

Indoctrination anxiety and the etiology of belief

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Abstract People sometimes try to call others' beliefs into question by pointing out the contingent causal origins of those beliefs. The significance of such 'Etiological Challenges' is a topic that has started attracting attention in epistemology. Current work on this topic aims to show that Etiological Challenges are, at most, only indirectly epistemically significant, insofar as they bring other generic epistemic considerations to the agent's attention (e.g. disagreement, consistency with one's own epistemic standards, evidence of one's fallibility). Against this approach, we argue that Etiological Challenges are epistemically significant in a more direct and more distinctive way. An Etiological Challenge prompts the agent to assess whether her beliefs result from practices of indoctrination, and whether she should reduce confidence in those beliefs, given the anti-reliability of indoctrination as a method of belief-acquisition. Our analysis also draws attention to some of the ways in which epistemic concerns interact with political issues—e.g. relating to epistemic injustice, identity-based discrimination, and segregation—when we're thinking about the contingent causal origins of our beliefs.

Keywords Indoctrination · Etiology · Genealogy · Disagreement

All those opinions and notions of things, to which we have been accustomed from our infancy, take deep root, that 'tis impossible for us, by all powers of reason and experience, to eradicate them.

Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature

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1 Introduction

Setting: New York, the 1880s; the women's suffrage movement is gathering momentum. Ernest, a minister, preaches a sermon arguing that the movement subverts God's plan for humanity. His beliefs on this matter reflect several influences, including his seminary education and the views of his parents and childhood teachers. Ernest's one-time interest in progressive sexual politics, influenced by his exposure to Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) thanks to a radical aunt, was quashed when his sympathy for Fuller's views led to him being chastised by his teachers in seminary classes. Subsequent support for an anti-suffragette view by others in the community cemented Ernest's adherence to this stance. After delivering his sermon, Ernest is confronted by his radical aunt. After trying to reason with him, the aunt, exasperated, says "you only oppose women's suffrage because you were raised to accept the naturalness of the patriarchy!"

If Ernest concedes that his convictions *are* a product of his acculturation in a patriarchal society, how should this affect his commitment to them? More generally: how does recognition of the contingent cultural etiology of one's beliefs affect their epistemic standing? Several philosophers have addressed these questions recently, including Sher (2001), White (2010), Schoenfield (2014), and Andreas Mogensen (forthcoming).¹ While reflecting on his Marxist upbringing, in his seminal discussion of this topic, G. A. Cohen says "it should give us pause that we would not have beliefs that are central to our lives... about important matters of politics and religion... if we had not been brought up as we in fact were" (2000, p. 9). The authors following Cohen try to say precisely how entertaining such concerns should 'give us pause.' In so doing, they frame the problem as one concerning the generic phenomenon of doxastic contingency, i.e. the fact that it is, in some fundamental sense, an accident that any of us come to hold the beliefs we actually hold. But this way of framing things ignores a central anxiety that's adverted to in Cohen's original discussion. When we challenge each other (or ourselves) with the allegation, "you only believe P because you were brought up in culture Q," we're not always merely adverted to the *accidentality* of the beliefs in question. At least sometimes we're insisting that those beliefs were acquired via a non-truth-conducive program of belief-inculcation, i.e. via a process of *indoctrination*. Treating the questions in this area as indicating a problem relating to indoctrination, rather than the generic problem of doxastic chanciness, allows us to discern the epistemic implications of recognizing one's own beliefs as culturally contingent, and to recognize important political dimensions of this epistemological topic. Or so we argue in what follows.

In Sect. 2 we identify different uses to which the challenge "you only believe P because..." can be put. In Sect. 3 we present the views of several authors who regard

¹ Interesting unpublished work in this area also includes Adam Elga, "Lucky to be rational"; Joshua Schechter, "Luck, rationality, and explanation: A reply to Elga's 'Lucky to be rational'"; Katia Vavova, "Irrelevant influences"; Paul Silva, "Etiological information and diminishing justification (or, the truth behind debunking arguments)"; and Amia Srinivasan, "The Archimedean urge." Beyond work that's explicitly focused on the etiology of belief, there is also a large literature on the evolutionary debunking of morality; seminal works include Joyce (2006) and Street (2006). For an overview of this literature see Vavova (2015).

the epistemic significance of this type of challenge as being entirely parasitic upon other kinds of generic epistemic demands, and we present some reasons to resist this analysis. In Sect. 4 we argue that these challenges can undermine beliefs by causing them to be recognized as a product of indoctrination. We also argue that our view doesn't transform these challenges into sources of general skepticism. In Sect. 5 we distinguish our claims about the significance of indoctrination from more general concerns about the irrationality of dogmatic thinking *per se*. We finish in Sect. 6 by noting connections between epistemological and political issues related to indoctrination. The intersection between epistemology and political philosophy is a fertile space for philosophical inquiry, and we hope to orient the emerging literature on doxastic etiology towards that intersection.

2 Two uses for etiological challenges

“You only believe P because you were raised in culture Q” is a familiar kind of challenge. A might say to B in a discussion about religion: “you only believe in Jesus’s divinity because you were raised in the church;” or in a debate about politics: “you’re only opposed to gun control because you were raised in a Republican household;” or, as in our opening example: “you only oppose women’s suffrage because you were raised to accept the naturalness of the patriarchy.” We’ll call the challenge that’s issued in cases like these an *Etiological Challenge*, and we’ll call the beliefs that Etiological Challenges call into question *Target Beliefs*. Our aim is to give an account of the epistemological significance of Etiological Challenges. Unlike others, however, we want to begin by considering the purposes people may have in issuing Etiological Challenges. Sometimes, of course, Etiological Challenges are just used as rhetorical devices. For instance, in a public debate A might issue one of these challenges to B in an effort to undermine B’s credibility with the audience, without any actual interest in the rationality of B’s beliefs. What we’re interested in, rather, are two different ways that issuers of Etiological Challenges may be trying to prompt rational revision of the recipient’s Target Beliefs.

In one kind of case, Etiological Challenges may be intended to serve as ‘Indirect Pointers’ to other generic epistemic factors; the idea being that once those factors are taken into consideration the Target Belief will merit less confidence. For instance, “you only believe P because you were raised in culture Q” may be A’s way of suggesting to B that his evidence vis-à-vis P seems inadequate, and thus challenging B to reassess the probative force of his evidence. As White says, “what is going on here in many cases is just that a thought like this occasions the reassessment of [the] beliefs on more general grounds” (2010, p. 576). Other, more complex epistemic considerations can also be indirectly pointed to by Etiological Challenges. For instance, issuing an Etiological Challenge can be a way of making salient facts about disagreement. And if, as Conciliationists (e.g. [Feldman 2006](#); [Elga 2007](#); [Christensen 2007](#)) contend, realizing that one’s belief is rejected by epistemically well-credentialed others requires the agent to reduce her confidence in the contested proposition, then Etiological Challenges can serve as a demand for the recipient to revise her belief, by adverting to a fact that

triggers Conciliationist principles.² Or to take another case, an Etiological Challenge can be a way of making salient facts about the unreliability of the process via which Target Beliefs were formed, thus foregrounding higher-order evidence that may affect the rational standing of those Target Beliefs.³

In contrast to these kinds of Indirect Pointer cases, Etiological Challenges may instead, at least sometimes, be intended to spur belief-revision by eliciting in the recipient a feeling of *Indoctrination Anxiety*. Indoctrination anxiety, on our usage, is something narrower than *Genealogical Anxiety*, in which an individual is caused to “worry that the origins of her beliefs will turn out to be a source of discredit not vindication,”⁴ and also narrower than a more general feeling of *Contingency Anxiety*, in which an individual is led into “a feeling of unease due to discovering that she holds certain beliefs because of arbitrary factors in her background.”⁵ Indoctrination Anxiety, rather, is the distinctive sense of unease a person experiences when she’s led to suspect that her beliefs resulted from a systematic program of doctrinal inculcation.⁶ In at least some cases where A issues an Etiological Challenge to B, A tries to instill this type of unease in B, by putting it to B that her belief isn’t merely an *accident* of culture or geography, but that it is, rather, a product of a method of belief-transmission that’s geared towards making people believe things which they would otherwise reject, and that B should revise or reject her belief in view of this consideration.⁷

The question ‘what are the issuers of Etiological Challenges trying to do in issuing such challenges?’ does not bear directly on the question of what epistemic significance Etiological Challenges possess. But it’s useful nevertheless to consider the former question. If it’s true that Etiological Challenges are sometimes intended to elicit Indoctrination Anxiety, then this can encourage us to seriously consider the possibility that something of epistemic significance underlies this connection. And this may lead us to doubt the prevalent view in the literature, which sees the epistemic significance of Etiological Challenges as entirely indirect, and reducible to the force of other generic epistemic considerations to which they direct our attention.

² This view about the significance of Etiological Challenges is advanced in Sher (2001), White (2010), and Mogensen (forthcoming); we’ll discuss it in Sect. 3.

³ This view is advanced in Vavova, “Irrelevant influences” (see note 1); we’ll discuss it in Sect. 4.

⁴ We take this term and formulation from Srinivasan (2011).

⁵ We take this term and formulation from Mogensen (forthcoming).

⁶ We allow that Indoctrination Anxiety may be an instance of these other types of Anxiety. But an account that characterizes the worry arising from Etiological Challenges in terms of Indoctrination Anxiety—as ours does—differs from and identifies a narrower worry than one that characterizes it merely in terms of either Genealogical or Contingency Anxiety.

⁷ Note that, as well as being issued in second-personal terms, Etiological Challenges can also be issued first-personally (i.e. to oneself: “I just believe P because...”), or third-personally (i.e. “he just believes P because...”). Some uses that we’ve identified for second-personal Etiological Challenges may be unintelligible in first- or third-personal terms. For instance, it’s unclear whether Indoctrination Anxiety could be provoked in anyone, in the case where A tells B that some third party, C, just believes P because he was brought up in culture Q. And it seems unlikely that any form of rhetorical ammunition could be at work in a first-personal context. While some authors in the literature show an interest in first-personal Etiological Challenges—most notably, Cohen (2000)—we’ll confine our attention to the implications of second-personal Etiological Challenges in what follows.

3 Etiological challenges as Indirect Pointers

In seeking to identify the epistemic significance of Etiological Challenges, several authors treat them as nothing more than Indirect Pointers to considerations relating to disagreement. On this view, if A says to B “you only believe P because you were raised in culture Q” the effect this has on B’s justification for believing P reduces to whatever effect is generated by B attending to the putative fact that other apparently well-credentialed people reject B’s view about P. Parts of Cohen’s discussion suggest this view about the force of Etiological Challenges. Cohen says I lack good reason to believe P over a rival proposition Q if I can’t justifiably believe my grounds for believing P are better than another person’s grounds for believing Q. Cohen calls this ‘The Principle,’ and he suggests that:

In a wide range of cases... people who continue to believe p (can readily be brought to) realize that they believe p rather than q not because they have grounds for believing p *that are better than the grounds for believing q that others have*, but because they were induced to believe p. (Cohen 2000, pp. 12–13, our emphasis)

When people continue to hold such beliefs, Cohen says, they’re irrationally violating the Principle. For Cohen, then, the force of Etiological Challenges can be reduced to the force that’s generated by facts about disagreement, since the Principle that impugns the rationality of the belief he’s describing is, in essence, one that condemns steadfastness in the face of disagreement.⁸ White even more explicitly identifies the force of Etiological Challenges with factors relating to disagreement. Unless Etiological Challenges function as an invitation to adopt radical skepticism—in which case they play no special epistemic role, given that there are many ways to push skeptical anxieties—their undermining effect, if any, White says, must derive from disagreement. So, in reference to Cohen’s worries about nurtured convictions, White says:

What is driving the distinctive worry here has nothing to do with facts he has discovered about the etiology of his own beliefs. It is just the fact that he has evidence that there are apparently very smart, well informed philosophers who differ in their opinions. (White 2010, p. 608)

Mogensen also endorses this view, which he calls The Disagreement Hypothesis. In cases in which an Etiological Challenge is issued, Mogensen says “any defeater that occurs is to be explained by reference to the epistemic significance of disagreement” (forthcoming, p. 10).⁹ Although all three authors are somewhat non-committal in judg-

⁸ Note, however, that Cohen focuses on a case that differs from standard examples of symmetrical peer disagreement.

⁹ Mogensen (forthcoming, p. 17) makes the strong claim that even in cases where there’s no actual disagreement the significance of disagreement can defeat the rationality of Target Beliefs, if and when the actual disagreement is ‘arbitrarily absent.’ Mogensen thus argues that some merely possible disagreement can be undermining, since some merely possible disagreement is arbitrarily absent. If this is correct, it supplies Conciliationism with a reply to Kelly’s argument that Conciliationism tends towards global skepticism, since, as Kelly says Conciliationists must claim, all merely possible disagreement has undermining force (see Kelly 2005).

ing precisely how far the epistemic ramifications of facts about disagreement extend, they all agree that whatever epistemic significance Etiological Challenges possess derives from their functioning as Indirect Pointers to facts about disagreement.¹⁰

Another construal of Etiological Challenges as Indirect Pointers sees their force as deriving from the basic requirement that, in holding the Target Beliefs, an agent satisfies the demands imposed by her own epistemic standards. On this view, the epistemic implications of an Etiological Challenge for the challenge's recipient are just reducible to whatever epistemic implications are generated by her attending to the question of whether or not she is satisfying her own standards of reasoning vis-à-vis the Target Beliefs. Schoenfield endorses this view about the underlying epistemic force of Etiological Challenges, saying that if we think some "irrelevant influence" has "caused us to reason irrationally," then "learning about the influence may give us reason to reduce confidence" (2014, p. 213). On Schoenfield's account, reasoning rationally ultimately amounts to reasoning in accordance with one's own epistemic standards, provided those standards are, by one's own lights, no less truth-conducive than any available alternative set of epistemic standards. So Etiological Challenges should prompt an agent to freshly reevaluate whether (or to what degree) she has reasoned in accordance with her own epistemic standards. If she has failed to reason in accordance with her standards, then she should reduce confidence in the Target Beliefs, but if she has reasoned in accordance with her standards, no such revision is necessary.¹¹ Adam Elga endorses a similar view. When one realizes that certain of one's beliefs resulted from the influence of an irrelevant factor, he asks, how much should that reduce the strength of the belief? And the answer, he says, is that it ultimately depends

On whether the irrelevant factor put one at risk for failing to live up to one's own standards for reasoning. If so, then learning about the factor should reduce the strength of beliefs influenced by the factor. If not, not.¹²

The thought underlying Schoenfield's and Elga's claims—that when a belief is challenged, one ought to consider whether the reasoning that led one to that belief accords with one's epistemic standards—is hard to resist. Likewise, the thought that's guiding those who treat Etiological Challenges as Indirect Pointers to disagreement—that when a belief is challenged, one should ask whether facts about disagreement undermine that belief—also seems plausible. Insofar as Etiological Challenges can function as Indirect Pointers to these (and other) generic epistemic considerations, it's surely the case that some part of the epistemic significance of Etiological Challenges is derivative, by dint of their connection with these other generic considerations to which they

¹⁰ Sher also partly locates the significance of Etiological Challenges in facts about disagreement, but unlike White and Mogensen, he doesn't regard their force as reducible to the significance of disagreement. For Sher disagreement and Etiological Challenges combine to exert a complementary undermining challenge (see Sher 2001, pp. 69–72).

¹¹ That is, provided that the agent is (as far as she can discern) in a so-called Permissive case, that is, a case in which there is more than one rationally permissible doxastic attitude to hold towards the proposition given the evidence.

¹² Elga, "Lucky to be rational," p. 2 (see note 1).

indirectly point. Nonetheless, we think others writing on this topic are mistaken in asserting that the epistemic significance of Etiological Challenges is just reducible to the significance of the other generic considerations to which they indirectly point. Three worries lead us toward this view.

First, it's *prima facie* plausible that Etiological Challenges possess some distinctive significance in our intellectual lives, as opposed to being just another thing that directs our attention to generic epistemic ideals or norms. The fact that the emerging consensus in the literature doesn't accord a distinctive significance to Etiological Challenges is at least a *pro tanto* reason to see whether it's possible to formulate some alternative account of how Etiological Challenges can affect the rational standing of Target Beliefs.

Second—most importantly—it *is* possible to formulate an alternative account of how Etiological Challenges affect the rational standing of Target Beliefs, one in which Etiological Challenges don't just serve as Indirect Pointers to other generic epistemic factors. We present our alternative account in Sect. 4.

Third, the sort of inquiry Etiological Challenges should initiate for their recipients seems to differ importantly from the sort of inquiry that is likely to be initiated by construing them as Indirect Pointers. Etiological Challenges encourage us to pay attention to notable facts about our belief-forming processes that would otherwise be ignored. By contrast, the sort of reflection prompted by the Indirect Pointer construal is typically *redundant*, in that it is unlikely to uncover epistemic considerations that the agent will judge herself as having failed to take into account when she originally formed her belief. Suppose B is a devout Christian, and suppose A says to B “you only believe in Jesus's divinity because you were raised in the church.” If B treats this Etiological Challenge as an Indirect Pointer to considerations relating to disagreement, the questions B then needs to ask herself are whether there are relevantly well-credentialed agents who reject her views, how many such agents there are, and whether there is a countervailing plurality of well-credentialed agents who endorse her views. Of course it's possible that B will come to see the social epistemic facts about people's views on this topic as ones which rationally require her to revise her belief in Jesus's divinity.¹³ But it's unlikely that B will reach this judgement, (i) because her existing commitments predispose her to downplay the credentials of her opponents and inflate the credentials of her allies, and (ii) because she will typically think that she's already tried to take all of this into account anyway.¹⁴ (Something similar will likely occur where B treats the Etiological Challenge as an invitation to reconsider whether she is living up to her own epistemic standards).¹⁵ To demand

¹³ Mogensen suggests that Etiological Challenges can help us think in a way that resists this temptation. Perhaps that's right, but the temptation to be self-serving in such judgments is strong; see for example Peter van Inwagen (1996) reflections on disagreement.

¹⁴ Social psychologists suggest that humans operate within a framework of “naïve realism,” the sense that one sees the world *objectively*, and that this leads us to judge our own views as relatively common, and alternative views as relatively uncommon, in the wider population, and to overestimate the prevalence of bias among those who clearly disagree with us. So one may be antecedently likely to behave as we predict. See Pronin et al. (2004).

¹⁵ Perhaps, like in Garber's approach (2009, p. 46ff.), in processing the doubts occasioned by reflecting on the historical contingency of her religious convictions, B may end up retaining her convictions while

that a person adhere to good general epistemic practices in reviewing her beliefs is to remind her to do what she has presumably been trying to do all along. And hence this advice is redundant, particularly when the agent's ability to adhere to good general epistemic practices in reviewing her beliefs has been compromised by a prior program of intellectual manipulation. Indeed, as we aim to show in the following section, the influence of such manipulation is something Etiological Challenges themselves can be used to bring to light. Insofar as an inquiry into such coercive influences has the potential to uncover *new* information about one's belief-forming practices, an account that construes Etiological Challenges as prompting this sort of inquiry is better-able to capture their distinctive epistemological role.

4 Indoctrination, confidence, and skepticism

The analysis of Etiological Challenges as nothing but Indirect Pointers is too generic. Etiological Challenges at least sometimes call for a distinctive type of self-interrogation, one which has the potential to unseat those dogmatic tendencies that subvert our attempts to effectively engage in routine intellectual self-monitoring. When you receive an Etiological Challenge, the worry you should attend to isn't merely that you may have failed to fully satisfy generic epistemic ideals vis-à-vis the Target Beliefs. Rather, your worry should be that you may have been *systematically manipulated* into accepting Target Beliefs, in a way that bypassed or impaired your capacity for critical resistance, and whose workings were—or have become, with the passing of time—hard for you to detect. If you recognize a non-trivial likelihood that you've been indoctrinated into holding some belief, it's rationally appropriate for you to revise that belief. And Etiological Challenges are a good way of pressing the question of whether it is indeed likely that your beliefs result from indoctrination.

What exactly is indoctrination, though? There's a significant literature on this topic, the main themes of which we'll only be able to sketch. Snook (2000, p. 2) identifies three key questions that an account of indoctrination should address. First, does indoctrination involve any particular educational *methods*? Second, can only some doxastic *contents* be imparted via indoctrination? And third, does an educator have to *intend* any particular outcomes for her educational practice to qualify as indoctrination? While we can't fully address all three questions, we can say that the types of belief-inculcation of interest here are chiefly characterized by methods, rather than by contents or intentions.¹⁶ Indoctrination consists in the use of educational practices that serve to impart something like *absolute* and *inflexible* acceptance. To indoctrinate is to “teach someone to *fully* accept the ideas, opinions, and beliefs of a particular group

Footnote 15 continued

coming to regard them as ‘works-in-progress,’ which she shouldn't rely upon as reference-points for practical decision-making. But still, intellectual humility isn't the same as belief-revision, and treating Etiological Challenges as Indirect Pointers prematurely limits their capacity to elicit the latter.

¹⁶ Although the characteristic practices of indoctrination frequently are enacted deliberately or intentionally, we maintain that it's possible for such practices to be enacted in the absence of any conscious intention to indoctrinate.

and to *not consider* other ideas, opinions, and beliefs.”¹⁷ What kinds of educational practices serve to establish such absolute and inflexible commitments? Conjecturally, the following kinds of practices seem to be the *most* obvious candidates:

Deterrence: students are discouraged (explicitly or implicitly) from asking critical questions about, and from entertaining possible reasons to doubt, Target Beliefs.

Allegiance-Building: students are encouraged (explicitly or implicitly) to understand their ongoing acceptance of Target Beliefs as a matter of loyalty or fidelity to a social group.

Credibility-Prejudicing: students are encouraged (explicitly or implicitly) to prejudicially accord high credibility to those who endorse Target Beliefs, and to prejudicially accord low credibility to those who oppose them.^{18, 19}

Affective-Conditioning: students are trained to associate positive feelings (e.g. pride, joy, honor) with acceptance of Target Beliefs, and to associate negative feelings (e.g. fear, shame, dishonor) with rejection of them.²⁰

Repetition: students are subjected to gratuitously repetitive endorsements of Target Beliefs, i.e. repetition beyond what’s necessary for normal educational purposes (e.g. rote memorization).

A process of indoctrination needn’t incorporate all, or only, these practices. The greater the degree to which each of them is in effect in an educational system, the more fitting it is to characterize that system as one effecting indoctrination. Indoctrination is not an all-or-nothing affair, and our judgments about when (and what degree of) indoctrination has occurred in a given case will have to allow for degrees of uncertainty. In a paradigmatic case—like, say, a child who is systematically isolated from outside sources of information, while being educated in a doctrinally-strict, closed religious community—all the relevant factors tend to favor the judgment that the child in question has been indoctrinated. In a more complex case—like a student attending graduate

¹⁷ This is from the text of a definition given at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indoctrination>.

¹⁸ One means of Credibility-Prejudicing is what we might call *Isolation*, that is, the structuring of students’ environment so that they don’t encounter people who might present—or constitute—counter-evidence to the ideology into which the students are being indoctrinated. Allen Buchanan (2004, p. 97) discusses a process of Credibility-Prejudicing via Isolation: “A person brought up in a racist society typically not only absorbs an interwoven set of false beliefs about the natural characteristics of blacks (or Jews, and so on), but also learns epistemic vices that make it hard for him to come to see the falsity of these beliefs. For example, when a child, who has been taught that blacks are intellectually inferior, encounters an obviously highly intelligent black person, he may be told that the latter “must have some white blood.” Along with substantive false beliefs, the racist (like the anti-Semite and the sexist) learns strategies for overcoming cognitive dissonance and for retaining those false beliefs in the face of disconfirming evidence.”

¹⁹ Third-personal Etiological Challenges may sometimes be used to effect Credibility-Prejudicing. When inculcating a belief in some proposition, P, an educator may say, of those who deny P, “they just believe P because they were raised in culture Q” with the aim of tarnishing their opponents’ credibility in the students’ eyes.

²⁰ This practice pushes one towards being a ‘toady’ rather than a ‘pawn,’ in the sense of those terms (applied to beliefs) as used by Yaffe (2003, p. 338). Indoctrination that uses Affective-Conditioning doesn’t merely work towards getting someone to *affirm* the Target Beliefs, it pushes the person towards self-consciously *identifying* with those beliefs.

school among a coterie of like-minded scholars sharing idiosyncratic views²¹—some of the factors identified above will be present to some extent, and will thus provide some support for the judgment that the student in question has been indoctrinated. Ultimately, though, with respect to any particular educational environment whose character is being assessed, it is a complex, contestable question whether indoctrination is occurring. Our basic point, in any case, is that there are intuitive, important differences between educational approaches that respect and cultivate a student’s capacities to critically assess alternative viewpoints in seeking to impart knowledge,²² and educational approaches which undermine, denounce, or bypass these capacities, and characteristically impart—either due to the educators’ aims, or due to structural features of the policies in place in the educational system—a rigid and single-minded system of beliefs.^{23,24}

But aren’t there innocuous forms of “indoctrination” that are ubiquitous in our educational practices, especially for very young children? When a parent sternly tells his toddler not to touch the stove, he doesn’t encourage critical reflection or reason with her—indeed, he *can’t* reason with her, given her stage of cognitive development—and he may well attempt to instill a degree of fear in the child in order to produce in her the appropriate level of caution. If this is the kind of indoctrination that Etiological Challenges advert to, these challenges will be toothless, since this type of education is innocuous and unavoidable. But the unavoidability here is precisely what explains the innocuousness. The sort of indoctrination that Etiological Challenges are advertising to, by contrast, is the sort that unnecessarily *bypasses* or *inhibits the development of* a person’s capacity for rational thought. When the parent tells the child not to touch the stove, he neither bypasses nor inhibits her rational capacities, since she has no such capacities to bypass—at least, not ones sophisticated enough to understand, through reasons, why she shouldn’t touch the stove—and this sort of directive does not hinder the development of such capacities later in life. By contrast, the practices we’re claiming to be characteristic of indoctrination *do* bypass or inhibit people’s rational

²¹ A type of case central to Cohen’s discussion (2000).

²² To be clear, then, a negative view of what we’re calling ‘indoctrination’ doesn’t entail skepticism about whether testimony can be a source of justification. Of course in some areas (e.g. morality) it’s controversial whether people should rely on testimony in their deliberations, and when indoctrination involves testimony that broaches such contested terrains, skepticism about testimony will be concomitantly appropriate. But outside these areas, one can accept that testimony generally justifies belief, while remaining suspicious of indoctrination, since indoctrination is a form of belief-inculcation in which the normal channels of routine information-exchange that testimony utilizes are exploited in the service of a manipulative agenda.

²³ Although we can’t defend this assertion here, we think the notion that exposure to alternative world-views itself constitutes a form of indoctrination (e.g. of liberal ideals about tolerance) is wrongheaded. For discussion of some legal and philosophical aspects of this critique of liberal pluralism, see [Stolzenberg \(1993\)](#).

²⁴ In describing this as a coercive educational practice, we’re not suggesting that beliefs can be coerced as such. We agree with the view in [Locke \(1946\)](#) that people can only be coerced into actions, not into holding beliefs. We suggest, though, that educational practices can coerce forms of behavior that result in predictable doxastic outcomes.

capacities; as when a child is told from a young age that disavowing theism leads to damnation. That's the kind of indoctrination that concerns us.²⁵

While there are several questions that one might take up regarding the epistemic implications of indoctrination,²⁶ we'll just focus on one: should you reduce confidence in P if you come to believe that you were indoctrinated to accept P? The answer, we think, is 'yes.' Indoctrination, as we've characterized it, is not merely an *unreliable* way of acquiring beliefs. Rather, we submit, it is *anti-reliable*, given the contexts in which it typically operates.²⁷ Whether (and to what extent) a belief-forming process is reliable depends upon the environment in which it operates.²⁸ And while epistemically benign indoctrination is undoubtedly *possible*, the actual social environments in our world in which the characteristic practices of indoctrination play an integral role in inculcating beliefs are ones which—by anyone's lights—mostly inculcate falsehoods. Many of us will be happy to say in general that the products of indoctrination in closed religious or political communities—the environments in which it seems indoctrination is most likely to occur—are just benighted moral ideas and supernatural mythologies. However, even someone who accepts the tenets of some religious faith or political doctrine that's transmitted partly via indoctrination should believe that in the majority of cases in our world in which people acquire a comprehensive belief system via the characteristic practices of indoctrination, the token beliefs into which they're indoctrinated are false. In short, she should recognize that these practices typically yield beliefs with which she disagrees, i.e. beliefs she thinks are false. (For example, a Christian who thinks that indoctrination usually leads to Jewish, Islamic, and atheistic worldviews will think indoctrination usually leads to false beliefs.) Thus for all of us, by our own lights, if we acquire a reason to believe we were indoctrinated into P, we also get a reason to think that our confidence in P has heretofore been too high, given that our prior confidence in P was set by an anti-reliable method of belief-acquisition.

As an analogy, suppose you glimpse a news headline which states that Hillary Clinton has spent \$2 Billion on advertising in the first month of her Presidential campaign, and suppose this leads you to assign a credence of 0.9 to the stated proposition. If you

²⁵ In their defense of directive moral education—their proxy for indoctrination—Sher and Bennet (1982, p. 676) distinguish between directive methods that *impair* a child's later ability to respond to moral reasons and those that don't, and they argue that although the latter can be acceptable, the former aren't. In general, everyone should recognize a distinction like this, between objectionable and unobjectionable forms of education vis-à-vis respect for a student's rationality. Regardless of whether our version of the distinction is the optimal one, most of what we say here would hold given any reasonable way of drawing the relevant distinction.

²⁶ There are at least two ways, for instance, that indoctrination may undermine *knowledge*. First, if one's belief in fact resulted from indoctrination, it probably won't constitute knowledge, since (i) knowledge (plausibly) has a safety condition (see Williamson 2000), and (ii) indoctrination is an unsafe process of belief-acquisition. (On this point, see also Toby Handfield, "Genealogical explanations of chance and morals," (October 10, 2013), Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2343405>.) Second, regardless of whether one's belief *in fact* resulted from indoctrination, if one has reason to believe (or if one just does believe) it did, this too may undermine knowledge. These two ways that indoctrination undermines knowledge mirror White's distinction between blocking v. undermining debunking (see 2010, p. 575), and Mark Schroeder's distinction between objective v. subjective defeaters (2015, pp. 228–230).

²⁷ That is, we claim that not only does indoctrination *fail* to lead to a high proportion of true to false beliefs, it also tends to lead to a high proportion of false to true beliefs.

²⁸ See Goldman (1992), (Pollock 1986, pp. 118–119) and (Sosa 1991, pp. 138–142).

later learn that the headline you saw was from an anti-reliable source of information (e.g. if you find out it was an item of news satire from *The Onion*)²⁹, then you should not just disregard the headline as if it were merely uninformative. Rather, you should think that the proposition asserted in the headline is probably false. Indoctrination is presumably not *as* anti-reliable a method of belief-acquisition as credulously reading headlines from *The Onion*. But the lesson from the analogical case carries over. If you come to think that your doxastic attitude vis-à-vis P has its causal origins in an anti-reliable method of belief-acquisition, then you should reduce your confidence in P in a way that's proportionate to your judgment about the extent of that method's anti-reliability.³⁰

This way of thinking about the epistemic implications of Etiological Challenges doesn't lead to radical skepticism. First of all, we have countless mundane beliefs which we have no reason to think are due to indoctrination. Etiological Challenges tend to target "religious, moral, political, and philosophical beliefs," that is to say, "the kinds of belief that are very central to who we are, and to important decisions we make about how to structure our lives" (Schoenfield 2014, p. 194). Indoctrination Anxiety does have far-reaching implications, then, but it doesn't imply anything like radical skepticism based on the possibility of global error. If you're reflecting on whether you've been indoctrinated vis-à-vis P, your concern shouldn't be the general skeptical worry, that you might *lack* a good independent reason to believe in the *reliability* of your judgments vis-à-vis P. Rather, your concern should be that you might *have* a good independent reason to believe in the *anti-reliability* of your judgments vis-à-vis P.³¹ On this point—i.e. on the question of how one blocks the slide into skepticism that's threatened once we start taking Etiological Challenges seriously—we're ostensibly following Katia Vavova's view. Vavova argues that "to the extent that your independent evaluation gives you good reason to think that you're unreliable with respect to matters like P, you must revise your confidence in P accordingly."³² Like Vavova, we think that the implications of an Etiological Challenge depend upon the specifics of the case one is evaluating. However, we disagree with Vavova's suggestion that Etiological Challenges indicate the sorts of error we fall victim to "simply because we are fallible." The kinds of errors that are rendered salient when Etiological Challenges elicit Indoctrination Anxiety differ importantly from the kinds of errors arising from the general consideration of our intellectual fallibility. Indoctrination is a result of

²⁹ See www.theonion.com/article/hillary-clinton-campaign-shuts-down-after-blowing--50461.

³⁰ Again, we are not claiming that indoctrination is necessarily anti-reliable, but only that it's plausible that in the environments in which indoctrination characteristically operates in our world it is anti-reliable. If, however, we were mistaken about this, and indoctrination turned out to be merely unreliable rather than anti-reliable, this would not affect our argument very much. For, regarding belief revision, the main difference between learning a belief was formed via an unreliable process versus an anti-reliable process concerns the extent of the necessary revision; the latter typically calls for more extensive revision than the former. But insofar as agents must revise their beliefs in response to learning those beliefs were formed via an unreliable process, and insofar as learning this is not akin to the possibility of global error, the main points of our argument could still be sustained.

³¹ This is why Elga is wrong to make the inferences he makes on pp. 7–8 of "Lucky to be rational" (see note 1).

³² Vavova, "Irrelevant influences," p. 12 (see note 1); see also Sher (2001, p. 67).

systematic interference with a person's capacity to understand the world, a matter of "causing another person to respond to reasons in a pattern that serves the manipulator's ends" (Yaffe 2003, p. 335).³³ To be sure, our general cognitive fallibility renders us susceptible to errors borne of indoctrination. However, these errors are not just due to general cognitive limitations, but rather to educational practices that exploit those limitations and result in—and sometimes aim at—the subversive manipulation of people's intellectual lives.³⁴

5 Overcoming dogmatism

One might worry that talk of Indoctrination Anxiety is just a way of adverting to a more basic set of epistemological issues about dogmatism. We understand dogmatism here as a type of illegitimate, misleading evidence-screening. Here's a familiar—sometimes tempting—pattern of dogmatic reasoning: I know P is true, so I know that evidence against P is evidence against something true, so I know such evidence is misleading and should be ignored.³⁵ Kelly (2008) calls this *Kripkean Dogmatism*.³⁶ David Christensen describes a similar pattern of reasoning that can occur in cases of disagreement. It would obviously be wrong, he says, for someone to think: "so-and-so disagrees with me about P. But since P is true, she's wrong about P. So however reliable she may generally be, I needn't take her disagreement about P as any reason at all to question my belief" (Christensen 2011, p. 2). Theoretical remedies to these kinds of specious patterns of reasoning are not especially difficult to locate. Regarding Kripkean Dogmatism, Harman (1973) and Sorensen (1988) point out the irrationality of someone treating her prior belief in or knowledge that P as a fixed, incontrovertible reference-point for subsequent reasoning. And regarding the disagreement case, Christensen posits a principle he calls *Independence*, which states that "in evaluating the epistemic credentials of another's expressed belief about P, in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about P, I should do so in a way that doesn't rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief about P" (Christensen 2011, pp. 1–2).³⁷

Where Etiological Challenges are construed as attempts to elicit belief-revision via Indoctrination Anxiety, do they actually do anything more than prompt the agent to

³³ Yaffe says we sometimes "manipulate the way an agent responds to reasons, and sometimes... manipulate what reasons she has," and he calls these two forms of manipulation "indoctrination" and "coercion" respectively (2003, p. 340). In the epistemic case, what reasons a person has may result from censorship, which may itself be a component of indoctrination. Thus, we include both sorts of manipulation under the category of indoctrination.

³⁴ Vavova does think some of the central cases of irrelevant influence resemble brainwashing; see "Irrelevant Influences," p. 10ff. As brainwashing is arguably an extreme form of indoctrination, we are sympathetic to this thought. But her characterization of the phenomenon as one merely involving general higher-order evidence makes the worry presented by Etiological Challenges too generic. By contrast, our proposal implies that there is something special about Etiological Challenges—vis-à-vis the connection to practices of indoctrination—which is not shared by all higher-order evidence.

³⁵ This is paraphrased from Harman (1973, p. 148).

³⁶ Kripke's discussion of this kind of reasoning can be found in Kripke (2011).

³⁷ Though according to Kelly (2013), one can reject the kind of reasoning Christensen describes *without* endorsing Independence.

monitor herself for dogmatic reasoning, and where it's found, try to correct it via the kind of remedies noted above? On one hand, the patterns of reasoning that indoctrination breeds often do fall under the broader category of dogmatic thinking. But mere diagnoses of dogmatism's pathology, or analyses of what makes it pathological, don't address the question of how to dislodge patterns of dogmatic reasoning that have become ingrained in people's minds. When every attempt an agent makes to monitor his own reasoning—his appraisals of evidence, the cogency of his inferences, and so on—is jaundiced by his rigid adherence to an insular belief-system, generic accounts of dogmatism's pathologies aren't much help. In order to perturb his dogmas, this agent needs some way to open up critical distance between his reflective thoughts and the content of the closed belief-system in which most of his judgments have heretofore been mired. And one way the agent can achieve this is by adopting—or even just trying to adopt—a more detached, empirical perspective upon his own education and intellectual formation, examining his experiences through an anthropological, historical, or psychological lens.

Where Etiological Challenges provoke Indoctrination Anxiety, they force the agent to think of her own belief-system as not *merely* contingent or accidental, but rather, as a product of social forces in the service of a political agenda. And this is, we take it, a central theme of the critical tradition which links scholars of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, and which Ricoeur (1970) calls 'the school of suspicion.' In his account of this tradition, Leiter (2004) argues that "the lesson which underwrites the *suspicion* that Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud recommend by way of providing alternative causal trajectories to explain our beliefs," is that "we *should* be suspicious of the epistemic status of beliefs that have the wrong causal etiology." And for Nietzscheans like Leiter, as for us, this suspicion should at least sometimes result in doxastic revision proper. Our view thus goes beyond a general, schematic point about genealogical inquiries, namely that they may, as Prinz (2007, p. 243) says, help us "determine when a value is *especially suitable* for reassessment." Nonetheless, we think suspicion—or whatever one wants to call it: self-doubt, Indoctrination Anxiety—is at least one important element in the process of critical self-interrogation that's urged in an Etiological Challenge.

The question remains as to *how*—via what practical steps—a person can determine whether she has been indoctrinated. We are open to a variety of practical approaches, however we would emphasize that the question shouldn't be treated as an abstract, Cartesian meditation upon the mere *possibility* of one's reasoning being systematically distorted. Investigating the likelihood of one's own indoctrination requires delving into the empirical details of one's educational experiences, and trying to ascertain the influence of indoctrinating practices—*Deterrence*, *Allegiance-Building*, *Credibility-Prejudicing*, *Affective-Conditioning*, and *Repetition*—upon one's belief-formation. And while there's potentially a role for introspection in this, introspection can only get us so far. Beyond introspection, one approach to investigating these questions will be to ask one's friends, family members, and teachers (imperfectly reliable though they might be) what they recall about the nature of one's educational history. Alternatively, one might revisit the educational institutions of one's youth to observe their practices and try to jog forgotten memories of one's experiences. Or else there are comparative strategies: one may compare the remembered details of one's own education with the reported experiences of people from different cultural communities (or historical

moments), and in the comparison, seek an enlarged perspective on the nature of one's education. Or one may expose oneself to unfamiliar communities, and having better appreciated a diversity of educational approaches, form a clearer conception of the ways in which one's own education may have been narrow and idiosyncratic (or as the case will be for some, limiting and oppressive). And of course if one hasn't ever spent time apart from the community whose belief-system one has inherited, one may do well to distance oneself from that community so as to view it 'from the outside.'³⁸

It's true that when a person has been indoctrinated into a closed, self-reinforcing system of beliefs, trying to conduct a detached, empirical self-examination of her educational formation won't necessarily enable her to recognize her indoctrination for what it is. The most effective indoctrination covers its own tracks, after all. Nonetheless, to defend the view that Etiological Challenges have a distinctive epistemic significance in connection with Indoctrination Anxiety, we needn't claim that investigating the likelihood of one's own indoctrination guarantees appropriate belief-revision, or even that it's a much more effective pathway towards such revision than the pathway one follows in treating Etiological Challenges as Indirect Pointers. All we need to defend is the following plausible claim: that seeking to uncover the facts about one's own educational formation can illuminate potential reasons for belief-revision that would otherwise remain obscure. Work to date on Etiological Challenges tells us that their epistemic significance ultimately just lies in the kind of generic epistemic ideals that all self-conscious belief-maintenance should already aim to be sensitive towards. This analysis prematurely forecloses one important mode of self-evaluation via which Etiological Challenges have the potential to exert a salutary epistemic influence on our lives.

6 The dual political-epistemic ills of indoctrination

Coming to regard one's beliefs as a product of indoctrination may have important political ramifications. Although all approaches to education embed political values, the way indoctrination characteristically functions—as an abnormally coercive educational practice, which tends to serve a non-transparent political program—raises distinct political concerns and demands special scrutiny. For the agent who's processing Indoctrination Anxiety, this scrutiny shouldn't only involve an examination of the epistemic standing of indoctrinated beliefs, it should also involve an interrogation of the politics one is embroiled in as a result of one's indoctrination. In what follows we offer a brief preliminary characterization of some of the ways in which epistemic and political concerns interact with respect to the effects of indoctrination.

³⁸ Allen Buchanan describes his own experience with this sort of process. In coming to reject the racist worldview which he was indoctrinated into as a child, Buchanan describes how moving away—geographically—from his deeply racist community of origin initiated the transformation. "I left this toxic social environment at the age of eighteen, and came to understand that the racist worldview that had been inculcated in me was built on a web of false beliefs about natural differences between blacks and whites. My first reaction was a bitter sense of betrayal: Those I had trusted and looked up to—my parents, aunts and uncles, pastor, teachers, and local government officials—had been sources of dangerous error, not truth" (Buchanan 2004, p. 96).

6.1 Indoctrination as a pathway to wrongful treatment

The introductory example, about Ernest the anti-Suffragette minister, straightforwardly illustrates the idea that indoctrination can be used to inculcate beliefs that underwrite an oppressive and discriminatory politics. Insofar as indoctrination should be characterized as a pathway to oppression, as exemplified in such a case, we'll just advance a modest conjecture. Practices of indoctrination like those described in Sect. 4 aren't always used to inculcate oppressive political views, and such views don't only result from indoctrination. However, as compared to relatively non-coercive educational practices, and to other methods of belief-acquisition, it's more likely in a given case, in our world, that beliefs acquired via indoctrination will be in the service of an oppressive politics. If that's right, then when an agent comes to see her beliefs as a product of indoctrination, this gives her a *pro tanto* reason to regard it as more likely than before that those beliefs are implicated in an oppressive politics, e.g. as a source of legitimizing or justifying force within that politics. And hence it's appropriate for the process of rational self-interrogation that's elicited by coming to regard one's beliefs as a product of indoctrination to be accompanied by a corresponding process of political reevaluation.

6.2 Indoctrination as a mode of wrongful treatment

Indoctrination can also be a form of wrongful treatment in itself, insofar as it impairs or subverts people's intellectual autonomy. In acquiring a system of beliefs, in formulating a conception of the good, and in developing the underlying intellectual capacities that are necessary for both of these things, people should be free from coercive intellectual manipulation. Claims like these are most naturally situated within an explicitly Liberal political morality, and the conception of human intellectual autonomy that these norms rest upon figures prominently in Liberal theorizing about freedom of speech and thought.³⁹ But endorsing these ideas doesn't require any commitment to Liberalism as such. Under a reasonably broad range of political values, it will be regarded as non-trivially harmful to subject children (or, indeed, adults) to the kind of indoctrinating practices characterized in Sect. 4. Where an Etiological Challenge calls the rational standing of a Target Belief into question by provoking Indoctrination Anxiety, it can thus simultaneously prompt the agent to reflect upon whether she has been subjected to some form of maltreatment in the process of her education, and to consider what steps might be required in order to remedy any resultant harms.

6.3 Indoctrination and epistemic injustice

Indoctrination can contribute to both testimonial and hermeneutical epistemic injustice. *Testimonial injustice* occurs "when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (Fricker 2007, p. 1). The paradigmatic case of

³⁹ A significant recent example of this approach in free speech theory is Shiffrin (2014).

this is one in which someone “receives a credibility deficit *owing to identity prejudice* in the hearer” (Ibid, p. 28). This connects with one of the characteristic practices of indoctrination identified in Sect. 4, namely *Credibility-Prejudicing*, in which indoctrinated subjects are encouraged to prejudicially accord high/low credibility to those who accept/reject Target Beliefs. Whether these prejudices track society-wide prejudices (e.g. along ethnic lines), or whether they instead track more idiosyncratic sectarian biases (e.g. ‘don’t trust people who reject our faith’), subjects of indoctrination are in either case acculturated into perpetrating testimonial injustices. *Hermeneutical injustice* occurs “when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (Ibid, p. 1); the victim of hermeneutical injustice is left “unable to make communicatively intelligible something which is particularly in his or her interests to be able to render intelligible” (Ibid, p. 162). Indoctrination can contribute to this in at least two ways. First, in closed sectarian communities, indoctrinating practices can be used to deprive people of explanatory resources which would help them understand the idiosyncratic or marginalizing aspects of their experiences. Second, indoctrinating practices can prevent people from accessing tools of critical self-examination that would help them recognize the very fact of their having been indoctrinated. Practices of *Deterrence*, in which students are discouraged from asking critical questions and entertaining doubts, seem likely to be especially potent in effecting these kinds of hermeneutical deficits.⁴⁰ Etiological Challenges, understood as provocations of Indoctrination Anxiety, can help subjects overcome these forms of epistemic injustice. Recognizing your beliefs—the ones that have implications for the relative credibility of people in different social groups—as a product of indoctrination, calls for you to reassess your credibility assignments. And that recognition may also help you overcome hermeneutical injustice, even if just by helping you to see yourself as hermeneutically under-resourced. Challenges that make salient the likelihood of your being indoctrinated can thus make some contribution to the cultivation of the epistemic virtues—testimonial justice and hermeneutical justice—that militate against these two forms of injustice.⁴¹

6.4 Indoctrination and the imperative of integration

When someone has had an ideological creed instilled in her by a narrow sectarian community, as opposed to having been acculturated into an ideology that’s widely accepted in the society at large, it will be easier for her to reevaluate her commitment to the beliefs in question. This is because sometimes in the sectarian case, but rarely in the society-wide case, the agent can seek to spend time in different social circles wherein her original belief-system isn’t the norm. An appropriate response to Indoctrination Anxiety thus dovetails with what is, on a popular line of thought in recent non-ideal political theory, one of the principal ethical imperatives that obtains in contemporary multicultural societies, where segregation along ethnic or cultural lines structures our informal

⁴⁰ The use of isolating strategies is relevant here again; see note 18.

⁴¹ See *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapter 4. Of course, as Fricker makes clear, inculcating these virtues may require more than merely recognizing oneself as having fallen prey to the corresponding vices.

social hierarchies. Elizabeth Anderson identifies a series of complementary remedial aims—e.g. greater democratic integrity, improved access to opportunity, more egalitarian welfare outcomes, reduced discrimination, and more effective education—that are promoted via the integration—i.e. the realization of “comprehensive intergroup association on terms of equality” (2010, p. 112)—of divided societies. Programs of indoctrination aimed at insulating sectarian communities from outside influence, e.g. via the use of *Affective-Conditioning* or *Allegiance-Building*, can stabilize cultural segregation, and that by itself is a reason for a politics of anti-segregation to oppose them. But the grounds for opposition run deeper; Anderson explicitly identifies ‘epistemic diversity’ and ‘plural sources of justificatory accountability’ as important causal pathways towards the realization of proper social integration (Ibid, pp. 127–34). What this suggests is that the political and epistemological reasons to favor integration—and to oppose (certain paradigmatic uses of) indoctrination—are not merely convergent, but interdependent. Etiological Challenges express demands that reflect this interdependence; demands not only to reexamine the grounds of our beliefs, but to consider how our political commitments may owe to our having been acculturated in invidious conditions of segregation.

7 Conclusion

The literature on Etiological Challenges has interpreted the force of these challenges as boiling down to a kind of generic reminder to engage in various types of intellectual self-monitoring. But Etiological Challenges can and should be thought of as confronting their recipients with a deeper, more elusive demand: to try to determine whether one’s ability to engage in intellectual self-monitoring might have been compromised all along, by one’s having been subjected to a program of indoctrination that has impaired one’s ability to fairly assess considerations that tell against one’s prior commitments. And this opens up a connection between the epistemological implications of Etiological Challenges and a range of political issues. These interconnections are discernible in the examples in the literature that illustrate the concerns raised by Etiological Challenges, and also in our opening example. When we think of Ernest’s beliefs about women and their right to vote, we don’t regard his standpoint as one that merely fails to reflect an appropriate level of rational self-monitoring. We worry that his beliefs have been systematically trained towards affirming a preordained set of dogmas, and we see these beliefs as underwriting or legitimizing a corresponding set of malign political commitments. Our analysis of Etiological Challenges and of their normative implications is an attempt to do justice to this sort of understanding of such cases, and to reorient people’s thinking about what a remedial response to the epistemic and political ills that are manifested in such cases would actually require.

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