How problematic is brainwashing?

The Concept

Brainwashing .. is more generally applied to any technique designed to manipulate human thought or action against the desire, will, or knowledge of the individual. By controlling the physical and social environment, an attempt is made to destroy loyalties to any unfavourable groups or individuals, to demonstrate to the individual that his attitudes and patterns of thinking are incorrect and must be changed, and to develop loyalty and unquestioning obedience to the ruling party ..

The techniques .. typically involve isolation from former associates and sources of information; an exacting regimen requiring absolute obedience and humility; strong social pressures and rewards for cooperation; physical and psychological punishments for non- cooperation ..

(Britannica)

Totalitarian regimes and cults have clearly attracted the strongest accusations, though colloquially we see it applied more widely e.g. in terrorism, human trafficking, ideologies, etc .. If we sidestep the controversy over its existence in a pure form and assume the concept has at least philosophical relevance, what part does it play in today's world?

Questions

- Offenders - e.g. youngsters Patty Hearst and Lee Boyd Malvo - have often failed in using it as a defence. To what extent are we responsible for being suggestible? At what age do we become so?

- Without bodily involvement can it truly operate against someone's will e.g. did the intrusive hours of state tv and patriotic songs in prison have any chance in changing Navalny's mind?

- To what extent does truth in the 'inserted' thoughts mitigate an infringement? Does *deprogramming* simply mean *reprogramming*?

- In the recent UK debate over assisted dying some feared the choices of a minority would cheapen life and change the way everyone viewed death. Can we avoid affecting other's views even when we don't consider ourselves to be acting politically?

- If brainwashing is taking ownership of another's thinking is there a polar opposite e.g. in journalism or education? How can we protect our minds?