## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Indoctrination

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**Abstract**

The indoctrination debates have been a key feature of the philosophy of education over the past 50 years. While it is generally acknowledged that the pejorative associations of indoctrination only emerged over the last 100 years, those normative associations are widely taken to be an essential part of the concept itself as are the positive connotations of education. I explore some of the problems of assuming that the term must refer to something negative and the essentialism that this implies. The attempt to 'transvaluate' indoctrination results in the claim that the concept is virtually indistinguishable from education. Drawing on Ivan Snook's *Indoctrination and Education*, I examine several candidates for indoctrination to show that the pejorative label is not a good fit. I argue that much of what is framed as indoctrination turns out to be either impossible–implausible or necessary–inevitable; the fact that there is scarcely a gap between these extremes should give us pause to wonder about this term and its relation to education: By providing a term for those influences of which we generally disapprove, does the concept of indoctrination act as a way for educationalists to uphold and protect the normative view of education (that education must aim for something intrinsically worthwhile)?

This paper forms part of a Special Issue entitled 'Beyond Virtue and Vice: Education for a Darker Age' in which the editors invited authors to engage in exercises of 'transvaluation'.

Certain apparently settled educational concepts (from agency and fulfilment to alienation and ignorance) can be reinterpreted and transvaluated (in a Nietzschean vein) such that virtues become vices, and vices, virtues. The editors encouraged authors to employ polemics and some occasional exaggeration to reimagine educational values that are all too readily accepted within contemporary educational discourses.

## INTRODUCTION

With a background in Religious Studies, I have always been interested in beliefs, both religious and otherwise. I have long wondered how beliefs arise or are changed; how people's beliefs go through formation, crisis, conversion or dissolution. As my studies progressed, I came to understand that whatever we mean by 'religion', belief was only one part of it: For many 'religious' people in the world, their commitment is defined by practices, habits and dispositions as much as beliefs. So, when I came to read philosophers and educationalists discussing indoctrination, I was generally struck by two problems: first, the emphasis on beliefs—surely education (like religion) has to do with far more than beliefs; second, the weight of normativity when it comes to stating what is education vis-à-vis what is indoctrination. The more I think about it, the less convinced I am that we have clear ways of making this normative distinction. The following article is an attempt to think through this view and some of the implications that follow.

On one view of the matter, a philosophical approach can be understood as a way of uncovering the essential definition, idea, or *eidos* of something. In an educational context, this might be thought to entail philosophers of education attempting to uncover or formulate the essential definition of key educational concepts. In the case of this article, the expectation might be that I seek to uncover the essential core of *indoctrination* (Neiman, 1989), and how it relates to, and is distinguished from, related concepts: education, initiation, inculcation, conditioning, propaganda, or, as has particular potency today, radicalisation. We might hope that this approach yields robust criteria for distinguishing the essence of indoctrination. I will argue that this hope is in vain: The essentialism presupposed by this kind of philosophical approach is unlikely to help us settle the matter of defining indoctrination, a term so often debated that any contemporary account cannot avoid the weight of historical analysis. Matters of philosophy are seldom, if ever, finally settled.

For the purposes of scoping, I will consider indoctrination primarily in relation to 'education', even if this involves some artificial—or, rather, stipulative—positioning of terms. My purpose is to explore an interpretation of indoctrination by questioning contemporary assumptions that 'indoctrination' must refer to something of which we disapprove; and the corollary view, that 'education' must refer to that of which we approve (what I refer to as the normative view of education). More specifically, I argue that much of what is framed as indoctrination turns out to be either impossible to do or educationally necessary or inevitable. There is scarcely any gap between the extremes of what is impossible and what is necessary that should make us wonder whether, by categorising influences of which we generally disapprove, the concept of indoctrination exists to provide educationalists with a way to uphold and protect the 'normative' view of education (that education must aim for something intrinsically worthwhile). As with the potent concepts of radicalisation and extremism in recent debates, how the term is used is often a matter rhetorical positioning of those we disagree with. Let us explore some of the rhetoric that seems to offer descriptive analysis.

A more radical interpretation of the aim of this paper would be to 'save' indoctrination. How can we possibly save indoctrination? And why would we want to? General usage could hardly be suggestive of anything less educational: 'the act or process of forcing somebody to accept a particular belief or set of beliefs and not allowing them to consider any others' (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2020).[1] Such a characterisation is common enough but begs certain questions. How could someone be forced to accept a particular belief? How does one prevent consideration of alternatives? Could such a process ever be justified? What about inculcating a noble lie or pious fiction? And why the focus on beliefs? As children grow up, educational influences are felt on so many levels that a focus on beliefs seems very narrow. So, this initial definition, based on general usage, is hardly complete. Philosophers of education are prone to careful conceptual analysis and so do not leave the matter there.

In what follows I will turn to the indoctrination debates of recent decades within the philosophy of education in the Anglophone context. I will explore Snook's criteria for indoctrination and consider his paradigm cases of indoctrination. This is followed by two analytical sections that examine the impossibility and then the inevitability of indoctrination. This leads, in the following section, to a discussion of whether indoctrination is helpfully framed in terms of the transmission of doctrines (and the various problematic methods that might be called indoctrinatory). The general argument is that, according to the interpretation of education offered here, the educator is always intending to improve the student's relation to some knowledge, skill or disposition. The educator's actions are educational to the extent that their intentions are directed by what they take to be improvements. I do not offer a standard from which to judge whether they are right, only that they intend the good in their own terms. The consequence of this argument is that what often looks like indoctrination is here defined as a form of education. The question then becomes one of how to ensure that the 'influencee' (student) is protected from aims that might not be good.

## THE INDOCTRINATION DEBATES

To say that indoctrination is a significant concept within the philosophy of education is an understatement. And yet, we seem to have established a rather orthodox view that indoctrination is not educational; it is bad, and we should not do it. Is there any more to be said? Surely I should hesitate to return to a matter which, even in the early 1980s, was thought to be a 'dead issue' among philosophers of education (Laura, 1983, p. 43) and which some say has 'outstayed its welcome by several decades' (Lang, 2009, p. 403) but which, nevertheless, appears to continue to fascinate philosophers of education such that they 'are compelled to revisit the grave; not merely to lay flowers but to exhume the corpse!' (Wareham, 2019, p. 41).

But I am not all that hesitant because the discussion seems far from over and continues to be used to police the border between the kinds of influence of which there is general approval (education), from those of which there is not (for instance, in contemporary discussions of extremism (Bartlett & Miller, 2010). Conceptualising indoctrination remains vital to conceptualising education itself, a task that is necessary because, of all concepts within Education Studies, *education* remains remarkably undertheorised (Kenklies, 2020). Thus, to define indoctrination, one cannot avoid defining education; or perhaps it is better to acknowledge that any lack of clarity concerning one mirrors the lack of clarity concerning the other. Ruth Wareham is right to explain the ongoing interest in indoctrination by reference to its 'genuine relevance to a variety of issues which sit on the socio-political fault lines manifest in liberal democratic societies' (2019, p. 41), but I want to add a further reason for the persistence of indoctrination debates: that notions of indoctrination rest on 'contextualist' rather than on 'objectivist' foundations. This claim builds on Alven Neiman's definition of contextualism (aka historical consciousness), that 'all inquiry is shaped, at least to some extent, by historical and social realities' (1989, p. 54). If we accept this, we may appreciate how each generation (re)defines its own framing of indoctrination in the historically inflected terms of its context. So, some of the foundational discussions of indoctrination gathered by Snook (2010; originally published in 1972) reflect, to some extent, the context in which they were written.

This does not mean, of course, that the arguments are of no relevance to us today, but that they are of their time. For instance, most chapters assume that indoctrination entails the transmission of propositional truth claims in ways (or with intentions) that are not wholly defensible. Many of these debates are positioned within an educational frame, the general assumption being that education is also primarily about transmitting various claims (though with more justification in the case of education). This approach to education and indoctrination seems to me to characterise a particular form of Anglophone philosophy of education, and though there are still many who continue with these general notions of education and indoctrination, I would argue that its heyday is over (Ariso, 2019).

An objectivist approach can be interpreted as the attempt to discover an essence that allows for an objective or universal definition of indoctrination vis-à-vis education. A discourse that disregards contextual understanding in general can (problematically, in my view) assume a universalist or 'objectivist' stance. So, my reading rests both on Neiman's distinction between contextualist and objectivist approaches to defining indoctrination and on agreeing that the contextualist approach is the most fruitful. Neiman (1989) gives an account of the contextual influences that have given shape to some recent historical episodes within the indoctrination debates and builds on the foundational work by Ivan Snook. In drawing out some of Neiman's and Snook's key arguments, I present another explanation for the ongoing interest that philosophers have in the concept, as well as offering a potted history of the indoctrination debates within the field of philosophy of education.

Given the context of the Cold War, it is little wonder that the 30 years spanning the 1960s to the 1980s was a fertile period for philosophers of education interested in indoctrination. During this period, Anglophone philosophers became particularly interested in the question of how indoctrination should be defined, and especially how it can be distinguished from legitimate forms of educational influence. This perhaps reflects the fact that by then the pejorative connotation of the term had fully taken hold even though it is difficult to explain how and why.[2] These indoctrination debates were framed by three key notions. First, that 'a pejorative meaning is now firmly attached to the word indoctrination' (Callan & Arena, 2009, p. 104); as Snook put it, 'once indoctrination is clearly understood, it will be obvious that it is reprehensible' (Snook, 1972, p. 3). Second, education was often understood positively or normatively (Peters, 1966). Thus, Snook claimed that '"Education" carries a plus sign where "indoctrination" carries a minus sign' (1972, p. 103). Third, that the development of rational autonomy was considered to be desirable (Siegel, 1990). It is notable that all three notions still seem to be widely held. From these three notions, it follows that those influences that bring about rational autonomy are defined as education; influences that diminish or inhibit rational autonomy are defined as indoctrination (Cuypers & Haji, 2006). But if this conclusion is generalised, it risks imposing a particular (at least contextual) perspective. One could even reduce the foregoing argument to the following: that education is defined as those influences, and processes of influence, of which there is general approval (the development of rational autonomy, in this case); indoctrination is defined as those influences and processes of influence, of which there is general disapproval. Since approval and disapproval are, at least to some extent, local and historical (contextualist), what is called indoctrination (and education) is likely to be subject to some regional and historical variation.[3] This makes general analysis tricky. From a contextualist perspective, this is not such a problem, but many philosophers of education seem rather more committed to something like objectivism by seeking objective (or at least general) criteria in their analyses of indoctrination. Thus, in 1972, Snook published two important books (Snook, 1972, 2010), the first of which, *Indoctrination and Education*, offered an influential structure for thinking about general criteria (necessary and sufficient) that might be used to distinguish indoctrination in ways that are relatively systematic. Snook outlines four major criteria: (1) *content* or subject matter whose rationality is thought to be questionable; (2) *methods* of teaching that withhold reasons from the student; (3) the *intentions* of the teacher to indoctrinate and (4) the *outcomes* of influence being someone who has been indoctrinated. These four criteria continue to influence debates about the nature of indoctrination to this day (e.g., Taylor, 2017; Wareham, 2019)

Although critical of what he takes to be Snook's 'objectivist' stance,[4] Neiman shows how these four criteria, as well as the more or less plausible combinations of them (e. g., intention and content, see Flew, 1966; White, 1970), framed the indoctrination debates over the 1970s and 1980s. Neiman argues, however, that despite the appeal to general

criteria, they tend to rest on assumptions that are best understood as contextualist. It is hardly a novel insight to point out that the view of a thing is shaped, to some extent, by context. Often the attempt to tell the history of indoctrination begins by making the point that indoctrination has not always been interpreted pejoratively.[5]

Educational fashions change, and as they do, so do our interpretations of the family of terms related to 'educational influence', as well as their relations with each other. For this reason, any account of the history of the term indoctrination cannot be disentangled from stories of its siblings. If indoctrination is understood to be the 'implanting of doctrines' (Gatchel, 2010, p. 8), then such an understanding would only be assumed to be 'morally abhorrent' (Wareham, 2019, p. 41) in an educational culture that does not accept the implanting of doctrines as a legitimate form of educational influence. Gatchel argues that in the Middle Ages, the notion of indoctrination as implanting of doctrines 'came to designate the total educational process' (Gatchel, 2010, p. 9).[6] Today we tend to read the phrase 'implanting of doctrines', and therefore of 'indoctrination', quite differently. Call something *indoctrination* within one of the major journals in the field of the philosophy of education[7] and you are generally assumed to be raising an objection. The objectionable nature of indoctrination is so self-evident these days that we can now refer to the so-called indoctrination objection (Cuypers & Haji, 2006). The distinction between objectionable influence (indoctrination) and justified influence (education) has been presented in various guises, perhaps the most common being the idea of non-rational influence: Legitimate educational practices are thought to involve the student's understanding of the reasons for the object of learning; indoctrination takes place where the reasoning of the student is not engaged; rather, it can be said to involve 'inculcating beliefs and actions without regard to, and furthermore impervious to, the force of reasons' (Hanks, 2008, p. 193). As I will show later, this is not the only important aspect of the concept of indoctrination, but it seems to be a widespread view, evident in the writings of such educational luminaries as Richard Peters (1966, Ch. 1) and Israel Scheffler (1973; Siegel, 1997, p. 2). Yet, this important distinction seems unable to account for the many forms of educational influence whereby such reasons are not shared with the student. Before moving directly to the question of non-rational influence, I want to establish the parameters of my own account by detailing Snook's (1972) concept of indoctrination in more depth.

## SNOOK'S CASES OF INDOCTRINATION

Snook offers eight cases of what 'might be called indoctrination' (1972, pp. 4–5). He follows this by an invitation to 'sit in on a discussion in which some reasonably sophisticated people discuss these cases' (pp. 9–11). While we might query this reference to the 'reasonably sophisticated' (what does that encode?!), I find Snook's style generally clear, open and dialogical. I will quote Snook's cases in full before, in the following sections, showing how each one sits among the categories of what is impossible and what is inevitable. Having the cases before us is helpful because it seems likely that Snook understood these to cover all the general cases of the term in a relatively comprehensive sense: The cases provide a snapshot of the analytical toolkit that informs the debates.

1. A Communist teacher in a Communist country teaches in such a way that the class is convinced that Communism is the only political system worthy of support.
2. A convinced Communist teaching in an English or American school tries hard to convert the class to Communism.
3. A teacher of literature knows that his interpretation of a literary work is disputed by many authorities but he makes no mention of these and presents his interpretation as the correct one.
4. As part of a research project, a student-teacher teaches what he knows is false (wrong dates, places, proofs, etc.).
5. A parent tells a young child, 'Put away your toys: you must always be tidy.'
6. A teacher stresses rote learning for the table, lists of Latin verbs and major world capitals.
7. A parent unconsciously influences her children who adopt her standards, values and attitudes.
8. A teacher of religion believes that certain doctrines are true and teaches them as if they are true (Snook, 1972, pp. 4–5).

In what follows, I contend that most of these cases are either educationally necessary and inevitable or that they describe conditions that are highly implausible, perhaps impossible. I shall deal with the smaller category of the implausible–impossible first.

## THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF INDOCTRINATION

Whether a teacher *is able* to persuade a class that Communism (or any given ideology) is the only ideology worthy of support seems to be an empirical question. Perhaps it seems implausible, but not theoretically impossible. Certain conditions, such as the presence of a sufficiently charismatic leader along with a group of people primed in certain ways, might result in people holding beliefs that 'we' (the author and the imagined reader) consider dubious; consider, for instance, 'cult' leaders like Jim Jones who led the Peoples Temple which culminated in an infamous mass suicide in Jonestown (Moore, 1985).

Let's turn to Snook's first case: 'A Communist teacher in a Communist country teaches in such a way that the class is convinced that Communism is the only political system worthy of support' (Snook, 1972, p. 4). The impression here is that such a teacher does not encourage open-mindedness but has a singular intention to persuade. But we are not told about intentions, only outcomes. Nor are we given any insight into the method of persuasion: Does s/he provide reasons, and are they good reasons? Even provided with good reasons, one might feel that the outcome of the whole class being convinced suggests that something dubious has taken place: Has the class been forced into their shared conviction? This is unlikely to be the result of liberal inquiry. It is as if the teacher is pulling levers or producing reliable effects through calculated causes. To Snook's first case, one can reasonably reply: What sorcery is this! That a teacher teaches '*in such a way*' as to convince the class that Communism is the only worthy political system! If only it were that easy.

Education can be viewed as a social and human process, which deals with social groups and human beings, not the kinds of beings that behave as predictably as natural objects whereby every effect is thought to have an identifiable cause. Moreover, in educational situations, we cannot be sure if some change is an effect of any particular cause since the relation between the two remains obscure, particularly when it comes to educational influences. Snook hints at this where, in the ensuing dialogue, Anne, one of the 'reasonably sophisticated people' asks how we would 'know whether their ultimate state was related to what was done to them by the teacher?' (1972, p. 8). This is a good question that brings to mind the idea that education is not a matter of inputs and outputs; there is a general limitation in terms of how positive we can be that our influences have the anticipated effects. That may explain why educational theorists are prone to employ organic metaphors, where agency and causality are more obscure: The teacher cultivates certain notions, habits or sensibilities; s/he creates conditions for growth or facilitates certain kinds of development. The role of the teacher is not causal agent (efficient cause), who can, through certified means, deliver particular outcomes within the mind of the child, namely, fully formed and adhered to beliefs.

One of the general problems with the concept of indoctrination, understood as forcing others to believe certain things, is that it does not seem possible. Whatever beliefs are (and there is, of course, considerable disagreement on that point; see Lewin, 2016), they do not seem to be the kinds of things that can be reliably inserted into others. It seems that the believer him/herself must be an agent, at least to some extent, in the act of believing. Even then, the psychology of belief is hugely complex. Consequently, we can understand why Thomas Green argued that '[i]t is a curious but quite understandable fact that it is both grammatically and logically impossible for a person to say of himself truthfully and in the present tense, that he holds his beliefs as a consequence of indoctrination' (Green, 2010, p. 30). While a teacher cannot directly and predictably bring about beliefs in a child, what they can (and do) do is create conditions in which they believe certain educational outcomes are more likely.

As dangerous as those influencers like Jim Jones may be, their capacity to persuade or coerce is complex, circumscribed, and, I suggest, scarcely understood. So-called cult leaders might use threats or actual physical and emotional violence to 'manipulate' people: as though they are puppets with the influencer playing puppet master. Whether

influencers ever force belief may be a semantic issue, though it seems important to keep in view the activity and agency of the learner, to affirm the freedom of the student to make choices about the educational influences that they choose to accept; to give the student credit, or saddle them with the responsibility, of taking up the proffered influences in particular ways. Although no doubt a very complex case, the folk who joined Jim Jones' Peoples Temple are not served by being cast only as vulnerable people who were made into victims by a malevolent influence or a puppet master.[8] The rather comforting idea that these people were victims of brainwashing, risks denying them the humanity and agency that they deserve: They were not forced into their beliefs because forcing belief is not possible.

Whether indoctrination is understood as forcing people to believe certain things or the apparently less objectionable idea of convincing them of a certain idea (Communism), I have argued that neither statement seems plausible. If we can convince someone of some political view, it is hard to see how it could be brought about through a causal mechanism. For the most part, convincing requires reasons and explanations and therefore is not indoctrination.

## THE INEVITABILITY OF INDOCTRINATION

We have so far only discussed one of Snook's cases and found it to be somewhat implausible, impossible or perhaps not actually a case of indoctrination. Many more of the cases appear to be inevitable. So if indoctrination is defined differently, in terms of possible influence, we are presented with a different issue: that indoctrination is a necessary or inevitable aspect of any educational influence. Now the term becomes much harder to distinguish from education more generally, particularly if we use the term non-normatively to describe the structures pertaining to the intention to influence.[9]

We have already noted the commonplace conception of indoctrination as 'non-rational influence'. This is sometimes characterised as teaching with a non-rational method, without providing reasons for what the teacher tries to do (Snook, 1972, p. 22). Before educational orthodoxies tended towards more so-called child-centred or progressive methods, a form of 'traditional' education could be discerned in which children were routinely taught without them necessarily understanding the reasoning behind the teaching. Whether this image of traditional education is a 'straw-dog', used rhetorically by reformed, progressive or alternative educators against which they define their approaches, it has come to refer to educational practices which, in certain interpretations, would qualify as indoctrination. We can see in Paulo Freire's concept of banking education (2007) or Dewey's characterisation of 'traditional education' (1938, pp. 17–23) the positioning of students more as passive receptacles than as agents of their learning, and therefore, suggestive of a kind of teaching that does not fully engage the reason of the student.[10] While Freire and Dewey present this approach in critical terms, elements of traditional education seem hard to entirely avoid. Learning by rote is typically conceived as a traditional approach and is illustrated in Snook's sixth case: 'A teacher stresses rote learning for the table, lists of Latin verbs, and major world capitals' (1972, p. 5). Presented in this way, we are less likely to call this indoctrination than just poor pedagogy (though, indeed, it might be argued that this continues to have a place and may be the best way to learn some things). Even if we did decide to call it 'poor pedagogy', it is probably not inevitable, so in what sense might we regard indoctrination as educationally inevitable? Elmer Thiessen acknowledges 'the seeming inevitability of indoctrination' (Thiessen, 1985, p. 229). He argues that although the apparent unavoidability of indoctrination is a problem philosophers of education often touch upon, it is 'seldom faced squarely' (243). Thiessen goes on to argue that

> [t]he use of non-rational methods is generally seen as something to be avoided, as miseducative, and even as immoral. ...[But] the use of non-rational methods is unavoidable. Many writers are forced to concede that the use of such methods is both necessary and good. (p. 244)

This leads Thiessen to give up the methods criterion for indoctrination: 'non-rational methods are not always wrong' (p. 245). But when are non-rational methods justified?

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First, let me acknowledge the possibility that unintentional influences could be defined with the concepts of non-rational methods of education and/or indoctrination, as noted by Snook in case 7: 'A parent unconsciously influences her children who adopt her standards, values and attitudes' (1972, p. 5). In this case, reasons are not given to the children; indeed, even the parent is not aware of 'reasons' for their influence. The issue here is that such unconscious influencing could be said to be happening all the time. It could be argued that almost every waking moment of our lives involves forms of often undetected social influences. Even where other people are not around, the spaces (architecture and environment) and times (calendars) in which we live appear to be socialising influences, and it is highly unlikely that the result of these social influences is always good. But in order to distinguish the realm of education from all other forms of socialisation, it seems analytically prudent to restrict our concepts of education and indoctrination to the realm of intention: intention being a necessary condition for educational or indoctrinatory influences.[11] At least that allows us to focus on whether intentions are good which, although not straightforward, is simpler than determining whether outcomes are good.

The realm of intention is the realm of reasons. Many influences in early childhood are structured and intentional and so considered reasons are present. But whether and to what extent it is appropriate or prudent to share those reasons is a matter of pedagogical judgement. Educational influences may well entail the withholding of reasons since the child may not yet be in a position to understand and evaluate reasons. Moreover, we routinely habituate children into certain practices and dispositions that seem more like initiation or indoctrination into certain forms of life than teaching 'that, how, or to' (Thiessen, p. 245).[12]

There are further contexts and circumstances in which reasons for educational influence might not be shared. Harvey Siegel acknowledges that for young children, the requirement to share reasons might not always make sense. When we inculcate beliefs without sharing our reasons, it may be because young children are not yet capable of understanding them. Siegel calls this 'non-indoctrinative belief inculcation' in an attempt to distinguish it from indoctrination, the key distinction being that this justified form of belief inculcation is temporary:

> There is a world of difference between causing Johnny to believe things in such a way that they are now held sans rational justification, and in such a way that he comes never to see the importance or relevance of inquiring into the rational status of his beliefs; and causing Janie to believe things in such a way that they are now held sans rational justification, but with the view that this lack is temporary, and with an eye to imparting to Janie at the earliest possible time a belief in the importance of grounding beliefs with reasons and in developing in her the dispositions to challenge, question and demand reasons and justification for potential beliefs (Siegel, 1990, p. 82).

In general, Siegel is right that the influencee should be protected from a kind of permanent state of irrational belief. But I would question Siegel's use of the language of causality to describe the inculcation of beliefs. Moreover, his general point that educators should seek to provide reasons at the appropriate time could also be questioned. Educators employ a variety of pedagogical conceits to create certain educational conditions. For instance, a schoolteacher may create a certain seating plan for the children without *ever* disclosing the intentions to the students. Or a parent might reward a child with a certain activity that in fact is intended to advance some other skill (e.g. coding apps on a digital tablet). Moreover, non-rational influence might affect how the child understands and uses reason itself: It would be paradoxical to appeal to reason in the formation of reason.

As with most figures within the indoctrination debates, Siegel is a proponent of autonomous critical thinking as the fundamental goal of education. However, as Cuypers and Haji point out, that educational goal might itself be said to depend upon a form of indoctrination: 'the constituent components of critical thinking have to be indoctrinated if there is to be any hope of the child's attaining the ideal [of autonomous critical thinking]' (Cuypers & Haji, 2006, p. 723). The paradox of indoctrination suggests that one must become part of a tradition of (a certain form of) rationality (which is arguably contextual) in order to develop rational standards: in order to have some idea of what qualifies as reasonable criteria for believing something.[13] However, determining what counts as 'good reasons' is, at least to some

extent, local and historical: or should I say that context has some influence over the standards by which reasons are considered good or bad. There may be (more or less) agreed standards, and the existence of discourse (like the article you are now reading) implicitly or explicitly affirms the existence of standards of reason and argumentation without (at least in my case) claiming that those standards are universal or objective (I believe in my argument while acknowledging the possibility that it may reflect my own biased point of view). But this suggests that people are being initiated into those standards, something I would not wish to object to. I would not deny the possibility of affirming reasons or standards as being better or worse (in a sense that exceeds the local and historical). If we are to affirm our own standards or reasoning (which seems almost unavoidable), we should, I think, simultaneously acknowledge the possibility that those standards might not be universal and absolute. To support this idea, I refer to Paul Feyerabend's persuasive view of educational influence and its protection:

> A good teacher will not just make people *accept* a form of life, he will also provide them with means of seeing it in perspective and perhaps of even rejecting it. He will try to influence and to protect. He will not only make propaganda for his views, he will add an ingredient that makes them less lethal and that protects people against being overwhelmed by them (Feyerabend, 1991, p. 75).

So, it is not initiation into standards (or more broadly, the intention to influence) that is objectionable. The problem arises where we do so entirely unselfconsciously: We do not consider that our influence just might overreach or be unjustified, and we do not, therefore, offer some simultaneous protection. Education cannot avoid promoting something (an understanding, a disposition, a habit, a skill), the question is whether we can simultaneously (and somewhat paradoxically) protect the influencee from the very influence that we undertake.

But surely there are some standards of reason that fall below what is acceptable: surely some reasons are just bad reasons. For instance, many have noted the inability of certain people to modify or correct their beliefs in the face of clear evidence. In the book *When Prophecy Fails*, Festinger et al. (1956) offer an account of a small 'occult' group, the 'Seekers', whose leader, Marion Keech, predicted that a great flood would destroy much of the United States. When the predictions failed to materialise, the group did not abandon their beliefs and disband even though evidence seemed to show that they were mistaken.[14] Similarly, in cases of conspiracy theory, or extremism, people appear to become relatively resistant to rational analysis (Bartlett & Miller, 2010). In cases like this, individuals may hold beliefs in spite of contrary evidence. But I would argue that this does not mean that beliefs are held entirely without *reason*. Nor, would I suggest, are there no circumstances in which their beliefs might change. Whether we judge these people impervious to reason itself seems to be a matter of perspective (Çavdar, 2012). But the person who holds on to views that seem odd to you or me, does, I would argue, have reasons. Whether those reasons are the reasons they give when an interlocutor asks about their views is another matter. More to the point, it seems to me, is whether those reasons are considered 'good'. Clearly, their reasons are not shared by some, but are shared by others. We are dealing again with a matter of context and perspective.

Of Snook's other cases, there are some that appear to hinge on what is sometimes called the epistemic status of what is being taught. While some believe that 'doctrines' (the 'content' of indoctrination) are, by definition, neither known to be true or untrue, and that therefore indoctrination refers to teaching of that which is unknown as if it were known,[15] for others the epistemic status is of relevance. Given that indoctrination normally refers to what is either untrue, or not known to be true, let me turn to the epistemic status of content.

There are cases of teaching what is either not true or unknown, while believing it to be true or known. Religious claims are sometimes thought to be either not true or unknown (controversial issues), but sometimes presented educationally as though they are known or established. In these cases, the teacher may believe them to be true or known, as in Snook's eighth case, 'A teacher of religion believes that certain doctrines are true and teaches them as if they are true' (Snook, 1972, p. 5). So, the idea that they entail controversial issues may not be accepted by the teacher. Establishing what qualifies as a controversial issue (and what should be treated as controversial within education) is beyond my scope and something I take to be significantly influenced by context. But whatever the epistemic status of the

'content' here, we come back, I would argue, to issues of pedagogy: that education may not be best conceived in terms of belief transmission. Thiessen points out that the structural arrangement here of initiating children into particular religious beliefs using non-rational methods is 'common to the initiation of individuals into any public traditions. The problem is one which also applies to the initiation into a scientific way of viewing the world' (Thiessen, 1985, p. 246). Thus, the epistemic status of content is really only half the story: It may not be the task of the teacher to disclose what is true or known, but to create conditions for thinking and acting that might result in learning, growth or development. Thus, I now turn to the prevalent metaphor of belief transmission to consider other, hopefully better, metaphors in which to frame indoctrination debates.

## INDOCTRINATION AS TRANSMISSION OF DOCTRINES

A long-standing feature of accounts of indoctrination (see Green, 2010; Wilson, 2010) is that it 'involves the transmission of beliefs rather than behaviours' (Wareham, 2019, p. 43). Wareham argues that an outcomes-based account of indoctrination is the most convincing, understanding this in terms of a breach between what the indoctrinated student believes, and the evidence they have to support that belief:

> indoctrination is best described as a teaching process, pertaining to the transmission of beliefs, which directly results in an illegitimate barrier between the beliefs an individual holds and the evidence or reasons she has for holding them; a barrier which causes her to be closed-minded (Wareham, 2019, p. 44).

Her account foregrounds the outcome in which the student holds certain doctrines in the face of contradictory evidence suggesting that the critical faculties of the student have been restricted or rendered inoperative. In addition to my misgivings about the theoretical limitations of attributing direct causality to the relations between educational inputs and outcomes discussed earlier, I would take issue with two interconnected ideas: first, that teaching content is framed as propositional beliefs; second, that those propositional beliefs are transmitted by the teaching process. The first argument is beyond the present scope and is something I discuss elsewhere (Lewin, 2016). Let me turn to the second issue: the method of belief transmission. Wareham objects to a particular kind of belief transmission, one that results in closed-mindedness. One may note already that the capacity to *cause* closed-mindedness cannot rest only with the teacher. But my issue here is with the transmission metaphor.

To transmit a belief suggests that the educator holds the belief, for it seems that the teacher cannot transmit what they do not have. The metaphor of belief transmission suggests that the belief object (sometimes referred to as a proposition P) travels from the active voice of the teacher to the student. While I recognise that the metaphor is (unfortunately) commonplace, I do not think it captures well what actually happens when one person seeks to influence another (whether justifiably or not). So, I will briefly revisit the abundant organic metaphors within educational discourse: growth, natural education, nourishment, maturation, cultivation, etc. These metaphors abound perhaps because it is widely recognised that education is not best understood with the idea of a transmission of justified true beliefs from teachers to students. A better structural model to explore this further is the educational relations described by the educational triangle.[16]

Drawing on the model of the educational triangle, the educator is presented as the person who attempts to positively influence[17] the student's relation to some 'content'.[18] In other words, it is the student's relation to content that is at stake in the educational relation. If an educator is willing and able to improve that relation and does so through some form of influence (i.e., teaching), then nothing needs to be transmitted from the educator to the student. Rather the student's relation to something may be improved. This idea highlights the fact that the student's relation to educational content has its own integrity. This shift in emphasis reveals that the educator's capacity to influence is always circumscribed by the capacity of the student's relation to the content to be improved. The activities of establishing

conditions for improvement belong to the teacher; how those conditions are received and taken up by the student is not something that the teacher can ultimately control. In the final analysis, the student always (at least to some extent) accepts (or rejects) the attempts to influence of the educator.

For example, a child may believe that Santa will come down the chimney on Christmas morning. The child has a certain relation to their beliefs about Santa, reindeer, elves and so forth. At some point, the parent may take the view that it would be in the interests of the development of the child that they realise that the Santa story is fiction, and so the parent may attempt to influence the child's relation to this nexus of beliefs. But in such an account, the influence of the parent (the educator in this case) is circumscribed: the parent can't force the child to give up these beliefs. Indeed, it is by no means clear how beliefs are formed or dissolved. But the educator can attempt to influence the child's relation to these beliefs. What I want to emphasise is the activity of both the educator and the student: The educator might provide reasons (or other evidence) in the attempt to persuade the child that Santa is not real, but what the child does with these reasons cannot be controlled by the educator. The idea that the parent transmits some new information to the student is a poor metaphor for describing the complex rearrangement of ideas within the child.

In the context of my argument, one problem with this example is that it reinforces a model of education that I am seeking to avoid: that educational content is a characterised as 'propositional beliefs', a view that predominates within the indoctrination debates. Such kinds of influence are easier to discuss and analyse. But we can broaden our notion of content by suggesting that the parent uses their influence to encourage the child to develop writing skills by encouraging them to write a letter to Santa. In this case, the parent might not want to reinforce the Santa myth, but the opportunity to have the child engage positively in letter writing might outweigh that concern. The parent might not explain to the child the reasons for writing to Santa. The parent might also have the formation of other virtues in mind when encouraging letter writing: 'why don't you include something for others in your list of wishes to Santa?' Thus, the parent may encourage different virtues. Reinforcing the Santa myth may be a price worth paying. Here the parent attempts to influence the child's relation to beliefs, skills and dispositions, as well as aesthetic sensibilities by asking the child to write neatly and draw a reindeer.

This account of influence synthesises much of the foregoing discussion, illustrating a commonplace example of non-rational influence, but particularly focuses on the complex conditions and interactions that education-indoctrination entails. The example shows that the educational triangle, with its emphasis on the educator's interest in the student's relation to some content, is a better model (than transmission) for illustrating the complex interactions of actions and responses, agency and freedom in educational relations.

I have not comprehensively dealt with all of Snook's cases and in the space afforded this essay, will not be able to fully address them. Let me make some brief remarks about those which remain.

In the second case, '[a] convinced Communist teaching in an English or American school tries hard to convert the class to Communism' (Snook, 1972, p. 4). The 'content' is similar to the implausible first case, but focuses on the intentions to 'convert'. Conversion here means to change someone so that they adopt a particular conviction. The term is often applied to religious views, a fact that suggests that commitment to Communism can be thought to be akin to religious conviction. This opens up a range of much larger problems around the nature of religion, ideology and conversion. Presenting indoctrination as the intention to convert begs too many questions, some of which have been touched on already. In general, I would like to know in what ways the indoctrinatory intention to 'convert' differs from the educational intention to 'improve'. My general point is that the educator is always intending to improve the student's relation to some knowledge, skill or disposition, and to that extent their actions are educational inasmuch as their intentions are directed by what *they* take to be improvements. I do not offer a standard from which to judge whether they are right, only that they intend the good in their own terms. The consequence of this is that the intention to convert can be interpreted as a form of education.

Case 3 describes a situation in which a teacher presents a singular interpretation: 'A teacher of literature knows that his interpretation of a literary work is disputed by many authorities but he makes no mention of these and presents his interpretation as the correct one' (Snook, 1972, p. 4). Whether this is problematically reductionist or offers students a pedagogical reduction (a simplified entry point into a topic) is beyond my scope. But it is at least plausible

that such reduction could have a genuinely pedagogical intention (Lewin, 2019, 2020) and the idea that students are (temporarily) not told of these other views could, at least in principle, be justified pedagogically.

Case 5 might also be interpreted in pedagogical terms: 'A parent tells a young child, "Put away your toys: you must always be tidy"' (Snook, 1972, p. 4). While there are times and places when untidiness is not only acceptable but perhaps desirable, such a general rule of thumb does not appear to be objectionable.

Finally, we have number 4: the case of a research project that leads to a student–teacher teaching 'what he knows is false (wrong dates, places, proofs etc.)' (Snook, 1972, p. 4). This may be explicable perhaps because the intention here is not educational. If the research is the motivating factor and if this can be justified at all, the justification is not pedagogical, but is made on the basis of the value of the research (certainly in the context of the contemporary research ethics landscape, this seems highly implausible!).

## CONCLUSION

The indoctrination debates cannot be fully discussed in an article like this. I focused on Snook's contribution because of its systematic nature and enduring influence. Notwithstanding the fact that many people today would agree with much of Snook's analysis, his approach reflects the perspective of his age. So, my attempt at a Nietzschean transvaluation of indoctrination seems to result in the term being frustratingly difficult to pin down. Snook's lucid text is worth lingering on even though it serves to highlight that the term is difficult to use well. Of course, we are at liberty to use 'indoctrination' to speak of things that are educationally impossible or inevitable. Whether there is any space between these extremes as I have presented them, we should perhaps ask ourselves about how the terms are being used as much as what they 'mean'.

In the end, if the indoctrination debates tell us anything (and there is certainly a lot to take from them[19]), it is that efforts to neatly distinguish education and indoctrination seem to reflect certain contextual assumptions about the nature of education and influence that reward scrutiny. An important line of argument in this paper is that education-indoctrination always promotes something: Someone is trying to influence someone else concerning something. A significant part of the question of distinguishing education from indoctrination seems to hinge on whether that influence is justified. I have advanced a view of education as defined by intention: If the educator sincerely intends to improve the student's relation to something (even where we do not necessarily agree that the influence would amount to improvement), then we can interpret that as an instance of education. Some might reject that interpretation because they take education to be fundamentally normative (resulting in something intrinsically worthwhile). Employing the conception of education presented here makes distinguishing education from indoctrination very difficult: There do not appear to be criteria left to make that distinction. Because I find this distinction hard to uphold, I need to find another way to avoid the accusation of excessive or unjustified educational influence. To do this, I referred to the idea that the good teacher not only tries to influence the student but simultaneously protects the student from that very influence. So, the justification for education-indoctrination lies in the protection that simultaneously accompanies the inevitable influence. Although significant, this conclusion is still rather undeveloped: There is further conceptual work to do to understand how educators can seek to promote something in ways that are justified and empirical work to explore how this might happen in practice.

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### ENDNOTES

[1] My claim that this reflects general usage of the term is based on reference to the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*. Consulting the full *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 2020) reveals a far more nuanced and diverse set of definitions. Something of this greater range will be discussed in what follows.

[2] 'The writings of Dewey, Kilpatrick, Bode, Childs, and other Progressive educators together with the American reaction against German authoritarianism made this period one of increasing objection to the term indoctrination' (Gatchel, 2010, p. 8).

[3] The establishment of 're-education' camps in the far Western Uighur region of China ostensibly designed to counter forms of religious radicalisation and indoctrination gives some indication of just how much perspective is involved in determining whether any given influence is educational or not (Sudworth, 2020).

[4] See Snook (1989) for Snook's response to Neiman's criticisms.

[5] Eamonn Callan and Dylan Arena point out that back in 1852, J.S. Mill already used the word 'indoctrination' pejoratively: 'What the poor as well as the rich require is not to be indoctrinated, is not to be taught other people's opinions, but to be induced and enabled to think for themselves' (Callan & Arena, 2009, p. 120). Charlene Tan points out that '[w]hile Callan and Arena are right about Mill, this pejorative usage was confined to scholarly treatises and was not widely used until the middle of the twentieth century through the influence of American Progressivists' (Tan, 2011, p. 152).

[6] Green (2010) maintains that 'Though indoctrination may, in many contexts, be both good and necessary, it can never be justified for its own sake. It can only be justified as the nearest approximation to teaching available at the moment. Indoctrination, in short, may be sanctioned only in order that beliefs adopted may later be redeemed by reasons, only that they may be vindicated by teaching' (p. 35).

[7] See *Journal of Philosophy of Education, Educational Philosophy and Theory, Studies in Philosophy and Education, Ethics and Education* and *Educational Theory*.

[8] The idea that children and adults can be 'vulnerable to' or 'at risk of' radicalisation is one that has crept into popular discourse in recent years. Framing those engaged in terrorist acts as vulnerable victims is itself an chosen interpretation that can inappropriately diminish the agency and responsibilities of those involved with problematic consequences (see O'Donnell, 2016).

[9] I draw on Kenklies' (2020, p. 618) definition: '*Education* therefore is the deliberate attempt to engage with the relations someone has in order to change and improve those relations; *education* is about initiating, guiding, supporting, directing of learning and (trans)formation.'

[10] Freire's banking model of education is occasionally characterised as a form of indoctrination (e.g., Torre et al., 2017). Being aware of possible 'mis-educative experiences', Dewey (1938, p. 25) was in some respects critical of both traditional and progressive education—my thanks to the reviewers for this clarification. The capacity to differentiate educative from mis-educative experiences requires teachers' expertise to ensure that students experience the right kind of growth or development (in the right direction).

[11] This is consistent with the definition referred to earlier (Kenklies, 2020). This is not to say that parents don't sometimes intentionally influence their children or that intentions are easily disentangled from socialising influences.

[12] The argument that indoctrination has to be related to beliefs or propositions is swiftly and effectively dealt with by Snook (1972, pp. 28–38).

[13] I discuss this paradox in terms of the primary affirmation that any kind of learning involves (Lewin, 2014). In that context, education is described in terms of the hermeneutical circle: that education and learning depend upon a (non-rational) commitment to something. That commitment can be later refined by reflection that might allow for something like Siegel's account of non-rational commitment being temporary.

[14] Dawson argues that 'when people with strongly held beliefs are confronted by evidence clearly at odds with their beliefs, they will seek to resolve the discomfort caused by the discrepancy by convincing others to support their views rather than abandoning their commitments' (Dawson, 1999, p. 60). Similarly, perhaps, scientists engaged in what Thomas Kuhn called *normal science* often discover anomalies: Evidence against the theory in which they are operating. Those scientists do not abandon their theory, they look for explanations to resolve the anomalies.

[15] 'In educational literature, Gregory and Woods, and Tasos Kazepides, have revised the content criterion in accordance with Popperian falsificationism. Gregory and Woods claim that unscientific doctrines are such the kinds of statements that we can never know are true or untrue (e.g., political or religious conviction). No new findings or conditions can make a doctrine false. Gregory and Woods call this the "not-known-to-be-true-or-false" property of doctrines' (Huttunen 2017, p. 955).

[16] I acknowledge Karsten Kenklies for bringing this model to light for me. The model is not at all common within English-speaking educational theory but is far more fundamental to German pedagogical theory.

[17] One could envisage attempts to influence someone's beliefs and behaviours where the intentions are not positive, by either being indifferent to the good of the person being influenced (e.g., advertising) or, perhaps, seeking to actively harm the person being influenced (malevolence). According to the definitions used here, these would not quality of instances of education.

[18] As should be clear, this concept of content is very broad, to include knowledge, skills, dispositions, sensibilities and so on.

[19] I appreciate Snook's point: '[t]he important thing is not that the reader agree with my conclusions but that he engage with me in the process of analysis' (Snook 1972, p. 13).

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