

## LOSING SIGHT OF REALITY

### Introduction

Some might incorrectly be accused of 'losing sight of reality' when they have not been aware of all the facts or are illogically applying those facts. Once given the facts and using logic, such people would see reality.

However, there are many who will never see reality and it has nothing to do with lack of facts or using illogical arguments.

Over time their incorrect beliefs have become so strong, that they will avoid or disregard anything that challenges their beliefs. Because of the discomfort or pain of realising their beliefs maybe wrong, they will completely avoid reality. This is a psychological condition known as cognitive dissonance.

### Cognitive Dissonance

In the 1950s, social psychologist Leon Festinger and his colleagues embedded themselves in a cult led by a doomsday prophet named Dorothy Martin. The cult members believed that spacemen called the "**Guardians**" were coming to collect them in flying saucers to save them from a coming flood that would destroy humanity.

Like all doomsday stories before this one, no spacemen or flood ever came. Dorothy Martin would respond by revising her predictions after talking to the "Guardians". For some reason, the Guardians only communicated through Martin. The cult followers were told repeatedly;

***"Sure, the spacemen didn't show up today, but they were sure to come tomorrow."***

The researchers watched in fascination as the believers kept on believing, despite all the evidence that they were wrong. Not only were they ignoring reality, as each prediction failed, counterintuitively, their beliefs became stronger rather than raising doubts and becoming weaker.

In their book about their study "*When Prophecy Fails*" by Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schacter they wrote;

***"Tell him you disagree, and he turns away. Show him facts or figures and he questions your sources. Appeal to logic and he fails to see your point. Suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that his belief is wrong: what will happen? The individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before."***

Festinger developed the theory of "Cognitive Dissonance" to explain what was happening. In short it is a way of dealing with the extreme discomfort of

simultaneously holding two thoughts (i.e. a belief and reality) that are in conflict. Reality will be avoided or ignored. It was a wonderful example of group irrationality.

The parallels between Martin's Guardian Cult and the Green followers today are stunning. As each Green prediction fails, a Green follower will never acknowledge the failure, or discuss it, and will ignore it grasping for another prediction to sustain their irrational beliefs. If challenged they will attack the person or ignore the facts or figures while demanding their source so that person can be attacked.

The discomfort of seeing their beliefs clashing with reality results in cognitive dissonance. This explains the Green followers' continued beliefs over decades in the face of more than a dozen failed Green campaigns over seventy years. In the Global Warming campaign with hundreds of failed predictions in the past forty years being ignored, they irrationally claim that most, if not all, the predictions have been correct.

For example, while standing on a New York freeway that Dr. James Hansen (NASA scientific advisor to Al Gore) had predicted would be under metres of water, Hansen stated he still believes all his predictions are correct even the one about the freeway he was standing on. We should start to get concerned about scientists' behaviour when they can no longer look reality in the face.

## **Conclusion**

This disregard of facts, logic and reality supports this web sites' views that Western citizens are increasingly becoming more irrational and are fast losing their critical thinking skills.

If this becomes widespread, as occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the society believed in witchcraft, then collectively the '*misbehaviour*' of the followers can cause serious damage to our society.