

## Research Space

### Lecture

**0 Sapere Aude**

**Beighton, C.**

# Sapere Aude: Enlightenment ideas, values and slogans and academic cancel culture



**“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

- shambolic and negative
- handmaiden to capitalism ( i.e. a measure of (online) productivity, not behaviour or values.)
- Sad puritanism (resentful scolding and threats)

## Caveat 2: positivity

- Fear of CC is itself a moral panic (pomo irony? Or “right wing myth”)
- ritualized mimicry of the judicial process
- *“Ambition makes rational debate impossible, even when our freedom to speak remains perfectly intact.”*



# Self-censorship

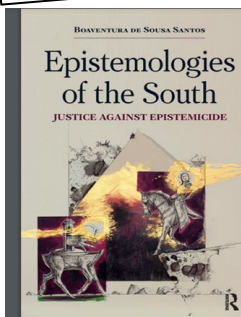
1. perceived hostility from peers
2. fear of harming the reputation of the organisation
3. anxiety about damaging career prospects by daring to exercise **the public use of reason.**

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

# Cancelling the Enlightenment?

“...Western philosophy, for which the subject-object dialectic, the Cartesian viewpoint, and the absolute I-know-it-all attitude still hold massive sway.”

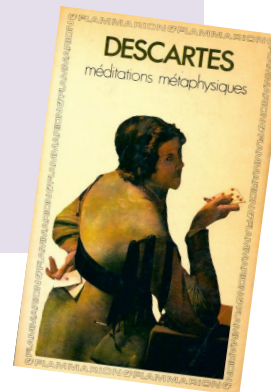
- “Cartesian doubt is a systematic process of **being skeptical about the truth of one's beliefs**”
- “*dubito ergo cogito, cogito ergo sum*”
- (wikipedia)
- even the *cogito* is undermined by Evil Genius Doubt.



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!*  
"Have the courage to use  
your own understanding."



christian.bei



ury.ac.uk



# And of course...

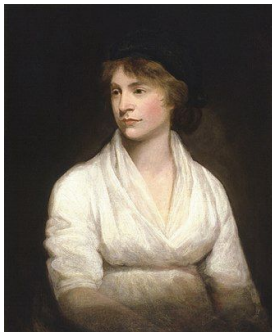
- “...I have no need to think, if only I can pay” I. Kant.



# 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:  
public use of  
reason

# Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793)

**“The tocsin of reason  
resounds through the  
whole universe:  
recognize your rights.  
The powerful empire of  
nature is no longer  
surrounded by  
prejudices, fanaticism,  
superstition and lies.”**



**"They never forgave her, and  
she paid for her  
carelessness with her  
head."** (in 1793)



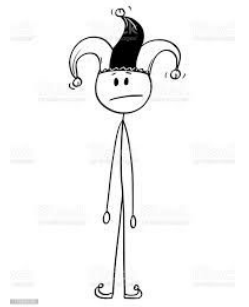
# Just one example...

*“The difference between the European savages and the American consists chiefly in the fact that while many tribes of the latter are entirely eaten up by their enemies, the former know how to make a better use of their captives than to roast and eat them. They use them to increase the number of their subjects and thereby the number of instruments for still more extensive wars.” (IK, [1795](#))*





# Slogans for fun...



“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.*

**Wollstonecraft – Rousseau – Kant?**



Enlightenment is a *concept*,  
not a time, place or object

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# 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/post-liberal-epistemology/>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3810704?seq=1>

[https://unescochair-cbrsr.org/pdf/resource/Epistemologies of the South.pdf](https://unescochair-cbrsr.org/pdf/resource/Epistemologies_of_the_South.pdf)

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html>

