BOOK REVIEW

HEART OF WOKENESS: A REVIEW OF *CYNICAL THEORIES* AND *COUNTER WOKECRAFT*

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Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Universities Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity – and Why This Harms Everybody* (Swift Press, 2020)

Charles Pincourt and James Lindsay, *Counter Wokecraft: A Field Manual for Combatting the Woke in the University and Beyond* (Independently published, 2021)

James Lindsay is a grizzled veteran of the culture wars. But he was not always so. According to Lindsay, reading 'Glaciers, gender, and science: A feminist glaciology framework for global environmental change research'[1] sent him to a very dark place mentally.[2] He didn't come out of his room for three days.[3] Helen Pluckrose (herself a now-grizzled culture war veteran), recalls needing 'to talk him down'[4] (presumably from a ledge, and hopefully only a figurative one).

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[1] Mark Carey, M Jackson, Alessandro Antonello and Jaclyn Rushing, 'Glaciers, gender, and science: A feminist glaciology framework for global environmental change research' (2016) 40(6) *Progress in Human Geography* 770.

[2] Jordan B Peterson, 'Interview with the grievance studies hoaxers' (YouTube, 11 January 2019) 01:02:11-01:02:57.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid 01:02:58-01:03:08.

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Such is the cost of engaging with what Roger Scruton describes as the 'nonsense machine'.[5] However, both Pluckrose and Lindsay endured, and have made significant contributions to the fight against wokeness.[6] Pluckrose edited *Areo Magazine* from 2018 to 2021,[7] and founded Counterweight,[8] an organisation that supports 'individuals who are subject to mistreatment and abuse for questioning ideology'.[9] Lindsay founded *New Discourses*, a website that provides resources to understand 'Critical Social Justice'[10] (which could be considered the formal name for wokeness). Pluckrose and Lindsay's most notable contribution to the culture wars was their work, along with Peter Boghossian, comprising the 'grievance studies affair'. Here, Pluckrose, Lindsay and Boghossian submitted a number of articles to what they termed 'grievance studies' journals. The articles contained obvious errors, but used what would be described today as woke language. Out of the 20 articles they wrote, 7 were accepted for publication and, of these, 4 were published.[11]

Another notable contribution of Pluckrose and Lindsay is *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity – and Why This Harms Everyone* ('Cynical

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[5] Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015) 191-196.

[6] In this review, the term 'wokeness' is intended to encompass variants like 'wokeism'/'wokism', 'woke ideology' and, indeed, 'Wokeshevism'. I use this term for the sake of consistency with this review's title. (Yes, 'Heart of Wokeness' is a nod to Joseph Conrad, and ties in the quote by Elon Musk that is found later in this review.)

[7] Helen Pluckrose, 'Editorial Announcement', *Areo Magazine* (Web Page, 6 April 2021).

[8] 'About Us', *Counterweight* (Web Page).

[9] 'Counterweight Mission and Values', *Counterweight* (Web Page).

[10] 'About', *New Discourses* (Web Page).

[11] James A Lindsay, Peter Boghossian and Helen Pluckrose, 'Academic Grievance Studies and the Corruption of Scholarship', *Areo Magazine* (Web Article, 2 October 2018).

Theories').[12] Lindsay has also collaborated with Charles Pincourt, to write *Counter Wokecraft: A Field Manual for Combatting the Woke in the University and Beyond* ('*Counter Wokecraft*').[13] (It should be noted that 'Charles Pincourt' is a pen name. He works as a professor at a university in North America.[14] Given the treatment of other academics who have infringed woke sensibilities, Pincourt's prudence regarding his identity is wise.) Both books are timely and necessary, and I recommend them to readers interested in understanding and defeating wokeness.

Each book covers the 'weaponisation' of postmodern theories and their wide deployment in public discourse. How this happened must be understood. In my academic experience, I have seen complex theories once confined to academia converted into tweet-sized packages to bamboozle and browbeat[15] opposition in broader society. Bamboozling uses esoteric terms to confuse opponents while making those using them appear informed, sophisticated, or both. Browbeating uses 'loaded language' ('istophobe' terms,[16] and the like) to shut down

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[12] Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Universities Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity – and Why This Harms Everybody* (Swift Press, 2020).

[13] Charles Pincourt and James Lindsay, *Counter Wokecraft: A Field Manual for Combatting the Woke in the University and Beyond* (Independently published, 2021).

[14] 'Welcome to the Woke Dissident Blog', *Woke Dissident Blog* (Web Page, 3 May 2022).

[15] I am not alone in thinking 'browbeat' is an appropriate term; Pluckrose and Lindsay use it themselves: Pluckrose and Lindsay (n 12) 131.

[16] Terms like 'racist', 'sexist', 'homophobe', 'Islamophobe', and 'transphobe'.

arguments, portraying opponents as bigoted, ignorant, or both.[17]

Coining an important new term, Pluckrose and Lindsay describe *applied postmodernism*: the use of postmodern theories to serve activism.[18] After providing a brief history of postmodern thought,[19] they distill postmodern theories into those principles and themes that activists now use routinely. The two principles are the *postmodern knowledge principle* and the *postmodern political principle*.[20] The *postmodern knowledge principle* is a '[r]adical skepticism about whether objective knowledge or truth is obtainable and a commitment to cultural constructivism.'[21] Postmodern theorists may concede that there is an objective reality.[22] However, knowledge and truth are cultural constructs.[23] These constructs are products of dominant discourses within a culture: those with sociopolitical power determine what is 'knowledge' and what is 'true'.[24] Hence, any claims about truth are limited by one's culture, and reflect prevailing socioeconomic power in any event.[25]

The postmodern knowledge principle leads to *postmodern political principle*, which is 'a belief that society is formed of systems of power

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[17] Scruton (n 5) 9 observes:

> Newspeak occurs whenever the primary purpose of language – which is to describe reality – is replaced by the rival purpose of asserting power over it. ... Newspeak sentences sound like assertions, but their underlying logic is that of the spell. They conjure the triumph of words over things, the futility of rational argument, and also the danger of resistance.

[18] Pluckrose and Lindsay (n 12) 24, ch 2.
[19] Ibid 21-30.
[20] Ibid 31.
[21] Ibid 31, 32-35.
[22] Ibid 32-34.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid 34.

and hierarchies, which decide what can be known and how'.[26] Dominant discourses permeate society; all within it perpetuate them 'through routine interactions, expectations, social conditioning, and culturally constructed discourses that express a particular understanding of the world.'[27] Consequently, the system privileges some and oppresses others.[28] Further, while this result may not have been intended by anyone in the system, all within it will have done their part to bring it about.[29]

The four themes are *the blurring of boundaries*, *the power of language*, *cultural relativism*, and *the loss of the individual and the universal*.[30] *The blurring of boundaries* challenges categories so to 'deny [them] any objective validity and disrupt the systems of power that might exist across them.'[31] Hence, boundaries are blurred between categories such as objective and subjective, truth and belief, science and the arts, natural and artificial, high and low culture, man and animal, man and machine, and health and sickness.[32] They are also blurred between categories of gender and sexuality.[33] *The power of language* involves two ideas. First, that language has 'enormous power to control society and how we think and thus is inherently dangerous'.[34] Second, that language is 'an unreliable way of producing and transmitting knowledge'.[35] *Cultural relativism* rejects the idea that cultures

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[26]   Ibid 31, 35-39.
[27]   Ibid 36.
[28]   Ibid 36-37.
[29]   Ibid.
[30]   Ibid 31.
[31]   Ibid 39.
[32]   Ibid.
[33]   Ibid.
[34]   Ibid 39-40.
[35]   Ibid 40.

can meaningfully critique one another.[36] Each culture has its own discourses that shape the knowledge of its members, and will bias any critique of another culture.[37] *The loss of the individual and universal* involves rejecting individual autonomy, as individuals are products 'of powerful discourses and culturally constructed knowledge'.[38] Further, universals concerning human nature and human rights are rejected as 'at best naïve' or, '[a]t worst... an attempt to enforce dominant discourses on everybody'.[39] Pluckrose and Lindsay note:

> The postmodern view largely rejects both the smallest unit of society – the individual – and the largest – humanity – and instead focuses on small, local groups as the producers of knowledge, values, and discourses. Therefore, postmodernism focuses on sets of people who are understood to be positioned in the same way – by race, sex, or class, for example – and have the same experiences and perceptions due to this positioning.[40]

Indeed, a key concept in applied postmodernism is *positionality*. This is 'the idea that one's position in society, as determined by group identity, dictates how one understands the world and will be understood in it'.[41] Further, a person's identity may be comprised of not one 'self' but multiple 'selves', each one occupying a particular position and subject to its own privileges and oppressions.[42] Thus, any one person has intersecting privileges and oppressions, and the applied postmodernist concept of *intersectionality* explores this dynamic.[43] Pluckrose and Lindsay note that '[t]he number of axes of social

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[36] Ibid 41.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid 42.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid 118.
[42] Ibid 118.
[43] Ibid 125-128.

division under intersectionality can be almost infinite', however – and importantly – 'they cannot be reduced to the *individual*'.[44] Pluckrose and Lindsay continue:

> People often joke that the individual is the logical endpoint of an intersectional approach that divides people into smaller and smaller groups – but this misunderstands the fundamental reliance on group identity. Even if a person were a unique mix of marginalized identities, thus intersectionally a unique individual, she would be understood through each and all of those group identities ... She would not be understood as an individual.[45]

This aspect of applied postmodernism should not be overlooked. Indeed, in *Counter Wokecraft*, Pincourt and Lindsay add an additional principle to the postmodern knowledge principle and the postmodern political principle, which they call the *subject principle*:

> The subject principle is that individuals are primarily defined by their group identity (white, female, black, European, cis-gendered, etc). That is to say that they are subjected to their group identity in society - which is why I call this the subject principle (this is how the post-structuralists aka the (high-) postmodernists often referred to individuals, ie as subjects). This implies that people are oppressors or oppressed according to what group/ groups they are identified with. Similarly, it implies that how people behave is primarily a function of group identity, and (taken together with the political principle) that their behavior supports and helps perpetuate the oppressive systems around them unconsciously. White people for example, simply can't help but behave in ways that perpetuate their oppression over non-white people in society. Importantly, it also implies black

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44   Ibid 127 (emphasis in original).
45   Ibid 127-128.

people behave in such a way that perpetuates their oppression, although from a different perspective, and that is one reason they behave differently than white people.

A corollary of this principle is that since individual behavior is defined by one's identity, individuals are responsible or accountable for actions associated with any identity to which they are associated. As such, the oppressive acts of one member of a group is the oppressive act of all members of that group. Finally, this accountability is valid across time. The oppressive act of a member of a group at one time can be attributed to a group identity (and its members) at another time.[46]

Taking up Lindsay and Pincourt's observation, the subject principle opens the door to what I term *unwarranted collective guilt*. What do I mean by this? Here, I distinguish between *warranted* and *unwarranted* collective guilt. Warranted collective guilt is finding members of a group liable when they have acted together to commit a wrong. For example, criminal laws concerning parties to offences and conspiracies are a way of finding warranted collective guilt.[47] Unwarranted collective guilt is attributing guilt to members of a group when the link between the wrongdoing and those members is tenuous or non-existent. Finding someone liable for wrongs they did not do is profoundly unjust. This includes finding them liable for the present or past actions of others.

But let's return to my overview of *Cynical Theories*. Pluckrose and Lindsay describe the influence of applied postmodernism with respect to certain academic fields, namely postcolonial theory,[48] queer

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[46] Pincourt and Lindsay (n 13) 5-6.
[47] See, eg, *Criminal Code* (WA) chs II, LVIII.
[48] Pluckrose and Lindsay (n 12) ch 3.

theory,[49] critical race theory and intersectionality,[50] feminisms and gender studies,[51] and disability and fat studies.[52] They then describe the concept of *reified postmodernism*. Here, radical doubt about the human capacity to know reality won't do, at least not to activists.[53] Rather, there has to be *some* reality to ground their approach.[54] The reality is that of oppression,[55] and of socially constructed categories.[56] Pluckrose and Lindsay then cover the spread of applied and reified postmodernism from universities into broader culture.[57]

Both *Cynical Theories* and *Counter Wokecraft* provide ideas regarding how wokeness can be defeated. When it comes fighting wokeness in particular organisations, Pincourt and Lindsay argue for early intervention if possible.[58] Those seeking to combat it must know woke terminology and, when they see it being used, to take it seriously.[59] (Pincourt and Lindsay note that such language is used as entry points from which wokeness spreads in an organisation.)[60] Further, they argue for identifying and thwarting the appointment and advancement of the woke in organisations, and for identifying, protecting, and promoting anti-woke allies.[61]

For their part, and speaking more generally, Pluckrose and Lindsay argue for secularism, which rests on the principle that 'no matter

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[49] Ibid ch 4.
[50] Ibid ch 5.
[51] Ibid ch 6.
[52] Ibid ch 7.
[53] Ibid 46-48.
[54] Ibid 51-52, 182-183.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid 57-58, 182-183, 186.
[57] Ibid ch 9.
[58] Pincourt and Lindsay (n 13) 49, 51.
[59] Ibid 49-54.
[60] Ibid 23, 34-37.
[61] Ibid 57.

how certain you may be that you are in possession of the truth, you have no right to impose your belief on society as a whole'.[62] With this principle is 'the inalienable right to reject the moral injunctions and prescriptions of any particular ideology *without blame*'.[63] They observe that '[n]o one is subject to the *oughts* of any particular moral group, no matter how strong the conviction of its members'.[64] But '[t]he postmodernist project, especially following the applied turn – and even more so after its reification – is overwhelmingly prescriptive, rather than descriptive'.[65] So:

> [W]e must oppose the institutionalization of its belief system. Because the Social Justice movement is not officially a religion and because genuine social justice aims are in keeping with antidiscrimination legislation, it has been allowed to bypass the barriers to imposing one's belief system on others. As liberals, we must object to this imposition and defend people's rights to disbelieve in Social Justice, without incurring any form of punishment.[66]

Pluckrose and Lindsay also argue for defeating wokeness in the marketplace of ideas.[67] They observe that liberalism has an impressive track record of dealing with issues.[68] Here, they note the role of empathy:

> Humans are capable of great empathy and of horrifying

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[62] Pluckrose and Lindsay (n 12) 263.
[63] Ibid (emphasis in original).
[64] Ibid (emphasis in original).
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid 264. Pluckrose and Lindsay distinguish between social justice and 'Social Justice'. The former term is concerned with addressing social inequalities: at 13. The latter term 'refers to a very specific doctrinal interpretation of the meaning of "social justice" and means of achieving it while prescribing a strict, identifiable orthodoxy around the term': at 14.
[67] Ibid 264-265.
[68] Ibid 246-248.

callousness and violence. We have evolved this way because it has
been in our interest to both cooperate within our own groups and
compete with others. Our empathy is therefore largely limited to
those whom we see as members of our own tribe and our callous
disregard and violence is reserved for those seen as competitors
and traitors. By seeking to expand our circle of empathy ever
wider, liberal humanism has achieved unprecedented human
equality. It did so by exploiting the better part of our nature –
our empathy and sense of fairness. By seeking to divide humans
into marginalized identity groups and their oppressors, Social
Justice risks fuelling our worst tendencies – our tribalism and
vengefulness. This cannot work out well for women, or for
minority groups, or for society as a whole.[69]

Pluckrose and Lindsay note the example of Martin Luther King who
'[appealed] to white Americans' pride in their country as the Land of
Opportunity and their sense of fairness, and making common cause
with them in their hopes for the next generation. He called upon their
empathy and stressed their shared humanity.'[70] They note that King
would have met with less success had he adopted Robin DiAngelo's
approach, '[asking] white Americans to be "a little less white, which
means a little less oppressive, oblivious, defensive, ignorant, and
arrogant"'.[71]

Here, it is useful to use DiAngelo's works to illustrate some of what
Pluckrose and Lindsay (and Pincourt and Lindsay) have been saying.
DiAngelo is an academic who facilitates workplace training on racism.
She has written two influential works. The first is her article 'White
Fragility'.[72] The second is her book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard*

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[69]   Ibid 258 (citations omitted).
[70]   Ibid (citations omitted).
[71]   Ibid (citations omitted).
[72]   Robin DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (2011) 3(3) *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 54 ('White Fragility').

for White People to Talk About Racism.[73] (I will refer to the article as 'White Fragility', and the book as *White Fragility*. Hence, please note the format.) I will first comment about certain arguments that DiAngelo makes. I will then comment about empathy.

DiAngelo makes a number of arguments in both works. Examining all of them is beyond the scope of this review. My comments are directed to DiAngelo's approach to positionality, the individual, and the universal.

In 'White Fragility', DiAngelo's gives the following definition of racism:

> [Racism encompasses] economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color. This unequal distribution benefits whites and disadvantages people of color as a group.[74]

In *White Fragility*, DiAngelo explores the definition of racism in more detail.[75] She argues:

> When a racial group's collective prejudice is backed by the power of legal authority and institutional control, it is transformed into racism, a far-reaching system that functions independently from the intentions and self-images of individual actors. J Kēhaulani Kauanui, professor of American studies and anthropology at Wesleyan University, explains, 'Racism is a structure, not an

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[73] Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Allen Lane, 2019) ('*White Fragility*'). Pluckrose and Lindsay also summarise and critique *White Fragility*: see Pluckrose and Lindsay (n 12) 205-207.

[74] DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (n 72) 56 (citations omitted).

[75] DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (n 73) 19-24.

event.'[76]

She continues:

> [R]acism – like sexism and other forms of oppression – occurs
> when a racial group's prejudice is backed by legal authority
> and institutional control. This authority and control transforms
> individual prejudices into a far-reaching system that no longer
> depends on the good intentions of individual actors; it becomes
> the default of society and is reproduced automatically. Racism
> is a system.[77]

Thus, DiAngelo identifies the structures and systems in which individuals are positioned.

DiAngelo is dismissive of individualism generally and individuals in particular. In *White Fragility*, she states:

> Individualism is a story line that creates, communicates,
> reproduces, and reinforces the concept that each of us is a unique
> individual and that our group memberships, such as race, class,
> or gender, are irrelevant to our opportunities. Individualism
> claims that there are no intrinsic barriers to individual success
> and that failure is not a consequence of social structures but
> comes from individual character. According to the ideology
> of individualism, race is irrelevant. Of course, we do occupy
> distinct race, gender, class, and other positions that profoundly
> shape our life chances in ways that are not natural, voluntary, or
> random; opportunity is not equally distributed across race, class,

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[76] Ibid 20 (citations omitted). It should be noted that DiAngelo defines prejudice at 19 as 'pre-judment about another person based on the social groups to which that person belongs', which 'consists of thoughts and feelings, including stereotypes, attitudes, and generalizations that are based on little or no experience and then are projected onto everyone from that group'.

[77] Ibid 21.

and gender.[78]

In 'White Fragility', DiAngelo says the following with respect to individualism and white people:

> [Whites] are ... taught to value the individual and to see themselves as individuals rather than as part of a racially socialized group. Individualism erases history and hides the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today. It allows whites to view themselves as unique and original, outside of socialization and unaffected by the relentless racial messages in the culture. Individualism also allows whites to distance themselves from the actions of their racial group and demand to be granted the benefit of the doubt, as individuals, in all cases.[79]

Indeed, to DiAngelo, it is 'narcissism' when whites 'respond defensively when linked to other whites as a group or "accused" of collectively benefitting from racism, because as individuals, each white person is "different" from any other white person and expects to be seen as such'.[80]

In a statement that recalls what has been said above concerning positionality and the subject principle, DiAngelo states:

> We bring our racial histories with us, and contrary to the ideology of individualism, we represent our groups and those who have come before us. Our identities are not unique or inherent but constructed or produced through social processes. What's more, we don't see through clear or objective eyes – we see through racial lenses. On some level, race is always at play, even in its

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[78] Ibid 10.
[79] DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (n 72) 59.
[80] Ibid 60.

supposed absence.[81]

As to universalism, it:

> [F]unctions similarly to the discourse of individualism but instead of declaring that we all need to see each other as individuals (everyone is different), the person declares that we all need to see each other as human beings (everyone is the same). Of course we are all humans, and I do not critique universalism in general, but when applied to racism, universalism functions to deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white. Further, universalism assumes that whites and people of color have the same realities, the same experiences in the same contexts (ie, I feel comfortable in this majority white classroom, so you must too), the same responses from others, and assumes the same doors are open to all.[82]

I make two remarks here. The first is that DiAngelo largely disregards the value of individuals. In *No Offence Intended: Why 18C is Wrong*, Lorraine Finlay, Augusto Zimmermann and I note the uniqueness of the human species[83] and of each human in it. We cite[84] the following observations by Patrick Lee and Robert P George concerning the intrinsic worth of humans:

> What distinguishes human beings from other animals, what makes human beings persons rather than things, is their rational nature. Human beings are rational creatures by virtue of possessing natural capacities for conceptual thought, deliberation and free

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[81] DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (n 73) 85-86.

[82] DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (n 72) 59.

[83] Joshua Forrester, Lorraine Finlay and Augusto Zimmermann, *No Offence Intended: Why 18C is Wrong* (Connor Court, 2016) 67-68, 137 ('*No Offence Intended*').

[84] Ibid 67. Please note that the excerpts I am about to quote do not have the emphasis that we placed on certain words in *No Offence Intended*.

choice, that is, the natural capacity to shape their own lives.[85]

And further:

> The capacity for conceptual thought in human beings radically distinguishes them from other animals known to us. The capacity is at the root of most of the other distinguishing features of human beings. Thus, syntactical language, art, architecture, variety in social groupings and in other customs, burying the dead, making tools, religion, fear of death... wearing clothes, true courting of the opposite sex, free choice, and morality – all of these and more, stem from the ability to reason and understand.[86]

We further note that every human is an individual unique in time and space.[87] Indeed, '[a] person's uniqueness in time and space is perhaps the one thing that they can claim against everyone and everything else.'[88] Hence, each human life has worth: when a human dies, something unique is lost.

My second remark concerns the role of humans individually and collectively in generating the type of systems and structures DiAngelo refers to, namely social constructs.[89] My departure point here is a thought experiment. In *White Fragility*, DiAngelo contends that there are far-reaching systems that function independently of individual intentions and that are reproduced automatically. However, suppose every individual in a system was removed. What would happen to it?

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[85] Patrick Lee and Robert P George 'The Nature and Basis of Human Dignity' (2008) 21(2) *Ratio Juris* 173, 174.

[86] Ibid 184-185 (citations omitted).

[87] Forrester, Finlay and Zimmermann (n 83) 68, 138, 144.

[88] Ibid 138.

[89] DiAngelo does not appear to be referring to physical and biological systems that exist independently of human consciousness.

The answer is clear: the system would cease to exist.[90] This suggests that individuals play a critical role in creating and maintaining a system. The same can be said for the economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions and beliefs that DiAngelo notes in 'White Fragility'. If all individuals within the structures are removed, then the structures cease to exist. If there are no individuals, then there are no beliefs, and no actions.

So individuals are important to systems and structures, but how? To answer this, I will refer to some of the work of John Searle. Searle is an analytic philosopher who has written in the fields of the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of language, and the philosophy of society. Searle's work is extensive, and a detailed examination of it is beyond the scope of this review. All I can do is provide enough detail to show the problems in DiAngelo's approach.

To Searle, human consciousness has *intentionality*, which is:

> [T]hat capacity of the mind by which it is directed at, or about, objects and states of affairs in the world, typically independent of itself. So if I believe that it is raining, fear a rise in interest rates, want to go to the movies, or prefer cabernet sauvignon to pinot noir, I am in each case in an intentional state. Intentional states are always *about* or *refer to* something. Intending, in the ordinary sense in which I intend to go to the movies, is just one type of intentional state among many others such as belief,

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[90] It could be contended that individuals from other systems could 'revive' a system that ceased to exist. But that only underlines the importance of individuals in creating and maintaining systems. It could also be contended that other systems could revive the system that ceased to exist (rather than the individuals in those systems). However, if all individuals were removed from the other systems, then those systems would cease to exist.

desire, hope, and fear.[91]

Searle notes that intentionality is a biological phenomenon generated in the brain, as shown by hunger and thirst, desires involving bodily needs.[92] Damage to the brain can affect whether or not someone feels these desires.[93] Further, there is not only individual intentionality but collective intentionality:[94] 'wherever you have people sharing their thoughts and feelings ... you have collective intentionality'.[95] Hence, there are collective beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, and intentions.[96] That said, collective intentionality only exists in the brains of individuals – it cannot exist anywhere else.[97]

Searle distinguishes between intrinsic intentionality and derived intentionality.[98] Intrinsic intentionality is an intentional state that someone has 'regardless of what anyone else thinks about it'.[99] Derived intentionality is that 'derived from agents who have intrinsic intentionality'.[100] Importantly, Searle notes that '[a]ll linguistic

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[91]   John R Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 25 (emphasis in original) ('*Making the Social World*'). It should be noted that DiAngelo uses 'intentionality' in *White Fragility* and 'White Fragility': see DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (n 73) 153; DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (n 72) 58, 62. However, she uses 'intentionality' in the sense of 'purpose' and not 'directedness'.

[92]   John R Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (Basic Books, 1999) 95 ('*Mind, Language and Society*').

[93]   Ibid.

[94]   Searle, *Making the Social World* (n 91) 43; see also Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (n 92) 118-120, John R Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (Free Press, 1995) 23-26 ('*The Construction of Social Reality*').

[95]   Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (n 92) 120.

[96]   Ibid 118.

[97]   Searle, *Making the Social World* (n 91) 44.

[98]   Searle also distinguishes intrinsic and derived intentionality from ascriptive intentionality, which is using intentional states metaphorically: see Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (n 92) 93. My focus in this review is on intrinsic and derived intentionality.

[99]   Ibid 93.

[100]   Ibid.

meaning is derived intentionality'.[101] To illustrate, Searle contrasts the statement 'I am very hungry right now' with 'In French, "J'ai grand faim en ce moment" means I am very hungry right now'.[102] The former statement describes someone's intrinsic intentional state: the person is hungry, regardless of what anyone else thinks.[103] The latter statement 'is derived from the intrinsic intentionality of French speakers'.[104] He continues:

> That very sentence might have been used by the French to mean something else, or it might have meant nothing at all, and in that sense its meaning is not intrinsic to the sentence but is derived from agents who have intrinsic intentionality.[105]

To Searle, collective intentionality is the basis, ultimately, for

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

language and social constructs.[106] However, and to repeat, collective intentionality depends on individual minds.

Here, I add observations by Daniel Kahneman and Steven Pinker. Once again, intentionality concerns what a mind is *directed at*. It is important, therefore, to discern what a mind was (or minds were) directed at when determining meaning. However, human minds have a limited capacity for attention. Daniel Kahneman observes that '[t]he often-used phrase "pay attention" is apt: you dispose of a limited budget of attention that you can allocate to activities, and if you try to go beyond your budget, you will fail'.[107]

This 'limited budget' should be kept in mind when discerning

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[106] See Searle, *Making the Social World* (n 91) chs 3-5. DiAngelo draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of *habitus*, which 'is the result of socialization, the repetitive practices of actors and their interactions with each other and with the rest of the social environment. Because it is repetitive, our socialization produces and reproduces thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions.': DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (n 73) 101; see also DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (n 72) 57-58. However, as Searle observes in Searle, *Making the Social World* (n 91) 62 (citations omitted):

> All of the philosophers of politics and society that I know of take language for granted. They all assume that we are language-speaking animals and then they are off and running with an account of society, social facts, ideal types, political obligation, the social contract, communicative action, validity claims, discursive formations, the habitus, bio-power, and all the rest of it. It may seem odd that I claim that Habermas, Bourdieu, and Foucault take language for granted because they all have a great deal to say about it and they recognize its importance for their philosophical/sociological researches. But the problem with all of them is that they do not tell us what language is. They take it for granted that we already know what language is and go on from there.

Searle's account of intentionality's role in language and social constructs arguably provides a more complete analysis than Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. (That said, Searle notes similarities between Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and his own concept of the 'Background': see Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (n 94) 132.)

[107] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1st paperback edition, 2013) 23 ('*Thinking, Fast and Slow*').

intentionality in both its intrinsic and derived forms. Attention will ordinarily be directed at denoting or describing the object or state of affairs in the world. Attention will *not* ordinarily be directed at deceiving or dominating (or both) while denoting or describing, as this takes extra effort. Such things happen, to be sure, but it is unwise to assume that they happen all or even most of the time. Here, there is much to commend a *graceful* approach. I use 'graceful' in two senses: first, skillful discernment using depth, breadth, and rigour; second, applying the principle of charity (which I detail later). Such an approach helps sort those who mean well from those who don't.

So, to illustrate with Searle's example, an individual's attention is directed at their hunger. The attention of French speakers is directed at describing the state of hunger. In neither case is attention directed at hunger *and* oppressing someone. Further, it is *not* profound or sophisticated to think that this is what is actually happening. Rather, it's paranoid. And silly.[108]

Pinker's observations concern how children can create complex languages. Pinker notes two examples. The first example concerns pidgin languages, that arise '[w]hen speakers of different languages have to communicate to carry out practical tasks but do not have the opportunity to learn one another's languages'.[109] Hence, pidgin is a 'makeshift jargon' comprised of 'choppy strings of words ... highly variable in order and with little in the way of grammar'.[110] However,

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[108] It could be argued that individuals and groups are motivated by unconscious bias. Further, that systems and structures have a racist impact regardless of intentions. My focus is on the role of individuals in generating systems and structures. However, I address unconscious bias in (n 122). I address impact later in this review, including in (n 138).

[109] Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* (Penguin, 1995) 20. Pinker draws on examples from the Atlantic slave trade and indentured servitude in the South Pacific.

[110] Ibid.

when children are exposed to pidgin, they create complex grammars that smooth it out.[111] The resulting language, termed a creole, has grammatical features like 'auxiliaries, prepositions, case markers and relative pronouns'.[112]

Pinker's second example concerns sign languages. In Nicaragua, prior to the introduction of schools for the deaf, the deaf were isolated from one another.[113] After schools for the deaf were introduced and gathered the deaf together, the deaf developed, in effect, a pidgin sign language.[114] However, deaf children who learned this sign language from around the age of four began to creolise it.[115] In another case, deaf parents taught sign language to their profoundly deaf son.[116] The son learned sign language from no other source.[117] The parents did not learn sign language until they were fifteen or sixteen years old, and signed badly.[118] The son, however, smoothed out the clunkiness in his parents' sign language.[119] Pinker observes that this 'is an example of creolization by a single living child'.[120] (It's almost as if an individual is creating a system...)[121]

There is something else worth noting in these examples. When creating language, the children's attention appears directed at improving the language so that it better describes things. It does not appear that the

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[111] Ibid 21.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid 24.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid 27.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid 26.
[119] Ibid 27.
[120] Ibid.
[121] This is a case of creating systems that smooth out an existing system. Still, it's intriguing evidence.

children's attention is directed at creating or maintaining systems of oppression.[122]

So, individuals are important to systems and structures, as are individual and collective intentionality. Further, when individuals or groups create or use a system or structure, it is important to consider *what* their attention is directed at. True, the attention of an individual or a group may be directed at judging or treating others unfavorably on (for example) racial grounds. They may also do this while claiming that this is not what they doing. However, in many cases this is not what is happening. When considering intentionality in individuals, groups, systems, and structures, discernment is key.

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[122] In *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman notes that, if someone is talented, less energy is required to exercise a skill: Kahneman (n 107) 35. Kahneman says that the mind has two systems: System 1 and System 2. '*System 1* operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control'; '*System 2* allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration': at 20-21 (emphasis in original). It could be argued that the children are exercising a System 1 talent for language creation, and using spare energy to implicitly (or unconsciously) oppress others. I make three points in brief reply. First, and once again, language is derived intentionality, and the children's intentional state appears directed at making their language work better. Second, the science of implicit (or unconscious) bias has significant issues with reliability and validity: see Olivia Goldhill, 'The world is relying on a flawed psychological test to fight racism', *Quartz* (Web Article, 3 December 2017). Third, attributing such unconscious motives to the children evidences hostile interpretation. There are issues with hostile interpretation for the reasons I give later in this review.

It could also be argued that making any kind of distinction in language engages in discrimination and exclusion, and is therefore oppressive. However, this is a non sequitur. Yes, it is a matter of fact that language *discriminates* by distinguishing between words, and it *excludes* properties from the definitions of words. However, it does *not* follow that this is a bad thing. If language did not do these things, it could not work. (Indeed, it would not be possible for language to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, and freedom from oppression.) Further, arguing that 'discrimination' and 'exclusion' are necessarily bad things commits a fallacy of ambiguity between the factual and normative senses of these terms.

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Here, it is worth noting the role that conventions play in discerning intentionality in general and intent in particular. Searle notes that conventions are socially recognised, repeatable devices that speakers can use regularly to convey a message.[123] Here, I add that there are what I term conventions of certainty, creativity, and possibility. What do I mean by these terms? *Conventions of certainty* are used to discern, clarify, confirm, and verify. *Conventions of creativity* are used to create new terms or expand existing ones.[124] *Conventions of possibility* are used to deal with chance.[125]

Conventions of certainty can be employed to clarify where there is confusion. We can discern such things as fact from fiction, spiritual from secular, tangible from intangible, objective from subjective, and part from whole.[126] To illustrate this I will use an example that Searle uses concerning the 'argument from conceptual relativity':[127]

> Here is how it goes. All of our concepts are made by us as human beings. There is nothing inevitable about the concepts we have for describing reality. ... For example, relative to one conceptual scheme, if I am asked 'How many objects are in this room?' I may count the various items of furniture in this room. But relative to another conceptual scheme, that does not distinguish between the elements of a set of furniture but just treats the furniture set as one entity, there will be a different answer to the question 'How many objects are there in the room?' As an answer in the first conceptual scheme, we can say that there are

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[123] Searle, *Making the Social World* (n 91) 75-76.
[124] These conventions also concern applying existing, expanded or new terms to create fiction.
[125] Such conventions deal with the chance that something will happen, is happening, or has happened.
[126] This list is not intended to be exhaustive.
[127] Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (n 92) 22.

seven objects in the room. Within the second scheme, there is one object. So how many are there really?[128]

Searle continues:

> There really are seven objects in the room as counted by one system of counting, and there really is only one object, as counted by another system of counting. But the real world doesn't care about which system of counting we use; each gives us an alternative and true description of the one world, using a different system of counting.[129]

Note how the conventions of certainty are being used. Through them, we can *distinguish* different systems of counting. We understand that each system *groups* and *splits* a different way. We can discern how *human-created concepts* relate to *objective*, *tangible* objects in *physical reality*.[130]

My point here is that, by using such conventions, it is possible for to be clear about general and specific matters. As to general matters, recall that intentionality is about what the mind is directed at. Through conventions of clarity, it is possible to discern whether minds in a group are directed at the same thing. It is possible to discern whether views differ or are shared. Individuals can discern these things with other individuals, and groups with other groups. Ultimately, it is possible to discern general (if not universal) views about objects and

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[128] Ibid 22-23. Searle is making this argument in reply to the claim that, because we have different conceptual schemes, we cannot know reality.

[129] Ibid 23.

[130] If need be, we could also, for example, discern whether or not the situation described was fictional or the objects had spiritual significance.

states of affairs in the world.[131] Indeed, discerning such views appears to be routine. To recall Searle's example from earlier, we can arrive at general (if not universal) views about hunger. We can also arrive at such views about, for example, thirst, water, rain, soil, sky, sun, and stars. We have our differences, to be sure, and let's talk about them. But we have a lot in common, not least our shared experiences of a beautiful world and a wonderful universe. Let's talk about them too.

As to specific matters, we can discern what an individual intended to say. Misspeaking is hardly a rare occurrence. Conventions of clarity can confirm the meaning of what was said. They can clarify what the mind was directed at when speaking. Here, empathy plays a role, and this brings me to my next comment about DiAngelo's works.

One thing that has struck me about the works of wokeness is that their approach is often *graceless*. The graceless approach is the converse of the graceful one I outlined earlier. Like I did with 'graceful', I am using 'graceless' in two senses. The first sense is 'lacking skill', such as failing to apply any or all of perspective, insight, or rigour sufficiently. The second sense is 'lacking charity', that is, failing to apply the principle of charity. What is the principle of charity? As The Ethics Centre explains:

> The basic idea behind the principle of charity is thinking well of people. Those we're debating are intelligent and unlikely to be advancing stupid or illogical ideas. When a charitable listener hears something that doesn't make sense to them, they will try

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[131] In passages from *White Fragility* and 'White Fragility' quoted earlier in this review, DiAngelo notes the effects of socialisation, and also that people see through racial lenses. Through conventions of certainty, it is possible to identify how people are socialised and how their various "lenses" work. It is also through such conventions that people can overcome the limitations that their socialisation and lenses impose. Once again, shared views are possible.

to work out what was really meant.[132]

So, '[f]or a discussion to be successful, we need to do our best to understand what a person means rather than what they explicitly say.'[133] The Ethics Centre notes the advantages of this approach:

> First, we show respect to our opponents as thinkers and as people. We don't assume we're smarter than them at the outset. Instead, we use arguments as an opportunity to learn.

> Second, we give ourselves the chance to hone important ethical skills. We exercise imagination and empathy to understand someone else's view before going on the attack.[134]

Pincourt and Lindsay summarise the principle of charity as follows: '[c]harity ... involves making an effort to understand what people are trying to argue while providing people the benefit of the doubt if they do so imperfectly'.[135] However, they observe:

> A common Woke technique is to abandon any pretense of charity of interpretation, which is often done by problematizing what people say independent of what they intended to say.

> This is justified from the [Critical Social Justice] perspective because it is assumed that people unconsciously speak to and perpetuate oppressive power structures to which they are subject. As such, even what they may have 'meant' to say is meaningless in contrast to the uncovering of the oppressive meaning that they cannot help but express.[136]

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[132] 'Ethics Explainer: The Principle of Charity', *The Ethics Centre* (Web Article, 10 March 2017).
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Pincourt and Lindsay (n 13) 29.
[136] Ibid.

Not for nothing did Pluckrose and Lindsay title their book *Cynical Theories*: hostile interpretation is routine in the works of wokeness.[137] Pluckrose and Lindsay note the influence the Jacques Derrida. To Derrida 'the speaker's meaning has no more authority than the hearer's interpretation and thus intention cannot outweigh impact. ... [S]ince discourses are believed to create and maintain oppression, they have to be carefully monitored and deconstructed.'[138]

But why is hostile interpretation routine? I venture three reasons. First, hostility is confused with insight. A speaker cannot *possibly* mean well; rather, something dark and dangerous must drive them, and this must be exposed! Now, a speaker may be driven by fear, anger, hate,

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[137] Pluckrose and Lindsay (n 12) 14-16, 36-37, 39-41, 131-132, 166, 239.

[138] Ibid 40. It is perhaps unsurprising that John Searle and Jacques Derrida clashed, but the Searle-Derrida debate is beyond the scope of this review. That aside, I make three brief points concerning focusing on impact and not intentions. First, there are issues with assessing statements (or actions) by the subjective impact it makes on the hearer. Such impacts can vary widely from hearer to hearer. Further, it is too easy for someone to contrive some sort of negative impact.

Second, focusing on impact often overlooks *what* is being impacted. In *No Offence Intended*, Finlay, Zimmermann and I developed the 'body/idea distinction': Forrester, Finlay and Zimmermann (n 83) 136-145, which I have developed into the 'capacity/product distinction': see Joshua Forrester, 'Rights and the Rectification of Names' (Conference Paper, NCC National Conference, 24 February 2021). As I say in the latter work at 7 (emphasis in original):'[t]here is a qualitative difference between harming a body with the *capacity* for thoughts and feelings on the one hand and, on the other, harming the *products* of those capacities, namely the thoughts and feelings themselves.' Thoughts and feelings have an intangible quality that in fact can make them very resilient: at 8. This should be considered when assessing the impact of statements about a person's (or group's) beliefs and/or practices, as beliefs and practices are ultimately sourced in thoughts and feelings.

Third, there are issues with considering impact in the context of "oppressive systems". Using DiAngelo's definition of racist systems as an example, such systems distribute privileges, resources and power unequally between whites and people of colour: see DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (n 72) 56. Putting aside the difficulties with concepts like 'distribute', 'privilege', and 'power', labeling unequal outcomes as racist is simplistic. Such outcomes are causally complex (for a detailed exploration see Thomas Sowell, *Discrimination and Disparities* (Basic Books, 1st rev ed, 2019). Further, treating the system and all who are in it as racist is tyrannical, as it justifies "anti-racist" measures that are pervasive and drastic.

disgust, or the like. However, great care should be exercised when discerning this.[139] For example, concern should not be confused with fear, frustration with anger, dislike with hate, or unease with disgust.

The second reason is related to the first: intellectual pretention. That is, hostile interpretation is thought to be intellectually sophisticated. One *surely* must be thought clever when one shows how even innocuous statements perpetuate vast systems of oppression! If anyone disagrees, you can have them choke on a big serve of jargon salad. Perhaps this is the appeal of applied postmodernism and other woke theories: they *look* intellectually sophisticated. However, woke theories are by people who are not as smart as they think they are, for people who are not as smart as they think they are.[140] There are real issues with woke arguments concerning systems and structures. As I argued earlier, individual and collective intentionality have roles to play in systems and structures, and should be part of any analysis.

The third reason is that hostile interpretation is a power play. That is, it allows power to be wielded against the speaker. Whatever the speaker says can be disregarded, or used as the basis for state and/or societal censure. Ultimately, there is a chilling effect: if what someone says will be misconstrued and even punished, then what is the point of speaking?

But the lack of empathy goes beyond just hostile interpretation. *White Fragility* provides a stark illustration of this. DiAngelo recounts the following situation:

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[139] Ironically, it is often easiest to discern in the works of wokeness. (Actually, it's not that ironic; Lindsay has coined 'The Iron Law of Woke Projection' for good reason: James Lindsay, 'What the Iron Law of Woke Projection Tells Us About Marxists', *New Discourses* (Web Page, 22 February 2022).)

[140] It should not surprise that this is something that can also be said of postmodernism and Marxism.

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A cogent example of white fragility occurred during a workplace anti-racism training I co-facilitated with an inter-racial team. One of the white participants left the session and went back to her desk, upset at receiving (what appeared to the training team as) sensitive and diplomatic feedback on how some of her statements had impacted several of the people of color in the room. At break, several other white participants approached me and my fellow trainers and reported that they had talked to the woman at her desk, and that she was very upset that her statements had been challenged. (Of course, 'challenged' was not how she phrased her concern. It was framed as her being 'falsely accused' of having a racist impact.) Her friends wanted to alert us to the fact that she was in poor health and 'might be having a heart-attack.' Upon questioning from us, they meant this literally. These coworkers were sincere in their fear that the young woman might actually die as a result of the feedback. Of course when news of the women's potentially fatal condition reached the rest of the participant group, all attention was immediately focused back onto her and away from engagement with the impact she had had on the people of color.[141]

This is a remarkable passage, and I don't think DiAngelo realises just how bad it makes her look.[142] On DiAngelo's own account, a woman who is in poor health appears to be having a heart attack at a training that DiAngelo is co-facilitating. The woman's coworkers genuinely fear for her life. DiAngelo appears to do nothing to help a woman suffering a serious, potentially fatal, health emergency.[143] Rather,

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[141] DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (n 73) 111.

[142] It should be noted that DiAngelo also mentions this example in 'White Fragility': DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (n 72) 64-65.

[143] My focus is on DiAngelo's response as someone present at the workplace training seminar. There is also the matter that DiAngelo is co-facilitating this training seminar and thus is in a leadership position. Someone in her position would be expected to lead a response in a health emergency.

DiAngelo's concern is that the woman is a *distraction*, drawing attention away from the people of color.[144]

This is not a sound emotional response. Indeed, it would not have been out of place among gulag guards.[145] I daresay that this is the result of viewing people in terms of how they fit into a system. They are not viewed as individuals unique in time and space whose death is a permanent loss, but as interchangeable and replaceable cogs.

Then there is the matter of DiAngelo's towering condescension. This is evident early in *White Fragility* when DiAngelo says of white people that 'our opinions are uninformed',[146] 'we don't understand socialization',[147] and 'we have a simplistic understanding of racism'.[148] In 'White Fragility', DiAngelo asserts that whites 'have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides'.[149] Further, they 'receive little or no authentic information about racism and are thus unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity'.[150] For the reasons I gave earlier, not thinking critically or with complexity is a criticism that more aptly applies to DiAngelo's approach. Being

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[144] It could be argued that my interpretation of this passage from DiAngelo is uncharitable. To avoid doubt, I applied the principle of charity. This is an emergency situation, and it would be understandable if DiAngelo was shocked into inaction. But DiAngelo does not say this. Rather, she had enough presence of mind to think that the woman's health emergency was a distraction.

[145] Interestingly, DiAngelo observes that emotions are political, being 'shaped by our biases, beliefs and cultural frameworks': DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (n 73) 132. Even if this premise is granted, DiAngelo's response to this situation says nothing good about her own biases, beliefs and cultural frameworks.

[146] Ibid 7. Please note that the quote is a heading (as are the next two quotes). I have altered the format from the all caps and bold text in which they are formatted in *White Fragility*.

[147] Ibid 9.

[148] Ibid 13.

[149] DiAngelo, 'White Fragility' (n 72) 57.

[150] Ibid 58.

mired in identity politics, DiAngelo's perspective is limited. In fact, those whom DiAngelo criticises for considering the individual and the universal have a deeper and broader perspective than DiAngelo's.

Indeed, when I re-read *White Fragility*, I read certain examples[151] DiAngelo provides as scenes from a comedy like *The Office*. That is, DiAngelo is a clueless, Michael Scott-like character[152] who presents workplace training seminars in which she makes poor arguments and unfair accusations. She then gives laughably oblivious reasons for why people are upset. Reading the examples this way is hilarious. However, the laughter dies when reading DiAngelo's reaction to the worker apparently suffering a heart attack. Here, the fictional comparison is less Michael Scott and more *Harry Potter's* Dolores Umbridge.

As Matt Taibbi remarks, 'DiAngelo isn't the first person to make a buck pushing tricked-up pseudo-intellectual horseshit as corporate wisdom, but she might be the first to do it selling Hitlerian race theory.'[153] Indeed. If Leni Riefenstahl were around today she might have filmed a documentary praising *White Fragility's* increasing influence in academia, media, business, education, the arts, and elsewhere. Given the intellectual and emotional shortcomings in DiAngelo's approach,

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[151] Such as the examples in DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (n 73) ch 9.

[152] Just to cover my bases, you can also read DiAngelo as a David Brent-like character from the British version of *The Office*. It is certainly arguable that David Brent is the better comparison.

[153] Matt Taibbi, 'On "White Fragility"', *TK News by Matt Taibbi* (Web Article, 29 June 2020).

perhaps it could have been called *Triumph of the Dull*.[154]

While we can joke, the fact remains that *White Fragility's* influence *has* grown, and is but a part of the growing influence of wokeness generally. Recall that DiAngelo's work includes facilitating workplace training on racism. She is far from alone. Every day, people like DiAngelo are presenting work like DiAngelo's.[155] This is a cause for deep concern because, as Elon Musk observes, '[a]t its heart, wokeness is divisive, exclusionary, and hateful. It basically gives mean people ... a shield to be mean and cruel, armoured in false virtue.'[156]

Wokeness must be fought wherever it is spread.[157] The fight won't be easy, but it is necessary. It will take place in workplaces, classrooms, boardrooms, bureaucracies, and in all forms of media, arts, and entertainment. *Cynical Theories* is an important contribution to

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[154] This variation of *Triumph of the Will* has been used previously: see, eg, Brian Winston, 'Triumph of the dull' (2001) 11(9) *Sight and Sound* 60; Paul Krugman, 'Triumph of the dull', *New York Times* (Blog Post, 27 February 2009); Binoy Kampmark, 'The Archibald in the Yarra', *Scoop Independent News* (Web Article, 4 August 2011); 'Film Review: Zero Dark Thirty – Triumph of the dull', *Phuket News* (Web Article, 7 February 2013). However, this does not mean that it cannot be used where appropriate...

[155] Christopher F Rufo has written a number of articles concerning the use of Critical Race Theory and related theories in business and education. This is a selection of them: Christopher F Rufo, 'Walmart v Whiteness', *City Journal* (Web Article, 14 October 2021); Christopher F Rufo, 'Don't Be Evil', *City Journal* (Web Article, 8 September 2021); Christopher F Rufo, 'Intersectional AmEx', *City Journal* (Web Article, 11 August 2021); Christopher F Rufo, 'The Woke Defence Contractor', *City Journal* (Web Article, 6 July 2021); Christopher F Rufo, 'The Woke-Industrial Complex', *City Journal* (Web Article, 26 May 2021); Christopher F Rufo, 'The Wokest Place on Earth', *City Journal* (Web Article, 7 May 2021); Christopher F Rufo, 'Subversive Education', *City Journal* (Web Article, 17 March 2021); Christopher F Rufo, 'Failure Factory', *City Journal* (Web Article, 23 February 2021); Christopher F Rufo, 'Woke Elementary', *City Journal* (Web Article, 13 January 2021).

[156] The Babylon Bee, 'Full Interview: Elon Musk Sits Down with The Babylon Bee' (YouTube, 22 December 2021) 00:14:28-00:14:50.

[157] It should be clear from the context, but to avoid all doubt: I am not advocating physical violence. The fight is a philosophical one, not a physical one.

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understanding wokeness. *Counter Wokecraft* builds on this, and offers tactical tips. Counterweight and *New Discourses* provide resources and support. But all of this is only a start. More philosophical weapons need to be developed and deployed. More organisations need to join the fray. Pluckrose, Lindsay, and Pincourt are out there fighting the culture war. Let's go join them.