

The Woke Culture: A Pathology of Post-Modern Tribalism

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In a recent article, “Critical Race Theory [CRT] is Worse than Marxism, the social thinker and author, Prof. Paul Gottfried, breaks ranks from his Alt-Right compatriots to argue that CRT “has nothing to do with traditional Marxism.” “The swear words “Marxist” and “revolutionary,” Gottfried writes, “are thrown around by conservatives, such as those at Heritage, the New York Post and Fox News, with the same abandon with which the left speaks about “human rights”...” Rather than being truly revolutionary, based upon the history of past revolutionary movements, CRT “is an instrument of repression brandished by those in power against those whom it is feared might resist them.” Yet most important, to label CRT as Marxist desecrates good ol’ Marx’s tomb.

In fact, at the time Critical Theory emerged from the German Frankfurt School in the 1930s, its most adamant opponents were the traditional card-carrying Marxists and Communists. The School’s intention was to actually re-write classical Marxism and to prolong the internal fallacies launched during the Enlightenment era. Perhaps its most redeeming value is its efforts to define and explain the phenomenology of social power and aggression. Its primary early proponents, such as Max Horkheimer, were also harsh critics of the rise of metaphysical realism and scientific dogmatism that today has turned modern science, especially the biological sciences and medicine, into a fundamentalist ideology or religion. But this is where Critical Theory’s contributions end. Critical theory has more in common with Freudian sexual repression and psychoanalysis than Marx. One of the 20th century’s great philosophers Karl Popper criticized the Frankfurt School for offering no viable and realistic pathway to improve society. Unlike Marx, who reasonably condemned capitalist society’s unfairness, he did offer a vision for a better future. On the other hand, Critical Theory for Popper, was “vacuous and irresponsible” for omitting a promised future altogether. Remarkably, modern Critical Theory’s leading spokespersons, such as Robin DiAngelo, are exemplars of the very manifestation of dysfunctional biases that Critical Theory rebukes. This may be a reason why those who embrace tribal wokeness are simply angry, maladjusted adolescents in adult bodies.

The 21st century woke generations appear to have entered a coma. Its characteristic qualia of ADHD would likely prevent them from getting through 20 pages of *Das Capital* let alone making any sense from it. The most recent incarnation of wokeness is not an awakening of

either conscientiousness or a higher conscious awareness that directly experiences the sacredness of all life, other humans, and the animal and plant kingdoms. It veered from its origins within the Black community in the 20th century when it was used to refer to a social and political awareness for racial and social injustices. In fact its first modern expression might be traced back to a 1962 [New York Times article](#) by the Black author William Melvin Kelly in referring to being “well informed, up to date.” To be authentically woke requires critical thought and discernment, and also an intuitive knowing to distinguish the cobra from the rope when groping in the dark. Now the term has been adopted by two entire generations, regardless of race, and politically weaponized with almost an ontological unease to conquer and divide. Hence to be woke is anti-woke.

Throughout human history there have been those who have held hierarchical power to control those who are subject and dependent upon that power, such as the rule of kings, emperors and authoritarian tyrants. And for having our daily needs met and securing financial ease there are the landowners, merchants and bankers. In all of these power relationships, equity is always on the side of those who hold power. At this moment our nation has reached an impasse where only a tiny group of individuals control and govern the dictates of the lives of the many.

The Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan wrote, “In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.” What McLuhan was suggesting is that the masses have the tendency to focus on what is most obvious and consequently miss or ignore the deeper and more subtle changes happening over a period of time. In other words, what may seem to be correct and just on the surface eventually brings forth deleterious or “unintended” consequences. McLuhan was writing long before the internet. Now, presidential campaigns and federal laws, public health policies, the mainstream media and the films and music are the conduits for how we define ourselves and establish the options of dogmatic beliefs that we ultimately identify with. But all of these narratives are controlled by a handful of power players, including the social media platforms such as Google, Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia. Succumbing to the siren’s call of this illusion is being woke with closed eyes.

There is a saying that if you do not know the product being advertised you are the product; and this is certainly true for how millions of Americans are persuaded to purchase junk they have no need for, including the honor of wearing a “woke” badge. Our personal realities thereby are reduced to millions of bits of algorithmic data that know more about us than we know about ourselves. We are sold on the promises of 5G technology despite the media never mentioning its serious dangers to human health and the environment. The risks of genetically modified foods and the lack vaccine science to prove their safety and efficacy are censored from public discourse. Federal agencies that started small and were believed to be temporary, such as Homeland Security, became permanent and unstoppable leviathans that encroach into every corner of our lives.

At this moment, we are being lectured like children to get vaccinated against the SARS-2 virus so life can return to normal. In principle, this sounds reasonable. However, to accomplish this there lurks under this message’s surface the hidden intention to bypass or trash essential regulatory protective measures to assure the safety of these products. If you get vaccinated, you are now “woke.” If you remain cautious or hesitant because nobody has even a vague idea about the Covid-19 vaccine’s long-term adverse effects, you should be

hermetically sealed away from the society, branded, canceled and censored.

Conventional medical voices who refuse to be misled by Biden's, Anthony Fauci's and Bill Gate' Ministry of Truth are also being canceled and censored from society by Silicon Valley and social media. So too are professors who have spoken out against student demands for personal entitlement and the anti-woke White Fragility diatribe that condemns genetic whiteness as racist. Students would prefer college to be sanitized of critical thought, a pleasant, non-intrusive and safe environment filled with teddy bears and psychologists next door to drug their episodes of existential angst and purposelessness in life.

As the pandemic hijacks our attention, global warming increases. But federal experts tell us we have time. Biden tells us the economy is recovering and flourishing and a herd of lemmings believe this message despite 20 percent of Americans who will go to sleep hungry tonight. Those with cancer, heart disease, diabetes and dementia are told to just hang on a bit longer; a big pharmaceutical cure is just around the corner. But for decades, this carrot has been dangled before us and has yet to come to fruition.

Everything today is its opposite. The blue and red pills have been pulverized together. Only a purple pill laced with the strychnine of lies and half-truths is offered by an unduly legislative system run by technocrats and their private financial handlers. Woke and anti-woke are indistinguishable since both are born from similarly delusional worldviews isolated from reality. Neither is capable of observing the preciousness and fragility of human life. What should be a condemnation of the class and economic struggle against the elites' persecution of everyone else has degenerated into hate-filled identity war, both on the Left and the Right. It is only the rare authentic progressive who has transcended this divide and can observe wisely the battlefields orchestrated by politically motivated ideologues, aristocrats and the media.

As the US spins further into a controlled dystopia, it is difficult to imagine that the trajectory towards social decay can be easily reversed. Arthur Miller said, "an era can be said to end when its basic illusions are exhausted." Therefore, we still have a long way to go and it may require a full system-failure at all economic and social levels before a viable and realistic effort can restore what has been lost from the ethical wasteland left in its wake. It took Rome several centuries to collapse but we are on course to accomplish this feat within a decade. To remain optimistic, therefore, requires a rejection of the dominant Social Darwinism and the specter of what Thomas Huxley called the Church Scientific that now informs both parties and that has shackled us into a fatalist purgatory or worse Dante's hedonic hells of lust, gluttony and greed. The evangelical Christian Right, as science's counterrevolutionary reactive response, is equally a major contributor to the dumbing down of the nation's sanity with fairy tales and superstition.

Our indoctrination into scientific materialism, our surrendering our autonomy and divine freedoms to political and corporate regimes, and the clashes over political correctness, that disempower us from believing we can change our conditions, has resulted in a sense of hopelessness in life and growing existential despair. It is contributing to the unbridled frenzy of anger in the streets, again from both the Left and Right. Ideological beliefs become dogmas founded upon our mental afflictions, which in turn hold rule over our emotions, fears and hatreds and reactions. No wonder that pessimism is on the rise and optimism is in decline.

Only a personal encounter with a deeper purpose and meaning in life, which cuts through

the tyranny of our false sense of the self or ego, can ultimately guide us to rise above the turmoil and crises facing us. This does not imply a detached disinterest, an ascetic renunciation, from the plights of our neighbors and humanity. In fact, only by discovering authentic kindness and compassion through a personal introspective inquiry into ourselves and our connection with the others can an authentic sense of well-being and genuine happiness emerge. It is a commitment to finding our interconnection, in fact our interdependence, with others in the spirit of selflessness and service.

Yet to be left alone with only your own mind to keep you company terrifies the vast majority of people, including those who might be characterized as “normal.” This was observed in literally “shocking” experiments. In a University of Virginia study, hundreds of student participants would sit alone in an empty lab room for 15 minutes. No mobile phones, books, paper or anything was permitted. Just themselves and the cacophony of static in their own minds. However, there was a button they could push if they felt so inclined that would give a moderately painful electric shock. The results? Sixty-seven percent of men and 25 percent of women chose to find amusement to occupy their minds by shocking themselves rather than sit quietly and have peaceful time for self-reflection. This was despite all of the participants stating prior to the experiment that they would pay money to avoid being shocked with electricity.

So if modern American society relies solely upon mental and emotional distraction to survive, clearly there is no hope for constructive solutions to emerge to confront climate change, racism, identity politics, inequality, etc. Nor will society evolve beyond that of primates if we can only function from our reptilian and limbic brains. Obviously not everyone will discover the same purpose to his or her life’s meaning. It is an individual quest that is largely entwined with each of our unique gifts, skills, passions and talents that we have brought into this incarnation. Those who disagree that one can discover meaning in life are the dogmatists of materialism and should be shunned as deranged scientific fanatics. Logic and reason alone will not satisfy this discovery, although developing skills in critical thought and discernment is more often than not necessary. It is only the rare person who has immediate intuitive knowledge about herself and the world around her.

For the remainder of us, we need to reeducate ourselves to create a roadmap, develop a discerning eye, and engage in deep introspection into ourselves to find a genuine well-being that transcends power player’s board game to manufacture social strife, division and hatred. It is an individual journey that begins deep within ourselves and ends by embracing others in community despite all differences. However this is not an exercise in reason, but a direct experience within the depths of ourselves. When we touch on that space that can only be reached by subjective introspection new horizons of opportunities and possibilities open up. Then we can understand the words of the great jazz artist John Coltrane, “I know that there are bad forces, forces that bring suffering to others and misery to the world, but I want to be the opposite force. I want to be the force which is truly for good.” In that honoring of our inherent goodness, genuine well-being and happiness is found and only then can our illusions and dogmatic beliefs be broken down.

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