

Holy Apostles College & Seminary

A Scholarly Definition of Wokeism

by
Jeffrey Camlin

1 November 2024

ABSTRACT

Wokeism is a *doctrina* (doctrine) of knowledge, reason and belief within U.S. society, about U.S. society, taught by scholars (*doctors*) and teachers to their students. Currently there exists three definitions of wokeism in dictionaries. Currently there exists no scholarly peer-reviewed articles in science or philosophy on the theory of wokeism. Interestingly, there does exist 170 articles in various publications talking about wokeism by scholars. Since there is no current definition or subject in philosophy of the subject of wokeism, it is either impossible or intellectually dishonest to have a reasoned argument including the word wokeism by any doctor of philosophy. This paper establishes a scholarly definition of wokeism, as well as possible branches of philosophy to develop understanding of this subject and doctrine.

1.0 Introduction

In this paper we shall establish a definition of wokeism. The etymology of the word wokeism in the English language is a combination of the words *woke* and *ism*. The current definition of *woke* is “aware of and actively attentive to important societal facts and issues¹ and the suffix *ism* means a distinctive doctrine, cause, or theory.² So wokeism may be defined as a doctrine, cause, or theory of awareness to societal facts and issues.

While there may be an objection to the omission of *important* in this definition, importance of something is highly subjective depending on the doctrine, cause or theory and thus inappropriate for a rational definition. For example, the definition of important is giving evidence of a feeling of self-importance.³ Feelings are passions and may affect a person’s perception of reality.

Since the current definition of wokeism in the English language is three things, the goal of this paper is to refine the current English definition as one thing. First, we will investigate the etymology of *doctrine*, *cause*, and *theory* from Greek to Latin, then from Latin to English to establish meaning. Then we will establish a definition of these words to make clear to the reader what these words mean in the English language from their Latin and Greek roots. Finally, a definition of wokeism will be presented as one thing versus three things. For the purposes of this paper, the societal context is the current United States of America and will be referenced as “our society.”⁴

2.0 DEFINITIONS

2.1 DOCTRINE

Doctrine comes from a combination of two words from Latin. One word is *docere* which means “teach.” The second word is *doctor* which is a “teacher.” When these two things are combined there

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/woke>

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/woke>

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/important>

⁴ Societal context for this paper is not intended to be exclusive of other societies.

exists a new thing called *doctrina*, or teaching. Teaching generally has the goal of the transfer of some type of knowledge from one person to another. The other person is then said to be learning from the first person, the teacher.

At this point we must pause, since wokeism refers to something about a society, we must narrow down a society the English language. For this paper, the societal context is the United States of America, where the dominate languages are English and Spanish. This is significant, as the intellectual language in the U.S.A. is English, but the societal language is English and Spanish, so we must ensure an adequate translation of meaning to Spanish speakers as well. Interestingly but not surprisingly, doctrine in English is *doctrina* in Latin and also Spanish. However, doctrine in Spanish is a belief or set of beliefs, especially political or religious ones, that are taught and accepted by a particular group.⁵

The definition of doctrine in English is described as a principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief.⁶ However one describes doctrine as only a set of beliefs, while the other claims doctrine is both knowledge or system of belief.

Are a society's *facts and issues* knowledge or a system of beliefs? The Greeks answer this question as they described knowledge in two ways, *episteme* and *logos*, or understanding and reason⁷ and belief as *doxa*,⁸ or opinion. So we could describe the meaning of wokeism as a doctrine of knowledge, reason and belief within a society.

⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english-spanish/doctrine>

⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/doctrine>

⁷ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/>

⁸ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism-ancient/#:~:text=The%20Greek%20term%20translated%20here,%2Dand%2Dso%20to%20someone.>

2.2 CAUSE

A cause is significantly different than doctrine. A cause is a reason to feel something or to behave in a particular way.⁹We can contrast this with *docere* where a teacher is required to teach another person something. Cause comes from Latin *causa*, meaning “reason” or “sake.”¹⁰ This is helpful as doctrine includes reason. So we could define wokeism as a doctrine of knowledge, reason to feel something, and belief within a society.

2.3 THEORY

Theory is an ancient thing and in English the word remains relatively intact for over 2000 years from latin *theoria*, which came from Greek *theōria* which means "contemplation, speculation; a looking at, viewing; a sight, show, spectacle, things looked at."¹¹So, we can understand theory as simply a thought about something.

But something isn't nothing, thus we must consider metaphysics, which is a theory of existence. What exists and what does not? The only real advancement on what exists is *cogito ergo sum*¹² which means the only think a human being can know and is verifiable is that a human being thinks. What this means is best taught and visualized by the movie *The Matrix*¹³ where a person realizes what they thought was real was in fact false by an evil entity.

A theory is that there exists four realities:¹⁴ A person's reality (*cogito ergo sum*), A verifiable reality (a *doctor* teaches a *doctrina* to a *person*), A virtual reality within the verifiable reality (a *person* thinks online), A reality beyond the verifiable reality, *The* reality (which human beings may never know

⁹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cause>

¹⁰ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/cause>

¹¹ <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=theory>

¹² Latin phrase, *cogito ergo sum*, that was coined by French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes. Descartes first published the phrase in 1637 in his work *Discourse on Method*. He later included a similar phrase in his 1641 work *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

¹³ Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L. (1999). *The Matrix*. Warner Bros.

¹⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/reality> the **state** of things as they are, **rather** than as they are **imagined** to be

and is limited to our point of view). Wokeism must be defined in the verifiable reality as a society includes more than one person, and is verifiable.

3.0 REASONING

Wokeism is first a theory as it is a word which has been spoken by a person that has meaning as established in a contemporary dictionary in our society. When a word is spoken it is an act and thus is proof that a thought of something from a person's reality entered the verifiable reality of our society. So, wokeism is real. But, what would be a good, reasoned, definition?

An exhaustive search for peer-reviewed articles on the definition or meaning of wokeism was conducted and revealed no academic definition or theory of wokeism in any branch of science or philosophy, nor do any peer-reviewed article exists on this subject.¹⁵ A non peer-reviewed search was conducted and revealed 170 articles on the word "wokeism." After review there are various thinkers and scholars that talk about wokeism in various contexts where some refer to the word in "scare quotes"¹⁶ and others do not which indicates a definition of wokeism is needed in academia.

Since there is no academic definition of wokeism, it is impossible to claim there exists any particular cause or reasoning why anyone should feel or behave in a certain way as it relates to wokeism per 2.2. Therefore, we must accept that wokeism is a doctrine, (2.1). Thus, wokeism is a theory related to some sort of doctrine; a doctrine of knowledge, reason and belief within a society. Additionally, since this doctrine exists, there must exist doctors that teach this doctrine to others as we have found in 2.1. So, at this point we know that wokeism is a doctrine of knowledge, reason, and belief within our society, with those who teach it to others, and we shall call this a scholarly definition of wokeism.

¹⁵ The exhaustive search did reveal one possibility, Gater, W. (2024). Wokeism and the Human Body. Japan Mission Journal, 78(1), 63–72. However, this journal is written in Japanese about the Japanese society and contained no abstract. From the subject it appears to be an article about wokeism but not defining what wokeism is. I have reached out to the author for a copy of the text.

¹⁶ Scare quotes are [quotation marks](#) (= the [symbols](#) “ ” or ‘ ’) that are sometimes put around a word or phrase in a written [sentence in order](#) to show that the word is being used in a [special](#) way or in a way that may not be [correct](#) or [true](#): (SOURCE: Cambridge Dictionary)

3.0 CONCLUSION

Wokeism is a doctrine of knowledge, reason, and belief within U.S. society, about U.S. society, taught by scholars (*doctors*) and teachers (taught by *doctors*) to their students. Future work on this subject includes more detail on this doctrine, and how this doctrine is used in various facets of life in America. Since a doctrine with belief is involved, Thomist philosophers as well as scholars with interests in the Philosophy of Religion are well equipped to examine wokeism with the *Summa Theologiae* as a guide, replacing revealed truths with foundational texts identified in wokeism along side the analogous subjects of Aristotle and other philosophers.