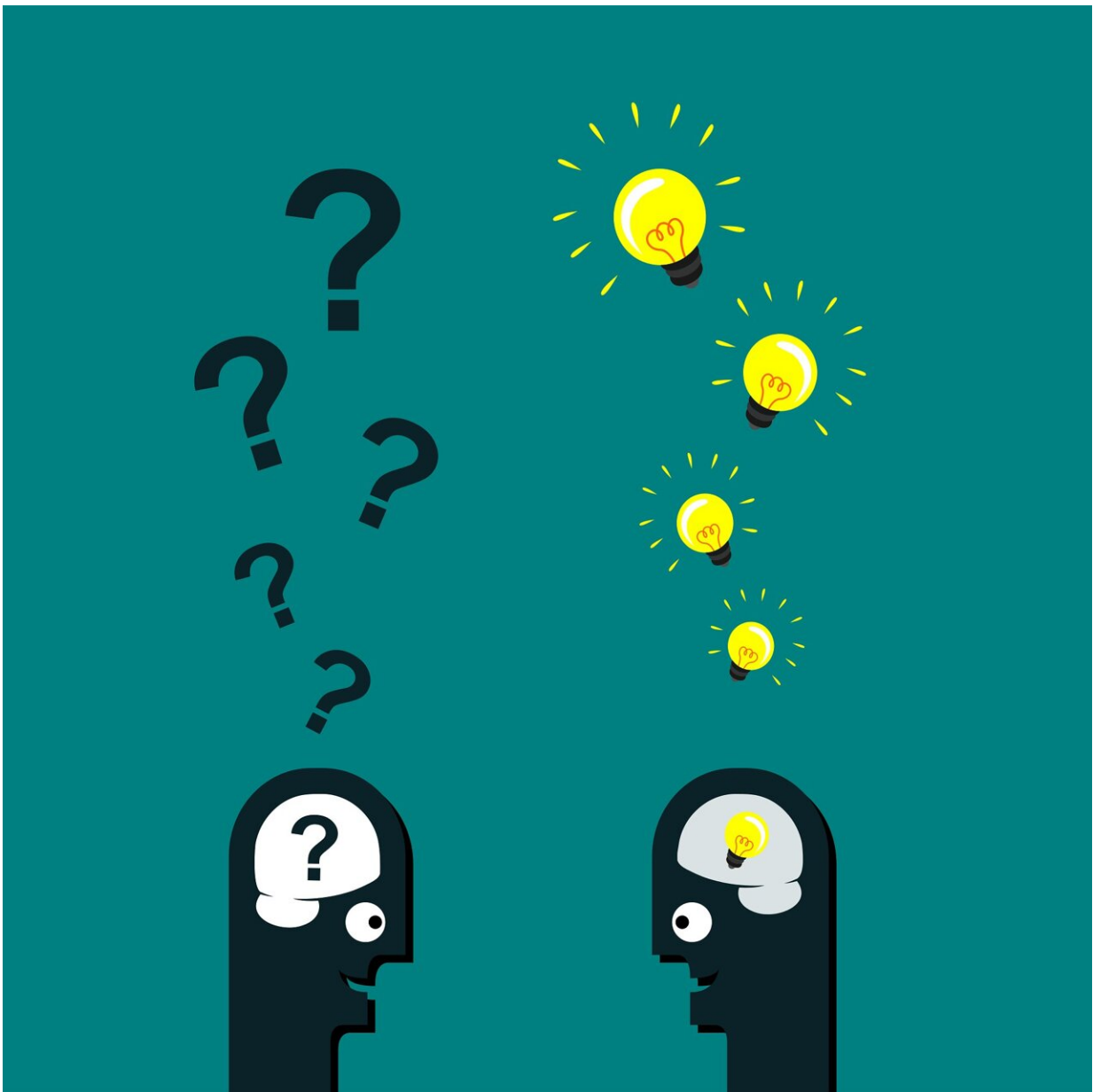


Common sense may depend on one's point of view

January 16 2024, by Bob Yirka



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A pair of social scientists at the University of Pennsylvania has found, via case study, that the term "common sense" may apply differently depending on perspective. In their study, [published](#) in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Mark Whiting and Duncan Watts used a case study to better understand how people use the term.

The term "common sense" may at first blush appear to be clear—it has for many years been a term people use to describe sensible understanding or sound judgment, even if they do not know why. When a person says it, they believe that a situation they are describing should be viewed by everyone with the same understanding. But Whiting and Watts have found that may not be the case.

To better understand what is meant by the phrase and how it may be used and perceived by others hearing it, the researchers conducted a [case study](#) involving 4,407 claims of common sense from multiple sources. They then asked 2,000 people to read the claims and to rate how common-sensical they felt each of them were. Some examples included "avoid close contact with [sick people](#)" and "all people are created equal."

The researchers found that there were major differences of opinion regarding whether or not a statement was an example of common sense. They also found that such opinions tended to differ less when they regarded facts, such as the number of sides in a triangle. A closer look at the responses suggested that the way a person viewed a topic had a major impact on whether they felt something was common-sensical or not.

For example, if a person did not believe all people were created equal, then they likely did not believe that saying so was common [sense](#). This,

the researchers suggest, indicates that a universal meaning of things described by the term does not exist. They conclude that their findings could prove useful in future social science research efforts, or more practically, in the development of better AI applications.

More information: Whiting, Mark E. et al, A framework for quantifying individual and collective common sense, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2024). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2309535121](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2309535121). www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.2309535121

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