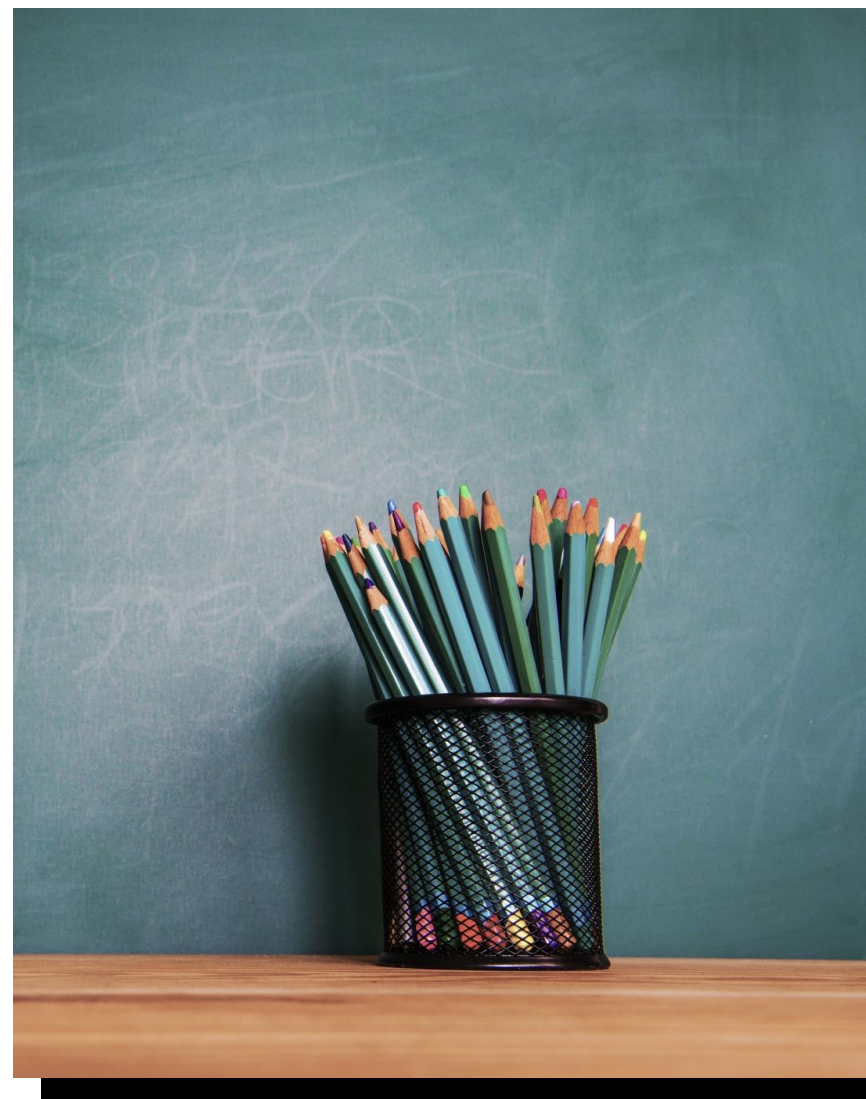


WHAT IS
INDOCTRINATION?



PERSUASION

- Indoctrination seems to involve successfully persuading someone to adopt certain beliefs.
- Suppose I try to convince you to be a Marxist. I spew a lot of Marxist propaganda at you. But you simply refuse to listen to me. Maybe my attempts backfire, pushing you further away from Marxism. Have I indoctrinated you?
- Hardly! I have *tried* to indoctrinate you, perhaps. But I have *failed* to do so.



PERSUASION AS A NECESSARY CONDITION ON INDOCTRINATION

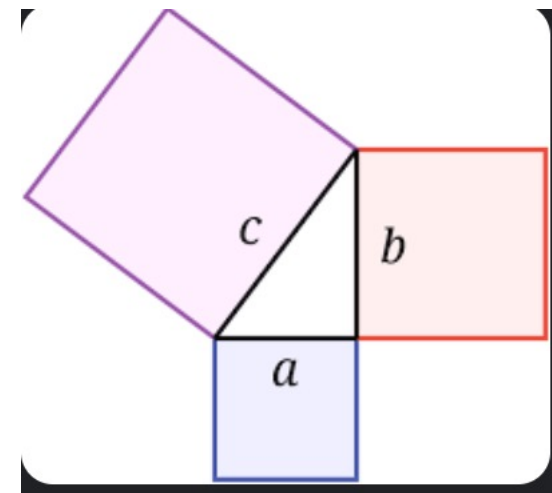
- If A indoctrinates B, then A causes B to adopt certain beliefs.
- This is plausibly a necessary condition on indoctrination. Is it also sufficient? That is, does every case of successfully persuading someone to adopt certain beliefs count as indoctrination?



NOT A SUFFICIENT CONDITION

- If A indoctrinates B, then A causes B to adopt certain beliefs.
- Does every case of successfully persuading someone to adopt certain beliefs count as indoctrination? **Surely not!**

A teacher guides their student through the proof of the Pythagorean theorem, patiently answering any questions that arise along the way. By the end of the lesson, the student sees why the Pythagorean theorem is true - they can prove it! The teacher has caused the student to believe the Pythagorean theorem is true. But they haven't indoctrinated the student.



NOT A SUFFICIENT CONDITION

- If A indoctrinates B, then A causes B to adopt certain beliefs.
- Does every case of successfully persuading someone to adopt certain beliefs count as indoctrination? **Surely not!**

I've just come inside from outdoors. You ask me what the weather is like. I tell you that it's sunny out. You believe me. So I've caused you to adopt a belief - that it's sunny outside. But I haven't indoctrinated you.



NOT A SUFFICIENT CONDITION

- If A indoctrinates B, then A causes B to adopt certain beliefs.
- So what else is required for indoctrination?



A SUBJECT MATTER REQUIREMENT?

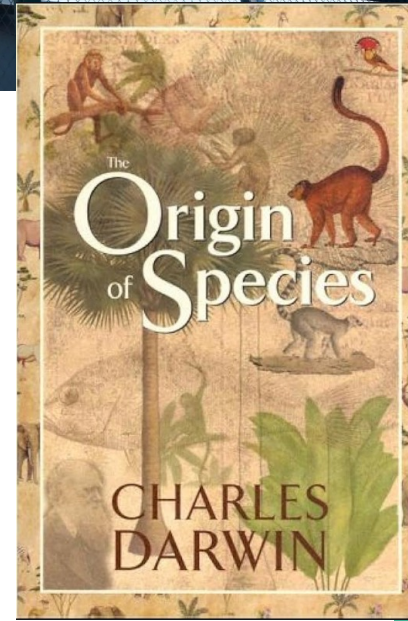
- One possibility: indoctrination requires a **distinctive subject matter** - it must be about a **political or religious topic**.
 - This would explain why teaching the Pythagorean theorem doesn't count as indoctrination - it's about math, not politics or religion
 - Also would explain why telling you that it's sunny out doesn't count as indoctrination



A SUBJECT MATTER REQUIREMENT?

- Counterexample:
- Imagine you are forced to go to the Darwinist re-education center. Every day, you wake up at dawn and are forced to recite passages from *The Origin of Species*; every night the loudspeakers blast excerpts from *The Descent of Man*. Anyone who raises questions or doubts never gets an answer; they are just forced to scrub the latrines (which are super gross btw). At the end of two year stay, you come away a fervent believer of Darwinism.

This seems like a paradigmatic case of indoctrination. But it's not about a political or religious subject matter: it's about evolutionary theory. Moreover, it seems we can easily adapt the case to be a mathematics re-education center, or a musical appreciation re-education center, or whatever.



A MORE PROMISING APPROACH

- In prototypical cases of indoctrination, it seems that the person who gets indoctrinated ends up holding their beliefs **uncritically** or **dogmatically**.
- E.g., someone is indoctrinated into a fundamentalist religion; ends up dogmatically holding their religious beliefs without any tendency to critically reflect on them or examine them.
- This also seems to be what's going on in the Darwinist re-education camp: if the indoctrination process is successful, you end up holding Darwinist beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic fashion.



INDOCTRINATION AS ANTITHETICAL TO CRITICAL REFLECTION

Revised Proposal:

- If A indoctrinates B, then A causes B to adopt certain beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner.
- What counts as an uncritical or dogmatic manner? Roughly, this involves:
 - Being unwilling to critically reflect on one's beliefs
 - Being unwilling to consider alternative hypotheses/explanations of the evidence
 - Not being open to the possibility that one's beliefs are mistaken
 - Being more confident in one's beliefs than the evidence warrants



INDOCTRINATION AS ANTITHETICAL TO CRITICAL REFLECTION

Revised Proposal:

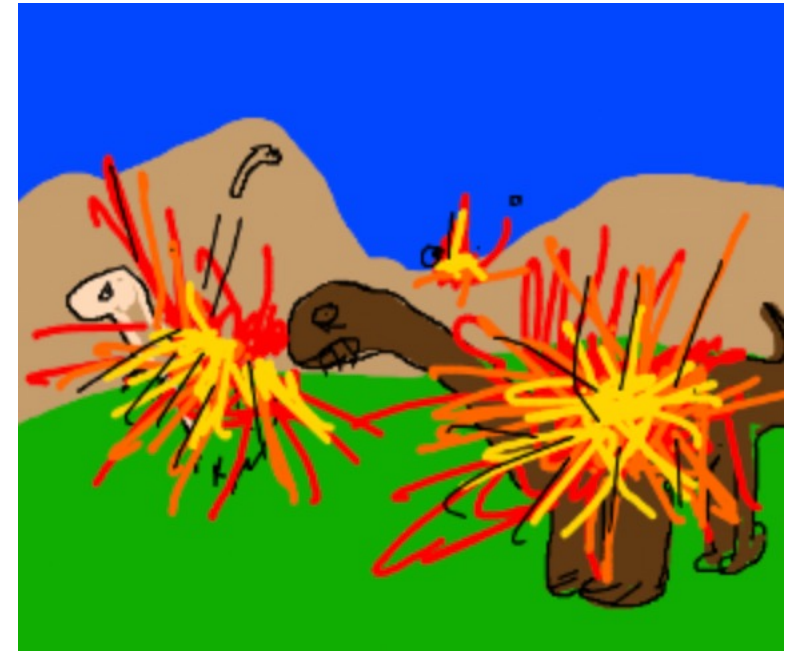
- If A indoctrinates B, then A causes B to adopt certain beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner.
- Is this a sufficient condition for indoctrination?



- If A indoctrinates B, then A causes B to adopt certain beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner.



In a paleontology class, a teacher reviews the evidence for the hypothesis that dinosaurs were killed by an asteroid, taking plenty of time to answer questions and consider alternative hypotheses. One of the students - "Fred", let's call him - comes to uncritically and dogmatically accept that dinosaurs were killed by an asteroid. But Fred doesn't do this on the basis of the evidence presented. He believes this just because he thinks it's a cool idea.



WHAT'S MISSING?

- In a paleontology class, a teacher reviews the evidence for the hypothesis that dinosaurs were killed by an asteroid, taking plenty of time to answer questions and consider alternative hypotheses. One of the students - "Fred", let's call him - comes to uncritically and dogmatically accept that dinosaurs were killed by an asteroid. But Fred doesn't do this on the basis of considering the evidence presented; he believes this just because he thinks it's a cool idea. It seems wrong to say that the teacher indoctrinated Fred.
- Why not? Well, one possibility is that what's missing is *intent*. While the teacher intended for Fred to believe that the dinosaurs were killed by an asteroid, the teacher didn't intend for Fred to believe this in an uncritical or dogmatic manner. So we might try to analyze indoctrination as follows:
- A indoctrinates B if and only if A *intentionally* causes B to adopt certain beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner.



AGAINST AN INTENT REQUIREMENT

- A indoctrinates B if and only if A *intentionally* causes B to adopt certain beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner.
- One problem with this approach is that it seems possible to unwittingly or unintentionally indoctrinate someone. For example:
- Mark is a fervent Marxist. He is teaching a political philosophy class. He doesn't try to indoctrinate his students with any particular ideology. But he can't help subtly presenting the material in a way that is highly biased towards Marxism - he paints rival ideologies in an unflattering light; he glosses over the problems with Marxism; he subtly mocks students when they say things that are critical of Marxism, etc. It seems in this case he might end up indoctrinating his students into Marxism even though he didn't intend to do so.



AGAINST AN INTENT REQUIREMENT

- Mark is a fervent Marxist. He is teaching a political philosophy class. He doesn't try to indoctrinate his students with any particular ideology. But he can't help subtly presenting the material in a way that is highly biased towards Marxism - he paints rival ideologies in an unflattering light; he glosses over the problems with Marxism; he subtly mocks students when they say things that are critical of Marxism, etc. It seems in this case he might end up indoctrinating his students into Marxism even though he didn't intend to do so.
- One feature of this case is that even though Mark doesn't intend to indoctrinate his students, he uses teaching methods that seem to systematically encourage his students to adopt Marxist beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic fashion (even though he doesn't realize that's what he's doing). I think this observation can point us in the direction of a better approach...



FINAL ANALYSIS

- A indoctrinates B if and only if:
 - 1) A leads B to adopt certain beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner, and
 - 2) A does so in a way that systematically tends to cause people to adopt beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner.



FINAL ANALYSIS

- A indoctrinates B if and only if:
 - 1) A leads B to adopt certain beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner, and
 - 2) A does so in a way that systematically tends to cause people to adopt beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner.
- Explains why teaching the Darwinist re-education center counts as indoctrination: the methods employed systematically tend to cause ppl to adopt Darwinist beliefs in an uncritical/dogmatic manner.
- Explains why the paleontology class doesn't count as indoctrination: the pedagogical methods do not systematically tend ppl to adopt paleontological beliefs in an uncritical/dogmatic manner.



SOME CONSEQUENCES OF THIS ANALYSIS

- According to the analysis I've presented, a crucial feature of indoctrination is that it involves causing the indoctrinated person (the "victim" of the indoctrination) to hold beliefs in an uncritical and dogmatic manner.
- This is, arguably, part of why we think indoctrination is **bad**. We think it is *irrational* to hold beliefs in an uncritical and dogmatic manner - doing so reveals an intellectual failing.



INDOCTRINATION AS A TWO-WAY FAILURE?

- In discussions of indoctrination in the current media/political landscape, accusations of “indoctrination” are usually taken to suggest the person doing the indoctrinating is doing something bad – they are failing to teach in the way that they should.
- But this analysis suggests that the fault may also lie in the person being indoctrinated: by definition, they are being less than fully rational, since they have come to hold beliefs in an uncritical and dogmatic manner. (If they formed the resulting beliefs in a rational and reflective manner, they wouldn’t have been *indoctrinated*.)



AN UNFLATTERING PORTRAIT OF STUDENTS?

- If this is right, then accusations of the form, “Professors at university X are indoctrinating the students” not only paint an unflattering picture of professors at University X (which is obvious), but they also paint an unflattering picture of students at University X.
- These accusations suggest that the students are passive victims of their professors, who are unable to use their critical thinking skills to resist holding uncritical/dogmatic beliefs, and to thereby resist being indoctrinated.

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