

Challenge Your Opinions

If it remains true, as Socrates said thousands of years ago, that the unexamined life is not worth living, then it's always an appropriate time to question one's own beliefs and opinions and, sometimes, to change them. And maybe by doing so, you will find your wisdom expanding and learn to change yourself.

BY DAN D. GARTZKE

Nobody gets everything right the first time, every time, and all of us should have the freedom to question and change our former opinions from time to time.

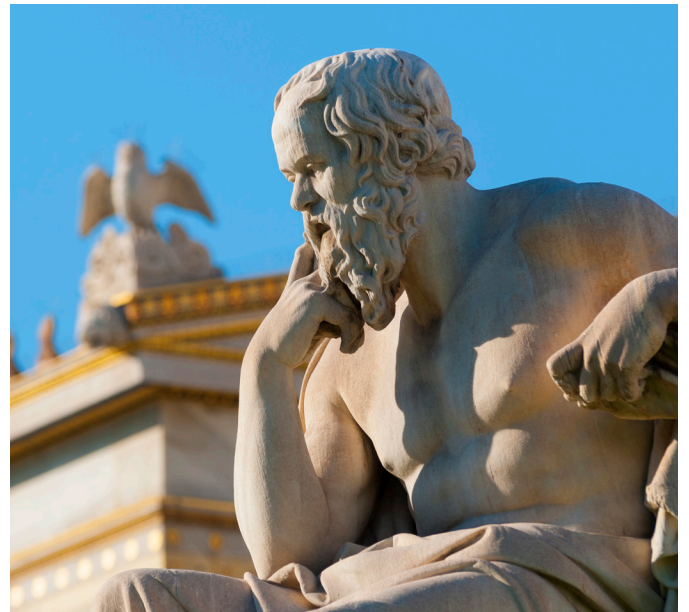
The longer I live, the more I recognize that new facts often come to light over time that can affect my opinions.

I am not the same person I was just 10 years ago, and certainly not when I was in high school in the 1970s. I think back to some of the positions I held back then, some of my statements, and question my younger self.

The world is simply not the same, and new facts present new perspectives. When the underlying facts change, any thoughtful person (which I like to consider myself) will always reexamine their opinions and their beliefs. It gives us the opportunity to explore where those original opinions and beliefs came from and whether we still hold them. Sometimes reexamination establishes the desire to stick with our original opinion, but sometimes reexamination shows us that however strongly we held a belief, it no longer makes sense and we can reject it. I understand that British economist John Maynard Keynes once said, "when the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?"

I raise this here because I am bothered by the prevalence of attempts to "cancel" or censure people for past beliefs. Cancel culture is a form of public shaming that ignores nuance and can stifle free speech.

Our civil society requires discourse and discussion. We value the free exchange of ideas and honest debate. We do not and cannot shut down or ignore someone with whom we disagree. Instead, we should seek honestly and forthrightly to engage them in discussion.



Maybe we can convince them to change their mind, but maybe we are the ones who will be convinced. No one has all the answers the first time, every time.

Allow yourself to make your own mistakes and to learn from them. Just as importantly, do not cut off contact from others or cancel them just because you disagree. That is intolerance and precludes any opportunity to challenge our own opinions and either reinforce them or discard them if they are no longer valid. And it most likely will not result in the person with whom you disagree changing their mind.

We can all expand our viewpoints by hearing from others. **WL**



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