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## **How to Change People's Beliefs? Doxastic Coercion vs. Evidential Persuasion**

**Abstract:** The very existence of society depends on the ability of its members to influence formatively the beliefs, desires, and actions of their fellows. In every sphere of social life, powerful human agents (whether individuals or institutions) tend to use coercion as a favorite shortcut to achieving their aims without taking into consideration the non-violent alternatives or the negative (unintended) consequences of their actions. This propensity for coercion is manifested in the doxastic sphere by attempts to shape people's beliefs (and doubts) while ignoring the essential characteristics of these doxastic states. I argue that evidential persuasion is a better route to influence people's beliefs than doxastic coercion. Doxastic coercion perverts the belief-forming mechanism and undermines the epistemic and moral faculties both of coercers and coerced. It succeeds sporadically and on short-term. Moreover, its pseudo doxastic effects tend to disappear once the use of force ceases. In contrast to doxastic coercion, evidential persuasion produces lasting correct beliefs in accordance with proper standards of evidence. It helps people to reach the highest possible standards of rationality and morality. Evidential persuasion is based on the principles of symmetry and reciprocity in that it asks all persuaders to use for changing the beliefs of others only those means they used in forming their own beliefs respecting the freedom of will and assuming the standard of rationality. The arguments in favor of evidential persuasion have a firm theoretical basis that includes a conceptual clarification of the essential traits of beliefs. Belief is treated as a hypercomplex system governed by Leibniz's law of continuity and the principle of self-organization. It appears to be a mixture consisting of a personal propositional attitude and physical objects and processes. The conceptual framework also includes a typology of believers according to the standards of evidence they assume. In this context, I present a weak version of Clifford's ethical imperative. In the section dedicated to the prerequisites for changing beliefs, I show how doxastic agents can infuse premeditated or planned changes in the flow of endogenous changes in order to shape certain beliefs in certain desired forms. The possibility of changing some beliefs in a planned manner is correlated with a feedback doxastic (macro-mechanism) that produces a reaction when it is triggered by a stimulus. In relation with the two routes to influence beliefs, a response mechanism is worth taking into consideration – a mechanism governed to a significant extent by human conscience and human will, that appears to be complex, acquired, relatively detached from visceral or autonomic information processing, and highly variable in reactions. Knowing increasingly better this doxastic mechanism, we increase our chances to use evidential persuasion as an effective (although not time-efficient) method to mold people's beliefs.

**Keywords:** belief, doubt, evidence, mechanism, evidential reason, evidential persuasion, doxastic coercion, doxastic conduct, rational believer

