are thereby affirmed
through female imagery of the divine. Youth, maturity, and age can
each be seen positively, as human potentiality, creativity, and
wisdom in relation to the maiden, mother, and old woman. Positive
attitudes toward the self as woman are allowed to prevail over prior
self-negating ones. If women are to claim themselves more fully,
nurturing communities are necessary to guide them through the
death of the old symbolic order to rebirth into a new community of
being and living. Strength gained through the connectedness of the
new community allows one to proceed with confidence (rather than
defiance).

Men also need to form communities in which they can critique
their dehumanization by patriarchy and form a culture of liberation
from it. A transformational dialectic occurs when each person is open
to the reality of the other. This includes the willingness of feminists to
listen to those who have not examined the androcentric assumptions
governing their lives or do not accept the feminist critique of
patriarchal domination in the religious traditions.

Transformation sometimes includes radical reformulation of prior
views, but it also includes learning from tradition. Traditionalists
and post traditionalists must continue their dialogue in good faith,
recognizing that different voices assert different cognitive and
emotive positions. The goal is an ethics of freedom that applies
equally to women and men. Such an endeavor requires a view of
human nature in which femaleness and maleness are celebrated for
their sexuality, rationality, and spirituality.

Irish Murdoch, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, uses the word attention
''to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an indi-
vidual reality. I believe this to be the characteristic and proper mark
of the active moral agent'' (Murdoch 1970, 34). One could say that
the mark of the moral agent, as described by Murdoch, is the mark of
the individual who is grounded in the experience of ontological
connectedness—the I-Thou relation. Attention to the reality of each
individual will result in greater contributions from both women and
men as we share, with equal significance, in the symbol-making
systems that give meaning to our lives.

NOTES

1. Scientific and religious issues in Western civilization have evolved largely according to belief in the power of knowledge to control. Man's project to know and control other aspects of nature (including woman's nature) has been associated with scientific progress. Conflicts between science and religion have generally entailed difficulties in sorting out the power relations between men and God. On the other hand, power struggles between women and God have resulted in witch hunts and the minimalization of women in both religion and science. Things are changing, however. New models of God are being developed (see, e.g., McFague 1987). Greater association between the power of God or Goddess as well as integrative (rather than dominative) power will undoubtedly lead to scientific projects that are consistent with ecological survival and birth (rather than with destruction and death).

2. Amanda Cross's "murder mystery" is a good example of a woman who was selected for a high academic position because her department had been promised a large sum of money if a woman was installed as its chair. The woman, selected by an all-male committee, assumed she was chosen because of her credentials, which *did* qualify her for the position. She did not realize, however, that her colleagues were compelled to choose her (or another woman) to get the grant. Consequently, their cool attitude toward her was puzzling, but she was used to being the only woman in the department and, therefore, alone most of the time. She would have nothing to do with the women's groups on campus because she did not want to "tarnish" her reputation by association with them. One day she was found dead in her office, and the mystery is: How did she die? The answer to this question reveals much about the situation of women in academia today.

3. Much of what I say here with reference to Kant is also in Tomm 1987. I include the material because it is central to current debates about sexual differences and equal opportunities. It is important, in light of these debates, to reveal the fallaciousness of the different-but-equal dictum espoused by Kant (among others). We need to accept sexual differences, and associated needs, in our attempt to establish equal opportunities. All emphasis on difference, however, must be in reference to biological differences, without going onto prescribe psychological and social attributes (i.e., gender proscriptions) that lead to separate-sphere arguments. Women's reproductive capacities and activities must be seen as part of our normative account of human nature and human activity. The implication of taking the biology of women seriously is that scientific activity will have to be redirected toward life-giving and preservation rather than to destruction and death.

4. I am indebted to Lorraine Code, who discussed this issue ("Whose Knowledge?") at the meeting of the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy at the University of Guelph, Ontario, on 18 September 1987.

5. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part 1, art. 1-4, quest. 92, "The Production of the Woman."

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