

MITIGATION AND ERASURE: REMOVING UNPLEASANT CONCEPTS FROM LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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Abstract:

Mitigation and avoidance of certain linguistic expressions constitute a persistent feature of human communication. These behaviours manifest in multiple forms, ranging from simple politeness to euphemism and linguistic taboo, and from politically correct and woke language to the contemporary practices collectively referred to as cancel culture. The latter, like the ancient damnatio memoriae, may involve not only linguistic avoidance but also physical interventions such as the removal of monuments or the exclusion of specific texts from educational curricula. Although these practices differ in motivation and intensity, they originate from long-standing cultural beliefs and social mechanisms aimed at regulating the expression of concepts considered unpleasant, dangerous, or morally problematic. Recent controversies—such as the banning of the Bible or of Homer’s Odyssey in certain school contexts, or disputes over the display of Michelangelo’s David—illustrate how moral realignments can produce temporary extremes before stabilising into new normative frameworks. While political thought since the Renaissance appeared to move away from morally judging past societies, current debates suggest a renewed inclination to evaluate historical artefacts and figures according to contemporary ethical standards. The study presented here examines these phenomena comparatively, demonstrating that modern avoidance practices continue patterns deeply rooted in linguistic behaviour and cultural history. The long-term outcomes of the present moral reconfiguration remain uncertain.

Keywords: *Cancel culture; Politically correct language; Woke language; Euphemism and linguistic taboo; Ethics and communication.*