

## **Research Space**

Unpublished conference or workshop item

**Sapere Aude - enlightenment values and academic cancel culture**

**Beighton, C.**

Sapere  
Aude:  
Enlightenme  
nt ideas,  
values and

A portrait of Olympe de Gouges, a French philosopher, writer, and feminist. She is depicted from the chest up, wearing a white, high-collared dress. Her hair is styled in a large, dark, powdered wig. The background is a dark, textured grey. The portrait is partially obscured by a dark, jagged silhouette on the left side.

**“Man, are you capable of being just? It is a woman who poses the question”**

*Olympe de Gouges 1748-1793*

# Queen's speech on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

- promise to “strengthen and renew democracy”
- Higher education: free speech and academic freedom



Gavin Williamson

# “creeping culture of censorship” (p. 5)?

- has produced a “**chilling effect**” on academic freedom



“there is a growing atmosphere on campuses that is antithetical to constructive debate where differing opinion is respected”. (pp.18-19)

# some caveats (1)

## Caveat 1

- Only “a tiny proportion” of events have actually been cancelled in recent years:
- [a recent briefing paper](#) = actual incidents of “no platforming” are **rare**.

## Caveat 2

- attributable to a **very small minority** of individual **students or staff**



# More seriously...(2)



**Caveat 1: negativity**

**Caveat: 2: positivity**



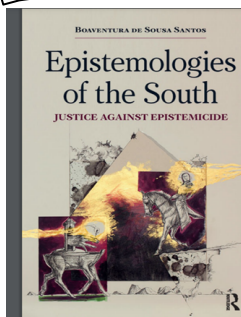
# Self-censorship

1. perceived hostility from peers
2. fear of harming the reputation of the organisation
3. anxiety about damaging career prospects by daring to exercise **the public use of reason.**

Although threatening **fines** for 'no-platforming' may have the 'very same effect' as banning controversial guests

# Cancelling the Enlightenment?

- “Cartesian doubt is a systematic process of **being skeptical about the truth of one's beliefs**”
- "*dubito ergo cogito, cogito ergo sum*"
- (wikipedia)
- [even the \*cogito\* is undermined by Evil Genius Doubt.](#)



Gender, Development, and  
Post-Enlightenment Philosophies of  
Science

SANDRA HARDING

Recent "gender, environment, and sustainable development" accounts raise pointed questions about the complicity of Enlightenment philosophies of science with





# Enlightenment: values or slogans?

Descartes /  
Spinoza  
Hobbes /  
Rousseau  
Leibniz /  
Voltaire  
Hume /  
Kant

- Lots of (anachronistic?) controversy, but
- Deus sive natura (BdS)
- *No man has any natural authority over his fellow men.* (JJR)
- Cultivate your garden: (V)

*Sapere aude:* (V)  
"Have the courage to use your own understanding."



# And of course...

- **“...I have no need to think, if only I can pay” I. Kant.**



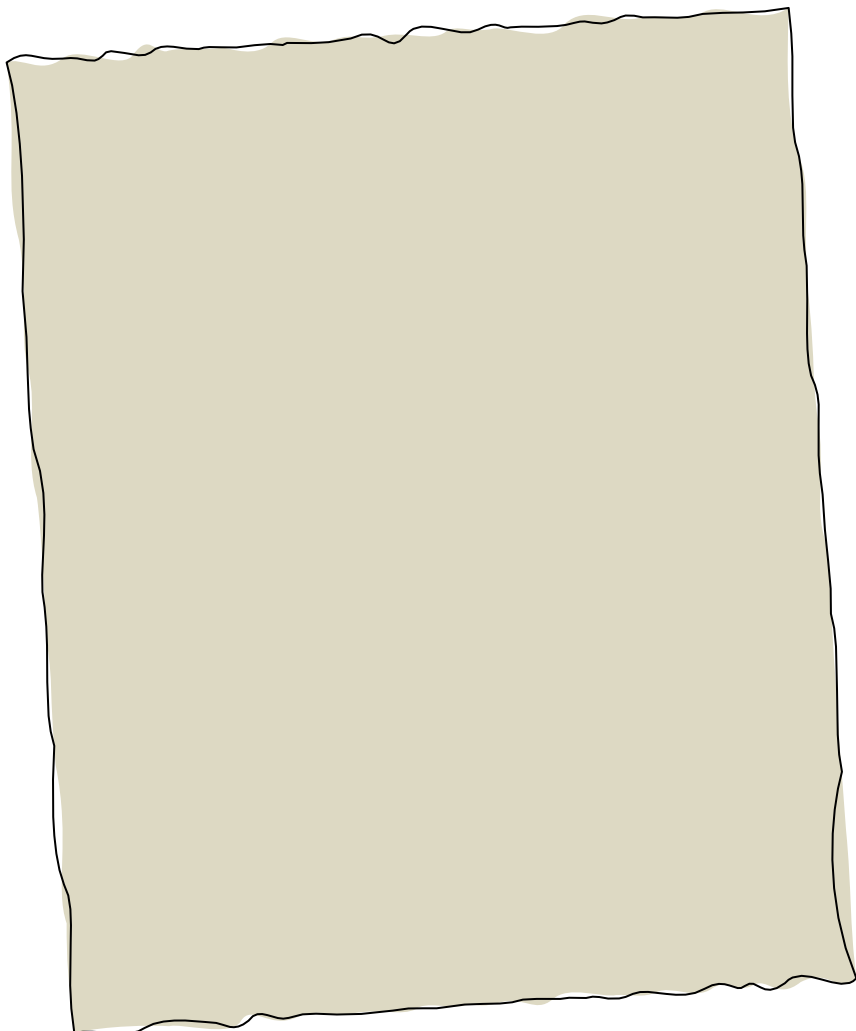
# So enlightenment values = escaping nonage

- Olympe de Gouges
- Mary Wollstonecraft
- Catharine Macauley

- "the only limit to the exercise of the natural rights of woman is the perpetual tyranny that man opposes to it"
- "All the sacred rights of humanity are violated by insisting on blind obedience."
- *"I have no desire to see the residence of the tyrants"*

Coffee houses, salons,  
debating societies:





7/7/2021

[christian.beighton@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:christian.beighton@canterbury.ac.uk)

**"They never forgave her,  
and she paid for her  
carelessness with her head.**

**“ (in 1793)**



"To study  
and not

# Slogans for fun...



think is a  
waste.  
To think  
and not  
study is

*To suppress free  
speech is a double  
wrong. It violates the  
rights of the hearer as  
well as those of the  
speaker.*

dangerous  
"

**Wollstonecraft – Rousseau –  
Kant**



"To study and not think is a waste. To think and not study is dangerous."



*To suppress free speech is a double wrong. It violates the rights of the hearer as well as those of the speaker.*



# Reading

background

And if you read only one...

- Expert comment

**A chilling debate?  
Cultivating free speech on  
campus.**

- Expert comment

**Knowing narratives:  
challenging the spectacle of  
racist discrimination.**

<https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/po>

