

Why We Live in a World of Propaganda

Among many of Intellectual Takeout's audience members, there seems to be a presumption that most discourse today is some form of propaganda.

Here are three reasons for this presumption, and why it might be grounded—at least in part—in reality:

1) Our technological society.

In [Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes](#), philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul maintained that widespread propaganda goes hand-in-hand with, and is only possible within, a technological society:

“Propaganda is called upon to solve problems created by technology, to play on maladjustments, and to integrate the individual into a technological world. Propaganda is a good deal less the political weapon of a regime (it is that also) than the effect of a technological society that embraces the entire man and tends to be a completely integrated society.”

For Ellul, the “technological society” is one that increasingly seeks to centralize and standardize human activities so as to achieve predictable results. It becomes obsessed with *means*, and propaganda is one of the primary means used by those in power to insure the accomplishment of their ends.

2) Emotivism.

As defined by Alasdair MacIntyre, [emotivism](#) (which is a form of relativism) is “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling.” According to MacIntyre, emotivism is prevalent in our culture, and is accompanied by the attitude that what was previously considered “objective truth” is now only irrational personal bias. If that is so, then one is right to assume that people and groups will increasingly resort to irrational means such as propaganda to convince others of their beliefs.

3) The failures of education.

In [“The Lost Tools of Learning,”](#) Dorothy Sayers remarked that people

today “have become susceptible to the influence of advertisement and mass propaganda to an extent hitherto unheard of and unimagined.” The reason for this, according to Sayers, is that modern education fails to provide students with the knowledge and powers of logic necessary to discern truth from falsehood. Deficiencies in education have allowed propaganda to thrive.

Many instinctively know that their deficient educations have left their intellectual defenses weak, and so, out of fear, they are quick to label material as “propaganda.” Unfortunately, the really effective propaganda usually remains undetectable to most, and what people label as propaganda is often a form of *ad hominem* used to avoid engaging with other’s positions.

So what’s the proper way to combat (as much as possible) a world permeated with propaganda? Ideally, one would seek to fill in the holes of one’s education while at the same time avoiding (again, as much as possible) those channels used for the purposes of propaganda.

But sadly, from what I’ve seen, the majority response today seems to be resignation to propaganda, and freedom for most consists merely in choosing their preferred medium and voice of propaganda.