

Assignment 4

Feminist philosophy of science.

Sandra Harding identifies three types of feminist philosophy of science (see Godfrey-Smith p.141). They are (1) feminist empiricism, (2) radical feminist epistemology, and (3) standpoint theory. We can think of these as alternative hypotheses about the ways that androcentric biases might impact science. Kathleen Okruhlik adds a fourth hypothesis: (4) that such biases influence which hypotheses are generated and, ultimately, which ones are adopted.

Your assignment is to see how well these four hypotheses account for a range of different examples from the field of primatology. I do not want students to describe each of these four alternatives. But you will have to understand them in order to do the assignment.

In her paper "The paradox of feminist primatology" (2001), Linda Fedigan discusses what she calls eight 'tools' of gender analysis. Each tool exposes some respect in which androcentric biases influence the science of primatology.

Your assignment is to assess five of these 'tools' (of your choice) in light of the four hypotheses, mentioned above. For example, Fenigan explains how subtle choices in language shape our views about primate behaviour. Assume that she is correct that female primates were historically described as more passive than males. Which of the four hypotheses (mentioned above) best accounts for this pattern? Why?

Your discussion of each tool should be a short paragraph – about ½ page each.