

BEYOND COMMON SENSE

Ten familiar claims - and the critical reframes that reopen democratic inquiry

“Common sense” often isolates one fragment of truth from the larger system that gives it meaning. The aim is not to end debate, but to shift attention toward history, institutions, power, ownership and democratic consequences.

1

“They worked hard and built the company. Why shouldn't they keep whatever the market gives them?”

CRITICAL REFRAME

No major fortune is created by one person alone. Workers, public research, infrastructure, law, finance and consumers all make it possible. Ask how collectively produced wealth became so privately controlled.

2

“The market decided. Who are we to interfere?”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Markets are created and enforced by public rules. The issue is never whether society intervenes, but whose interests those rules, subsidies, protections and bailouts serve.

3

“Government is the problem. Private business is always more efficient.”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Efficient at doing what - and for whom? A firm can efficiently produce profit while neglecting public health, workers, communities and needs that cannot be made profitable.

4

“People are poor because they made bad choices.”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Choices matter, but they are made within unequal conditions shaped by wages, schools, housing, health, discrimination, inherited wealth and access to power. Poverty is not simply a personal defect.

5

“Some inequality is natural - and it motivates people to succeed.”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Differences in effort do not explain extreme concentrations of wealth and power. The democratic question is when inequality lets a small minority control institutions, public policy and everyone else's life chances.

6

“Technology is just a tool. It depends on how people use it.”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Technologies are designed, financed, owned and deployed under particular power relations. AI is not neutral when a few corporations decide what it does, whose labor it replaces and who benefits.

7

“You can't change human nature.”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Claims about “human nature” often turn behavior rewarded by one society - competition, acquisitiveness, obedience - into timeless truth. Institutions also cultivate cooperation, solidarity and democratic agency.

8

“Both political parties are corrupt, so politics is pointless.”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Withdrawal does not eliminate power; it leaves organized interests with fewer obstacles. The question is how ordinary people can build enough organized power to transform compromised institutions.

9

“There is no realistic alternative to the system we have.”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Democracy, labor rights, public education, Social Security and civil rights were all once dismissed as unrealistic. Declaring alternatives impossible is one way the present protects itself from democratic imagination.

10

“That sounds ideological. We should just stick to the facts.”

CRITICAL REFRAME

Facts do not interpret themselves. People decide which facts matter, how they connect and which questions are worth asking. Critical inquiry makes hidden assumptions and power relations visible.

THE DSF METHOD

When you encounter a political claim, ask:

- What assumptions does it make?
- What history is missing?
- Who benefits from this framing?
- Which institutions shape the outcome?
- What alternatives are ruled out?