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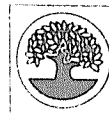
John Deely and Brooke Williams, Series Editors

COMMON SENSE

THE FOUNDATIONS FOR
SOCIAL SCIENCE

Edited by
Frits van Holthoorn
and
David R. Olson

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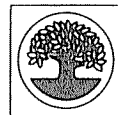


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Chapter 11

Common Sense and Social Structure: A Sociological View

Siegwart Lindenberg

Introduction

In sociology, common beliefs and values within a group have played such a prominent role that they have crowded out attention to a body of knowledge that is essential for *human* interaction within a group *and* across group boundaries: common sense. In this paper, I will first develop a concept of common sense that clearly indicates in what way commonsense knowledge must be conceived to be more than just a shared body of knowledge. Then I will discuss the functions of common sense with regard to human interaction. In my own value judgment, these functions constitute the most essential element of civilization. It is therefore important to ask: under what conditions is common sense likely to develop and under what conditions is it endangered? As I will argue, the biggest danger for common sense comes from two structural conditions: solidarity and power. How is it possible to neutralize these dangers? There are two major protective conditions for common sense: institutions (especially those pertaining to "acceptable evidence") and the social sciences.

What is Common Sense?

Intuitively, common sense refers to a common body of knowledge but is common sense simply any shared body of knowledge among a group of people, or is it something more specific than that? Our intuitive use of the term seems to require that common sense is something more specific than just a shared (common) body of knowledge. For example, we would not refer to the shared body of technical knowledge of physicists as "common sense." What, then, is the kind of shared knowledge that would fit our intuition about common sense?

The basis for the concept of common sense to be developed below

is formed by three fundamental assumptions: first, there is considerable uniformity of nature on this earth. Gravity operates virtually everywhere; most living things grow and decay; in most places there is a twenty-four hour cycle of day and night, etc. Second, there is considerable uniformity of human nature on this earth. Human beings have periodic desires for sleeping, eating and drinking, they have preferences and expectations, they get angry when certain expectations are frustrated and are happy when certain expectations are met; they are fallible but they can learn; they are subject to a life-cycle; etc. Third, there is considerable uniformity in human experience. This assumption is partially a derivative of the first two assumptions: the considerable uniformity of nature and human nature exposes people everywhere to similar regularities and because there is considerable uniformity of human nature, these regularities are experienced with considerable uniformity. Partially, the third assumption introduces an additional, substantive aspect: the juxtaposition of uniformity of nature and human nature is such that by and large human beings will always live in the company of other human beings, they will always experience scarcity of some kind, and will always be confronted with problems and problem solutions arising from the company of others and from scarcity. This, again, contributes to a considerable uniformity of human experience.

Since human beings learn from experience and since there is considerable uniformity in human experience, they cannot help acquiring knowledge that is *in principle* compatible. It is compatible only in principle because the way knowledge is acquired and the context into which the knowledge is placed (say, the concepts used and the world view integrating the knowledge) may prevent the compatibility of knowledge from being easily discovered. Nonetheless, there is an objective basis for compatible knowledge derived from human experience.

The most important ingredient of common sense, as I intend to use the term and as I believe intuitive use of the term would have it, is now isolated: its objective basis. But this is not enough. Imagine a group of people who believe that they are different from anybody else: they believe that they can magically manipulate nature so that it is thought to be discontinuous with nature anywhere else and they believe they are especially endowed with psychic qualities so that *their* human nature is thought to be different from anybody else's. On the basis of these beliefs, the

knowledge derived from "experience" in this group is coded in such a way that it is by definition different from the knowledge others could derive from experience: it is, to them, esoteric. By contrast, common sense, as the intuitive use of the term would have it, is knowledge expected to be available to all human beings *as human beings*. A first definition of common sense is now possible:

Common sense is a body of knowledge common to a group, pertaining to nature, human nature and social situations and thought to be rooted in a uniformity of human experience.

Thus, common sense is not just a shared body of knowledge and not just a shared body of knowledge objectively deriving from a uniformity of human experience. Common sense also contains the *meta-belief about its own source*. It is thereby incompatible with any categorical exceptions. No race, no ethnic group, no gender is in principle excluded from access to this body of knowledge and no special circumstances are needed to gain access to this kind of knowledge. Exceptions are individual (and extraordinary) circumstances or conditions such as to live in isolation or to be a fool. The former restricts exposure to experience, the latter restricts learning from experience. The three assumptions, forming the objective basis for common sense, assert that the meta-belief belonging to common sense has a veridical aspect. Once the belief exists, it guides the development of the body of knowledge belonging to common sense. It is a regulative belief bound to lead to discoveries and to have important consequences for other elements of belief-systems (e.g., world views) and for institutions. This aspect will be elaborated later.

There is still one ingredient missing. Imagine it is part of common sense that, given the absence of drugs, a person's character cannot radically change from one day to the next. Imagine further that you are in good standing and that one day your acquaintances call you a liar and devious character as, in fact, happened to the Jews in the Third Reich. You appeal to common sense that you could not have changed overnight but to no avail. Aside from indicating an extremely disturbing experience, this example shows that sharing a body of knowledge is not enough. A shared body of knowledge must also be *operative*, that is, one must be able to appeal to it successfully. The prime requirement for this is *coorientation* (mutuality): "I know that you know that I know." People must not only have the same knowledge but also know that they share it. An appeal to common sense depends upon the acknowledgement of its mutuality. This acknowledgement may be

come so unrewarding under certain circumstances that it will be denied, which renders the body of knowledge or parts thereof practically inoperative. This topic will also be discussed in further detail later on.

We now have the full definition of common sense: *Common sense is an operative body of knowledge, common to a group, pertaining to nature, human nature, and social situations and thought to be rooted in a uniformity of human experience* (see the Appendix for a comparison with other concepts of common sense).

Functions of Common Sense

Common sense may have many different functions, but I would like to concentrate on three: first, its baseline function; second, its reference function; third, its appeal function.

The baseline function

Because common sense is intentionally universal, it establishes a general baseline for human interaction. We all presumably share an understanding *because* we are human beings endowed with much the same nature living in a world with considerable uniformity. This presumption may be wrong in a particular instance, but the regulative belief itself cannot be falsified by this error. Rather, the content of the baseline changes. Common sense implies that there is always a basis for interaction *as equals*.

The reference function

When we are confronted with beliefs or assertions that seem counter to common sense we are sceptical about them. Common sense acts as a point of reference with which other beliefs and assertions are compared and tested for plausibility. For example, if we hear from a foreign traveller that in the land of Oz people don't eat and drink, that they never lie and never get angry, and that things don't fall if they are dropped, then we will be very sceptical. Why? The land of Oz is very far away and things may be different there but not *that* different. The tale violates our regulative belief about considerable uniformity of nature and human nature. Only a "fool," an individual exception from access to com-

monsense knowledge, would believe this tale. Being sceptical does not mean that a belief or assertion incompatible with common sense is necessarily rejected. Rather, it means that standards of evidence or standards for the credibility of the source or standards for the explanatory argument become more severe. Here other bodies of knowledge may become relevant for correcting commonsense knowledge *without* destroying its reference function. Suppose that someone believes that the twenty-four hour cycle of night and day is one of the uniformities of nature on this earth. He will be very sceptical about tales about countries where the sun does not rise or does not set for months. An explanation of the sun's strange behavior is possible *because* the uniformity of nature will correct his commonsense knowledge but leave its regulative belief intact. The possible interaction between the growth of specialized knowledge (science) and the growth of commonsense knowledge, indicated by this example, will concern us later on in more detail.

The appeal function

Common sense is, by definition, an operative body of knowledge. You can successfully appeal to it. Imagine that you are accused of murder. The evidence cited against you is that you are a member of a certain race living in the vicinity of where the murder was committed. You will appeal to the commonsense knowledge of your accusers. Where is the motive for murdering this person? People don't kill other people without any reason, and there are no categorical exceptions (such as a race) to this rule. In a way you appeal to the reference function of commonsense knowledge and thereby you request that the standard of evidence be raised relative to the standard your accusers used. Given common sense, your appeal or somebody else's appeal on your behalf, should be successful. It does not take much imagination to appreciate the importance of this appeal function. If it is impaired, the result is not an ordinary dispute over the truth of beliefs or assertions, it is a social catastrophe that blocks the baseline function of common sense.

Social Structure and Common Sense

Since common sense contains its own regulative belief and since this belief has a veridical aspect, common sense should grow with increasing contact between groups. The guiding (or regulative) belief that all human beings have access to a body of knowledge simply because they are human beings living in and with society must lead to discoveries of communality, given the veridical base of this belief. An utterly ethnocentric world view must be ameliorated as contacts with other ethnic groups intensify. With the growth of common sense, its three main functions will increasingly govern intergroup relations. This means a) that a basis comes into existence (or is expanded) on which members of different groups can interact as equals; b) that required standards of evidence concerning claims about "strange" characteristics or behavior of another group become more stringent; and c) that members of different groups can increasingly appeal to common sense vis-à-vis each other. This is no mean feat and may well be the single most important element of civilization.

Yet, the growth of common sense is by no means as automatic as the above picture may suggest. The regulative belief, namely that we all share an understanding because we are human beings, may be missing altogether, in which case it cannot guide the growth of commonsense knowledge. Or changes in the institutions and social structure may actually lead to a loss of commonsense knowledge. Orwell's *1984* is a book about a society in which common sense has been eradicated; and that is precisely the frightening feature of this society. Fascist society can also be characterized as a society in which commonsense knowledge has been so reduced that its three main functions are virtually inoperative in human interaction, not just across group boundaries but also within groups, even families. What, then, are the institutional and social-structural conditions that affect the growth of common sense? This question may be worth a lengthy monograph all by itself, but in the context of a short paper at least some main points can be mentioned.

Solidarity

Durkheim is the sociologist who has made "solidarity" one of the central concepts of this science. He argued that solidarity among people is first and foremost produced by what they have in com-

mon: their collective consciousness, that is, their shared norms and values. This has sometimes been interpreted to be "common sense," so that common sense and collective consciousness are actually the same thing. I would like to argue precisely the opposite: that common sense and collective consciousness are, up to a point, each other's enemies.

Strong solidarity within a group also means a strong we/they demarcation that militates against the operation of any of the three major functions of common sense across group boundaries. The stronger the solidarity within a group the less likely that there is a basis for interaction as equals across group boundaries, the more likely that the strangest tales about another group are believed and remain unchallenged (low standards of evidence concerning "strange" characteristics and behavior), and the less likely that the appeal of somebody from another group to common sense will be taken seriously.

But is it not the case, that at least *within* the solidarity group, a common sense (restricted to the group members) is operative the more so, the stronger the group's solidarity? Not likely. The common consciousness (including conscience) is a protected set of sentiments and beliefs that remains thus unexamined and undiscussed, being celebrated and reinforced in common rituals. In Durkheim's words, this set is endowed with awe; it is holy, being contrasted with the "profane" of everyday experience. As such, the common consciousness may have a baseline function, a reference function and an appeal function, but none of these functions refer to human (or group member) experience. The common consciousness may (and in all likelihood will) mask the influence of human experience on equality in interaction, the standards of evidence and the appeal to shared knowledge. For example, the common consciousness may contain the shared belief that the truth is revealed to certain persons of their group and not to others. The claims made by people with this privileged access will override anything the others have learned from experience.

The most fertile ground for common sense to develop is a weakening of solidarity within groups, coupled with a strong motivation to detect a communality across groups that is based on the uniformity of human experience. Historically, this motivation may have drawn its strongest impulse from the production and trade of consumer goods. The interest in expansion of markets puts a premium on the discovery of human communality, irrespective of any collective consciousness. It is not surprising that Adam

Smith linked the rational economic motivation (the desire to better one's position) to the ability to put one's self into the shoes of the other (sympathy).

It was said above that common sense and collective consciousness are contradictory "up to a point." By this is meant that the total lack of solidarity cannot be considered the ideal condition for the maintenance or growth of common sense. Mutual isolation does not easily lead to discovery of communality and leaves little interest in the other's experience. Weak solidarity as the result of cross-cutting social circles (Simmel) creates larger and more varied networks of communication. It therefore exposes the individual to a greater variety of human circumstances and establishes a broader base for the discovery of communality as well as differences. At the same time, the likelihood is lowered that a particular collective consciousness overrides common sense. As Durkheim himself observed, increased division of labor will reduce strong solidarity; therefore it should enhance the growth and use of commonsense knowledge.

Although there seems to be a secular trend of decreasing solidarity, at least in Western history, there have been many times in which solidarity increased rather than decreased. Times of war, nation building and the arrival of nationalism, and times of economic downturn are periods when solidarity increases within certain groups and weak solidarity vanishes between groups. What is common to these different phenomena is that they create higher "negative externalities." These externalities are interdependencies in which the action of one can have a considerable negative effect on the other. For instance, in times of war people become more dependent on each other in cooperating against the enemy. Failure to cooperate may become very dangerous for everyone in the group. Norms of cooperation and values identifying the group vis-à-vis the real or assumed threat (that creates the negative externalities) have become activated or established. In Durkheim's terminology, the common consciousness is thereby heightened. In these times, common sense, even if it was operative before, will be strongly reduced and thereby it will lose the effect on interaction. Standards of evidence will no longer become *more* stringent as claims about other people's characteristics and behavior become more outrageous; that is, people become gullible, and with the loss of this reference function, the baseline and appeal functions will vanish as well. Civilization will have taken a giant step backwards.

Power

Asymmetric social relationships are not conducive for the growth of common sense. When power governs social relations, the communality of human experience does not play a large role. Power can dictate and override common sense. In addition, hierarchical relationships reduce communication between levels: the greater the power difference the greater the reduction. In this sense, power has much the same effect as solidarity on common sense.

There is one particular way in which power can subtly but thoroughly corrupt common sense: through the control of language (communication). For instance, a state or a church can link important rewards and punishments to the use of language, regulating forms of salute, favoring certain concepts and punishing the use of others, forbidding certain topics, favoring certain forms of argument, regulating the meaning of words and gestures, etc. While such control of communication is never complete, it works much more thoroughly than most people in the situation are aware of because common sense is excluded from the transactions. In a slightly more fanciful way, we can say that transaction costs are lowest for the regulated language. If you want or need agreement without much fuss, you better stick to the regulated language; and everybody wants or needs agreement without much fuss many times a day. At first, one of the overriding experiences is the experience of duplicity, of saying things you don't really mean. Yet you cannot talk about it, because you would have to break out of the regulated language in order to do so, which will create even more trouble. Neither can you express that you think you both share this experience, nor can you appeal to this experience as belonging to common sense. In essence, the communality of experience becomes completely private and ineffable. Few people can keep this up for very long. Soon the regulated experience, validated in quick agreement, will become a stand-in except for the most intimate relationships. Not surprisingly, one of the salient features of 1984 is the complete regulation of language divorced from any experience whatsoever.

A similar effect can come about without central regulation in times of increasing solidarity. In these times, shifting transaction costs create a homogeneity of arguments. For example, in times of war or impending war, it will become increasingly costly to attempt to argue stringent standards of evidence regarding out-

rageous claims about the enemy. You would have to explain that by this you do not mean to be a traitor or to be disloyal or to be against your fatherland. After long explanations people still may not believe you. Even worse, you yourself may give anybody who argued like this a hard time. Agreements then become increasingly easier in one direction, crowding out all three functions of common sense.

In large groups, increasing solidarity and increasing power are likely to feed each other because cooperation requires coordination and powerholders exploit solidarity to reduce their governing costs. This combination increases the likelihood that the two effects against common sense come together, including the regulation of language. Unless there are strong restraints in favor of common sense, this double onslaught of power and solidarity will prove to be catastrophic for common sense and its three functions. The easier solidarity is built up in the face of a real or imagined threat and the larger the group in which it builds up the more likely that power and solidarity will combine against common sense. Restraints against that will be discussed shortly.

Before we turn to the possible safeguards for common sense, one ironic aspect of power has to be mentioned. Large scale power, be it by states or churches, can ironically contribute to the growth of common sense by homogenizing human conditions and thereby making communality more easily discoverable. For example, in the U.S.S.R. many different peoples have come (or been) under one rule and a particularly penetrating rule at that. Living conditions are thereby made more equal and human experiences are thus in principle more equal too. With a reduction in solidarity *and* in power, this homogeneity will actually turn out to be a fertile ground for the growth of common sense. The Christian church may have performed a similar feat in Europe.

Institutions

Where common sense is operative it cannot fail to find its way into constitution and law. Political institutions are a good example. They are either grounded in common sense, concerning the fallibility of men, their corruptibility, their good but fleeting intentions and so on, or they are grounded in the combination of power and solidarity. Common sense finds its way into a body of law if it has a strong influence on social relations; central to all of these is

the body of law governing evidence. This body will incorporate all three functions of common sense: the principal equality of men in their access to commonsense knowledge and in their basis for interaction, the raising of standards when claims are against common sense (although they may be compatible with the common consciousness), and the ability to appeal to shared common sense.

The body of law governing evidence may be the strongest bastion against sudden assaults on common sense. Once this body of law gives way, others will follow even if they are explicitly grounded in common sense. Regulation of language may indeed be the most effective weapon to undermine this body of law, because "evidence" is not simply "given." For example, if contradicting a policeman is *regulated* to mean disrespect for the state and its institutions (and punished as such), then evidence will soon be completely removed from its link to experience and to the regulative belief of a common understanding. Yet to the degree that common sense has crystallized in institutions, its demise under the attack by power and solidarity will be considerably slower.

Social sciences

Given a body of law in which common sense has crystallized, the most effective protection of common sense may come from the social sciences. These sciences are established on the idea that there is a considerable communality in human experience. Thus they share the regulative basis with common sense. The institutionalization of such sciences in a society is thereby politically and socially much more than just the addition of another science.

First of all, the standards of evidence concerning claims about characteristics and behavior of other groups are institutionalized and guarded by collegial criticism. Anthropology and descriptive sociology play an important part here. By themselves, however, these standards help common sense only indirectly: they render the reference function of common sense less necessary. Outrageous claims about other groups in the public debate can be countered by claims from social scientists who have studied these groups. While this is already an important safeguard against outrageous claims, it is not enough to protect common sense. For this protection, a second aspect of social sciences becomes essential.

Social scientists do not just describe but also attempt to explain.

Explanation is the process whereby very different phenomena are shown to derive from the same underlying uniformities. Customs, language codes, laws, values and norms etc., differ from social group to social group, often masking the uniformity of human nature and of human experience. What social scientists do is show that these differences in custom, language, code and manner, etc., are differences of circumstance which, *given* the uniformity of human nature and of human experience, produce the observed variety of social arrangements and social behavior. The more explanatory the social science the better it will demonstrate this relationship between uniformity of human nature and experience and the observed differences. It thereby reinforces the guiding idea of common sense and the three functions of common sense. Not surprisingly, the most successful social science is often called "commonsensical" which some, through ignorance or design, take to be a pejorative characteristic.

In any case, the conjunction of descriptive and explanatory social science will reinforce common sense directly if allowed to filter to the public through education and/or mass media. I know of no better defense of the social sciences and it should be easily understood why these sciences are considered potentially or actually subversive: common sense is subversive because it is directed against the effects of power and solidarity. A political system based on power and solidarity will therefore also not tolerate the growth of a descriptive *and* explanatory social science.

Summary and Conclusion

Because there are considerable uniformities in nature, human nature and human experience, it is likely that these uniformities will be discovered and knowledge pertaining to these uniformities will be thought to be accessible to all human beings. The body of knowledge about these uniformities, together with the belief about its source (human experience) is called common sense in a particular group if members of this group know they share the body of knowledge and the belief about its source. Intuitive understandings are compatible with this definition and some misunderstandings of other conceptions can be cleared up without destroying the intuitive understanding (see the Appendix).

The importance of common sense lies in its three main functions: the baseline function, the reference function and the appeal func-

tion. By virtue of the baseline function, there is always a basis for interacting as equals; by virtue of the reference function, standards of evidence are raised if descriptions about the world, and about social phenomena in particular, are incompatible with common sense; by virtue of the appeal function, human beings are responsive if others appeal to common sense, i.e., if they appeal to the baseline and reference function. An added value judgment of this author is that these three functions of common sense constitute the single most important element of civilization.

Because common sense contains its own regulative or guiding belief (*viz.*, about its source) and because this belief has a veridical base, it should grow. Yet there are some important social-structural obstacles to its growth: solidarity and power. Solidarity within a group increases the demarcation vis-à-vis other groups and thereby impairs all three functions of common sense. In addition, solidarity stresses common norms and values that override the influence of common sense. Power, by creating social distance, also impairs the three functions of common sense. The most devastating effect of power on common sense may be regulation of language which renders human experience inoperative in social interaction. The worst assault on common sense comes from a combination of power and solidarity, as happens in large social groups under threat.

There are two major safeguards of common sense that will considerably retard the onslaught of power and solidarity: institutions in which common sense has crystallized and the social sciences. Of all institutions, the body of law governing standards of evidence, seems to be the most important for the protection of common sense. The regulation of language, however, is a particular threat to this body of law, so that eventually power and solidarity will be able to undermine even those institutions built upon common sense.

Social sciences protect common sense in two ways. First, they have controlled standards of evidence concerning characteristics and behavior of other groups (descriptive social science), and second, they attempt to explain the variety of kinds of social arrangements and behavior found in different groups with reference to *uniformities* in human nature and experience (explanatory social science). The combination of these two ways reinforces the guiding belief of common sense and its three functions. To call social science explanations "commonsensical" is ultimately a compliment to both common sense and social science. When power and

solidarity are strong, the combination of descriptive and explanatory social science is usually suppressed. Common sense is, in effect, suppressed. With respect to the influence of power and solidarity on interaction, common sense is subversive.

If this line of argument is valid, a further conclusion can be drawn. Since common sense is subversive with regard to power and solidarity (and especially with regard to the combination of these two), it needs to be protected as a safeguard against the (combined) negative effects of power and solidarity. For this purpose, there are two telltale signs that indicate that common sense is under attack: when standards of evidence do not become more stringent, when claims about others deviate from common sense and when people and authorities think that social science is a luxury we cannot afford.

Appendix: Comparison to Other Concepts of Common Sense

It is useful to confront the concept of common sense developed in this paper with some issues connected with other concepts of common sense (see Holthoorn and Olson, in this volume). First, common sense as a *capacity to recognize self-evident truths*. This definition contains two elements: one, common sense as a human capacity, and second, reference to self-evident truths. It is clear that there is a large overlap between my definition and this one. The ability to appeal successfully to knowledge presumably available to all and not in need of further evidence or justification *simulates* a situation in which this knowledge is called self-evident and in which the ability to appeal to it successfully is ascribed to a human capacity in the other.

Yet, the definition is problematic. What is self-evident truth? That glass breaks? That God exists? That man has a right to happiness? That a bachelor is an unmarried man? "Self-evidence" in the sense of immediately intuited certainty, does not refer to any content and is in principle compatible with any content, including the belief ("truth") that certain races or ethnic groups have a different human nature from the rest. Without grounding common sense in human experience, including the meta-belief in a uniformity of human experience, one lets it degenerate into the human capacity to leave shared beliefs unquestioned. In itself this is not an uninteresting discovery about groups, as we know from Durkheim's studies on "conscience collective" (collective consciousness plus conscience). But Durkheim was concerned with a particular strong form of moral integration, not with common sense. As discussed in the main text, strong moral integration is likely to stand in the way of the development of common sense.

Secondly, opinions are divided about whether common sense is *universal or relative to a group*. In the light of my concept of common sense, it is possible to shift these problems in a progressive direction. Common sense is universal in two very different ways: on the one hand, its basis is factually universal; on the other hand its regulative component is intentionally universal. A uniformity of human experience creates a universal source of knowledge that is compatible in principle. But this does not mean that the compatibility is obvious, nor does it mean that all knowledge acquired from human experience is valid. Thus, what is universal is an objective uniformity of human experience, not knowledge of this uniformity. The regulative component of com-

mon sense is responsible for the other universality: the belief that there is a human uniformity of experience, that there is knowledge pertaining to this uniformity. Here, the universality is not objective but part of the belief and the belief itself is far from being universal. The body of knowledge attached to this belief is culturally relative. A group may have so little contact with contrary examples, that it mistakes certain cultural features to be universally human. For example, members of a small, homogeneous society experiencing no serious conflicts may adopt the mistaken belief that "human nature abhors conflict." When this society comes into regular contact with a society in which conflicts are considered the normal order of the day, its members will revise their commonsense knowledge, if they are guided by the regulative belief that what is not uniform cannot be part of *human* nature. Thus, while the basis of common sense is universal and its regulative component is intentionally universal, the body of knowledge of common sense is relative to time and place. The progressive problem shift consists of the following: don't ask whether common sense is universal or relative but ask: under what conditions is relative commonsense knowledge changed and what is the role of universal aspects in this change. The interesting dynamic of common sense derives from this juxtaposition of universality and relativity: whenever relativity is discovered it calls for a change in the body of knowledge. Because there is an objective basis, discovery itself is likely and the body of knowledge is likely to change in the direction of a better approximation to the objective basis.

Third, a related dispute concerns this question *whether common sense is "given" or whether it needs practice and education*. Human nature is given in both senses: as regularity to be experienced and as a set of basic capacities to process the experience. But knowledge from experience is never "given." It has to be acquired and in the process considerable mistakes can be made. Thus, practice, trial and error, is as essential for common sense as the given regularities and capacities. Of course, education can improve basic capacities, and thereby the learning efficiency of practice, as it can unnoticed uniformities. But education can also interfere with learning from experience by protecting beliefs against experience. The biggest danger of instruction is the possibility that individuals are taught to believe that phenomena *inaccessible to experience* are nonetheless part of "common sense." For example, the idea that the state is a volitional entity (setting its own goals and having its own purpose) and that this entity is accessible

to experience, cannot but corrupt common sense if people believe it. Mysticism eradicates the thin but important line between knowledge that is in principle accessible to all and esoteric knowledge. It will therefore destroy the workings of the meta-belief about the uniformities of human experience, suspending the three functions of common sense.