

Is Common Sense Becoming Uncommon?

How many legs does a dog have if you call his tail a leg?

Four, because even if you call it a leg, it's still a tail.

– Abraham Lincoln

P.J. O'Rourke once wrote, "Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys."

Common sense tells us the second half of this analogy is on its face a bad mix. Nothing good follows the mixing of teenage boys, alcohol, and cars. Our laws recognize this as a fact, a truth, by establishing minimum age requirements for driving and drinking.

Our Founding Fathers recognized the truth of the other half of this analogy. Give a government too much power and too much money, and you are asking for a dictatorship of one kind or another, soft or hard, but nevertheless a dictatorship.

In his short book *Reclaiming Common Sense: Finding Truth in a Post-Truth World*, Robert Curry gives readers a brisk but effective defense of common sense, truth, and reality. Using the quote from P.J. O'Rourke and several dozen other sources, he takes on the era we now inhabit, which more and more people describe as "post-truth."

As Curry points out, we use common sense in our everyday lives in making hundreds of decisions a day. An astrophysicist may be as bright as one of the stars she studies, but common sense tells her she must still perform the mundane rituals of life – making coffee, dressing for work, following the route to her lab – if she is to match her life to reality.

Most of us recognize that “common sense is the foundation of thinking and of human action.” If someone stands atop a 40-story building and declares he can fly, common sense tells us that unless we stop him he will drop like a stone. If we hand a butcher knife to a three-year-old, common sense would drive our relatives and friends to intervene. If we wake one morning and tell our spouse we telecommunicated with President Trump for three hours before dawn, and we meant it, common sense will tell her she needs to cart us off to the funny farm.

Curry tells us that Americans were once “common-sense realist[s],” citing various historians and academics who were of this school. In the Declaration of Independence, as Curry states, Jefferson wrote the words, “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Self-evident truths mean truths that exist in and of themselves, and are universally recognized.

Except, apparently, in a post-truth society.

The relativism cultivated in universities over the last half century has spread into our corporations, our workplaces, and our government. Its dictates are enforced in some cases by law, in other instances by politically correct mobs smearing anyone opposing them. “The ruling class,” Curry notes, “in and out of government is trying to impose linguistic realism on ordinary people, by official edicts and by social pressure.

Linguistic realism means that what “people say about themselves and others has more reality than any objective facts.” It doesn’t matter if our claims fly in the face of reality. Truth is what we say it is.

Therefore, we have the following:

Common sense tells us there is a difference between males and females, yet our culture, and sometimes the law, demand that

we allow others to declare their gender.

Common sense tells us that a celebrity with millions in the bank is a success, yet if he claims to be oppressed, we must believe him.

Common sense tells us that trillions of dollars of debt is dangerous, yet many applaud politicians who champion fantasy plans that will sink us into greater debt.

Common sense and past experience tell us that trusting medical concerns to the government will be a disaster, yet we have politicians screeching for universal health care coverage.

Common sense tells us we should protect our borders, yet plenty of people still call for allowing others to enter our country without documentation.

In Hans Christian Anderson's "The Emperor's New Clothes," two con men trick an emperor into believing that they have woven clothes for him invisible only to those unfit for office or stupid. As the emperor parades naked down the street, all the people are afraid to say anything for fear of being thought stupid. Finally the spell is broken when a little boy cries out, "But he's wearing no clothes at all!"

Where's that kid when we need him today?

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