

Common Knowledge

Common knowledge is that the best way to start your day is with a decent breakfast. Arnold's mom told him that. So did his dad. Later, his wife. And his children. It was common knowledge. Yet Arnold rarely ate a good breakfast. It was common knowledge he should be malnourished, tired all day, eventually dead. Yet he grew up fine.

Arnold never ate breakfast—nothing but coffee until noon. Despite common knowledge, he survived. He knew someone who, despite common knowledge, had a bowel movement only once every three months. Only one's own body substituted its own knowledge for common knowledge.

Arnold was fascinated by how common knowledge changed every decade. Did toilet seats spread STDs? Common knowledge for decades was no—until it wasn't. A good breakfast topped every dietary chart (although what constituted a good breakfast was debated.) He knew common knowledge recommended wheat and milk for breakfast—which turned out problematic for those with gluten and lactose intolerances. Bacon and eggs had protein but too much fat. Fruit was too high in sugars. No one choice worked for everyone, despite common knowledge.

Arnold believed it was time to alter common knowledge to what was real. But how? Decade by decade, common knowledge alters itself. He might find a way to have people ignore common knowledge but knew it would be replaced by a new common knowledge. People believed in common knowledge. Over the years, Arnold travelled to many nations. Each had its own common knowledge. All nations agreed their knowledge was the only knowledge. People thrived with a shared belief.

Which, Arnold realized, was common.