

From the Editor's Desk

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This issue has been a long time coming. For several years, this journal has been bouncing around—moving from person to person. The long-time Managing Editor Frank Fair initially handed it off to our colleague here at Sam Houston State, Dr. David Wright. Unfortunately, David left the profession a few years back, and handed it back to Frank. Subsequently, Frank asked me to take it over, and I agreed. And I was getting prepared to officially take over the duties in the Spring of 2020 when the COVID pandemic hit. As a first time Editor of a journal, it took a lot of time and energy just getting my feet underneath me and figuring out how to go through the process of copy-editing, formatting and publishing the content that I had. And, due to circumstances, I had little in the way of guidance on how exactly to do so. In the past year, just about everything has become increasingly difficult in colleges and universities. We've suffered budget cutbacks, increased work in developing courses in new and unfamiliar modalities—all the while dealing with the inconstant commitments by the University administration. But although the journal has seen a large gap in the publication schedule, I am pleased to say that *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines* is back and poised for a new era. With a new look and updated format, I look forward to moving *Inquiry* forward, and adding a little punk-rock sensibility to the journal.

In 1784, Immanuel Kant equated Enlightenment with development. Enlightenment, he tells us, is “emergence from [our] self-imposed immaturity.” The ability to think freely, or to use reason “without guidance from another” is one of the key features he outlines as exemplified of the period. It's important that he identifies this immaturity as “self-imposed,” because it is not in spite of our abilities by which we enter such a state. Rather, it results from “a lack of resolve or courage” to use our own understanding. Thus, borrowing a maxim from the Roman poet Horace, Kant identifies “*Sapere Aude!*” [Dare to be wise!] as the characteristic “motto” of the Enlightenment.

When teaching critical reasoning in our classes, we often talk about the values concerned with critical reasoning—open-mindedness, charity,

concern for truth and accuracy, etc. But the ability of reason to participate in shaping our civil and political formations is often not considered amongst the benefits of becoming a critical thinker. Too often we think of reasoning as a purely *a priori* enterprise: logic doesn't tell us what to believe—it only tells us that if we accept statement *p* that we cannot accept “not-*p*”; or that if we accept that *p* and also that *p* implies *q*, then we must accept *q*. The precise content of these inferences too often fades into the background, since it's not considered relevant to reasoning in the abstract sense. Moreover, professors and teachers (often understandably) are reticent to teach content which explicitly challenges the existing political and social order. This is doubly condemned: not just as content, but as a specific type of content. Given the (often viscous) partisan attacks by anti-intellectuals and those on the ideological fringe regarding “left-wing professors” and our “indoctrination” of the students by some covert “agenda.” Meanwhile, the only *agenda* which most of us tend to adopt is to help our students become more effective writers and thinkers. If I'm not always successful in “indoctrating” students to do the reading before class, one would think that the influence we have on changing students' beliefs is at best hyperbolic. But what we can do is to model effective reasoning and clear thinking. Representative democracy is not possible without an educated populace.

But, in the broader sense: the ability to be enlightened comes back to Kant's point. We are not just training our students not just to be able to make good judgments based on reasons or evidence, but rather allowing them to mature and grow as individuals. And this would include training them in how to challenge traditional ways of thinking, and to be increasingly informed and engaged in the political process. Misinformation about the efficacy of vaccines, or mask-wearing, or election fraud, etc. are rampant. Expertise is reviled and watching YouTube clips is considered “research.” When we see events like the assault on the US Capital building on January 6, 2021, the constant refrain is that we need to better educate our students in critical thinking. But that often does not mean merely getting them to understand how *modus tollens* works; moreover, it means helping them to understand the difference between authoritative and non-authoritative sources of information, and how to make good inferences given the relevant evidence.

This inaugural edition of *Inquiry* concerns the philosophy of the French Enlightenment. While the concerns of the eighteenth century seem somewhat antiquated relative to our contemporary concerns, the values which were birthed during this time still endure and should be embraced. The French *philosophes* were one of the earliest and clearest examples of an intellectual movement which challenged the existing power dynamic. No longer were we content to accept edicts from clergy and nobility—but rather *using* philosophy to challenge these structures. That is to say:

to build a more “mature” and more humane society which caters to the diverse needs of the populace. We still have a significant way to go in terms of challenging biases which affect people—especially with regard to class, gender, race, etc. But if there is any hope for our future, we often must look to our past. And for this reason, it is only fitting that our first issue since relaunching the journal covers this important period of intellectual development. It has never been more relevant than now to teach the Enlightenment.