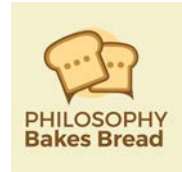


A Slice of Philosophically Baked Bread

A Companion One-Sheet to the “Philosophy Bakes Bread” Podcast

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Episode 1: The Molemen & Plato’s Cave Today

Imagine people who have been imprisoned since birth. They share a cell that is completely dark save for one wall, which is illuminated by an unseen source of light. Prison guards, other prisoners, boxes, carts, and so on pass between the light and the wall casting shadows. The inmates are incapable of interacting with each other except through speech, and all these prisoners see are shadows on the wall. These people come to name the shadows, have conversations about them, and take them to be real objects, as the shadow world is the only world they have known.

One day, one of the prisoners escapes and sees that some prison guards have been passing shapes in front of a fire, creating the images on the wall. She comes to see the shadows for what they are, partial representations of real things, only previously perceived in rough shapes and approximations. The freed prisoner escapes the prison itself and sees, for the first time, the sunlit world. At first, the sun light causes our escapee to squint and her vision is blurry. She experiences pain, irritation, and even a longing for the comfort of her familiar cell. She is tempted to return to her former life. However, after a time, her eyes adjust, and she comes to see things directly, rather than as shadows. She comes to see real trees, cars, and so on, and to know the difference between shadows and the things that cast them. The philosopher is the person who turns away from the shadows on the wall and who seeks the truth, rather than accepting without question manipulated, limited representations of real things. ([Plato’s Cave, a selection from Republic](#))

I. Bread Baking Questions:

- (1) What has the escapee learned after leaving the prison? How would you feel in this scenario?
- (2) Once she has left the prison, why might the escapee be tempted to return? What might this say about the nature of education or about learning new things in general?
- (3) After she adjusts to the world and comes to see things directly, *could* she be satisfied returning to her former life? *Should* she be satisfied with her new life? Why or why not?
- (4) In the rest of Plato’s story, the philosopher feels compelled to return to cave, to *free* and *educate* the people left behind about the true nature of reality. *Would* you feel the same compulsion? *Should* you? What might this say about our ethical obligations to others?
- (5) If someone told you things that contradicted experiences you’ve had in life, how would you react? Plato’s Socrates in the story says that the prisoners would want to kill the returned escapee, professing new claims that threaten their comfort and challenge their understanding of the world. Why would he say that? Is he right?
- (6) Are there beliefs that might be considered shadows on the wall, manipulations or accepted beliefs based on false or indirect evidence? What does Plato’s tale have to say about issues like climate change denial, vaccination claims, or the notion of alternative facts?

1) Alternative facts

[January 22, 2017, on Meet the Press](#), Chuck Todd and Kelly Ann Conway representing the Trump administration talked about the President's and Press Secretary's comments about for the turnout for President's inauguration.

- "You're saying it's a falsehood and Sean Spicer, our press secretary, gave alternative facts to that."
– Kellyanne Conway
- "Alternative facts are not facts. They are falsehoods." – Chuck Todd

Questions: Do you think the news media can communicate the truth? Or are reports always dependent on a perspective? If they can, what role might professional standards of reporting play in communicating facts or truths? If perspectives are always involved, what does that say about objectivity? Is the type of story relevant to answering these questions? Does a story about crowd sizes differ in some way from a story about a crime or political report?

2) Vaccines

- "Time magazine's article on the autism debate reports that the experts are certain 'vaccines don't cause autism; they don't injure children; they are the pillar of modern public health.' I say, 'that's a lie and we're sick of it.'" – Jenny McCarthy, in [Washington Post](#), 4/16/14.
- "If you ask a parent of an autistic child if they want the measles or the autism, we will stand in line for the [!^\$%ing] measles." – Jenny McCarthy, in [Time Magazine](#), 4/1/09.
- "A now-retracted British study that linked autism to childhood vaccines was an 'elaborate fraud' that has done long-lasting damage to public health, a leading medical publication reported Wednesday. An investigation published by the British medical journal BMJ concludes the study's author, Dr. Andrew Wakefield, misrepresented or altered the medical histories of all 12 of the patients whose cases formed the basis of the 1998 study" – from "[Retracted autism study an 'elaborate fraud,' British journal finds](#)," CNN, 1/5/11.

Questions: Should moral considerations play a part in what we take to be true or false? What role does doubt play in the decision to vaccinate one's child? Should parents always trust their doctor's opinions? When you are in doubt, what challenge does that pose for your inclination to act, such as to choose to vaccinate children? When is doubt healthy? When is it helpful, versus unhelpful?

3) Climate Change and Denial

- "Well, I think the climate change is just a very, very expensive form of tax. A lot of people are making a lot of money. I know much about climate change. I'd be—received environmental awards. And I often joke that this is done for the benefit of China. Obviously, I joke. But this is done for the benefit of China, because China does not do anything to help climate change. They burn everything you could burn; they couldn't care less. They have very—you know, their standards are nothing. But they—in the meantime, they can undercut us on price. So it's very hard on our business." – President Donald Trump, campaigning in June 2016, quoted in [Newsweek](#), 6/1/17.
- "According to an ongoing temperature analysis conducted by scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS), the average global temperature on Earth has increased by about 0.8° Celsius (1.4° Fahrenheit) since 1880. Two-thirds of the warming has occurred since 1975, at a rate of roughly 0.15-0.20°C per decade." – [NASA's earth observatory data](#)

Questions: Should one's circumstances play a part in whether we accept a report as true or false? How much justification, if any, do we need to say that something is true or false? What do we say to people who disregard evidence that challenges their beliefs?