# Woke Sorcery

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It may seem bizarre to analyze any current world events as involving sorcery: surely, sorcery is something that was never real, and attempts at sorcery disappeared hundreds of years ago.

To the contrary, the political philosopher Eric Voegelin demonstrated that many of the new political ideologies that have arisen during the recent three centuries have, in fact, been efforts to change the world by casting a spell of words over it.

Voegelin aimed his analysis chiefly at 19th-century thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, and Comte. He notes that Hegel quite clearly saw himself as a sorcerer, as he talked about his Zauberworte (magic words) and his Zauberkraft (magic force), that would transform reality.

But Voegelin's analysis applies equally well to more modern sorcerers. I myself fell into the enchantment of the spell of one of them: that spell, called "Scientology," cast by L. Ron Hubbard. After two years, I was able to break free of the spell only when presented with an analysis of how such a spell could be cast: once that happened, I realized that Hubbard had literally entrapped me in a net woven by his words.

The analysis of sorcery that enabled me to understand what Hubbard was doing was provided to me by Carlos Castañeda, in his discussion of "the second ring of power," in books that quite explicitly were about sorcery. I have no idea if Castañeda had ever read Voegelin, but it is interesting that Voegelin posited that sorcery was an attempt to create a "second reality." (Some readers may be inclined to think that, in using Castañeda to understand Hubbard, I was using one nutjob to break free from another, but so be it: I am just reporting what really happened.)

But what is this "second ring of power," or "second reality"? It is a reality created by a spell of words, that is supposed to be more real than the primary reality that we encounter every day.

How in the world could a "sorcerer" create such a "second reality" or possibly make living in it seem preferable to living in primary reality?

The first thing a sorcerer must do is seduce his acolytes into the secondary reality by offering some genuine insights about the nature of primary reality. So, for instance, Hegel, a brilliant scholar of the history of philosophy, could offer his readers novel perspectives on the development of the subject. Marx, who was a keen observer of the social scene around him, could provide genuine insights into mid-19th-century European social relations. Hubbard, who had studied Buddhism, psychoanalysis, and cybernetics, could offer potential acolytes an interesting perspective on their psychological difficulties with what he called "Dianetics." The genuine improvements many people made with Dianetic processing lured them into Scientology. Ayn Rand, another modern sorcerer, had absorbed much of Aristotle, and had personal experience with collectivist tyranny in the USSR, and thus could offer real insights into collectivist madness.

Voegelin describes this feature of sorcerers' construction of a dream world: "Replacing the first reality of experience by the second reality of imaginative construction, and endowing the imaginary reality with the appearance of truth by letting it absorb pieces of first reality" ("On Hegel," https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-642-65387-2\_30).

And Voegelin notes that this sort of sorcery is far more widespread than just the few thinkers I have mentioned: it is "the great confidence game played by modern man... under such titles as advertisement, propaganda, communication, and comprehensively, as ideological politics" (“On Hegel”).

Thus, ideologies gain their plausibility because they have genuinely pointed at something that is really a problem, say "racism" or "capitalist exploitation." But typically they try to treat this one problem as if it were the source of all problems.

The truths offered by a sorcerer, however, only serve as lures, inviting acolytes into the sorcerer’s second reality. Once "hooked" by these lures, the apprentice is then "educated" into a whole new way of viewing the world. This new vision is made attractive by the assertion on the part of the sorcerer that those who have embraced it are now superior to the run-of-the-mill humanity who have not done so. For example, followers of Hegel are told that they are at the forefront of the historical development of geist, or the "world spirit." Discussing Hegel, Voegelin observes: "Hegel's obsession was power. If he wanted to be the sorcerer who could evoke the shape of history, he had to penetrate the political events of the time with thought until the events and thought would coincide" (“On Hegel”).

Similarly, the most diehard Marxists are assured that they are "the vanguard of the proletariat." The devotees of Hubbard were promised that they could become "operating thetans," acquiring capabilities not available to non-Scientologists. And a Randian hero might live a life of freedom in "Galt's Gulch."

But these are promises about the future: the sorcerer's apprentice also gets a more immediate payoff: the conviction that they are now privy to previously hidden knowledge about how the world "really" is structured. The newly minted Marxist can "see" that class struggle is what really drives human affairs. The Randian acolyte now perceives the pernicious influence of "moochers" everywhere. As a new Scientologist, I was informed that I possessed superior knowledge of where people were on the "tone scale," and I would be able to spot "suppressive personalities." And, to jump ahead a little, the imbiber of critical race theory is enlightened to the "fact" that "white supremacy" is the key to understanding all things American. For someone floundering in the troubled waters of a society in flux, this assurance of special insight into reality is a tremendous boost to one's self-image.

To ensure the reader does not dismiss this analysis of sorcery as some sort of "right-wing" tactic to smear leftists -- although Rand was hardly on the left! -- I will cite another recent example of sorcery: what is often called "neo-conservatism." The secondary reality neoconservatives have attempted to create is one in which all actions by the United States are, by definition, virtuous, and all people, all around the world, have as their deepest aspiration to become American.

Ron Suskind reported on a conversation with a (neoconservative) Bush administration official as follows:

"The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' [...] 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'" (Suskind, Ron (October 17, 2004). "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush". The New York Times Magazine. ISSN 0028-7822)

It is stunning how explicit this official was about ignoring the primary reality of experience and creating "our own reality." If one were to write a fictional character intended to exemplify Voegelin's concept of sorcery, and put those words in his mouth, a critic would probably call it too ham-handed, a caricature of the ideologue.

The promise of being able to create one's own reality is very seductive: As Voegelin noted, "Once you have entered into the magic circle the sorcerer has drawn around himself, you are lost" (“On Hegel,” 228).

Having examined the general nature of sorcery, and of the Zauberworte, the magic words sorcerers use to cast their spell, we can proceed to look at the specific case of "woke sorcery."

We can begin with an old example. Although the "woke" have not recently paid much attention to mental disabilities, being more recently concerned with racial and sexual issues, they still devote some attention to "ableism," by which they seem to mean the suggestion that people with some handicap have a handicap. On the topic of mental handicaps Rick Hodges writes:

"In 1910, the Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Persons adopted three classifications of people we know today as intellectually disabled, as defined by a newly invented way to measure intelligence we now call the IQ test. 'Morons' were the most intelligent -- they had IQs between 50 and 70. 'Imbeciles' with IQs between 25 and 50 were the second level. Those below 25 would remain 'idiots.'" (https://humanparts.medium.com/the-rise-and-fall-of-mentally-retarded-e3b9eea23018)

But these terms -- and "moron" was a brand new one, with no prior meaning -- gradually came to be insults. So, they were replaced with "mentally retarded" -- until "retarded" also became an insult. So "intellectually disabled" was in, and "retarded" came to be regarded as "hate speech."

In primary reality, what is genuinely important is that those of us with normal mental capacities should exercise kindness and compassion towards those who are not so blessed, and realize that it is no accomplishment of our own, for instance, not to be born with Down's Syndrome. But that involves a change of heart, and is more difficult to accomplish than is a change in terminology.

Too many people feel the intellect they have been gifted with is somehow their own accomplishment, and thus feel entitled to those who have not been equally gifted. Tellingly, Hodges himself does not recommend this change of heart, but instead recommends a new form of word magic: simply asserting that a disability is not really a disability; just insist, he says, that there is "nothing wrong" with being mentally retarded. This "solution" is just as nonsensical as is the "euphemism treadmill" of continually changing words: of course, there is something wrong with someone who has an "intellectual disability": they have more than ordinary trouble learning new things, just as there is something wrong with someone who is blind: they can't see. Only a belief in Zauberworte could result in someone thinking that the only problem a person with an IQ of 30 has is that others think there is something wrong with him. But the person is nevertheless a child of God, and fully worthy of our love whatever disability they suffer from. Furthermore, there is "something wrong" with all of us, which should make us pause if we contemplate mocking or taking advantage of what is wrong with someone else.

A similar migration of terms has gone on regarding the... well, they were once "hobos" or "vagrants," then they became "the homeless," and now they are "the unhoused." The attempt to address social ills by word magic is also apparent in the shifting terms by which it is considered acceptable to refer to people of sub-Saharan African descent. "Negro" was once fine, but was replaced by "colored," as in the "National Association for the Advancement of Colored People." But then "colored" was denigrated, and "black" became correct. Then "black" was out, and "African-American" was de rigueur.

The last term was so strongly promoted at one time, especially in our schools, that my then young son, knowing that I had studied Ghanaian music, asked me, "Aren't most of the people in Ghana African-American?"

"No," I told him, "most of them are African-African."

And the use of the new term certainly did not stop people from stereotyping. Once, my next-door-neighbor (herself a "favored minority" in at least two senses!) called me up while I was at work, and told me, "A truck pulled up in your driveway... and a bunch of African-Americans got out of it... I'm worried you're being robbed."

In fact, this was a tree-cutting crew I had hired. But notice how my neighbor, in her racial stereotyping, was careful to use the then politically correct term for the men she saw, as though such word magic could erase the stereotyping.

But today, "African-American" is out, and "Black," with a capital "B," is in. This ridiculous dance from word to word for describing the same group of people illustrates the attractiveness of belief in word magic. Certainly, there remain white Americans who are genuine racists. And anyone of good will should strive to disabuse them of their ignorance. But the notion that we can make progress on this front by continually changing the word by which we refer to the subject of their prejudice ought to be dismissed as laughable... unless one has fallen under the spell of a sorcerer.

Word magic is also rampant in "gender" discussions. In fact, the very shift from talking about a person's "sex" to talking about a person's "gender" was itself an instance of word magic: the hope that renaming the biological reality of sexual dimorphism as if it were an arbitrary category like gender in a language might transform biological reality into social convention. (Consider that the Tuyuca people, living in the Amazon, have over 50 noun genders in their language: does anyone really think that this means that they recognize over 50 sorts of "genders" of people?)

According to woke gender theory, people are "assigned" a gender at birth. They "really" are whatever gender they choose to adopt. (Notice the belief in Zauberworte implicit in this position: it doesn't matter if you have a penis, testicles, and lots of testosterone coursing through your body: just so long as others refer to you as "she," you really are a woman. (And further, if they refer to you as "ze" or "they" or "flaubergaustemis", then you really are some imaginary alternative sex.)

One quite recent instance of Zauberworte is the repeated declaration, no matter how much violence really is involved, that BLM and antifa activities are always "peaceful protests." As Daniel McCarthy noted:

"Protesters in California set fire to a courthouse, damaged a police station and assaulted officers after a peaceful demonstration intensified, ABC News recently tweeted. The wording was perfect, better than any satire as an illustration of the corporate media’s biases." (https://spectator.us/mock-revolution-elites-protests-amazon/)

In this instance of Zauberworte, arson, vandalism, and assaults are merely an "intensification" of peace. No matter how much violence is occurring, so long as we call what is going on "peaceful protests", they will be, magically, made peaceful. In the meantime, a white person sitting quietly by himself, eating his lunch, is actually engaged in violence, since he is not helping the peaceful protesters loot stores and burn cars.

Another recent example occurred in the tech field. GitHub, a popular place for programmers to store successive versions of their source code, for years had called the mainline of those versions the “master branch.” But a believer in word magic decided this was casting a spell of slavery over black programmers, and now the name has been changed to the “main branch.” While I can’t imagine that this change will have the least effect on those most in need of help in our society… has anyone heard any stories of some poor kid racing back to his housing project yelling “Mommy, GitHub just did away with the master branch”?... it will ripple out into many development tools at no minor cost.

A curious example of word magic amongst "anti-racists" (which means people who think about almost nothing but race) is the notion of "racist dog whistle," or "coded" racist messages. Plain-old dog whistles, of course, are designed to make a sound at a pitch that dogs can hear, but humans cannot. By analogy, a racist dog whistle is some "coded" phrase by which racists can identify as such to other racists, but that non-racists will mistake for some innocent language. (For example, just the other day I heard a wokester claim that the phrase "civilized society" is a dog whistle, as though traditional Asian, African, and American Indian societies had no standards of civility!) A dog whistle is a sort of "secret Masonic handshake," but for racists.

The difficulty here arises from the fact that anti-racists continually claim to be able to "hear" these dog whistles, quite distinctly. But if they are designed to be recognizable only by racists... then wouldn't the woke who hear them be racist themselves? "No," they respond, "we have just studied these racists and broken their code." But in that case, wouldn't the racists pick a new code, one that hasn't been broken? When the Allies broke a German code in WWII, they were very careful to hide the fact, so that the Germans would keep using the (now useless) code. But the woke declare publicly, every hour of every day, on Twitter, on Facebook, and in woke journals, that they can decipher the racists' code. Are we supposed to imagine that the racists are clever enough to disguise their racism in seemingly innocuous phrases like "civilized society," and yet too stupid to change their code once it has been so thoroughly and publicly exposed? And if someone is tempted to respond, "Well, of course, racists are stupid!", they might contemplate the fact that pretty much no one ever has been as racist as the Nazis running Germany during World War II, and yet those racists were diabolically clever at fighting a war, and the Allied codebreakers, as noted, went to great lengths to hide the fact they had broken Nazi codes.

No, no serious explanation for this conundrum is forthcoming. And that is because this is not a serious theory about secret communication channels, but a use of word magic to "curse" those whose views the woke disagree with by attaching the stigma of racism to them: just call anything someone says, that you don't like, a "racist dog whistle," and there you have it: no need to even address whatever that person actually said.

Two other magical words found in the race chapter of the woke grimoire are “white supremacy” and “whiteness.” One might think that the idea that the US is a “white supremacist” nation would be easily debunked by noting that the top income ethnicities in America are Asian Indian, Taiwanese, and Filipino. But this pair of magic words are shape shifters: “No,” you will be told, “those groups have succeeded because they have internalized whiteness.” And whiteness means…? Hard work, punctuality, and politeness! (<https://nypost.com/2020/07/16/african-american-history-museums-whiteness-exhibit-raising-eyebrows/)> The Chinese had apparently internalized whiteness a couple of thousand years ago! So, these terms actually have nothing to do with race? Nope, now it is time for them to shape-shift back, as you are informed that these characteristics “privilege white ways of being.” You are wrestling eels.

Perhaps one of the most stunning feats of Zauberworte performed by the woke has been the re-definition of "racism" itself. The "old" definition is stated succinctly at the beginning of the Wikipedia article on racism:

"Racism is the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioral traits corresponding to physical appearance and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racism) This definition captures what people usually mean when they say, "So-and-so is a racist": that person thinks, for instance, that white people are superior to black people. It also fits well with historical examples of racism, such as the ideas that supported black slavery in the United States or the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. Quite clearly, it is not a definition designed to "support white supremacy" or in any way "let white people off the hook": many of the most egregious examples of racist belief and practice involve some white people believing themselves genetically superior to some other group, although not infrequently that has been another group of white people, for example, European anti-Semitism (Nazi Germany being the most extreme example), or the attitude of the English towards the Irish for some centuries, or the widespread belief among northern Europeans that they were better than their southern counterparts. But, of course, there are many other examples of Europeans holding racist beliefs vis-a-vis non-Europeans, towards Asian Indians, towards the Chinese, towards American Indians, and towards black Africans.

Thankfully, although such beliefs persist in some quarters, today they are widely discredited, and rejected by "polite society." For instance, the University of Illinois reports: "One of the most substantial changes in white racial attitudes [among Americans] has been the movement from very substantial opposition to the principle of racial equality to one of almost universal support." (https://igpa.uillinois.edu/programs/racial-attitudes)

So, given that we should never expect perfection in the city of man, this would seem to signal "mission accomplished," in terms of discrediting white racism, right? But then, if one has built an ideological dream world holding that the essential life difficulty facing black Americans is white racism, what is one to do? Well, engage in some Zauberworte, and come up with a new definition of racism, one that still condemns whites of this sin, despite the aforementioned change in attitudes, and, at the same time, excuses attitudes on the part of non-whites that obviously would fall under the common-sense notion of what racism is about.

The ideal of earlier opponents of racism, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, that "I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character," has now been re-defined as being really a racist attitude, called "color-blindness." As Wikipedia expresses the ideas of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva: "At an individual level, people with 'color blind prejudice' reject racist ideology, but also reject systemic policies intended to fix institutional racism." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racism#Color\_blindness) In other words, in the realm of this word sorcery, not judging people by the color of their skin is a "subtle" form of racism, and the evidence that a person is guilty of this prejudice is that they do not support the particular policies their accuser favors. The result is that if someone, for instance, opposes affirmative-action admission to universities, arguing that they do not really help black students, their argument need not even be entertained: that person is a racist, guilty of "color blindness," and their case can be dismissed as such.

In the face of such widespread sorcery, how can one resist its lure? Well, recall that Faust makes his bargain with the devil in exchange for unlimited worldly power and pleasure. So, the armor that shields one against such seduction is to adhere to the eternal moral verities, espoused by all the world's great religions, and never abandon them for the sake of personal advantage. But, of course, easier said than done!

Of course it would be wonderful if we could really eliminate all genuine racism from the world. And furthermore, although such aspirations cannot be achieved except in the city of God, we should not stop working towards such a goal. (Similarly, while we cannot realistically hope to eliminate murder from the world, we should never stop trying to eliminate as much murder as possible.)

But engaging in the childish word games of the sorcerers does nothing to help those most in need of our help. For instance, the plight of black Americans trapped in inner-city housing projects should be a matter of grave concern for all Americans. But changing what we call black Americans from "Negro" to "colored" to "black" to "African-American" to "Black" has done exactly nothing to help such people, and the actual programs pushed by "anti-racists" have mostly just helped middle-class blacks to get somewhat more promotions than they would have otherwise. A real solution to the terrible circumstances of such people will require fundamental re-evaluation of our social policies, and not more word magic.