

# Ignorance, Shmignorance

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: As I write, some of us turn to humor as a coping mechanism amid the horror that is the coronavirus pandemic. If by press time this piece lands poorly, I apologize in advance. If the coronavirus has claimed someone dear to you, you might want to skip this piece and read something better, a description that fits all other articles in this issue.*

"There is a cult of ignorance in the United States," wrote Isaac Asimov in the January 21, 1980, issue of *Newsweek*, "and there has always been. The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.'"

Ignorance, shmignorance. Asimov, it seems, had no regard for horse sense. Dictionaries define *horse sense* as "better than book learnin [*sic*]." At least, that's how dictionaries *would* define "horse sense" if, instead of leaving dictionary writing to lexicographers—who only study the language—we turned it over to real people who actually talk words pretty good.

If you number among the lucky few whom nature has endowed with horse sense, do not take it for granted. Nurture it. Protect it from destructive forces, such as education.

I cannot overstate the importance of horse sense. It is all that stands between us and the tyranny of elitist scholars who research, weigh, and test. No one put it better than former Texas State Board of Education Chairman Don McLeroy, who in 2009 showed himself the intellectual equal of the brightest horse when he said, "Somebody's gotta stand up to experts."

(McLeroy is a dentist by profession. I am sure I speak for patients everywhere when I say that dentists who don't give a damn about expertise provide hope for the future. Who wouldn't readily trade a trained dentist for a stand-in with horse sense and pliers?)

Horse sense has been on my mind a lot lately, and for good reason. I am writing two weeks after the World Health Organization officially elevated the spread of coronavirus to pandemic status. Due to production realities, two more months will elapse before publication, so it is certain that much will have changed by the time you happen upon these words. (Who knows? At sixty-five, I'm considered high-risk, so I may not even be around anymore. If I'm not, thanks for reading. Here's hoping FREE INQUIRY gives me one hell of an obit. Suggestion: Change "Cuno's Corner" to "Cuno's Coroner.")

But one thing the pandemic isn't likely to change is the continual popping-up of brave rebels whose horse sense eclipses the so-called medical expertise of so-called medical experts. Choruses of "I'm not gonna let the flu ruin my spring break," "God doesn't spread diseases," and "Quarantines will ruin the economy, ever think of that?" echo among, respectively, college students flocking to beaches, believers crowding into churches, and politicians who know more than epidemiologists about epidemiology and who are, apparently, under the impression that dead people go shopping.

There is little doubt that safety-measure-scoffing students, believers, and politicians will, in time, claim vindication. After the pandemic has run its course, they will tell us that fewer people would have died, and the economy would be in better shape,

had we only listened to them. This they will aver regardless of how things turn out. That's the beauty of horse sense: any outcome can be made to support any premise. Don't fall for that "law of non-contradiction" intellectualist dodge. People who learned about logic by not studying logic know there can be no doubt about B when it follows from both A and Not-A.

I shudder to imagine where we would be without horse sense. It was people with horse sense who put evolutionary biologists in their place by pointing out the futility of a half-evolved eye or wing. Horse sense debunked global warming by calling attention to what every climatologist had somehow overlooked—namely, that there are places on earth where snow falls. And it took horse sense to establish what quantum physicists still don't seem to grasp, namely, that indeterminacy means the universe responds when you jot down your goals and stick them on the fridge.

In the early stages of a pandemic, the stakes are even higher. We're no longer talking trivialities such as evolution, snowfall, and refrigerator magnets. We're talking life and death. If ever there was a time not to listen to people who know what they're talking about, this is it. Let equine enlightenment canter forth.

Better yet, let's cut out the middle-person, visit a nearby stable, and consult with actual horses. Their advice will surely prove no less useful. **FI**

Steve Cuno is a marketing consultant and the as-told-to author of Joanne Hanks's memoir, *"It's Not About the Sex" My Ass: Confessions of an Ex-Mormon, Ex-Polygamist, Ex-Wife*. Last we heard, he was alive and well and self-quarantined in the Salt Lake City area.