

Susan Haack: A Passionate Moderate

LESLIE MARSH

Managing Editor of *Cosmos + Taxis*

Department of Pathology and
Laboratory Medicine
The University of British Columbia Hospital

Web: <https://manwithoutqualities.com>

The title of this brief piece offers the clearest of clues as to why Susan Haack is of interest to this journal's readership. Whether or not Susan considers herself a liberal (in the *classical* sense of course), her concerns are certainly coextensive with those of classical liberalism. That Susan is one of the finest technical and most original philosophers of her generation is a given. What I want to emphasize, though, is Susan's distinctiveness in poking her head above the parapet in taking on *illiberality*—an illiberality that manifests itself in perennially hot topics, a Gordian knot of relativism, multiculturalism, feminism, affirmative action, scientism, junk science, the sociology of scientific knowledge, social constructivism, literary theory, epistemic privilege and more besides—in Susan's words, "activism masquerading as inquiry". Post-Sokal it seemed that this "fashionable nonsense" was in retreat. But its promoters were merely regrouping only to remerge in a big way two decades later. The New Cynicism that Susan had identified twenty years ago, is now even more ubiquitous within the academy and this time round, has gained currency well beyond the university.

Inspired by the issues Susan raised in *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays* and *Defending Science—Within Reason: Between Scientism and Cynicism*, I set up an analytically inclined journal that offered a forum to take on the radical constructivists and &c. Along with the late Anthony Quinton and Alvin Goldman, Susan formed the core tripartite of *EPISTEME*'s launch at the British Academy. Susan came off a long flight from China suffering from a nasty cold, and being the trouper that she is, went ahead with her talk without missing a beat. I thoroughly enjoyed Susan's company when I saw her at an *EPISTEME* conference on evidence and law at Dartmouth in 2008. Chatting about the philosophy department at the University of Miami over lunch I was struck about how forthright she was. The last time I saw Susan was at The University of British Columbia in 2011 when she delivered Sikora Lecture with a thoroughly entertaining talk, opening up with the "Rumsfeld Problem."

Susan is a paragon of intellectual virtue—independent-minded and epistemically modest—without ever dispensing with a commitment to approaching the truth. Unlike the prevailing virtue-signaling sophists, Susan is not only a philosopher's philosopher but talks without condescension to the proverbial man on the Clapham omnibus—other passionate moderates. Thank you Susan.