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# How to Talk to a Critical Theorist

FAIR ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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In many ways, Critical Theorists (or specifically Critical Race Theorists) are just like anyone. They feel all the emotions, they care about their kids and spouses, they worry about the bills they have to pay, they have ambitions, dreams, and self-doubts. They experience shame, loss, pride, and joy. If you find yourself in a casual conversation, then, all the normal rules of establishing a baseline human connection apply. Making small talk around similar concerns and interests is not a bad idea. We tend to be favorably disposed in some way to those that are friendly. The woke are no different in this regard.

At some point in the relationship, however, you are bound to come into conflict over the question of *values*. At some point, your interlocutor will make an assumption that you share their values, in order to test the relationship in its early stages. They may make a positive statement about new race-explicit curriculum initiatives, or a negative comment about an elected official, teacher, administrator, or

administrative policy that they consider to be anti-DEI, or one that doesn't go far enough.

Their expectation is that you will agree with their sentiments, which means you appropriately reflect their moral framework. However, if you don't immediately give a sign of this alignment, things may get awkward. The person may feel like the commonality they assumed to exist is now in jeopardy. A sidelong glance or a quizzical look is all it takes. If you choose to question their statement openly, or ask for clarification, the person may experience this as a challenge to their beliefs. You will notice, just by failing to act as a mirror for this person's assumed truth, that you are experiencing stress as well. So are they. This is entirely normal... get used to it!

Depending on your goals, you may choose to exit the interaction gracefully, at least on your end, or press your questioning. If you choose the second path, you will need to manage your emotions.

## *Self-control*

Engaging in advocacy for your principles in the face of a Critical Race Theorist, particularly in group settings, requires tremendous self-control. The great Civil Rights struggles of the '50s and '60s required activists to have enormous self-control. Yesterday's activists comported themselves differently from today's. The most effective among them dressed well, carried themselves with quiet dignity and self-respect, and strove to not let the hate and racism they faced deter them from making the right choices to advance the cause. You will need to adopt the same strategy in order to be effective against the neo-racism in vogue today.

When in doubt about your ability to control yourself, it is usually better to remain silent than betray negative emotions. Critical Race Theory interprets anger in opposition as fragility and denial. By playing into this expectation, it lets them put you more easily in that box, and will turn off any fence-sitters who are also present, who may be willing to hear you out.

## *Two Judgments*

If you engaging with a Critical Race Theorist in an open conflict, you should be prepared for two things:

- 1) They will think you are ignorant, and
- 2) They will judge you as immoral.

We will address each of these two judgments in turn, and suggest what you can do about it.

### *1) They think you are ignorant*

They will think you are ignorant, even willfully so. You will quickly be able to read this in their condescension and attitude.

The “woke” are always going to view any dissent by you as indicative of your mental childhood—yes they are really that condescending. In their worldview, their esoteric belief makes them savvy and perceptive, and anyone who doesn't accept their baseline understanding of privileged or oppressed group identities is sleepwalking through life, in a state of ignorance. So there is no way

you can ever hope to engage them at the level of mutual respect and still disagree—since your difference and deviation from their ideas makes you unworthy of intellectual respect. The only thing they will seek to do with you is to lead you into the light of their understanding. Many of them have had conversion experiences—at a training or conference where they were brainwashed--where they suddenly grasped the essence of the universality of privilege and oppression. You must appreciate that they are literally acting out of a realization gained during a quasi-religious experience.

### *2) They think you are immoral*

Woke morality rests almost entirely on selective empathy for groups they deem to be oppressed.

The moral awakening they experienced (for many of them at CRT conferences or workshops) was grounded in empathy for those oppressed. Your denial of that reality is not only an intellectual failing, it is a moral one. Anyone who cannot “see” that disparities are due to discrimination is therefore apologizing for oppression, minimizing and denying it, and therefore enabling it to continue. Imagine someone who noticed an elderly person who had fallen down while crossing the street, and refused to lift a finger to help. They will be just as appalled at your indifference as you would be at someone who behaved this way. They are on the side of the angels--on the “right side of history”--and if you disagree, then you are implicitly just as immoral as this bystander.

## *The Good News*

Once you realize and accept that these two judgments are inevitable, you can take steps to counter them. To do so, you must, first and foremost, maintain your self-control, hold fast to your principles, and articulate them whenever challenged. Jodi Shaw, a staff member at Smith College, made a YouTube video that expressed those principles with quiet, calm eloquence:

“People's identities are not reducible to their immutable characteristics. Stop expecting them to base what they think and feel about themselves on those categories. Stop presuming to tell me

or my kids how they should think and feel about themselves based on those categories. Stop asking them to project stereotypes and assumptions onto others, based on their skin color.”

Principles aren't powerful because they demonstrate that you're more intelligent. Ingraining them within you will demonstrate something more powerful than intelligence-conviction. And you can trust in them to the extent that you understand how crucial they are. The neo-racism of Critical Race Theory assigns group guilt, and group virtue to individuals based on immutable characteristics and superficial social identities. The pro-human principles FAIR stands for--individual rights, fairness, humanity, and understanding--have far greater moral power than this misguided pseudo-ethics, which holds individuals responsible for the assumed historical crimes of other members of the group.

### **Ask Questions**

The vast majority of educators have been trained in ideological echo chambers. It has never occurred to them that their worldview and teaching methods are mere ideologies, as opposed to truth generating processes. The silver lining in this is that these beliefs—critical pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, cultural appropriation, equity, inclusion, internalized racism, relativism, systemic racism, etc.—are especially vulnerable to questions. This is because educators who've received their teaching certificates (which is virtually all teachers) are highly unlikely to have experienced challenges to the views they've been taught to hold.

Before attempting to challenge or question their guiding principles, it is crucial that you understand what these principles are and why they hold them. Consequently, it is extremely important that you ask specific questions and, when appropriate, write down the answer. The purpose of asking questions is to understand why they believe what they do, and not as “gotchas.” When in doubt, ask. Once they attempt to reveal and justify those positions, then you can address them one by one at the level of your principles.

### ***The Ecological Fallacy***

In practice, one of the great fallacies at the heart of Critical Race Theory is called *the ecological fallacy*. Someone who makes an ecological fallacy is falsely assuming that each individual member of a group reflects the *average* statistical qualities of the group as a whole. Critical Race Theory holds each individual within a racial category as a tiny exemplar of the group, as experiencing the same privileges or oppressions that they have projected onto the group as a whole. They will twist and distort any deviance from this assumption to fit that projection. Exposing this fallacy whenever you can is very powerful.

### ***The Moral Failure at the Heart of Critical Race Theory.***

You can also directly impugn their lack of empathy, in that they don't view people as individuals, but as a collection of abstractions. Protecting the sanctity of the individual shows *more* empathy than Critical Race Theorists show towards favored groups, because, for you, no individuals can be dispensed with based on the color of their skin. Everyone deserves empathy, not just groups of people considered to be oppressed. For example, if a Critical Race Theorist accuses me of “not caring about black lives” because they draw attention to rioting that results in property damage and lost jobs, you can say with confidence that you absolutely do care, *even more so than them*, because, “not only do I care about police violence towards black people, but I also care about police violence towards all people. I care about small business owners, many of whom are black, who have had their businesses destroyed, and/or their insurance rates increased. I care about jobs lost as larger businesses move elsewhere. I care about the collapse of vulnerable communities that rioting causes, and the poverty that results. I care about the impact of these losses on the children who live in these neighborhoods. I care about reckless calls for “defunding the police” when the people that have been most harmed by these proposals are the very people BLM claim they have empathy for.” (h/t to James Lindsay, who discusses this in more detail in his podcast [“Four Roads to Deal with the Woke”](#)).

Attacking the selective empathy inherent in woke thought is based on the core principle of fairness.

This approach to argumentation can be replicated across many different domains where Critical Race Theories have been applied. Can you see how this critique of Woke “selective empathy” might apply to gender issues?

### ***Steal their Motte, and Bomb their Bailey***

Many Critical Race Theorists address challenges to their agendas by using a rhetorical technique called the “Motte and Bailey”. In his podcast [“Stealing the Motte”](#), James Lindsay offers a detailed breakdown on how this technique operates, and how it uses more easily defended arguments in order to advance more radical ideas.

***“Don’t you care about being more racially sensitive?”*** is used to justify indoctrinating children into becoming neo-racists that make broad assumptions of others based on their skin color

***“All we want is just to reduce inequality, make a more just world”*** is used to justify radical proposals--even teaching children to excuse or celebrate violent resistance and revolution. It is also used to dismiss the costs of riots and

***“Encouraging children to gain a deeper understanding of themselves”*** is used to justify teaching children to identify primarily with their racial and gender groups rather than their individual characteristics.

***When engaging with a Critical Theorist, you should anticipate this maneuver and pre-empt it.***

Assert the more easily defended position, which all agree upon, and use it to attack their more radical position.

“We all want to be sensitive to discrimination based on race, which is why we must never make assumptions about others based on it.”

“We should strive to reduce inequality, but extreme solutions lead to more inequality, not less.”

“Children should gain a deeper understanding of themselves, by being able to express themselves freely, not by conforming to a reductive identity based on race.”

### ***Conclusion***

The most important things to keep in mind, when talking to a Critical Race Theorist:

- 1) Stay calm. Expect to be condescended to both intellectually and morally. Ignore it.
- 2) Stand up for your principles.
- 3) Expose the flaws in their logic. Call out the ecological fallacy with facts.
- 4) Assert the primacy of your own moral schema, and confront them directly on their moral failings.
- 5) Steal their motte, and bomb their bailey.
- 6) See #1!

*Helpful Links:*

[\*No, the Woke Won't Debate You. Here's Why. - New Discourses\*](#)

[\*A Principled Statement of Opposition to Critical Race Theory: An Excerpt from 'Cynical Theories' - New Discourses\*](#)

[\*How to Talk to Your Employers About Anti-Racism - New Discourses\*](#)