



# Waking from Wokism: Inoculating Ourselves against a Mind Virus

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The surest way to work up a crusade in favor of some good cause is to promise people they will have a chance of maltreating someone. To be able to destroy with good conscience, to be able to behave badly and call your bad behavior “righteous indignation”—this is the height of psychological luxury, the most delicious of moral treats.

—Aldous Huxley

## Wokism as a Religion or Cult

The Enlightenment that began in seventeenth-century Europe did not invent individualism. It did, however, value as essential the individualism that had been part of our sense of self ever since our ancestors learned to reflect on past experiences and plan future ones. Before this blossoming, the role of organized religion was to put boundaries around the self, around individualism, and around science and reason, so that the actions of individuals served the interests of the collectivity as defined by said religion. Ultimate truths could be determined only by gods or traditions that transcended human reason.

The project of the Enlightenment was to release the individual from these bonds. In the process, the methods of science were refined. The dignity and autonomy of the

individual to seek knowledge were supported, and this led to the modern concept of humanism. This led further to an explosion of knowledge that has continued to this day.

The Enlightenment met furious resistance, first from religionists and monarchists who saw folly in breaking with traditional wisdom in favor of unfettered freedom and license. In the late eighteenth century, this was followed by the romantics, who abhorred the increasingly complex capitalistic societies around them. They advocated a return to the freedom and democracy of premodern, especially hunter-gatherer, times.

Karl Marx derided these romantics as being “utopian,” and he declared his socialism “scientific,” which would nonetheless result in the state “withering away.” Twentieth-century German philosopher and Nazi Party member Martin Heidegger viewed modernity and intelligence as “degenerate.” It could be overcome only by thinking that is considered more “primordial.” He declared that both he and the Fuehrer’s thinking transcended time—existing simultaneously in the past, present, and future.

Heidegger’s deconstruction of science and reason as being under the compulsion of their surrounding environment was used by Jacques Derrida in developing the concept of postmodernism and by Foucault in developing

the idea that what is taken as knowledge is dependent on the power relationships in a given society. Wokism, which is descended from these often contradictory sources, follows this anti-Enlightenment tradition of eschewing knowledge derived from critical thinking, with the added caveat that its core dogma—that oppression of identity groups is the reality that drives society—is the only truth that cannot be deconstructed.

From this account, we can see that wokism is dogmatic and nonrational. It derives truth from forces that transcend science and reason. As we shall see, it is also coercive, forcing its worldview on others and ruthlessly punishing those who refuse to be so led. Like fundamentalist religions, wokism presents itself as a morality play involving an epic and enduring struggle between the forces of good and evil.

Relying on critical race theory (CRT), “evil” is said to be racism that pervades all of society. Those who are not “awake” to this understanding—those who are not “woke”—are either overt racists or complicit in a power structure supporting racism. It should be noted that CRT, which is used to support these beliefs, is not a theory; it is not falsifiable. It is actually a statement of dogma. Objectivity, reason, and, therefore, even science are seen as “White.” Because one must accept the tenets of the belief system without reference to science or reason, those tenets are religiously held.

In the case of traditional religion, such dogma is accepted on faith grounded in divine revelation. While the basis of woke faith is not clear, Eric Hoffer helped explain the concept of a secular religion by noting, “A mass movement can get along without a god but not without a devil. An abstract devil won’t do, it must be tangible. This is why Christians must demonize and dehumanize opponents.”<sup>1</sup>

The devil in woke dogma is “Whiteness.” The idea that White people are inherently racist is itself a racist view, because it assigns a quality to a group of people based on their skin color. Some who identify as “woke” often insist that everything that happens has a hidden, fundamentally racist, misogynist, or anti-transgender explanation. Even the idea that two plus two is always four has been questioned on the basis that all knowledge is socially constructed.<sup>2</sup> One wonders how we can cure diseases and get a helicopter on Mars if two plus two is sometimes five.

How can people calling themselves anti-racist believe in the absurd concept of “good” racism? Over the better part of the past decade, wokism has become a major force in Western culture. It manifests in political correctness movements such as cancel culture, Black Lives Matter, trans-

genderism, CRT, 1619 journalism,<sup>3</sup> silent school boards, nervous professors, and the occasional bizarre museum exhibit.

Like religion generally, wokism strives to maximize donations of both money and time. An army of activists, albeit decentralized, is required to maintain a dominant force on social media, organize the “cancellation” of professors, journalists, and politicians who stray from woke dogma, and organize myriad rallies under the general rubric of “social justice.” When the woke decided to cancel sports broadcaster Don Cherry on a fabricated charge of racism,<sup>4</sup> the Canada Broadcast Council received so many complaints in two days that its system went down. The amount of time, money, and sustained energy required to maintain such an organization that has no obvious connection to the supernatural or promise of an afterlife suggests an extraordinary mechanism at play.

### Wokism as a Mind Virus

A virus is a microscopic agent that invades and appropriates the resources of a cell. A mind virus is a unit of culture that similarly appropriates the resources of the mind. Using the idea that our understanding of who we are, the self, is a mental analog of the body, one of the authors of this article (Lloyd Robertson) outlined in 2017 criteria by which units of culture could be said to infect that self. The four criteria include: (1) an observable change in self-definition; (2) a diminishing of the modern self, such that logically consistent thinking is restricted; (3) an appropriation of the individual’s resources to support further viral propagation; and (4) considerable emotional valence.<sup>5</sup> In a subsequent 2021 article, the author showed that wokism met these criteria.<sup>6</sup>

A pillar of wokism is identity politics. People are assigned to various identities, such as Black, White, indigenous, transgender, gay, and lesbian. All these groups except White are assumed to be oppressed with a victim narrative assigned to each. It is assumed that oppressed people lack voice. The White woke are assumed to have voice and are given the privileged position of “giving voice” to those who are lacking in this capacity due to oppression.

Minority group members who refuse to accept their victim identity or who oppose woke slogans such as “De-

1. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1951.

2. James Lindsay, “2+2 Never Equals 5,” *New Discourses*, August 3, 2020. Available online at <https://newdiscourses.com/2020/08/2-plus-2-never-equals-5/>.

3. “The 1619 Project.” Available online at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_1619\\_Project](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_1619_Project).

4. HP, “Left Populism: A Review of an Organized Mobbing,” *Humanist Perspectives*, May 12, 2021. Available online at <https://humanistperspectives.org/left-populism-a-review-of-an-organized-mobbing/>.

5. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, “The Infected Self: Revisiting the Metaphor of the Mind Virus,” *Theory & Psychology*, Vol 27, Issue 3, 2017. Available online at <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354317696601>.

6. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, “Year of the Virus: Understanding the Contagion Effects of Wokism,” *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal*, Issue 26.B, 2021. Available online at <https://in-sightjournal.com/2021/02/22/wokism/>.

stroy the patriarchy!” or “Defund the police!” are treated with derision. For example, non-woke Blacks have been called slurs that originated during slavery such as “Uncle Tom,” “house negro,” or “Oreo” (meaning White on the inside). These names exist for every shade of skin color. For people indigenous to North America, the slur used is often “apple.” For Hispanics, South Asians, and other brown folk, it’s “coconut.” For Asians, it’s “banana” or “Twinkie.”<sup>7</sup> During the 2021 Canadian federal election, a racially Chinese candidate was derided as “self-hating” on social media for having previously introduced a private members bill that would have set up a registry for agents of foreign governments, including China, who work in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

Non-woke Whites who do not accept their assigned identity are labeled “racist,” “sexist,” “homophobic,” “transphobic,” and, of course, “self-hating.” But it is not they who engage in self-hate. Best-selling woke author Robin DiAngelo suddenly discovered that she was White at age thirty-four and reported that she was afraid to leave her house in case someone noticed!<sup>9</sup>

Who we are, including our identity, is imbedded in a cognitive structure called “the self.”<sup>10</sup> This self is an evolved construct that allows us to situate ourselves in time both with respect to remembered past events and possible futures. In the course of such planning, we learn that there is an observable objective reality leading us to reason using internally consistent thought. The woke denial of objective reality under the rubric of postmodernism protects their dogma from critical examination, but in so doing, it reduces their capacity for critical examination.

As a substitute for reality testing, those who identify as “woke” believe all knowledge is constructed in language. In policing “proper” language, people are forcing the general public to accept the interpretations they produce. Restricting freedom of speech can restrict freedom of thought and impede the ability of individuals to build an objective understanding of the world.

In attempting to control, restrict, or inhibit our ability to reason, wokism devalues the Enlightenment ideal. In creating a secular religion to contain the individualism inherent in having a self, those who identify as “woke” recreate

the conditions of the Axial Age that saw the formation of most of the world’s major religions to control the capacities inherent in having a self. Wokism is not revolutionary but reactionary, not progressive but regressive.

**“In attempting to control, restrict, or inhibit our ability to reason, wokism devalues the Enlightenment ideal.”**

#### Viral Spread

We have examined how wokism appropriates personal resources for the purpose of spreading itself. It has been quietly taking over school boards, professional associations, human resource departments, editorial boards, law societies, and governmental institutions.

In June 2021, the American Medical Association recommended removing sex from birth records under the dubious assumption that someone could have incorrectly “assigned” an infant’s sex at birth.<sup>11</sup> In July 2021, the Canadian Historical Society issued a statement broadening the definition of genocide to include actions that had nothing to do with murder—without consulting the historians who make up its membership.<sup>12</sup> Also in the summer of 2021, “woke” lawyers with the British Columbia Law Society threatened to cut the funding of its magazine *The Advocate*.<sup>13</sup> The magazine had earlier bowed to woke pressure to cancel an article critical of a practice directive to lawyers in that province with respect to gender pronouns but had subsequently posted a letter to the editor on the same subject.<sup>14</sup>

The woke ideology is, in the end, fueled by emotion.

7. “List of Ethnic Slurs.” Available online at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_ethnic\\_slurs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ethnic_slurs).

8. Tom Blackwell, “Defeated Conservative MP Fears Attacks by Pro-Beijing Forces Swung Votes against Him,” *National Post*, September 23, 2021. Available online at <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/election-2021/defeated-tory-mp-fears-attacks-by-pro-beijing-forces-swung-votes-against-him>.

9. Matt Walsh, “WHAT? Robin DiAngelo Suddenly DISCOVERS She Is White.” Available online at <https://www.facebook.com/MattWalshBlog/videos/4302057536546227/>.

10. L. H. Robertson, “Mapping the Self with Units of Culture.” *Psychology*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, 2010, 185-193. Available online at <https://www.hawkeyeassociates.ca/images/pdf/academic/MemeticSelfJA3.pdf>.

11. Marcia Frellick, “Remove Sex from Public Birth Certificates, AMA Says,” WebMD, June 16, 2021. Available online at <https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/news/20210616/remove-sex-from-public-birth-certificates-ama-says>.

12. Barbara Kay, “Barbara Kay: Historical Association’s Genocide Statement ‘brazenly unscholarly,’” *National Post*, August 16, 2021. Available online at <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/barbara-kay-historical-associations-genocide-statement-brazenly-unscholarly>.

13. Ian Mulgrew, “Is Challenging New B.C. Court Pronouns Policy OK or Akin to Hate Speech?,” *Vancouver Sun*, September 26, 2021. Available online at <https://vancouver.sun.com/opinion/columnists/mlord-mlady-which-pronoun-do-you-prefer>.

14. Shahdin Farsai, “Republished: British Columbia’s Practice Directions on Preferred Gender Pronouns in Court Are Problematic,” *Canadian Gender Report*, February 10, 2021. Available online at <https://genderreport.ca/shahdin-farsai-practice-directions-on-preferred-gender-pronouns-in-court-are-problematic/>.

## “Wokism is not revolutionary but reactionary, not progressive but regressive.”

Those committed to wokism believe they are in a classic “good versus evil” archetypal drama. Thus, deviations from woke dogma are met with severe umbrage and are often considered tantamount to complicity in evil. This mentality creates a problem for those who identify as “woke,” especially those assigned the racial category “White.” All religiously held belief systems change over time, but there is no central synod informing individuals of new adjustments to the woke party line. Adherents can protect themselves from internal criticism by taking the most extreme positions and by being hypervigilant and overreactive against the slights of others.

For example, one of the authors (Robertson) has moderated humanist forums and observed individuals reviewing and editing their old social media comments to make themselves appear more politically correct and activist in the eyes of anyone reading the archive. Using another defensive tactic that author James Lindsay calls the “Iron Law of Woke Projection,”<sup>15</sup> they deflect their own behavior in the way a guilty person might self-protect by preemptively accusing others of what they’ve done.

This can lead to purity tests and infighting. For example, in 2021, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins—long considered a paragon of reason and humanism who had received the 1996 Humanist of the Year award—had the award revoked by the American Humanist Association (AHA).<sup>16</sup> His crime was the following tweet: “In 2015, Rachel Dolezal, a White chapter president of NAACP, was vilified for identifying as Black. Some men choose to identify as women, and some women choose to identify as men. You will be vilified if you deny that they literally are what they identify as. Discuss.”

Dawkins invited discussion on an apparent contradiction in wokism. Why would society support people who self-identify as the opposite sex to which they were born but vilify people who self-identify as transracial? Instead of allowing the discussion to proceed, the AHA closed the

15. James Lindsay, “No, Science Isn’t a ‘Social Construct,’” *New Discourses*, September 25, 2020. Available online at <https://newdiscourses.com/2020/09/no-science-isnt-social-construct/>.

16. Alison Flood, “Richard Dawkins Loses ‘Humanist of the Year’ Title over Trans Comments,” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/apr/20/richard-dawkins-loses-humanist-of-the-year-trans-comments>.

debate and stripped Dawkins of his earlier award.

The vilification of Dawkins was furious. Twitter descended into a veritable pile-on about why Dawkins was—at best—out of touch and at worst an “anti-trans-adjacent” or even a full anti-trans bigot. The “evidence” for all this was that Dawkins asked an interesting and difficult question.

In a spectacular further example of infighting over purity, in March 2021, *Teen Vogue* hired a new editor and asked her to resign a week before she had even started.<sup>17</sup> Screenshots of anti-Asian and homophobic tweets she posted as a teenager a decade before were identified. Despite having apologized and deleted the tweets, she was nevertheless no longer acceptable. Mere hours after the resignation, a senior staffer at *Teen Vogue* celebrated the move on Twitter, but eventually this staffer was herself outed for old unacceptable tweets.<sup>18</sup>

In another example of a depraved pile-on, shortly after the death of George Floyd in 2020, an Inuit woman posted a Snapchat video of her boyfriend and sister play-fighting. The video was promptly and mistakenly compared to the George Floyd video. Commenters lashed out. The sisters were doxxed, resulting in threatening phone calls, their house being egged, a neighbor’s car being damaged, each being fired from her job, and one additionally losing a job offer.<sup>19</sup>

The sisters won a defamation suit, which argued that the attacks against them were “vicious, misplaced and are deserving of punishment,” as well as “impulsive, naive, and misguided.”<sup>20</sup> The central figure in riling up the attackers intends to appeal the ruling. Her lawyer has concluded that the bullying over this misunderstanding was justified because the complainant “was free to view the act complained of as racist and that she ought to have been free to express it.”

Dawkins will be just fine. But those who aren’t humanist legends are much more cancelable. Perceived challenges to woke orthodoxy have resulted in social isolation, career opportunities drying up, campus lectures canceled, and firings.<sup>21</sup> There are even professors—liberal professors—who

17. Roxanne Jones, “Alexi McCammond’s Dismissal Isn’t the End of this Story,” CNN, March 26, 2021. Available online at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/26/opinions/alexi-mccammond-teen-vogue-what-comes-next-jones/index.html>.

18. Lee Brown, “*Teen Vogue* Staffer Who Opposed Hiring of Alexi McCammond Tweeted N-Word,” *New York Post*, March 21, 2021. Available online at <https://nypost.com/2021/03/21/teen-vogue-staffer-christine-davitt-under-fire-for-racial-tweets/>.

19. Brian Platt, “Judge Finds Ontario Women Were Defamed in Social Media Firestorm over Alleged George Floyd Post,” *National Post*, October 20, 2021. Available online at <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/judge-finds-ontario-women-were-defamed-in-social-media-firestorm-over-alleged-george-floyd-post>.

20. *Lavallee et al. v. Isak*, 2021 ONSC 6661 (CanLII).

21. Anne Applebaum, “The New Puritans,” *The Atlantic*, August 31,

are legitimately scared of their students.<sup>22</sup> Still other victims of the woke attack machine, most tragically, have killed themselves.<sup>23</sup> It's impossible to suspect that all this carnage is an accident. The carnage is the point; it's meant to scare us into compliance.

Some individuals believe they are bettering society. But destroying people doesn't make the world better, even if one believes such individuals are worthy of hate. As we have seen, cancel culture, a phenomenon associated with wokism, pillories people without due process. Woke policy suggestions have not fared better. Criminologists have noted that homicides rose by 34 percent in major cities last year after demand for defund-the-police programs.<sup>24</sup> Woke individuals are shooting their cause in the foot by worsening the plight of those they purport to champion. In many places, resources were to be reallocated to address roots of crime and crisis situations that may call for responders other than police. What we need is better implementation of those measures and *more* funding for better trained police.

Woke individuals offer an alternative reality based on ideology, but science is built from the ground up using empirical observation. What are progressive humanists grounded in the Enlightenment tradition to do? We find ourselves in a confusing moment in history when people who call themselves anti-racists are promoting racist stereotyping and policies. With this, it becomes impossible to continue to consider wokism as an attempt to fix or improve society. Rather, it has become clear that wokism is fundamentally an attempt to divide and conquer. Most striking, it has, in a fashion predicted in George Orwell's *1984*, compromised our ability to trust each other.

This is unforgivable. Wokism must be defeated.

#### The Inoculation

Our goal above all else should be to value evidence-based critical thinking. In keeping with Article 4 of the Amsterdam Declaration on humanism,<sup>25</sup> we strive for open, undogmatic dialogue that seeks to combine personal liberty with social

responsibility. Both authors work in a field in which dialogue is not merely important; it is *essential*. In society, when nothing is talked about, worked through, discussed, bandied, proffered, mused on, riffed, or thought out-loud about, nothing changes. We stagnate, and we suffer. Society needs to feel confident to *talk about things*—easy things, hard things, all things.

Inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment, let us strive for a society in which all are free to express ideas and have them subjected to the scrutiny of debate. Let us trust that open, robust, challenging, respectful dialogue is the way to build communities of citizens equipped to use good argument and reality-based evidence to inform. Through the process of open discussion, people will educate themselves about the best ways of fighting racism honorably, without counterproductivities such as ranking victimhood and punishing dissenters.

The Enlightenment values that affirm the dignity, worth, and autonomy of each individual, a rational approach to scientific endeavor, and a democratic orientation favoring freedom of speech can be shared by present-day conservatives, political liberals, and socialists alike. The anti-humanists are totalitarians of the Left as well as the Right. Humanism is diametrically opposed to any system of thought that emphasizes differences and fuels them artificially to establish an ideological dominance.

Those of us who reject wokism and value diversity of thought may be referred to as “heterodox.” Many have referred to this stance as “classical liberalism.” Some call it “libertarianism.” Instead of dividing us into as many labels and identities as possible, we need to remind ourselves of all that we have in common, to celebrate our shared attributes, to resume the work of Martin Luther King Jr.

In the end, there is but one race: the human race. Let us unite rather than divide. Let us build rather than destroy. Let us integrate rather than segregate. Let us not assume Black people are victims. Let us not assume White people are racists. Let us not assume that advocating for safe areas for women means someone is anti-trans. If we must assume something, let us each assume our most important identity, the one we all share: *Homo sapiens*. 

2021. Available online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/10/new-puritans-mob-justice-canceled/619818/>.

22. Edward Schlosser, “I’m a Liberal Professor, and My Liberal Students Terrify Me,” *Vox*, June 3, 2015. Available online at <https://www.vox.com/2015/6/3/8706323/college-professor-afraid>.

23. Anemona Hartocollis, “He Was Accused of Enabling Abuse. Then Came a Downward Spiral,” *New York Times*, January 4, 2020. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/04/us/dartmouth-lawsuit-bucci.html>.

24. Brittany Bernstein, “Thirteen Cities Broke Homicide Records in 2021 as Police Face Shortages, Budget Cuts,” *National Review*, December 31, 2021. Available online at <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/thirteen-cities-broke-homicide-records-in-2021-as-police-face-shortages-budget-cuts/>.

25. Humanists International, “The Amsterdam Declaration.” Available online at <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/>.

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