

Holding Teachers Accountable for Indoctrination: A Reexamination of I.A. Snook's Notion of "Intent"

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My interest in the notion "indoctrination" comes from my experience as a peace educator; it is common for the charge of indoctrination to be leveled at peace education's practitioners. This charge, I have found, is not made in any scholarly way but rather in a political manner. In addition, the charge has proven to be quite effective both in preventing the development of peace education courses in public schools and universities and in removing existing peace education programs from those institutions. Responses to charges of indoctrination from peace educators have been vague and terse and fail to provide a clear understanding of what the charges entail and how peace educators can or do avoid indoctrination.

Making the charge of indoctrination more than a vague political accusation, or what Nancy Glock refers to as "mere name-calling,"¹ and making clearer what is required to avoid indoctrination prompted me to take on the challenge of developing a conception of indoctrination that explains the persistent pejorative connotation of the word, allows educators to identify its occurrence with consistency, and enables teachers to hold educators morally accountable for indoctrination, not just in peace education courses and curriculum, but in more mainstream and generally accepted courses.

Offering a particular conception of indoctrination and providing a sufficiently thorough argument to defend it is far too large an endeavor to accomplish in this essay. Instead, my task here is to: (1) briefly review how indoctrination has been defined in the literature, (2) argue for a conception most closely aligned with I.A. Snook's but with an important and significant difference, and (3) present my own alternative notion and show how it is an improvement on Snook's conception.²

INDOCTRINATION AS DEFINED IN THE LITERATURE

According to the literature on indoctrination in education, a teacher indoctrinates if he or she fulfills one or a combination of the following conditions: (1) employs a particular type of teaching *method*; (2) teaches a certain kind of *content*; (3) causes certain educational *outcomes* to occur; (4) *intends* to get students to hold beliefs in a nonrational, noncritical manner. I briefly examine each of these conditions below then proceed to argue for defining indoctrination in terms of a teacher's intention.

Willis Moore, John Wilson, I.M.M. Gregory and R.G. Woods, and James McClellan all claim that indoctrination is best defined as the employment of nonrational instructional *methods* to get students to hold beliefs nonevidentially.³ They contend that the only way to get students to hold beliefs non-rationally is to employ nonrational teaching methods. The problem with defining indoctrination in terms of teaching methods, however, is that it is sometimes necessary and even

desirable to use nonrational instructional methods (such as when rote memorization techniques are used to get students to learn the math tables). Defining such teaching as indoctrination risks losing the strictly pejorative sense of the term. Furthermore, none of the theorists named above have made it sufficiently clear what is meant by “nonrational” teaching methods and therefore fail to provide an adequately lucid picture of indoctrination that allows people to identify indoctrination with consistency and respond appropriately to charges of indoctrination.

Another way in which indoctrination is defined in the literature is in terms of the *content* being taught. For example, Tasos Kazepides, Robin Barrow, and R.G. Woods, and Antony Flew all argue that indoctrination can not occur unless one is teaching doctrines.⁴ They claim that the use of nonrational methods to teach such things as the math tables does not constitute indoctrination because indoctrination is limited to the teaching of beliefs that are part of a larger doctrinal system. However, just as with the methods analyses, defining indoctrination in terms of content also has its problems. Theorists have failed to make a clear distinction between doctrinal beliefs and other sorts of beliefs. Thus, they have not provided a sufficiently clear portrayal of indoctrination that enables educators to identify it with accuracy. Also, the presence of doctrines alone cannot constitute indoctrination as it is quite possible to teach students about, say, Marxist ideology, without getting them to hold such beliefs non-rationally. There is a difference, in other words, between teaching students about Marxist beliefs and indoctrinating them into such beliefs.

Finally, some theorists, such as Barrow and Woods and Michael Hand, posit that indoctrination be defined in terms of the *consequences* of a teacher’s practices in his or her classroom.⁵ Each argues that indoctrination has not occurred unless students have come to hold beliefs in a nonrational manner even if a teacher employs certain methods and teaches a particular content intending to get students to hold the taught beliefs in a noncritical, nonrational manner. For them, indoctrination only occurs if the attempt to indoctrinate has been successful. The problem with a consequences analysis of indoctrination is that one can never be sure whether students’ holding beliefs non-rationally is caused by something the teacher did or by something else entirely. Simply because a teacher has students who end up holding beliefs non-evidentially does not mean that the teacher caused them to hold beliefs in such a manner.

I should note here that I make the assumption in this essay that indoctrination is something that educators and the public (within a liberal, pluralistic democratic society) find objectionable. In fact, as “indoctrination” is used as a term of condemnation and it is generally seen as a morally objectionable endeavor, I agree with Snook that it ought to be defined in terms of intention. Snook writes, “the results of indoctrination are such that they are a matter for moral concern and that to act with the knowledge that they will follow is to act intentionally and so render the agent liable to moral criticism.”⁶ Thus, according to Snook, because the results of indoctrination are of moral concern, we want to hold teachers who indoctrinate

morally accountable and to do this we must show that indoctrination is an *intentional* act. Much of the force behind Snook's intentional analysis comes from his notion of "intent." I therefore proceed to critically appraise his notion and then offer support for my own alternative and expanded notion.

EXAMINING THE NOTION OF INTENT

According to Snook, a teacher intends to get students to hold beliefs regardless of the evidence if either one of the two following conditions are met: (1) one *desires* that students hold propositions regardless of the evidence, or (2) one *foresees* that as a result of his or her teaching, students will hold beliefs regardless of the evidence.⁷ While we often think of an intended outcome as that which one desires or consciously hopes will occur, Snook argues that a desired outcome is only *one* of two ways that a person can intend something to occur. He suggests that in some circumstances, notably ones in which we are concerned with moral or legal accountability, even if one does not desire a particular outcome but does *foresee* that it will occur as a result of one's actions, we can say that the outcomes were intended.

Snook argues that there is legal precedence for including the foreseen as well as the desired in defining intent. If a prisoner blasts down a wall with the desire to escape, for example, but foresees that as a result of blasting down the wall a guard will die, that prisoner will be found guilty of murdering the guard. Snook notes that on the legal definition of murder, one cannot be found guilty of murder unless it is shown that one acted with criminal intent or the intention to unjustifiably take another's life. The prisoner, in this example, is guilty of murder, according to Snook, because he *foresaw* that his actions would result in the guard's death; therefore the prisoner *intended* the guard's death.

One problem with this example is that the prisoner is guilty of murder regardless of his intentions. When one causes the death of another while committing a felony, one can legally be charged with murder. This prisoner would be guilty of murder even if he did not foresee (that is, intend) the death of the guard, because blasting down the wall of a prison is a felony. While this particular example is not the best to demonstrate that the law makes no distinctions between the foreseen and the desired in establishing intent, Snook's claim that one's intention is determined by either what one desires or foresees is still valid for the contexts we have in mind, namely, contexts in which we want to hold someone morally accountable for what we regard as morally dubious activity or morally bad outcomes.

According to Revised Statute 626:2 General Requirements of Culpability, criminal law no longer uses the word "intent" to determine a criminal's guilt.⁸ Current legal practice is to use the notion "culpable mental states." To accurately determine whether or not one has committed a crime, juries are given instructions about what constitutes a culpable mental state as outlined by the aforementioned statute. Juries are told that a person ought to be held criminally culpable if one or more of the following conditions are met.

1. "Purposely." A person engages in an act with the purpose or desire to produce a particular criminal outcome.

2. "Knowingly." A person engages in an act knowing or having foreseen what the particular criminal outcome will be.
3. "Recklessly." A person engages in an act knowing and disregarding what the particular criminal outcome will be.
4. "Negligently." A person engages in an act and fails to be aware of the substantial risk that the act will produce a particular criminal outcome when a reasonable person would have foreseen such an outcome.

According to the statute, Snook's contention appears to be validated that the law includes both the foreseen and the desired in the notion of intent. Although the word "intent" is no longer used, it is reasonable to assume that a "culpable mental state" is akin to intent. Similarly, the condition of acting "purposely" is akin to acting with a certain *desired* outcome. And, acting "knowingly" is akin to acting with a particular *foreseen* outcome.

The statute indicates that a person is not guilty of committing a crime unless he or she physically engages in a criminal act and either desires the criminal outcome, foresees the outcome, or fails to see the outcome that a reasonable person would have foreseen. According to the law then, the desired, the foreseen, and the foreseeable all play a vital role in determining intent or a "culpable state of mind." Before examining the role of the foreseeable however, I wish to stay with Snook's notion and look at the role that the desired and the foreseen play in more ordinary, everyday instances, as well as cases of moral concern, rather than just cases of a primarily legal or criminal nature. Once Snook's notion of "intent" is clarified, I bring in examples from education to illustrate how we can understand the role of intent in indoctrination.

In his discussion of the role of the foreseen in determining intent, Snook describes an example of a man who uses an International Business Machines (IBM) typewriter.⁹ The man's desire is to type, yet he does foresee that his typing will help IBM's profits. Snook claims that it would seem "odd" to say that the man *intends* to increase IBM's profit. I agree. However, Snook points out that when the act being committed has results that are of moral concern, we do talk of one intending such results if they are foreseen. He offers an example of a pacifist who foresees that her support of a particular company will aid in the manufacturing of weapons. Although she may only *desire* to buy products that are affordable and convenient, we would typically hold her morally accountable (at least to some degree) for contributing to the manufacturing of weaponry.

Perhaps it would be helpful at this point to look more closely at an example where moral culpability is of primary concern. Snook asks if there is a *moral* rather than merely a legal distinction between what is desired and what is foreseen. Let us look at an example of a person who shoots and kills someone but neither desires nor foresees that someone will be shot as a result (perhaps he or she is cleaning a gun alone in the room and someone sneaks in). Snook, it would seem, would not find the person morally blameworthy because that person did not *intend* such an outcome. Here, I think, Snook's claim that intention be defined in terms of the desired and the

foreseen is justified. If the person *did* foresee that the actions would result in killing someone (perhaps he or she saw the person entering the room but did not care) then it seems reasonable to say that the outcome was intended and that blame may be assigned. This example supports Snook's contention that we define "intent" as that which is either desired or foreseen as it allows us to hold the person in the above example morally accountable for the death of the person shot because the other's death could be foreseen as an outcome of cleaning the gun.

For Snook, then, one intends certain outcomes when one either desires them or foresees that they will occur as a result of one's actions. Because I view indoctrination as a morally suspect activity and its outcomes as morally bad, I am interested (as is Snook) in defining indoctrination in a way that we can hold people morally accountable for indoctrination. Thus, adopting an intentional analysis makes sense. It is not reasonable to hold people accountable for morally suspect activities and results that they did not intend.

Snook, however, also asserts that, while we should include the foreseen consequences as part of our notion of intent, we should not include consequences that are merely *foreseeable*. He argues that defining "intent" as outcomes that are not foreseen but only foreseeable would be to render teachers' jobs impossible. Because it is virtually always foreseeable that some students will come to hold beliefs one teaches as true regardless of the evidence, according to Snook all teaching would be indoctrination if we insist that intent be defined by what is foreseeable. Thus, Snook argues that intent should only be defined in terms of the desired and the foreseen but not the foreseeable.

The distinction Snook makes between the foreseen and the foreseeable, I argue, is problematic. Granted there is a distinction, but it is far less significant than Snook would have us believe. The foreseen is something accomplished whereas the foreseeable expresses a potential, not *necessarily* something someone has done. While all things foreseen are by definition foreseeable, not all things foreseeable are foreseen — hence the distinction. However, all it would take to make the foreseeable into the foreseen is to simply make teachers aware that their teaching will inevitably result in some students holding taught beliefs as true regardless of the evidence. This foreseeable consequence then becomes foreseen. And, if it is foreseen, Snook would have such a consequence be considered intentional, rendering all teaching (from those teachers who have been made aware) indoctrination. Yet Snook does *not* consider all foreseen outcomes as outcomes that were intended. Rather he states that intended outcomes are those that one foresees "as a result of... [one's] teaching," yet he drops this very critical phrase when discussing the foreseeable.¹⁰

I argue that we ought to include the foreseeable in the notion of intent. Although Snook claims that it would render all teaching indoctrination, I disagree. I do not see that students will inevitably accept some beliefs they are taught as unquestionably true *as a result of the teaching*. While I agree with Snook that some students will inevitably accept some taught beliefs as true regardless of the evidence, I do not agree that they will do so because of something their teacher did or said. Students hold nonrational beliefs for a whole variety of reasons (for instance, it is part of a

religious belief system, because they want to fit in with peers, and so on). We ought only to hold teachers accountable for indoctrination if it is foreseeable that students would hold beliefs in a nonrational manner *as a result of their teacher's actions*.

This notion of intent seems in keeping with how the word is typically used. For example, if person A cleans a loaded gun in a crowded café and the gun goes off and shoots someone, we would ordinarily hold A morally responsible for the shooting even if the shooter did not desire that anyone get shot and did not foresee that anyone would get shot. We would hold that person accountable because he or she *ought to have foreseen* that the gun would go off and hit someone. In fact, as stated above in the legal statute, person A would be held legally accountable by virtue of the “negligent” condition of a culpable state of mind. Person A would have failed to recognize foreseeable risk.

A similar standard should be applied to the moral culpability of teachers. Let us say, for example, that a particular teacher did not foresee that, as a result of insisting to his or her seven-year-old students that Betsy Ross sewed the first U.S. flag, the students would uncritically accept such a claim as true. We hold the teacher accountable for indoctrination because that teacher *ought* to have known that the students would respond in such a way. Teachers should know that their students will accept what they teach them as true; it is part of students' training in schools to believe what they are told by their teachers (particularly young students). Thus, to avoid indoctrination, teachers should be careful to explain to their students that historical stories such as that about Betsy Ross are not always true and therefore students should not hold such a belief as a certainty (or, in the case with older students, instruct them to critically assess the relevant and available evidence and reasons of the beliefs discussed in class as far as they are capable of doing). If teachers take these steps to avoid indoctrination, then it seems reasonable to assume that students will not accept taught beliefs as true uncritically *because of something their teacher did*. In other words, if a teacher takes all reasonably possible measures to avoid indoctrination, it is not foreseeable that students will hold taught beliefs non-rationally as a result of something the teacher did. Some students, of course, will likely hold some taught beliefs in a nonrational, nondeliberative manner. However, knowing that some of one's students will hold beliefs non-rationally is not the same thing as knowing they will do so because of one's teaching. If we include foreseeable outcomes as part of what we mean by intent we do not, as Snook suggests, render all teaching indoctrination. Rather, we insist that teachers take reasonable steps to ensure that their students will hold beliefs in an open-minded or critically deliberative manner. If teachers act in such a way, then a reasonable person could *not* foresee that students will come to hold beliefs non-rationally as a result of their teacher's actions.

Thus far I have tried to show that Snook's objection to including foreseeable consequences as part of the definition of intent is unwarranted. Furthermore, I have attempted to show that we typically hold people morally accountable for outcomes they *ought* to have foreseen. Finally, I have argued that there is legal precedent in defining indoctrination in terms of desired, foreseen, or foreseeable outcomes. I

contend that this alternative conception of “intent,” unlike Snook’s, provides a definition of indoctrination that allows people to effectively identify and avoid indoctrination and to accurately level and respond to charges of indoctrination.

Defining indoctrination as Snook does, in terms of outcomes which are either desired or foreseen but not foreseeable, does not allow us to accurately identify indoctrination. We cannot know with any degree of certainty what another person desires or foresees. Although one could ask a teacher what he or she desired or foresaw, he or she could lie to us or deceive him or herself and be unable to give a truthful reply. Snook admits that it may, in fact, be quite difficult to accurately judge another’s intention. Yet he claims that such a difficulty should not affect our conception. He states: “It is one thing to determine what constitutes...[indoctrination], another to show that a certain person committed it.”¹¹ For my purposes, however, a definition of indoctrination *must* enable people to show precisely when and where indoctrination occurs and who should be held accountable. Snook himself claims that the key reason for defining indoctrination in terms of intention is to allow people to be held morally accountable for indoctrination. He does not indicate, however, how we can hold someone accountable if we cannot accurately identify who indoctrinates.

We *can* determine who indoctrinates if we include the foreseeable as part of the notion of “intent.” While we cannot know what another desires or foresees, we *can* know what is foreseeable. To illustrate, I refer again to the example of the teacher insisting to first grade students that Betsy Ross sewed the first American flag. A teacher may not desire or even foresee that students will hold this belief non-rationally (this information may be a required element of the curriculum). However, because students, particularly very young ones, are likely to accept as unquestionably true what their teacher tells them, it is foreseeable that the students will hold the belief non-rationally. Thus, we can accurately identify this as a case of indoctrination. We may *not* be able to identify this as a case of indoctrination, however, if “intent” was only defined in terms of the desired or foreseen, because we cannot accurately judge whether the teacher desired or foresaw that her teaching would lead to her students accepting unquestionably that Ross sewed the first American flag. Defining “intent” in terms of not only the desired and the foreseen but also the foreseeable allows us to identify with consistency when indoctrination occurs.

Adding the foreseeable to the notion of intent, then, meets my purpose of developing a definition of indoctrination that allows: (1) people to accurately identify indoctrination when it occurs, (2) people to respond effectively to a charge of indoctrination, and (3) educators to develop programs that avoid indoctrination. Thus, peace educators and educators of other marginalized curricula (such as queer studies and women’s studies), as well as educators of mainstream curriculum, can be judged more accurately about whether they do or do not indoctrinate. In addition, all educators can respond to a charge of indoctrination more effectively. I therefore conclude that this expanded notion of intent is an improvement upon Snook’s notion as it provides us with a more useful tool in accurately judging when indoctrination does and does not occur. My hope is that this alternative notion of intent will provide

an understanding of indoctrination that will allow educational administrators and teachers to be more confident in taking on the teaching of topics they know to be controversial.

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1. Nancy C. Glock, "Indoctrination": *Some Pejorative Senses and Practical Proscriptions* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1975).
 2. I.A. Snook, "Indoctrination and Moral Responsibility," in *Concepts of Indoctrination*, ed. I.A. Snook (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 152–61.
 3. Willis Moore, "Indoctrination and Democratic Method," in Snook, ed., *Concepts of Indoctrination*, 93–100; John A. Wilson, "Indoctrination and Rationality," in Snook, ed., *Concepts of Indoctrination*, 25–46; I.M.M. Gregory and R.G. Woods, "Indoctrination: Inculcating Doctrines," in Snook, ed., *Concepts of Indoctrination*, 162–89; James McClellan, *Philosophy of Education* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976).
 4. Tasos Kazepides, "Socialization, Initiation, and Indoctrination," in *Philosophy of Education Yearbook 1982*, ed. Donna H. Kerr (Normal, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 1983); Tasos Kazepides, "Indoctrination, Doctrines and the Foundations of Rationality," in *Philosophy of Education Yearbook 1987*, eds. Barbara and Donald Arnstine (Normal, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 1987); Robin Barrow and R.G. Woods, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1988); Antony Flew, "Indoctrination and Doctrines," in Snook, ed., *Concepts of Indoctrination*, 67–92.
 5. Barrow and Woods, *Introduction to Philosophy of Education*; Michael Hand, "A Philosophical Objection to Faith Schools," *Theory and Research in Education* 1, no. 1 (2003): 89–99.
 6. Snook, *Concepts of Indoctrination*, 156.
 7. I.A. Snook, *Indoctrination and Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).
 8. General Requirements of Culpability, *New Hampshire Code*, sec. 626 (1986).
 9. Snook, *Concepts of Indoctrination*.
 10. *Ibid.*, 155.
 11. *Ibid.*, 159–60.