

Propaganda

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In my [first blog post](#) I described how a personal narrative is a compilation of all of the experiences, experiments, and information that one encounters in their lifetime. The knowledge regarding how narratives form and how influential they are to a person's behavior is not new. Propaganda has a long history that begins as far back as the age of Athens.¹ What is new is the expertise of the propagandists and the incredible reach of social media and other electronic communications methods.

One of the things [my first blog](#) does is attempt to define propaganda: "Propaganda isn't an easy thing to define, but most students agree that it has to do with any *ideas or beliefs that are intentionally propagated.*" Wait... Ideas? Beliefs? These are synonyms for *narrative*. Remember that ideas have a physical manifestation in the brain. So combining and expanding a little bit, propaganda is the process of using symbols, hints, images, memes, emotional appeals, repetition, slogans, slurs and other suggestions to create a powerful lasting narrative to influence people's behavior. Propagandists quite literally create living quarters in our heads if we let them.

There is a joke I once heard that goes like this: A duck was paddling on the surface of a pond when he looks down into the water and sees two fish. The duck says, "Hey how's the water down there?" The fish look up at him and say in unison, "What water?" The joke is more instructive than humorous. We all live in an existence defined by our narrative that we are not even aware of how we "swim" in it on a daily basis. Even when someone asks us a question that nudges us to recognize our bias, we often cannot see it. It is especially difficult when we have other "fish" who share our primary assumptions and beliefs to back us up in our position.

What does this joke have to do with propaganda? Everything. Imagine if you grew up in a household where your parents controlled everything you learned and experienced. Your parents were taught you all the usual information about writing, math, biology, chemistry and physics. They taught you how to read and give speeches. The only difference is that when it comes to astrophysics, they taught you the earth is flat. They carefully omit or redact every textbook, video, physics and space reference and exploration history presented to you. They create the “water you swim in” with that piece of propaganda inserted. They have built a structure in your head that contains the narrative “flat earth” and missing is the more traditional astronomical arrangement.

Back to the definition of propaganda as ideas “that are intentionally propagated”. There is almost no space in that description for differentiation between objective reality and fiction. Outside of direct experience, ideas can range from the fantastical to the everyday “taken for granted”. Between these two extremes exist many of the common narratives about our existence that we encounter all the time and many give little question to. Some examples of narratives that are not objectively buttressed by reality are political parties, religions, nationalities, and human races. These are also ideas that “are intentionally propagated”, therefore propaganda.

Some readers are probably objecting strenuously right now. Religion is propaganda!? Yes, in fact I would argue that not only does it fit the definition, it often leads to negative behavior. At the very least, it stifles investigation into other spiritual/wisdom traditions. Another common, taken for granted propaganda meme, is the story of Santa Claus and other childhood mythical icons like the tooth fairy and the Easter bunny. Although seemingly innocent, these narratives erode two extremely important psychological bulwarks of sanity. The stories when revealed eat into the child’s trust of their parents and undermine their sense of reality. In addition, unfortunately, we live in a world filled with all different types of propaganda that shape our sense of who we are and guide our behavior.

The two fish, the child that knows nothing about the earth other than it is flat and the child that is convinced that Santa Claus brought the presents have (at least) one thing in common. They all have physical structures in the brain where these ideas exist. While there is no challenge to the ideas, they will remain as an integral part of how they see the world. Of course, most fish will probably live their entire lives without realizing that there is anything outside of the liquid world. Many people too will remain unaware that fabrication underlies their closely held beliefs. We are not entering a phase of humanity where we must break through our shared delusion, repel propaganda and act on a newly developed clarity of vision based on a solid worldview.

I describe the concept of a narrative, and how I protect it, in my [first blog](#). Another way to look at it is how I became aware or awake by minimizing or dismantling the false idea structures in my brain formed by propaganda. This is nothing new and there are scholars and teachers who look at it in different ways. One blog describes a “basic definition of awakening is that you realize what is real.”² I highly recommend that the reader peruse the blog and see what works for them. I realize at this point some of you may feel a little betrayed.

Possibly you have dabbled in meditation or feel you are “woke” already and that if you had known what the conclusion of the blog post is, you might not have read it. If this is you, congratulations, and I hope to see you on the activist trail. I wrote this blog to those people that understand science and are leery of

metaphysics. Those people that are convinced they know the answers in the rational, logical way and think they are immune to propaganda because they know the facts. To these people I say, “question all your assumptions.” Delve into your closely held beliefs. Dig into those concepts of nationalism, religion, dogma and forever growth capitalism. You might find that these ideas are just the blood fed connections in your brain propped up by the fish all around you saying, “what water?”

Russell Baldwin is a full time Forensic Scientist in southern California. In 2015 he realized the extent of eco-damage that humanity has/is doing to the Earth and has become an activist.

The [MAHB Blog](#) is a venture of the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org

References

1. [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-\(1944\)/the-story-of-propaganda](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-(1944)/the-story-of-propaganda)
2. <https://www.spiritualawakeningprocess.com/2010/08/what-is-spiritual-awakening.html>