

# The Woke Paradox

Progress, Backlash,  
and a Possible Path Forward

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## DEDICATION

To the changemakers—those who dare to dream beyond limits and act with relentless purpose. To the visionaries who see not just what is, but what could be, and inspire us to believe in a brighter future. To the courageous who stand firm in their convictions yet embrace the art of compromise when it serves the greater good. To the quiet negotiators and the bold revolutionaries, whose tireless efforts carve pathways for progress and lift the human spirit.

This is for you—who bring us hope through your actions, who make the world better with your beliefs, and who remind us that humanity’s greatest strength is found in the pursuit of a better tomorrow for all. I am honored to have had the opportunity to have had so many people share so much of their valuable time to guide me in understanding a subject that divides us yet has the unique potential to unite us like never before. This book is a collective endeavor, a culmination of the wisdom, insights, and experiences shared by persons from all walks of life and both sides of a global debate. It is a suggested path, possibly a roadmap for cultivating a future few can yet imagine.

As always, this book is dedicated to my mother, the game changer.

“Here’s to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels.

The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes.

The ones who see things differently.

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# INTRODUCTION

*“Wokeness is a religion. It has dogmas. It has blasphemies. It has heretics.  
And it punishes people for having sinned against it, even unknowingly.”*

– Douglas Murray

## **How did we get here?**

Mankind’s social progress is a beguiling tale, both straightforward and intricate. A fraternity of naked apes is what we essentially are. But this fraternity has evolved some. We now find safety and identity within small groups and the larger spaces of evolving cultures—spaces filled with distinct views, rules, and practices, not to mention varied reincarnations of the single religion that we apparently can’t live without. Our relative isolation within these varying “cultures of safety” was abruptly disrupted by the act of crossing oceans—a feat achieved by generations of shipbuilders that has profoundly shaped the course of human history. Several of these meetings resulted in value addition, where we took in and esteemed parts of the encounter as ours. Probably in incidents where we took on too much, and in the end, it turned out to be harmful. Disagreeing with an opponent when a great deal is at stake demonstrates the seriousness with which we take our individual and collective identities, formed by our childhood experiences and family and community traditions.

What these experiences have taught us forms the essence of who we are. When too much of that essence is at stake—when disagreements touch too deeply on our individual and collective identities—then serious conflicts result. Despite our many distinctions, what connects us is a fundamental human instinct to ensure existence and improve the lot of our kind. Our approaches and our beliefs may differ—sometimes drastically—and I am fully aware that what I propose is not always embraced. But I am nonetheless certain that what I envision deep down is also what many of you envision: a humanity that not only lives on but also thrives. Time and again, humans have shown that we can work together well, even warring individuals or tribes have shown that they can work together well, and we have demonstrated time and again that we can work together smartly. This human tale is a tribute to our capacity to adjust, gain knowledge, and come together around shared objectives when we elect to play nice together. We might essentially be little more than “meat popsicles” with our oddities and incongruities, but we have shown that working together can yield outstanding results time after time. Mankind’s voyage is far from complete, but we can look back on our shared history, and from it, we can elicit our next shared lesson—the next step on this journey.

### ***Humanity’s Leap Forward: A Century of Astonishing Progress***

Call me optimistic, but I believe humanity is the dominant species on this planet for one key reason: we are incredibly good at getting things done. We come up with ideas, make decisions, and solve problems with astonishing speed and ingenuity. Over the past century, this innate ability has propelled us through a whirlwind of progress that has revolutionized how we live, work, and connect. The transformation has been so profound that it is easy to lose sight of just how far we’ve come. Let’s take a closer look at the incredible milestone’s humanity has achieved in just the last hundred years.

### ***Aviation: From the Ground to the Stars***

The story of human flight began with the Wright brothers' first powered flight in 1903. Just a few decades later, commercial air travel brought global connectivity within reach. By the mid-20th century, the development of jet engines and mass air travel transformed international trade and tourism. Then, in 1969, humanity took its most audacious leap—setting foot on the Moon with the Apollo 11 mission. Fast forward to the 21st century, private space exploration companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin are not only envisioning but actively pursuing missions to Mars. In little more than a century, we went from tentative flights over sand dunes to exploring the cosmos.

### ***Medicine: Saving Lives at an Unprecedented Scale***

The discovery of penicillin in 1928 revolutionized medicine, dramatically reducing deaths from bacterial infections. Vaccination campaigns eradicated smallpox by 1980 and significantly curbed diseases like polio. Innovations like X-rays, MRIs, and robotic surgery have advanced diagnostics and treatment, while global health initiatives have boosted life expectancy and reduced infant mortality. These advancements have profoundly improved health outcomes and transform global quality of life.

### ***Computing: From Room-Sized Machines to AI Superbrains***

The evolution of computing has been nothing short of miraculous. In the 1940s, the first programmable computers filled entire rooms, but by the 1970s, personal computers made their way into homes. The 1990s saw the internet connect the world, transforming communication, commerce, and education. Today, AI and machine learning are revolutionizing industries, with systems like ChatGPT reshaping how we work and interact. Computing has not only become ubiquitous but integral to virtually every aspect of modern life.

### ***Transportation: Reinventing Mobility***

From Ford's assembly line in 1913 to the rise of electric and autonomous vehicles in the 21st century, transportation has undergone remarkable changes. Highways and urban transit systems reshaped cities, while advancements in drone and EV technology promise a greener, more efficient future. What once took weeks of travel can now be accomplished in mere hours, connecting people and goods like never before.

### ***Energy: A Shift Toward Sustainability***

Electrification of homes and industries began transforming society in the 1920s. Nuclear power offered a new energy source in the 1940s, and by the late 20th century, renewable energy technologies like wind and solar started gaining traction. Today, the global focus on sustainability is driving innovation in clean energy, reshaping the way we power our world.

### ***Communication: From Letters to Instant Connectivity***

The 20th century saw an explosion of communication advancements, from the radio to the internet. The internet's emergence in the 1990s and the rise of smartphones and social media in the 2000s have made instant global communication an everyday reality. These technologies have connected billions of people, fostering collaboration and cultural exchange on an unprecedented scale.

### ***Urbanization: Building the Future***

Modern infrastructure has transformed how we live. Skyscrapers, mass transit systems, and smart cities have redefined urban living, while advancements in clean water and sanitation systems have vastly improved public health. The focus on sustainability and smart technologies is now driving the cities of the future.

### ***Environmental Awareness: A Growing Consciousness***

Humanity's progress hasn't come without consequences, but awareness of our impact on the planet has grown significantly. Movements to address environmental issues, such as the Montreal Protocol to protect the ozone layer and efforts to combat climate change, show that progress and responsibility can go hand in hand.

### ***Agriculture: Feeding a Growing World***

The Green Revolution introduced synthetic fertilizers and mechanized farming, boosting food production and supporting a growing population. Today, precision farming technologies like drones and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are making agriculture more efficient and sustainable.

### ***Social Progress: Rights and Equity***

The past century has seen transformative social movements advocating for civil rights, women's equality, and LGBTQ+ rights. These movements have challenged societal norms and brought about greater inclusivity and equity, reshaping the moral and social fabric of our world. As we are recruited, forced, coaxed, or bribed to take sides and clash over the polarizing debates surrounding "wokeism," it's easy to lose sight of the fact that the contentious issues at debate are simply the latest chapter in the ongoing evolution of social progress witnessed within my own lifetime. Over the past 50 years, countless social justice victories have emerged from issues that were once the subject of intense debate and polarization. The expression "What was once heresy is now orthodoxy" has never been more true than in mankind's progress to now. This phrase reflects the idea that beliefs or ideas once considered radical or unacceptable ("heresy") often, over time, become widely accepted or mainstream ("orthodoxy"). It highlights how societal norms and values



evolve, often in response to cultural, political, or intellectual shifts. In the context of how mankind has made it this far, despite the countless wars we've waged over avarice or ego, the advancements we enjoy today reflect not only the need for ever-evolving societal values but also the tireless persistence of advocates, those willing to challenge entrenched norms, with the courage to envision a better future. Consider, if you will, some of the most significant milestones that have marked our collective journey toward progress.

### ***Civil Rights for Racial Equality***

The fight for racial equality has been one of the most transformative movements of the past half-century. From ending legal segregation in schools and public institutions through landmark laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to the election of Barack Obama as the first Black U.S. president in 2008, these victories have reshaped societal norms and expanded opportunities for marginalized communities. Affirmative action policies sought to correct historical injustices, increasing representation in education and employment. However, debates around systemic racism and the fairness of these policies persist, reminding us that the journey toward true equality is ongoing.

### ***Marriage Equality and LGBTQ+ Rights***

The legalization of same-sex marriage in countries around the world, including the U.S. in 2015 marked a turning point in the recognition of LGBTQ+ rights. Beyond marriage, legal protections against discrimination in workplaces and public spaces have advanced equality, and decriminalization of homosexuality in countries like India (2018) and Botswana (2019) has provided hope to millions. Yet, challenges remain, particularly around transgender rights and opposition from conservative groups, highlighting the delicate balance between progress and resistance.

### ***Women's Rights and Gender Equality***

The fight for gender equality has yielded profound changes, from reproductive rights and the legalization of abortion in many countries to greater representation of women in leadership roles. Laws in the U.S. have addressed workplace discrimination, while movements advocating for equal pay continue to push boundaries. Despite these victories, debates around reproductive rights, gender parity, and societal expectations show that the struggle for equality is far from over.

### ***Disability Rights***

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and similar legislation worldwide marked a turning point in the inclusion of people with disabilities. Public spaces, transportation, and technology have become more accessible, fostering greater participation in society. However, resistance to the costs of accommodations and the enforcement of accessibility standards remain ongoing challenges.

### ***Climate Justice and Environmental Protection***

The awareness of humanity's impact on the environment has led to significant achievements, from international agreements like the Paris Climate Accord (2015) to the widespread adoption of renewable energy technologies. Movements for environmental justice have highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities. Despite progress, debates over the economic implications of transitioning from fossil fuels and political resistance to climate science persist.

### ***Criminal Justice Reform***

Efforts to address systemic inequities in the justice system have led to reductions in the use of the death penalty, sentencing reforms for non-violent

drug offenses, and increased calls for police accountability through movements like Black Lives Matter. While these changes mark progress, debates around police reform, mass incarceration, and racial bias in the justice system remain central to the conversation.

### ***Recognition of Indigenous Rights***

Increased acknowledgment of Indigenous rights has led to formal apologies for historical injustices, such as Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Australia's apology to the Stolen Generations. Legal recognition of land rights and the preservation of Indigenous languages and cultures have furthered this progress. Yet, implementing meaningful sovereignty and addressing economic challenges continue to face resistance.

### ***Global Movements Against Apartheid***

The end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 and the election of Nelson Mandela as president symbolized the triumph of global solidarity and justice. The international community's support for sanctions and divestment played a pivotal role, though post-apartheid South Africa continues to grapple with economic inequalities that linger from its past.

### ***Advances in Healthcare and Public Health***

From the global fight against HIV/AIDS to expanded access to healthcare through initiatives like the Affordable Care Act (2010), public health advancements have saved countless lives. The growing recognition of mental health as a vital aspect of overall health has furthered societal progress. However, healthcare costs and lingering stigmas around mental illness remain hurdles to overcome.

We haven't solved all the world's problems—far from it. There is still immense work to be done, injustices to confront, and challenges to

overcome. But history shows that it's in our very DNA to strive, to adapt, and to push humanity forward. Progress isn't just a lofty ideal; it's a defining characteristic of our species. If the lessons above don't already inspire confidence, consider the three enduring pillars that have carried us through our struggles and triumphs, despite our many differences.

These are the forces that have united us, driven innovation, and paved the way for constant change.

**Persistence Pays Off:** Many of these victories were not achieved overnight but resulted from decades—sometimes generations—of relentless activism and unwavering dedication. They demanded tireless efforts from individuals and movements and profound and often painstaking shifts in cultural norms, legal frameworks, and political landscapes. The road to progress has been marked by setbacks, resistance, and sacrifices, yet it is through this enduring commitment that society has been able to challenge entrenched injustices, reshape systems, and inspire transformative change. Each step forward stands as a testament to the power of resilience, vision, and collective determination in the face of adversity.

**Resistance is Part of Change:** Significant progress rarely comes without fierce opposition, as it often challenges deeply ingrained beliefs, systems, and power structures. The very nature of progress disrupts the status quo, igniting fear, discomfort, and resistance from those who stand to lose privilege or are unwilling to embrace change. History is replete with examples of transformative ideas that were initially met with skepticism, ridicule, or outright hostility, from the abolition of slavery to the fight for gender equality and civil rights. Yet, it is through the tension of resistance that progress gains its strength and legitimacy, forcing societies to confront their values, question their assumptions, and ultimately evolve. Opposition, while daunting, is an essential part of the process, serving as a crucible in which new ideas are tested, refined, and

eventually embraced, often becoming the very foundation of what is later celebrated as progress.

**Intersectionality Matters:** The interconnected nature of social struggles—such as those for gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, and economic equity—reveals that no single issue exists in isolation. Intersectionality acknowledges the complexity of human experience, recognizing that individuals often face overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalization based on their unique identities. By connecting these struggles, movements have not only amplified their collective voice but also deepened their understanding of injustice, fostering unity and solidarity across diverse communities. This approach has strengthened advocacy efforts, creating coalitions that are more resilient, inclusive, and effective in driving change. Intersectionality is not merely a framework; it is a powerful reminder that progress for one group cannot be fully achieved without considering the interconnected realities of others. It challenges us to see the broader picture, to listen more deeply, and to act with a greater sense of compassion and justice, ultimately expanding the impact of every movement it touches.

### ***Reflection: Humanity's Collective Leap***

This past century of change is a testament to humanity's remarkable ability to innovate and adapt when we work together to seek solutions that will benefit the many. While these advancements have brought incredible progress, they've also introduced challenges—inequality, environmental degradation, and ethical dilemmas. Yet, as history has shown when we work together with a shared vision, there is no limit to what we can achieve. Humanity's story is one of boundless potential, and as we look to the future, our capacity to innovate and collaborate will remain our greatest strength. Our latest battle for social justice is no different—a test of our collective resolve to build a better, fairer society in the face of opposing views,

impassioned rhetoric, and often overwhelming complexity. The “woke debate,” with its focus on equity, inclusion, and accountability, has ignited fierce discussions about identity, privilege, free speech, and the limits of cultural and social norms. While the arguments can feel polarizing and the issues tangled in layers of historical and systemic context, this moment is part of a larger continuum—a necessary struggle to redefine what equality and justice truly mean in a rapidly evolving world. It is a testament to humanity’s ongoing commitment to progress, even when the path forward feels fraught with disagreement and misunderstanding. Despite the noise, the goal remains clear: to create a society where equality is not just a catchphrase, where words are not weaponized to divide but used to unite, and where everyone—regardless of race, gender, or background—benefits from a shared sense of opportunity and dignity. This isn’t the first time humanity has faced a critical juncture in its social evolution, and it won’t be the last. Just as past generations overcame monumental challenges to secure civil rights, gender equality, and environmental protections, we too must rise to the occasion, guided by a belief in the power of collective action and a commitment to ensuring a brighter, more inclusive future for all. The debates, though contentious, are evidence of progress; they signal a society grappling with what it values most, and that is a fight worth engaging in.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Rhyss Edwards is a former Army Combat Engineer who transitioned to a successful career in the media and tech sectors, where he has been recognized for his innovative contributions with two global awards and a nomination for the Prime Minister's Veteran Entrepreneur of the Year awards for his work in the health-tech space. Chris is the author of four books and holds a postgraduate degree in Creative Writing from Queensland University of Technology. Currently, he is a Science PhD candidate, exploring the intersection of technology and mental health, researching how technology can be leveraged to enhance human well-being. He runs marathons, doesn't sleep, and loves dogs.