

CALL FOR PAPERS

Epistemic Vices: Continuities and Discontinuities, 1600-2000

Leiden University, Institute for History, January 25-26, 2018

Conference aims

Impartiality, objectivity, honesty, and accuracy are qualities that generations of scholars have regarded as necessary for the pursuit of scholarly inquiry. Philosophers call them epistemic virtues, because these virtues facilitate the pursuit of epistemic aims such as knowledge and understanding of reality. As such, epistemic virtues are supposed to help scholars overcome barriers of prejudice, ignorance, sloppiness, and dogmatism – dispositions known as epistemic vices.

Following Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison's *Objectivity* (2007), historians of science and historians of the humanities alike are paying increasing attention to epistemic virtues. Surprisingly, however, they have devoted much less attention to the negative counterparts of these virtues: epistemic vices. Moreover, in so far as vices are subjected to historical scrutiny, there is little interaction between scholarship on early modern science and literature on the post-1800 period. This is regrettable, if only because vices such as dogmatism have surprisingly long histories, which can be traced only through collaborative efforts of modernists and early modernists.

This conference therefore intends to stage a conversation between historians of early modern science and scholars working on post-1800 science (the humanities and social sciences included), focusing on four closely related questions:

- 1) What *continuities* and *discontinuities* can be identified in how scholars in different times and places conceived of epistemic vices? How did vices acquire new meanings in new circumstances, sometimes even to the point of becoming virtues (as in the case of *curiositas*)?
- 2) To what extent have early modern catalogs of vice been *retrieved* in modern times – think of the rediscovery of Francis Bacon's "idols of the mind" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?
- 3) How to *explain* (dis)continuity over time? What were the carriers of the tradition (textbooks, for instance) or key factors altering the moral economy of science?
- 4) In what *language* did scholars speak about epistemic vices? To what extent are "deficient skills" and "lacking competences" modern reformulations of ancient *vitia sive errores eruditorum*?

Practical information

The conference will open with a keynote lecture by **Steven Shapin** (Harvard). Other confirmed speakers include **Richard Bellon** (Michigan State University), **Sorana Corneanu** (Bucharest), **Ian James Kidd** (Nottingham), and **Sari Kivistö** (Tampere).

In addition, the conference welcomes submissions for twenty-minute paper presentations related to one of the four questions above. Proposals of no more than 500 words are due by

June 15, 2017 and can be send to Herman Paul at h.j.paul@hum.leidenuniv.nl. Notification of acceptance will be given by July 8, 2017.

The conference will take place at Leiden University, close to Amsterdam Airport (Schiphol). There will be no conference fee. Lunches, and a conference dinner will be offered to all speakers at no cost. Participants will be responsible, however, for their own travel and accommodation costs.

More information

The conference is organized under auspices of “The Scholarly Self: Character, Habit, and Virtue in the Humanities, 1860-1930,” a research project led by Herman Paul and funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). For more information, please contact Herman Paul at h.j.paul@hum.leidenuniv.nl.