

Confirmation Bias, “Expert Consensus,” and Plato’s Cave

6 MIN • YOUTUBE • [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=ArMBZr35rV0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArMBZr35rV0)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArMBZr35rV0>

SUMMARY

Plato's allegory of the cave illustrates the dangers of ignorance and the human tendency to accept a distorted version of reality. Through the metaphor of prisoners mistaking shadows for reality, Plato highlights how challenging established beliefs can lead to ostracism and even violence against those who seek to reveal the truth. This concept remains relevant today, as societal pressures often suppress dissenting opinions, leading to collective illusions that can harm free society.

- *The cave represents ignorance, with prisoners mistaking shadows for reality.*
- *An escaped prisoner symbolizes the pursuit of truth and the challenges faced when returning to share it.*
- *Plato suggests that society often rejects those who challenge the consensus, fearing the disruption of their worldview.*
- *Collective illusions occur when individuals believe they are in the minority, leading to decisions contrary to their values.*
- *Historical examples, such as the backlash against dissenting voices during COVID-19, illustrate the dangers of suppressing debate.*
- *Socrates, as a martyr for free speech, exemplifies the risks of questioning authority and the consequences of open debate.*
- *The allegory serves as a warning about the importance of challenging consensus to uncover truth and maintain a free society.*

The cave appears in Plato's Republic book 7 and the idea of it is simple but profound. Plato tells us to imagine a cave and then imagine prisoners in that cave chained up facing a wall for their entire lives. Behind the prisoners there's a fire casting shadows onto the wall. Here's where it gets well philosophical. The prisoners think those shadows are reality because the shadows are all the prisoners have ever seen. Which makes perfect sense when you think about it.

If all you ever saw were those shadows, of course you would think they were real actual things, wouldn't you? You wouldn't know any better. Plato continues the mental exercise and suggests this idea. What if a prisoner were to escape, leave the cave, and see the real world? Then what if he returned and told the rest of the prisoners what he had seen? What would happen? Plato gets pretty dark at this point. >> We will not go.

>> Because what he theorizes is that the prisoners would reject the person who escaped, the person who learned the truth about the shadows, because the truth would shatter their worldview. He even speculates the other prisoners might kill the person who did nothing more than tell them what was real, tell them the truth. Pretty

bleak stuff. So what's the lesson here? Why does this matter today? Well, even thousands of years ago, Plato understood the way human beings trend towards consensus and confirmation bias.

Now, look, plenty of times there's good reasons for this. It can keep us safe. People can get more things done more efficiently when groups of us agree instead of constantly being at each other's throats. It's also more efficient since changing our minds takes a lot of neural energy and effort. You need neural energy to be able to go and contemplate something that is very different to what you've thought is the truth. You are encountering new information and your prefrontal cortex now has to make new connections. Now, if you've done these things before, you've got a neural pathway. You know exactly how it happens and you save energy.

That's what a habit is. A habit is formed so that you don't have to use a lot of neural energy. >> But it also sometimes leads to us believing lies like the prisoners in that cave. And even when we aren't sure about the consensus, we can often keep silent because we fear we're in the minority when in fact what we believe is actually broadly shared. This is what psychologist Todd Rose calls collective illusions. The majority of people in a group believe the majority think something that they don't. They lead individuals to make decisions that are contrary to their private values. And as a result, the entire group can end up doing something that almost nobody wants, which is fatal to free society.

As social creatures, most people are deeply, biologically, and psychologically inclined to go along with the crowd, right or wrong, and ostracize those who don't. Plato understood the extreme danger of being a person who challenges the consensus. And that holds true today as much as it ever did. Just ask the doctors who dared challenge the medical experts during COVID. People like Dr. Jay Bodacharia, who's been on this show, and the other authors of the Great Bington Declaration. They were among the few who opposed COVID lockdowns and mask mandates when the entire establishment was in favor of them. And like the mythical prisoner who escaped Plato's cave and returned with the truth, the authors of the declaration were pillaried. Anthony Fouchy called the declaration ridiculous, TOTAL NONSENSE, AND VERY DANGEROUS. The so-called experts did not want debate. They tried to stop it at every turn. We all remember the phrase trust the science and Fouch's infamous proclamation.

They're really criticizing science because I represent science. As we now know, Bodaria and his allies were exactly right. It turns out we should have had more debate at the time. Debate is how we break the spell of collective illusions and discover truth. Instead, we unleashed the hell of co authoritarianism on the world, and we and our kids are still suffering for it to this very day. Plato understood human nature all too well, the way we sometimes kill the messenger. His mentor, Socrates, actually was killed not long before Plato wrote the cave allegory. accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and worshiping false gods. He was put on trial, lost, and famously ordered to drink poison hemlock. That was all she wrote for Socrates.

There's a lot of complexity and debate around the reasons for his trial and execution, but what we know for sure serves as a really good warning for today. Socrates made a lot of enemies because he was constantly questioning powerful and influential people in public. In fact, Plato quoted Socrates as saying, "I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long I arouse and persuade and reproach each one of you." Put another way,

he embarrassed politicians and the elite, which can be a pretty bad move, sometimes fatal, as we've seen throughout history through to today.

Socrates can be seen as a martyr for free speech and a symbol of what happens when a society punishes open debate. If you like this clip, you should check out the full video and all the other great content we've got at Dad Saves America. So, be sure to hit the like button, subscribe, and ring that bell. So you won't miss our new stuff as it drops each week.