

## Weekly Essay Topics for PHL 335 (Heikes)

### **Essay 1:**

In “Cartesian Reason and Gendered Reason,” Atherton asks (p. 20): How can Descartes have given rise to a concept of reason that:

- (1) deprived women of their own minds AND
- (2) encouraged them to take control of their own minds?

Use any or all of our current readings or discussions to explain the reasons for this apparent contradiction. Also, take a stand on this issue. Do you think Descartes deprives women of rationality? Supports the rationality of women? Neither of the above? Defend your response.

### **Essay 2:**

Lloyd says, “The maleness of reason is not a unitary representation; rather it is a network of symbolic operations” (p. 82). Part of this network of symbolic operations includes the privileging of the mental over the bodily. Explain how the Cartesian tradition has engaged in such privileging, and discuss at least one of the reasons Elizabeth Grosz gives to support a re-focusing of our attention on the body. Is Grosz right? Explain.

### **Essay 3:**

While Grosz argues that we must overcome the masculinity of knowledge by coming up with alternative knowledges (mostly women’s knowledges) that can be contrasted against masculine knowledge, Sandra Harding “argue[s] against the idea of a distinctive feminist method of research” (p.17). Evaluate and take a stand on these two different approaches to knowledge. Give an argument in support of one or the other.

### **Essay 4:**

Describe what Moulton means by the “adversary paradigm” or “adversary method,” and evaluate it against the alternatives she mentions at the end of the essay.

### **Essay 5:**

Given what we have discussed up to this point in the course, explain what you take to be the most significant insight or criticism raised by feminist philosophers. Provide an argumentative defense of your choice.

### **Essay 6:**

Explain the key differences between standpoint epistemology and feminist empiricist epistemology. Which view do you think is stronger? Defend your response.

**Essay 7:**

“Realism” and “objectivity” are traditional philosophical concepts that feminists have ambivalent feelings toward. Pick *either* of these concepts, and explain why feminists argue both for and against it. Then, explain on which side (or neither) you think the truth lies. (In making your argument, both Fricker and Barwell can provide a launch point for your discussion.)

**Essay 8:**

Marnia Lazreg argues (pp. 52-55 in *Knowing the Difference*) that there are a number of paradoxes that emerge from feminist scholarship. Pick one of the five paradoxes she mentions, explain what it is or how it comes about, and finally assess whether Lazreg is correct in asserting that feminists encounter this paradox. (Note, Lazreg sets up Harding as her main opponent, so you can use Harding to make your argument.)

**Essay 9:**

Janna Thompson argues for a communicative ethics. Explain and evaluate what this communicative ethic is, how it rejects Cartesian individualism, and how it is supposed to serve as a feminist ethic.

**Essay 10:**

Read the first section of Nelson’s “Epistemological Communities” (entitled The Agents of Epistemology). Explain **and** evaluate who Nelson thinks is an agent of epistemology and how her view differs from historical views.

**Essay 11:**

What do you take to be the most important claim Longino makes in “Can There be a Feminist Science?” Explain the significance of this claim for feminists, and determine whether Longino is correct in making this claim. As always, defend your response.

**Essay 12:**

What do you take to be the most important claim Addelson makes in “Man of Professional Wisdom”? Explain the significance of this claim for feminists, and determine whether Addelson is correct in making this claim. As always, defend your response.