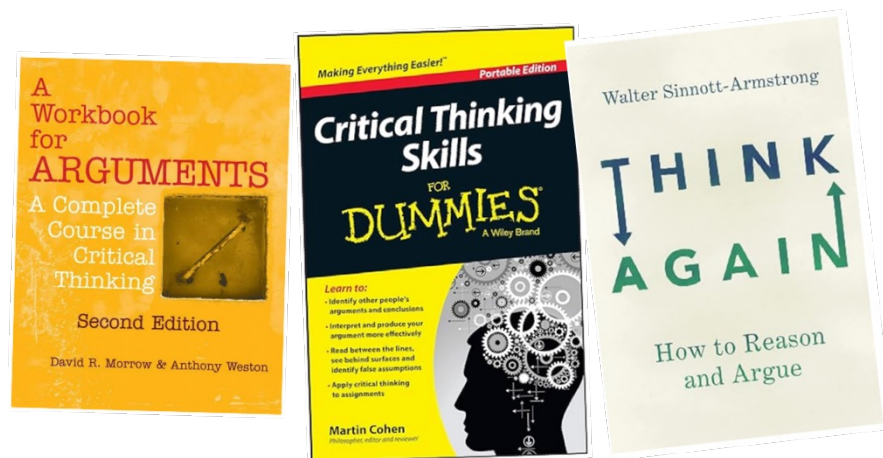


What is to be done?

- Suppose the account of indoctrination Dr. Beddor has proposed is correct.
- Answer to Prager: What's bad about it is that it causes people to hold views in an uncritical and dogmatic manner.
- In light of this, four questions seem important:
 1. How do I avoid being indoctrinated?
 2. How do I avoid indoctrinating others?
 3. How can we detect indoctrination?
 4. How should we respond to indoctrination?

How do I avoid being indoctrinated?

- One obvious answer: Refuse to hold any of your beliefs in an uncritical and dogmatic manner.
- Easier said than done!
- While this question is a good one, it is a familiar one – and there already exists a lot of material out there on how to be a critical thinker. (Take a philosophy class...)



- So let's focus on the other, less commonly considered questions.

How do I avoid indoctrinating others?

- A first proposal: Don't aim to indoctrinate!
- Problem: Not good enough, since it is possible to indoctrinate without intending to do so.
- A reassurance one might reach for:
 - Indoctrination is the result of something *systematic* about what the indoctrinator does.
 - But if one doesn't aim to indoctrinate, what are the chances of doing something systematic that causes people to hold certain beliefs in an uncritical, dogmatic manner?
- Problem: One can have unconscious but systematic habits.
 - (Example: a disapproving or disgusted facial expression on hearing certain ideas.)
- So unconscious systematic habits might well have an indoctrinating effect.

How do I avoid indoctrinating others?

- Since you might do things that encourage holding beliefs in an uncritical or dogmatic manner, one obvious strategy is to watch out for those things in your own behavior and try to stop it.
- What might I as a teacher do that is most likely to have this unhappy effect?
- Probably: react to certain expressions of ideas with a kind of moral outrage or disgust.



How do I avoid indoctrinating others?

- Moral outrage is certainly something that can make people hold views in an uncritical and dogmatic fashion.
- So it's best not to react in ways that cause people to link ideas to feelings of shame or guilt.
- This is not to say one should avoid setting out moral claims for consideration.
- Contrast:
 - How dare you think such a horrible thing! You should be ashamed of yourself!
 - What you're suggesting seems to me to be a morally problematic position. Here's why...

How do I avoid indoctrinating others?

- A more proactive strategy: Don't just try to avoid doing things that may indoctrinate; try to *do* things that *counteract* indoctrination.
- Intentionally aim at encouraging habits that are *contrary* to holding beliefs in an uncritical and dogmatic fashion.
- In other words: positively reinforce when a student raises a critical question about a claim they might have found difficult to criticize.



- Ironically enough, this is precisely the sort of thing one can imagine being *called* indoctrination: teachers encouraging students to question beliefs they already had!
- But of course this encouragement should also extend to cases where students raise critical questions about newer ideas.

How can we detect indoctrination?

- Is *this* a good sign of indoctrination?
 - Nearly everybody in such and such a group agrees on such and such claims, though others outside the group include many who disagree with those claims.
- No – Widespread agreement on something tells us nothing about whether the people in that group hold those views in an uncritical or dogmatic manner.
- There are at least three big difficulties facing us in trying to establish that indoctrination has occurred.

Difficulty 1: Lack of data regarding reaction to criticism.

- We need evidence that the alleged indoctrinatee is inclined to react in an uncritical and dogmatic way to challenges to the doctrine in question.
- But for many people there are very few occasions in which such challenges are faced or in which they have a chance to engage in a thoughtful, critical fashion.
- Most people tend to be conflict averse, after all.



- So the data is simply hard to get, especially if we want to say that an entire group (as opposed to a particular individual) is indoctrinated.

Difficulty 2: Assessing reactions to challenges.

- What would be the evidence that an alleged indoctrinatee shows a lack of critical thinking?
- There may be some easy cases: using moral outrage to end the conversation, turning to personal insults, using humor to deflect.

- But if it's not that kind of easy case...
- One may have to get "into the weeds" of the debate to see if someone persistently relies on bad arguments.

- Since that is a lot of work
 (and people are bad at it)
 there's not likely to be much data.

Difficulty 3: Multiple possible causes

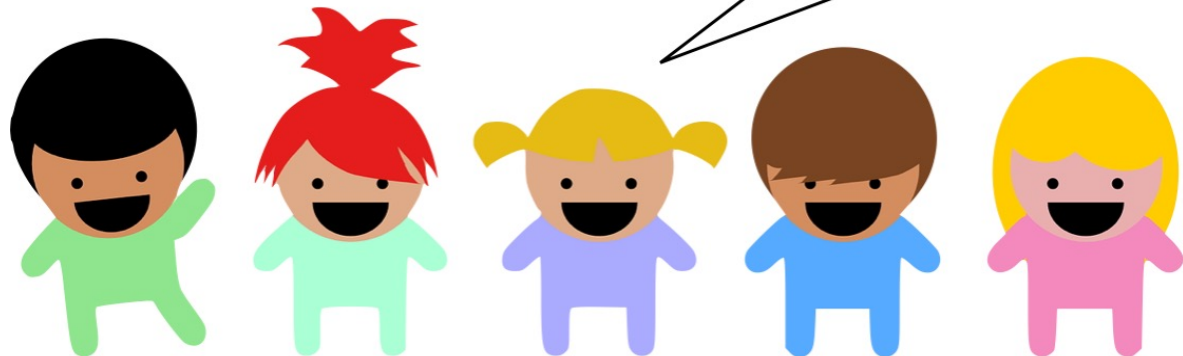
- Given our account of indoctrination, even if we are sure someone has the uncritical attitude towards a given doctrine, we still need to ask whether this was the result of something systematic by the alleged indoctrinator.
- The problem: there could be many different causes of that attitude.
- Peer pressure, mass media, parents, teachers, churches, ... and various psychological factors that might even be innate.

Difficulty 3: Multiple possible causes

- In fact, it's plausible that many people start off with an inclination to be uncritical and dogmatic about things they believe, so you hardly need a problematic institution to blame for this.

We're perfectly capable of being uncritical and dogmatic believers all on our own!

We're just born that way!



How should we respond to indoctrination?

- Suppose you believe that a certain group of people has been indoctrinated: what should you do?
- One thing you might want to do is help the indoctrinatees think critically about things they were inclined to treat dogmatically before.
- The best advice here is: SHOW, don't TELL.
- Point to details of the argument and raise questions specific to it in order to illuminate the problems.
- If the person then sees for herself why the argument is problematic, then they aren't relying on your authority and are then better equipped to think critically in the future.

A sad irony

- If you charge a group with indoctrination and they are innocent of this, one harm is to their reputation.
- But there's another harm – to those you are trying to warn of being indoctrinated.
- If a person believes that a group is guilty of indoctrinating others into believing some doctrine D, that person may use this as a kind of automatic and unthinking defense against what members of that group might have to say in favor of D.



A sad irony

- If you encourage people to react to challenges this way, you're encouraging them to dismiss challenges that might have some merit.
- Of course, if you have reason to mistrust someone, you should be vigilant in assessing critically what they say.
- But that's not the same as dismissing it as automatically of no merit.

- Publicly accusing groups of indoctrination then itself might be a way of indoctrinating.

- But I won't actually accuse the accusers of indoctrination – because I don't have enough evidence to support the charge that these accusations have that effect.

AND because, you know, I care about being consistent.