

The Plague of Conformity: How a Culture Forgot How to Think



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There have been many plagues throughout human history. The Black Death. Influenza epidemics that swept nations like winter storms. Ancient fevers that reshaped continents and toppled kingdoms.

Those were biological plagues. They came from outside us. We now look back on them as trials humanity endured and overcame.

The plague we face today is different

It does not come for the body first. It comes for the mind.

It does not kill with fever or infection, but through distraction and disintegration. It does not empty streets; it empties the interior world. It does not destroy civilizations through violence, but by slowly dulling their ability to think.

This plague looks like convenience. It feels like stimulation. It sounds like progress.



But it is the erosion of depth.

We are living in the most digitally informed yet intellectually shallow era in human history. Entire libraries rest at our fingertips, yet we scroll as if meaning is something we are trying to escape.

Information floods us. But nothing roots. Nothing synthesizes. Nothing transforms.

This is not an accident. This is a design.

| *The unexamined life is not worth living. — Socrates*

The Engineered Collapse of Attention

The modern mind is bombarded with micro-stimuli designed to hijack the dopamine system. Rapid scrolling activates a neurological loop: stimulation without satisfaction. The reward circuit fires, but never completes. The brain learns to crave newness instead of truth. Novelty becomes more desirable than meaning.

Repeated thousands of times a day, this rewires the prefrontal cortex itself.

The result is not merely distraction. It is the shrinking of the mind's ability to hold complexity.

The brain becomes trained to skim, react, scroll, and forget. We develop breadth without depth. Awareness without understanding. Opinion without reflection.

A mind that cannot be still cannot think.

A mind that cannot think cannot doubt.

A mind that cannot doubt cannot discern.

And a mind that cannot discern is the perfect subject of conformity.

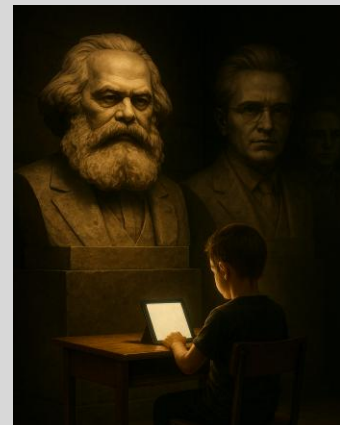
This is how culture is shaped now. Not through coercion but through consent without awareness. Not through force but through attention capture.

When a society turns from the pursuit of wisdom to the pursuit of stimulation, the soul becomes disordered.

— Plato

Gramsci would be smiling. He taught that political revolutions need not seize governments when they can seize consciousness. Control cultural institutions. Shape the imagination. Influence language. And people will police their own minds.

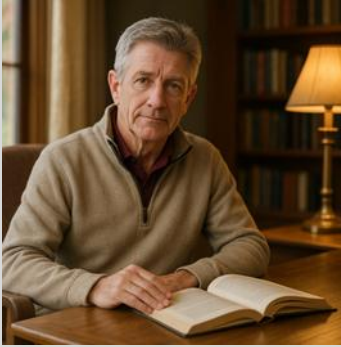
Socrates once said that the unexamined life is not worth living.





Today, the unexamined life is not just common.
It is encouraged. Normalized. Marketed.

My Place in This Landscape



I do not write as one immune to these pressures, but as one who has resisted them.

I have questioned the premature medicalization of identity, the over-prescribing of psychotropics, the prioritizing of optics over understanding, performance over presence, and compliance over curiosity.

Not to reject progress, but to protect meaning inside progress.

We now know the difficulty of deprescribing what was prescribed too quickly. We now understand that symptoms are not simply enemies to silence, but messages to interpret.

I have watched children and adults alike become separated from their own inner worlds, not through cruelty, but through well-intentioned haste.

| *Doubt is not a threat to truth. It is the beginning of responsibility. —*
Descartes

And Yes, Our Workplace Is Not Immune

Even in Christian, mission-driven environments like ours, the quiet pull of conformity is real. Not because anyone lacks conviction or goodwill, but because comfort is easier than depth.

There are moments, and we have all felt them, where the concern for dollars outweighs the concern for formation. Where Box1 budgeting shapes Box1 values instead of the values shaping the budget.

We hesitate to invest in training materials, including the books that carry the depth of the work, as well as in staff development and ongoing formation. Not because we doubt their value, but because resources feel tight, and so we unintentionally reduce the work to what is financially comfortable rather than what is clinically and spiritually necessary.



We sometimes allow cultural patterns to continue simply because naming them feels disruptive. Careless or coarse speech. Back-channel frustrations. Passive dismissiveness. Humor that undermines belonging.

Not because we approve of these things, but because addressing them requires courage, presence, and time.

Anything we refuse to name grows roots.

Clinically, we know the tension around prescribing and deprescribing. This is not about intelligence or intention, but about shared altitude.

When we avoid reflective dialogue because we fear bruising egos or stepping into another's professional lane, the patient becomes secondary to professional comfort. Informed consent becomes fragmented.

No single clinician sees the whole picture alone.

True informed consent requires shared perspective, shared humility, and the patient at the center of the process, not on the periphery of it.

This is not criticism. This is stewardship.

If we do not reflect together intentionally and courageously, we drift into the very conformity we lament: conformity to ease, conformity to speed, conformity to optics, conformity to ego safety.

But the work we do is sacred. Sacred work cannot be done cheaply, quickly, or unreflectively.

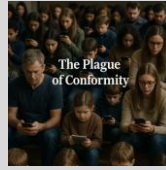
| *Healing requires courage. Courage requires truth. Truth requires stillness.*

A Call to Protect the Interior World

We are among the last stewards of the inner life.

If we lose the capacity to think deeply, ask difficult questions, and reflect courageously, then the culture loses its memory of wisdom itself.

Do not rush. Do not trade discernment for approval. Do not settle for the appearance of unity over the pursuit of truth. Protect the contemplative space. Protect the slow mind. Protect the conditions where identity and healing can unfold.



| *Above all else, guard your heart, for from it flows the wellspring of life. — Proverbs 4:23*

Conclusion — Choosing the Way of Depth

| *The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often. And sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself. — Friedrich Nietzsche*

| *Be still and know. — Psalm 46:10*

To be still is to resist the plague. To know is to reclaim the interior life. To think is to remain human.



May we choose depth over ease, integrity over optics, reflection over reaction, formation over conformity.

Not to set ourselves apart, but to remain awake.

Healing is not the work of efficiency. It is the work of presence.

May we be those people. May we cultivate such places. May we steward such work.

Together.