JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY & HISTORY OF EDUCATION



2024

From the Editors

That Which We Dare Not Speak: The Scourge of Wokeness, Cancel Culture, and the Fight for Justice

Whether you cheer for or hate either or both of these characters, you may have caught Bill Maher's 2023 interview with Elon Musk¹ where they discuss, among other things, "wokeness." Maher, who claims politically to be neither right nor left and who has long made it his business to confront head-on the so-called "politically incorrect," has himself borne the brunt of wokeness' cancel culture on several occasions, losing his job in the bargain. What comes through most in their discussion is their bewilderment: bewildering because wokeness is a constantly changing script, a script mysterious and wily, a primer for power-grabbing victimhood that proves a bottomless chasm of shape-shifting entrapment meant to "cancel," fire, or even jail those who violate its ever-more-nuanced script. During their discussion, Maher explains the wokeness virus as something you never see coming and can neither anticipate nor get out in front of: "it's like walking on a roof blindfolded," he says. Dangerous work indeed.

The scourge of the wokeness movement and its close companion cancel culture have no role in the dream of justice or the promise of democracy. In the earliest incantation of the term, "woke" was coined by Black folks first as a "watchword" to warn one another to take care, to "stay woke," and later colloquially to describe white folks who "got" the legacy of systemic racism and who acted in ways that humbly advanced racial justice. Unsurprisingly, like much Ebonic parlance, this term was swiftly appropriated and retooled, veering away from "woke" to arrive at "wokeness," teed up to become the toxic anti-speech, anticritique phenomenon wokeness manifests as today: as an ever-evolving, ever-lengthening list of ideas, phrases, and words, many of which are now named "hate speech," designed to threaten the life, livelihood, and freedom of anyone who dares dissent or differ and threatening to subject the speaker to unemployment, doxing, or jail time. Paradoxically, wokeness proponents proclaim it to be a movement and orthodoxy aimed at building tolerance, made all-the-more ironic by laws emerging around the world that criminalize any social-media post, for instance, that causes another person "anxiety" or upset,3 a well-worn step in the painful march toward totalitarian rule in formerly "democratic" nations. This dystopic scenario is playing out as we speak, with few acknowledging—let alone acting uponthe growing threat of increasingly deployed speech crackdowns. The past four years have seen Orwell's novel 1984 brought to life, and we have come to witness the truth of how "Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing." This is the aim of the "wokeness" political agenda; this is its only aim.

In the movement's insincere, ironic resolve to build tolerance, wokeness is instead revealed as chiefly concerned with sowing seeds of hate and divisiveness. To put it plainly, today's wokeness is not about justice, and never was. Wokeness cannot advance justice, rather it threatens the fight for justice. It is meant violently, bitterly to divide us, not unite us, in the fight for human rights and justice. We cannot fall for it. Instead, we in Social Foundations of Education have to call the question about what we stand for, who we are as a discipline, and who we are as human beings so we may begin properly to investigate from where or whom this current scourge of wokeness comes.

Wokeness seems to have become as viral as covid and, like covid, seems largely to be a disease of the left. Wokeness runs riot across university campuses since few of its inhabitants seem to have acquired immunity. Moving from "a single-word summation of leftist political ideology, centered on social justice politics and critical race theory," at once "shorthand for political progressiveness by the left, and as a denigration of leftist culture by the right," now its meaning grows murkier than ever.⁵ Wokeness escapes deep critical examination because to question its nature or any of its claims is to put oneself in grave danger of being set upon by an anti-free-speech mob determined to dismantle the career and character of anyone who dares question, oftentimes jeopardizing their safety in the process. In practice, wokeness is peculiarly infantilizing in how its believers patrol to "protect" those who claim hurt feelings or feel "unsafe." Among our colleagues in academe, wokeness drives out many faculty bold enough to challenge it, and many of those who remain fear the day they stumble across wokeness' many tripwires. Wokeness and cancel culture therefore constantly threaten, two points of a Bermuda Triangle of sorts: once cancelled, the "victimized" hungry mob moves on to suck in and disappear its next victim, with no justice served.

Hurt feelings and "feeling unsafe" of late rapidly have moved from vague excuses to crush free speech to the installation of totalitarian censorship laws complete with prison time. Look across the Western world at present and you'll see evidence of such calls to squelch speech everywhere, and increasing police brutality against those who practice free speech. Indeed, as I write, Pavel Durov, the founder and CEO of the Telegram app, has been violently arrested and detained in France, accused of many crimes, but alleged to have been targeted because he refused to censor his platform's users critical of the UK's current mass migration and associated policies. But as former UK MP, the Rt. Hon. Ann Widdecombe, argued a few years back at an Oxford Union Society debate of proposed

"no platforming" interwebs legislation, "Nobody has the right to live their lives being protected from offence or from insult or hurt feelings. It is an occupational hazard of living in society."7 In the UK, convicted violent offenders are gaining early release from prison8 so the government can relieve overcrowding, only to jail those who violate the Online Safety Act of 20239 which criminalizes tasteless and offensive social-media posts, among other forms of speech. By way of warning its citizens, the UK government just posted a positively Orwellian tweet—"Think before you post,"10—and got spectacularly ratioed in the process. Just vesterday Elon Musk tweeted vintage MSNBC video where U.S. democratic vice-presidential candidate Tim Walz argues there should be "no guarantee of free speech...especially around our democracy."11 Allow me to suggest, in the wise words of Maya Angelou, "when people show you who they are, believe them the first time."12 Right in line with Walz's proclamation, and something I've witnessed consistently during my time within the global medical-choice dissident movement, I call upon you to begin to recognize—if you have not already—that any time you hear speech branded "disinformation" or "misinformation," you are witnessing global, systematic, totalitarian suppression of speech.

Craft founder David Sacks points to how Americans are sharply divided by political party allegiance in their trust of the mainstream media (MSM): "Republicans [whose trust plunged to just 10%] realize it's propaganda... Democrats [whose trust grew rapidly since 2015 to 73%] are the people still plugged into the Matrix."13 This poll data provides important empirical evidence for the vast divide Americans now feel and uphold, a pernicious, deeply felt divide far-and-away vaster than any in modern memory. The "free press," U.S. and world MSM outlets, recently revealed to have been paid handsomely by the U.S. government to push the experimental covid transfection shots as "safe and effective" despite clinical trial data to the contrary, 15 largely have worked overtime to uphold the "woke is a thing" and "woke is right" narratives in ways overt and snide. During covid the mainstream media were paid to do the government's dirty work, only outed via a well-placed FOIA request, 16 yet even though the MSM has publicly been shamed and damned, they do not appear to have learned from their recent indiscretion or be motivated to change. When critiquing the role of the MSM, some now point out how schools of journalism all over the U.S. newly focus curriculum on manufacturing woke-adjacent "activist journalists" instead of old-school, investigative journalists; perhaps this educational phenomenon has a hand in our current, post-truth predicament.

While briefly chronicling the Musk/Maher interview, the formerly hard-hitting investigational journalists and now-woke staff of *Rolling Stone* open their article by declaring, Musk and Maher's "conversation... included a strained discussion of the **imaginary** 'woke mind virus' that both men worry is ruining younger generations." The *Rolling Stone* article is entitled "Elon Musk and Bill Maher Warn Against the 'Woke Mind

Virus,' a.k.a. Historical Fact," by which the author means to ridicule these men for daring to name wokeness as a virus since the alleged crimes of wokeness obviously represent "the truth." Now, I ask you as educators, if people with a such large listening audience as they are willing to discuss and even debate wokeness out of worry for the health and welfare of future generations and the price wokeness extracts from the functions of democracy, shouldn't their willingness to speak of "that which we dare not speak" be acknowledged as necessary by a supposedly free press? As Tyler Durden, publisher of *Zero Hedge*, pointed out recently, "The woke activist invasion of popular media since 2015 continues to ignore the reality that they are not 'rebels,' they are villains." ¹⁸

Anon Substacker Eugyppius, a former academic, got his start after being banned from twitter for investigative work into the truth behind the covid pandemic. In addition to his work on covid and the shots, he worries over wokeness, writing recently on its nature and political roots. He traces the nature of the "ideological cancer" and "menace" of wokeness to the "phenomenon of the high-low alliance," drawn primarily from French philosopher and economist Bertrand de Jouvenel, because he argues the high-low alliance is "central to understanding the modern political order, and in particular leftism and the various forms it adopts." ¹⁹ He chronicles how, during feudal times, the people were little governed practically, so a person could live their whole life long without ever encountering an agent of the crown. Aristocrats arose as a class to collect rents, etc., replaced by state agents as the populace grew. These state agents owed their living to the king and claimed their power locally to govern from the king. This new system begins the vast reach of state powers and, paradoxically, a "new ideology of freedom, rights, and the popular will emerged—all of it betokening, ironically, a closer governance of the common man than history had ever seen before."20 This power relation sets the stage for the low to challenge the high: "the merchants and later the capitalists drove out the landed aristocracy, only to find themselves the target of new socialist revolutionary movements in the nineteenth century."21

Similar to today, those groups who make up the left, who occupy the bottom of this high–low alliance, are never treated equally, some groups among the low are more "unjustly disadvantaged," and this demarcation means...

...the highly unstable nature of the lower classes in modern society, driven by mass immigration and rapid economic change, accounts for the volatility and malleability of leftism, which is the ideological cluster that is primarily responsible for articulating and justifying these high—low alliances. Classical Marxism promised justice to factory workers, the New Left of the postwar era shifted its focus to students, and today their Woke successors forge alliance with racial and sexual minorities. The promise is always one of a totally egalitarian society, but even when completely successful, the revolution merely extends the power of the rulers.²²

As Eugyppius sagely posits, "everyone preaching Wokeness is either a direct, personal beneficiary of the power process it represents, or a would-be target seeking ideological cover. [In academe] the end state toward which the Woke are driving, academically, is a university system where an all-powerful administration manages a wholly subordinate faculty employed on renewable contracts."²³ In the end, he says, "in the modern world, changes at the bottom—however they're advertised—presage systemwide revolution within the space of a [single] generation."²⁴

Mathematician and relentless wokeness critic James Lindsay who recently penned "A Letter of Warning to Young Woke People"25 offers a more direct and sordid take on the nature of wokeness. Some of you may dismiss his thinking outright because he appears on Joe Rogan and Fox News, but over the past four years I have come to understand that those of us who are not reading and listening to everything on both deeply divided partisan "sides" and everywhere in between, are not making use of our critical-thinking toolkit to try earnestly to figure out what is happening to our society and our republic, and are doing both themselves and our republic a grave disservice. In fact, the narrative producers are counting on the fact that we do not have the time or wherewithal to attend to another full-time, unpaid job in order to know what is happening, in order to search for and sift through, day after day, year after year, an amount of information that is at once astonishing in volume and oftentimes soul-withering in content. They are counting on our relentless curiosity to ebb, for us to wish so strongly for "before times" that we check out, that we comply rather than resist the fear porn, the incendiary provocations, the bait-andswitch social contract. But our intellectual curiosity and spiritual energy has never been more needed. I believe as strongly as I've ever believed anything in my lifetime that our lives and the lives of the ones we love and our communities depend on not giving up this Herculean task critically to seek, sift, understand, and act.

In 2022 at *The Drake Lecture* I focused upon the danger of failing consistently to scan for, recognize, and act upon blind spots.²⁶ Failure in this moment to listen to and give genuine consideration to absolutely everything in the ways I pointed to in my talk proves, without doubt, a grave blind spot. I argue dismissing some thinkers because they fall into a partisan pile I have come to believe I abhor becomes dangerous to our autonomy and agency, particularly in this very strange and disturbing moment in history. In his open letter, Lindsay draws his evidence from history's repetitive lessons as he pleads directly to the young woke.

You know how everything in Woke philosophy is "temporal," "spacial," and "contingent"? ... [Well,] you are a contingency for the Woke movement. You have your time—until you don't. When you become useless or a hindrance to the movement of History, you will be discarded. Every Marxist and Hegelian movement in history has proceeded this way, and this one will not be different.

... In the past, activists like yourselves were seen as useful "political prostitutes," and after the revolution, you were lined up against the wall and shot or deported to labor-reeducation camps and ground into destruction. ... Mao explained all of this in 1957.... You have been trained to hate, allegedly in the name of "stopping hate."

You are being trained by this movement to be a destabilizer. That's what all that "disrupt and dismantle" stuff is about. You are misled to believe you're disrupting and dismantling systems of oppression, but you're merely displacing the existing society for the one they'll seize control over. ... That's your future. Look at the screen, scan your face, and smile for the government, and don't dare signal in any way that you think anything you shouldn't be thinking.²⁸

"Liberation" movements are lies. Mao called his army—the same one he dispatched to destroy your counterparts in the Red Guard—the People's *Liberation Army* for a reason. Liberation is a destructive lie. You need to fight for Liberty. Your chains are forged by frauds and locked only in your heads.²⁹

Let me say here and now that even though I am a Social Foundations of Education scholar, teacher, and activist, I have changed radically in my thinking as I've watched events unfold over the past four years. I said it plainly during The 2022 Drake Lecture: I'm [forever] changed. And I now find myself examining every single thing that I teach and have taught, all I write, and the causes I champion, even though I can humbly say I worked hard to be responsible in what I taught and wrote in the past. Now I see that if we do not address wokeness head-on, we succumb to the role of indoctrinators rather than fulfilling our role as educators. As I told you in 2022, my awakening has been painful and wrenching; I have gone kicking and screaming from where I was to where I now am. I now examine closely, in particular, everything I teach because I want to make sure I am, to the best of my present knowledge, challenging wokeness and championing justice. I can tell you this with certainty: our students and our young colleagues are hungry for support in their own work to champion justice while eschewing wokeness. But, as I say in my paper's title, practically no one dares speak it.

I can tell you that the DEI industrial complex we see shamelessly cashing in on academic and corporate organizations is impressively bound up in wokeness, virtue signaling, and the cancel culture that accompanies the wokeness movement's agenda, all in the name of "equity." A few years back my university, ISU, instituted new Core Values, among those Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: a fervent call my Foundations colleagues and I made of the institution many times over many previous years; we cheered when DEI was named a Core Value. We of course were horribly deflated to

find the DEI Core Value was only window dressing: Black, brown, and LGBT bodies plastered on every webpage, but nothing of substance done to support minoritized students' success. Curiously, in his 2023 State of the University Address, then-Interim President Aondover Tarhule spoke over and again of ISU's commitment to and accomplishments in Diversity and Inclusion. No equity. It was never mentioned; bizarrely equity was disappeared. It's simply too much trouble. Equity requires that something big gives, and it's clear that's never going to happen.

The university's affair with the DEI industrial complex is not about justice, but about market-share, about virtue signaling, and, perhaps most disturbingly, is about luring minoritized students and families to come to schools with piss-poor records of persistence to graduation. The DEI industrial complex gallops on, healthy as a horse, because the DEI industrial complex is just another form of corporatized snake oil: never about equity, never about justice: prioritizing "the immaterial and symbolic" over 'the material and the concrete."³⁰ In academe we have painfully landed about as far away from the genuine, grassroots origin of the term "woke" as we can get and a far cry from where we ought to be as Foundations faculty teaching for justice.

In this moment, in our world, hope and hopelessness dance uneasily. Some argue vehemently that to claim guaranteed free speech is absolute is to misunderstand the concept, but I see the truth beneath the scourge of wokeness as simple: you either ascribe to free speech or you don't—there's no middle ground. Constitutionally protected free speech is and must remain absolute, just like you either fight for our rapidly receding republic or you fight against it, just like you either teach for justice or you teach against it. When you choose to buy into the current scourge of wokeness, you buy in to an ever-changing no-win game that requires you always comply by using "correct" speech. But speech branded either "correct" or "incorrect" is no longer free speech. As Lindsay³¹ cautions, such a political distinction flies right from the pages of Mao Tse-Tong's playbook, where we "are being targeted by the politics of compliance" using the same dynamic, and being told if we don't comply, if we don't have so-called "correct opinions" then we "don't have a soul." This is the exact way many on the left now divide the world: you are either woke or soul-less. He reports the goal of such a political movement is to cast those who comply as "better than everyone else...but also frustrated with everybody else"33 who refuses to comply. This "political wedge" of "rightspeak" that typifies wokeness is the lynchpin on which the entire wokeness machine turns. In fact, the wokeness movement and all the parallel anti-speech movements that exist at present are setting out "to dehumanize [those who won't comply or who even question] and motivate the other two groups [who buy in or who aren't sure] to destroy"34 those who refuse to comply. Those who come

around to compliance end up "agreeing with the tyranny," then falling upon those who remain noncompliant and unsure, calling them the crux of the social problem and preventers of "unity."

Mao called this formula 'unity, criticism, unity."³⁶ Foundational to this formula is creating the most highly "contentious, fractious, polarized situation where there's tremendous disunity."³⁷ Exactly the situation in which we find ourselves today, and not just with wokeness, but with covid and the shots, environmentalism and climate change, identity, national origin, sexual orientation, ability, and immigration—the exact same playbook utilized in every single one of these political imbroglios. Few seem to see or acknowledge the uncanny manufactured commonality across these political campaigns or how history foretells of their crushing, bloody, long-lived, totalitarian outcomes.

So, when you hear a political argument that "everything would be fine if 'these people would just do this thing," you are witnessing at its basest a political strategy calling for such compliance. Lindsay terms this "hatecraft," which amounts to "teaching the compliant to hate the people who are holding them back." History shows that "the larger the proportion of people that you can get to comply, the more powerful the hatecraft. ... That's how it works... they twist every virtue and every value into a weapon of enmity and hate. ... and the target is you." In the words of one of my colleagues in the medical-choice dissident movement, "the 'tell' of a fascist is now the catch phrase 'danger to our democracy." Listen for this phrase to be uttered as it has been carefully distilled by those meaning to bring you into compliance and to invoke in you a reaction of pure hatecraft.

In Social Foundations we are the folks who ask the questions, get deep beneath the surface, examine critically. So why aren't we doing so with wokeness? We have the tools and the theory, but we seem as a whole painfully to lack the motivation to call it. Have even we been silenced by the fear of pronoun landmines, cancel culture, and hate-speech accusations? Are the consequences now too grave, even for us, because our fight for justice has made a sharp 180-degree turn into a fight for our own personal and professional lives? If so, how will we ever turn this careening cart around? I can say that no matter whomever or whatever is pushing wokeness' political agenda, complete with all its punitive outcomes, this movement is in no way organic; it certainly has not bubbled up from the people, but rather operates as a massive, top-down campaign global in scope, inorganic in origin, and totalitarian in intent.

I have long argued that in Social Foundations of Education, many of our disciplinary quests for justice, for equity, for peace, for love, for a farmore-kind and compassionate world remain disappointingly unrequited.⁴¹ Our unrequited striving for justice, our teaching that sometimes seems

paradoxically to drive discrimination and deficit thinking more deeply below the surface in some of our teacher candidates, remain a source of sadness, of bewilderment, of burning shame. When I think about how to act in a way that can reveal and dismantle the scourge of wokeness and political compliance's many identically manufactured political pony shows, I remind myself of wisdom imparted by James Lindsay, speaking at the 2024 International Crisis Summit, who pleads with the young and old alike to awaken, to find a unifying credo that does not demand compliance, that does not stir the pot or gaslight or fire up hatecraft, that cannot make us forget our humanity in order to have us set upon one another. 42 He says,

I want to tell you something just to change your perspective on this in a tiny way that means everything: it is not enough to tell the truth. I'm gonna wax biblical on you: you have to love the truth. You have to love the truth with all of your heart and all of your mind and all of your soul and all of your strength, and then you must love your neighbor as yourself by telling him the truth as well. Why this is important is because if you tell the truth in the pressure of hatecraft or the politics of compliance comes [at] you hard enough, you will buckle. But if you love the truth, you will not. You will stand for the truth, you will seek the truth, you will defend the truth when it's under attack, you will defend other people who are standing for, seeking, and speaking the truth because it's the truth that you love, and you love it more than anything. And when you love the truth, speaking the truth becomes easy.⁴³

As the western world teems with, it seems to me, ever-more-deep partisan polarization and amidst the deeply suspect covid "pandemic" and the state's attacks on bodily autonomy, freedom of speech, and the scientific process itself, our mission humanely to teach, to teach for humanity and the just treatment of all humans, endures its own puzzling partisan polarization: "wokeness" versus justice, lies versus truth, hate versus love. I wholeheartedly know the so-called wokeness movement to be a separator, not a unifier or enlightener, but rather a pernicious and importantly—idiopathic distraction from our quest for justice and for all children and families to be served well and equitably by public schooling. Such partisanship endangers our disciplinary work via a sharp movement away from justice toward judgment, shutting off pedagogy and difficult dialogue in favor of indoctrination to force compliance and cancel culture's pronouncement. In so doing, today's "woke" abandon all hope that education can lead to social change, to enlightenment, to growth, and the just world Foundations educators have long envisioned, advocated for, and worked for; education's democratic enterprise is then left hopelessly unrequited. As Social Foundations scholars, what does it mean to be so committed to something "right" that, it turns out, is not right? In the end, "wokeness" has evolved into just another tool in the master's toolkit...and, if that's so, we've all just been played.

> Stacy Otto Illinois State University

Endnotes

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- Reproduced from a Gallup poll tracking America's trust in mass media by political party, 1997–2020; David Sacks [@DavidSacks], *Twitter/X* post, August 25, 2024, 2:34 pm, https://x.com/DavidSacks/status/1827776545412505855
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the subsequently released Pfizer documents, we learned such things as how more people died in the trial arm than in the short-lived control arm (the control arm was destroyed just a few weeks in; there remains no long-term safety data) and insight into the jabs' ineffectiveness against transmission. We learned that Pfizer BioNTech clinical trial documents contained a nine-single-spaced-page list of serious adverse events. They knew. Pfizer and other vaccine makers' lies and obfuscations were exposed, first on twitter/X through anon account owners like the uber-brave, persistent, wicked-clever Jikky Kij [@ jikkykji; a.k.a. The Mouse]. In the mouse's many incantations [because of repeatedly being banned from twitter until Elon Musk purchased twitter and reinstated banned accounts of many in the medical-choice dissident movement] the mouse exposed through public disclosures and drawing from profound, deeply moral, scientific brilliance a horrifying number of ways the transfections affect and can affect the human body. Jikky and the mouse army exposed and continue to expose the harms of covid transfections: Novavax, Pfizer BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna. Let me say it again: they knew. The drug companies knew. See the mouse's early pandemic-era twitter account, Jikky Kij [@JikkyKjj], and Jikky the mouse's current account, JikkyLeaks [@JikkyLeaks] for year upon year of bombshells such as these (https://x.com/JikkyKjj/status/1502813436002009092; https://x.com/JikkyKjj/status/1502444103543394307; https://x. com/JikkyKjj/status/1497472602511532036, a wee sample). If you'd like to read more truth on covid, I suggest Dr. Ah Kahn Syed's Substack, Arkmedic's Blog [https://substack.com/@arkmedic; a particularly potent and withering group of posts is the doctor's "Welcome to Gilead" series, the first of which can be found here: https://substack.com/@arkmedic/p-65859172], and A Midwestern Doctor's Substack, The Forgotten Side of Medicine [https://substack. com/@amidwesterndoctor], particularly his post entitled "What Really Happened Inside the COVID-19 Vaccine Trials?" [March 13, 2023, https://substack.com/@amidwesterndoctor/p-107535647]. If you'd like to learn more about undisclosed contaminants in the mRNA covid transfections, please see Kevin McKernan's Substack, Nepetalactone Newsletter (for example https://anandamide.substack. com/p/dna-fragments-detected-in-monovalent). These are all people (and mice) whose agenda is reliably and forever getting to the truth. And they always bring the receipts. Always.

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