



Requiem for a Discussion Page



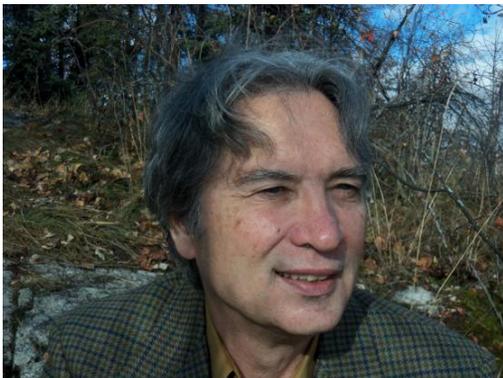
humanistfreedoms

Jul 12

As a follow-on to his popular article "[Is Wokism a Mind Virus?](#)" article, Dr. Robertson has agreed to share his experience as a moderator of a popular humanist-themed social media discussion page.

By [Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson](#)

In the early 1990s the Humanist Association of Canada (HAC) created an on-line open discussion forum for people who believed in the free and open exchange of ideas and were committed to respecting the dignity of each individual. This forum moved to Facebook shortly after 2005, and the discussion group's membership grew to more than 1,500. Then, in 2015 a re-branded Humanist Canada unveiled its new professionally designed Facebook page. Only board members could initiate posts on this new platform (although this right was eventually taken away from them as well). The old HAC listserv was allowed to continue. Although it was basically self-monitoring, board secretary Michel Virard was named administrator and I was named as one of three moderators. This article is about how this discussion group came to be viewed "problematic," and was terminated.



Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson

The major part of my time as a volunteer Humanist Canada board member at the time was to research the [need for ceremony](#) in the lives of humanists (Robertson, 2017b). As a consequence, I was invited to participate in a HAC thread initiated by the Humanists, Atheists and Agnostics of Manitoba on the need for humanist ceremonies. **As expected, the discussion was cordial, informative and productive. I returned to the discussion group site in 2019, but this time the language was anything but cordial.** Some members were calling on the moderators to ban others they called "racists," "alt-right," "white supremacists," and "anti-humanists." I read the offending posts. No one had advocated racism, white supremacy or even conservative politics. Earlier, white academic activists who used such language to support what some called "cancel culture" had appropriated the term "woke" from black culture to imply those that did not share their views were "not awake." I told these Woke to keep the discussion civil. A couple of weeks later I found the former victims giving as good as they got, so I admonished them all. Over time non-Woke stopped participating. With no debate, the only new threads on the old site were pleas for donations from a humanist school in Uganda that was, at the time, partially funded through Humanist Canada. To stimulate discussion, I posted an [article by a police officer](#) (Wilson, 2020) arguing against the then current campaign to defund the police. I invited comments, but as a moderator offered no opinion. One commentator stated that articles published in Quillette Magazine should not appear in a humanist forum. I set up a separate thread to discuss

whether we should censor articles based on their magazine of origin.

Several articles from Quillette were posted but none promoted an ideology of racism, sexism or hate, and I refused to impugn motives based on some subjectively held notion of "dog-whistling." One participant repeatedly expressed insult over my refusal to share my own views on the RCMP officer's article. I agreed to do so, but under my own name outside of the moderator role. The resultant exchange was reasoned and civil.

Two posts in a different discussion thread implied, without evidence, that humanist Steven Pinker was associated with pedophilia. I viewed this as promoting hatred against an individual, and in the role of moderator, I deleted the posts. During the subsequent discussion, I informed one of the posters that he could appeal my decision to the site administrator, but he replied that he would approach "Martin," the Humanist Canada president, instead.

During the ensuing months the HAC site generated more comments than the official Humanist Canada page despite having one third the members, and discussions were mostly civil. Then, in early August 2020, another moderator who had only recently become involved, cancelled a participant's right to post under circumstances I challenged. The moderator explained:

The reason I blocked Ullrich Fischer from (sic) the HAC site had nothing to do with the nature of the content he was posting, but for targeting another member for harassment by systematically going through her previous comments on previous posts and replying to each one. (Sassan Sanei, e-mail, Aug. 6/20)

Ullrich had posted "five or six" replies to separate posts mostly responding to comments the other member had posted to him. For example, she had advised "Please don't post alt-right material to a Humanist Group" to which he had responded, "Please don't define as alt-right everything which disagrees with you about anything." I restored Ullrich's privileges because due process had not been followed. I explained that we could create a rule limiting the number of posts a member could make, but in fairness we would need to communicate such a rule to everyone in advance, and no one should be cancelled after a first offense. I also pointed out that the alleged "victim" here had called yet another member a "terrible human being" and had sent that member a private message calling her a "condescending bitch," so if anyone should be cancelled it should be this alleged victim. Sassan then apologized to Ullrich admitting:

It was wrong of me to do that without informing you why the action was taken, giving you an opportunity to respond, or discussing it with other moderators. I'm sorry, and I promise you it will not happen again.

Sassan took exception to my use of the term "**Woke**." While the term had been appropriated from U.S. black culture, he explained the word was now used as a slur directed against the appropriators. I agreed to use an alternate term "**Identitarian Left**" instead.

In early September I deleted four posts that consisted of name calling, swearing or belittling of people. In keeping with our protocol, I notified the other moderators. Sassan re-instated two of the posts explaining in an email, "*The idea of a safe space does not extend to non-victimized or non-marginalized persons.*" One member whose post remained deleted after calling another "*a racist piece of shit,*" declared that I, the moderator, favoured "*raping and torturing children.*" When asked for evidence, he posted that I had deleted the incriminating posts.

At a meeting that included the Humanist Canada president, Sassan and me, it was decided to remove all reference to Humanist Canada in the old discussion group as the discussions were "*hurting our brand.*" I thought it odd that the site administrator had not been invited to this meeting. Nonetheless, the **Identitarian Left** still insisted that anything stated on the site represented Humanist Canada policy. In keeping with the discussion at our meeting, I posted:

This is not the official webpage of Humanist Canada and the opinions expressed here do not conform to any official statement or position. This is an open discussion group for humanists with a wide variety of opinions and perspectives. We ask that participants to this forum talk to each other respectfully.

One poster became so offended by this statement that he called on the president, Martin Frith, "to do something with me." In the meantime, Sassan suspended comments on a thread in support of ex-Muslims who had become

humanists, and he suspended the person who started the thread for the next 30 days with the ominous warning "if another admin approves (his posts) I will remove them." As it had become apparent that the two moderators were following different rules, I decided to bring it to the Humanist Canada board for resolution. I proposed that Sassan and I each resign to be replaced by a former Humanist Canada treasurer who could be seen as a neutral moderator using the following rules:

1. No racist, sexist or hate speech permitted;
2. Bullying including name-calling is not permitted;
3. Posts that contain racist, sexist or hate speech or otherwise exhibit bullying will be removed;
4. Participants who have posts removed will be advised of the reason for the removal;
5. Persistent abuse of the rules will result in an individual losing their posting privileges.

Sassan's response at the board meeting was to demand an apology from me for using the term "**Identitarian Leftist!**" The board decided to refer the matter to its social media committee. I reverted to using the term "Woke."

Four new discussion group members identified as transgender. When Sassan posted a "trans rights are human rights" banner in the forum, one trans person accused him of appropriating trans issues to advance his organization. He replied that his post was necessary because many humanists had been posting "transphobic" and "hateful" statements. I had not seen any such statements, and I asked Sassan to produce them. He said he had deleted them, but as moderator, I had access to all deletions, and found none. Sassan subsequently deleted as "transphobic hate speech" an article [written by a transwoman](#), that was critical of J.K. Rowling. I did not consider her call for dialogue to be hate speech, so I reposted it under my name. The initial discussion on this article was civil, but it was interrupted by an individual who called me a transphobe and a bigot without any arguments supporting those assertions. Ze also contacted me on my private messenger service with threats to have me removed as moderator. Ze subsequently posted, on the personal Facebook of another member, "*You are completely uneducated. Ignorant. Privileged and bigoted.*" As this individual had six similar posts removed earlier, I cancelled the member's posting privileges. Sassan reinstated the person without contacting me. I cancelled the person again. I then discovered I was cancelled as moderator. I appealed to the site administrator but he had been cancelled too! The president suggested we sort this problem out at the social committee meeting he would schedule.

The dam burst. Transactivists and their allies attacked non-Woke with the same derision that had prompted me to become an active moderator the year earlier. Three participants defended me saying that they had searched my postings and did not find any posted by me that were anti-trans. Woke replied that I had removed the offending posts. One of the Woke organized a letter writing campaign. Sassan defended this behaviour stating, "*The member(s) in question was (were) not harassing anybody. They were standing up and speaking out against the endless stream of hateful, transphobic commentary and bullying that has dominated the group in recent weeks.*" **No examples of such hateful, transphobic or bullying comments were given.**

The HAC discussion group was shut down with the rationale that social media necessarily degenerates into such divisive name calling. I believed this was likely true at the time, **but the New Enlightenment Project (NEP) established its own [Facebook discussion forum](#) in 2021, and it has proven to be a safe place in which humanists can have respectful, informative and civil conversations about controversial topics.**

Sassan had not been authorized to terminate a moderator or the discussion group administrator. President Frith was determined to ensure that this matter would not be discussed by the Humanist Canada board, and he invited me to attend a "discussion group post-mortem." After waiting for Martin who failed to attend, **Sassan apologized for his actions to the cancelled administrator and myself. I thought he should apologize to the board because he had broken a board protocol, but the former administrator suggested that we should move on to educate humanists about the threat of Wokism.**

This was my first direct experience observing Wokism in action. The Woke accused those who disagreed with

them of being anti-humanist. People who said Canada's first prime minister should not be blamed for things that happened well after his death were accused of favoring the torturing and raping of children. Feminists who want to ensure biological females have safe spaces were accused of wanting to deny transsexuals right to exist. Those who defended their positions were accused of harassment or bullying. There were thus two types of humanists represented: the Woke who viewed freedom of speech, science, logic and reason as 'white, male ways of knowing' in opposition to their "anti-racist" narratives; and, **those grounded in the Enlightenment view that we can learn about objective reality through careful observation, science, reason and logic. To these Enlightenment humanists, freedom of speech acts as an antidote to dogma and is a means of checking our own subjectively held biases.** Those who coined the term "The Enlightenment" implied that those who disagreed with their approach were unenlightened, but in my book, *The Evolved Self* (Robertson, 2020), I argue that **these values flow from the individualism inherent in having a self, and that this self is both cross-cultural and ancient. The Enlightenment was not about educating unenlightened people so much as removing cultural constraints on the powers of mind. From this lens, Wokism is a reactionary movement seeking to re-impose such constraints.**

I came to the conclusion that Wokism is not a coherent ideology but amalgam of partially assimilated and [conflicting belief systems](#) (Robertson, 2021). It replaces the economic ruling class of Marxism with the racial designation "white." It uses anti-Marxist postmodernism to "deconstruct" all beliefs with no rationale given as to why its own dogma is exempt from such deconstruction. Its attack on science and reason is copied from Martin Heidegger (1962), but it claims to be anti-fascist. It claims allegiance to social justice but ignores the egalitarian basis of the civil rights movement upon which social justice is built. The Woke claim to be anti-racist but promote the racialization of society through identity politics. They claim to be anti-capitalist while being embraced by the largest corporations in the world. They are convinced of their moral superiority, but are prepared to act unethically to defeat their opponents. **These contradictions help explain the psychology of the people I observed.**

Sassan had been extremely deferential to the transperson who accused him of using trans-issues to further an agenda. Sometimes referred to as "victim culture" (Campbell & Manning, 2014, 2016; Gabay et al., 2020; Haufman, 2020), **Wokism establishes a hierarchy of identity groups with members of some groups presumed to have suffered greater victimization thereby acquiring greater moral entitlement.** One would think that white males would be at the bottom of this hierarchy, but they are given a special role. Several times white males in the discussion group would state that they were "giving voice" to those "without voice." This gives them a leadership position in which they engage in aggressive attacks on others as evidence of overcoming their own "whiteness." On numerous occasions I observed Woke amending their posts after the discussion so as to make themselves appear more effective.

In periods of high emotion, Woke act as though they are subject to a moral panic, but individuals cannot sustain such energy indefinitely. I have demonstrated how complexes of cultural memes can attach to the self of an individual acting as a kind of [mind virus](#) (Robertson, 2017a), and I [subsequently](#) determined that Wokism meets this criteria (Robertson, 2021). Put simply, the Woke virus attaches itself to the selves of individuals so that a challenge to Wokism is felt as an existential attack on oneself. Like a primitive religion, Wokism protects its flock from alternate ideas by censoring individuals, declaring media it does not control to be racist, and by denying objective reality. If there is no objective reality, then science, empiricism and reason are empty culturally sanctioned performances legitimate only insofar as they promote Wokism.

Like a secret cult, Wokism may not be named and attempts to name it are deemed to be "slurs." The Woke would prefer to be known as "Left" or "Progressives;" yet we know there are many people who identify with the Left who embrace science, reason and free speech. We also know that progressivism is an Enlightenment doctrine that peoples' lives can be improved incrementally. By this measure a leading progressive is Steven Pinker (2012, 2018), a humanist whom the Woke have repeatedly denounced.

Every cult needs some means of identifying authentic members, and the Woke do this through the inventive use of language. For example, the word "Latinx" is not used by Hispanic people and it is not used by Woke talking to Hispanic people. It is used by Woke talking through Hispanic people to other Woke. The word "systemic" is thrown in before words like "racism," "sexism," and "oppression," but it is not used as an adjective because the Woke never explain how systems work to establish these problems. The word "problematic," is used in preference to the word "problem" so as to appear more "systemic." Similarly words like micro-aggression, intersectionality, and cisgender

are not needed for communication, but signify that the user is Woke.

In the final analysis, Wokism is about power. The Woke have taken over universities, school boards, media, non-government organizations and government agencies for the purpose of creating more Woke. Although they were successful in disabling and shutting down an open humanist discussion group, the Woke were not finished with Humanist Canada. Enlightenment humanists need to recognize the challenge to our movement and to update our understandings in light of modern conditions.

References

Campbell, B., & Manning, J. (2014). Microaggression and moral cultures. *Comparative Sociology*, 13(6), 692-726. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691330-12341332>

Campbell, B., & Manning, J. (2016). Campus Culture Wars and the Sociology of Morality. *Comparative Sociology*, 15(2), 147-178.

Gabay, R., Hameiri, B., Rubel-Lifschitz, T., & Nadler, A. (2020). The tendency for interpersonal victimhood: The personality construct and its consequences. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 165, 110134. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110134>

Haufman, S. B. (2020, June 29). Unraveling the Mindset of Victimhood: Focusing on grievances can be debilitating; social science points to a better way. *Scientific American*.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.; First English ed.). Blackwell. http://books.google.ca/books?id=S57m5gWOL-MC&pg=PA3&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false

Pinker, S. (2012). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. Penguin.

Pinker, S. (2018). *Enlightenment now: The case for reason, science, humanism, and progress*. Penguin.

Robertson, L. H. (2017a). The infected self: Revisiting the metaphor of the mind virus. *Theory & Psychology*, 27(3), 354-368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354317696601>

Robertson, L. H. (2017b). Secular weddings in Canada: An examination of a humanist response to the evolution of marriage. *Journal of Secularism and Non-religion*, 6, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.5334/snrl.76>

Robertson, L. H. (2020). *The Evolved Self: Mapping an understanding of who we are*. University of Ottawa Press.

Robertson, L. H. (2021). Year of the virus: Understanding the contagion effects of wokism. *In-sight*, 26(B). Retrieved March 1, from <https://in-sightjournal.com/2021/02/22/wokism/>

Wilson, M. (2020, June 30). Policing in the anomie era. *Quillette*, June.

Citations, References And Other Reading

1. Featured Photo Courtesy of : <http://liveyesand.com/episode-101-be-woke/>

