

Being Skeptical About Medical Skepticism

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Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic physicians and health authorities repeatedly tried to convince that every measure to battle the spread of the SARS-2 virus was based upon science. Hospital administrators and clinicians treating patients unquestionably followed whatever guidelines were decreed from above. As it turned out, the consensus that was built around guidelines and protocols was never based upon irrefutable scientific facts. Rather it was a consensus solely based upon obedience by the majority. The question before us is whether it is wise to accept every official health announcement as unbiased and scientifically objective.

As the pandemic progressed, a growing number of doctors and medical professionals observed gaping flaws in the government's arguments. If the medical establishment is wrong then so are its policies and guidelines. Moreover the mainstream media speaking on behalf of medical authorities is equally wrong, and this has had catastrophic consequences. Yet what we witnessed was a full frontal assault against medical professionals who criticized government wrong-headed pandemic measures.

Increasingly, those who advocate non-conventional medical therapies, such as naturopathy, homeopathy, traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, a plant based diet, nutrient supplementation, etc, are labeled ignorant. Natural medical modalities are accused of quackery and charlatany.

There are powerful contingents within the medical establishment that want the public to believe that alternative treatments to drug-base regimens have absolutely no science to support them. Despite these absurd claims, anyone can go to the National Library of Medicine's website and search for a wide variety of natural therapies and quickly discover tens of thousands of studies giving legitimacy to these modalities for specific diseases, infectious pathogens and health conditions. Therefore why have we reached a crossroads where natural healing is detested despite the scientific evidence to the contrary? And why are there extreme factions, notably Skeptic physicians and medical professors, who want to ban civil debate and deprive citizens from acting on their freedom of choice to choose medical treatments they see fit for themselves? For the past two decades the Skeptic

pogrom against non-conventional medical modalities has become more aggressive and has left the public deeply confused.

Modern day Skepticism is one of those annoying contagions that won't go away. It is rather like a persistent herpes infection. It flares up when you least expect it. On the internet, and especially on Wikipedia, its ideology and propaganda go largely unnoticed. It has successfully infiltrated many college campuses. Often required courses in "critical thinking" are simply taught by Skeptic missionaries pushing their materialist doctrine.

We have no reservations in stating that Skepticism is extreme scientific reductionism, and it is very pernicious in the biological, brain, evolutionary, and medical sciences. It is a serious threat to medical innovation, scientific discovery and in the long term to public health and a healthy society at large.

Although modern Skepticism has been a worldview dating back to the nineteenth century, today's Skepticism is far more radicalized. Because Skeptics believe they represent the pinnacle of scientific materialism, many of the movement's celebrity gurus feel they are the entitled saviors to redeem modern civilization from thousands of years of past history when human societies utilized medicinal plants and ancient mind-body practices to treat illnesses and the role of religion, spiritual practices, faith and belief to promote a sense of well being and psychological wholeness. As with so much of our dysfunctional postmodern world, Skepticism is a natural outgrowth of white-dominant, patriarchal entitlement that continues to plague the halls of science. It is another perversion of identity politics however disguised under the banner of science.

Within the larger Skeptic movement is a medical faction that goes under the name of Science Based Medicine (SBM). Since the latter half of the 1990s, modern medicine has been steered by what is commonly known as Evidence Based Medicine (EBM), a widely accepted theory that sound clinical decision making for treating diseases should rely upon reliable evidence from randomized clinical trials and high quality published papers and meta-analyses.

The corporate capture of EBM by private pharmaceutical interests has been setting back medical discovery innovation decades.

In principle, Science Based Medicine largely supports Evidence Based Medicine. To its credit, SBM also recognizes EBM's shortcomings, including the epidemic of erroneous research being published in medical journals, the increasing trends in confirmation bias in clinical trials and their results, and financial incentives to publish junk studies in professional journals. However, considering EBM's flaws and failures, SBM perceives itself as the next great leap for modern medicine in order to establish scientific consensus on medical discovery and therapeutic practices by including the "plausibility principle". Repeatedly, without any sound understanding for why a certain alternative health therapy either succeeds or fails, Skeptics invoke plausibility as the only necessary criteria to discard outright non-conventional practices and therefore to advocate against funding research to investigate any promises natural therapies may hold.

Relying upon the plausibility argument is a lazy-person's way to deceive oneself and to reinforce firmly established prejudices. Skeptics are easily outraged whenever they are accused of entertaining subjective biases that taint their evaluation of medical therapies outside their rigid reductionist belief system. Whenever Skeptics are confronted with a

scientific or medical narrative that is contrary to their own biases, and in the absence of a scientifically valid argument based upon strong evidence to support Skepticism's counter-narrative, the Skeptic mind simply fills in the blank with the "plausibility" argument. Plausibility thereby is conflated with reality. For example, among the many [screeds against homeopathy](#), Skeptics make long-winded attempts to discredit the evidence that they are culprit to "plausibility bias," also known as "belief bias." It is not surprising therefore that SBM's most militant voices convey a brutally amateurish understanding of human psychology.

Researchers at the University of [British Columbia and Yale reported](#) in their paper "The Curse of Knowledge in Reasoning About False Beliefs" that there can be a "curse of knowledge bias" that contributes to false beliefs used by young children. That is, the researchers report, "adults' own knowledge of an event's outcome can compromise their ability to reason about another person's beliefs about that same event. The curse of false beliefs as contingent upon the plausibility argument goes to the heart of the "science wars" between Skeptical materialist views of medical science and advocates of non-conventional medical practices, including nutrition, naturopathy, Chinese and Ayurveda medicine, etc., whose world view is less narrowly linear and more akin to modern systems theory and the empirical evaluation of cause and effect relationships. What some psychologists call the "plausibility fallacy" is when someone is convinced about an irrational assumption that a plausible explanation is a conclusive proof. Aside from exaggerating its belief in the power and value of science, Skepticism in the biological and medical sciences can more accurately be described as nihilistic skepticism, a penchant to assert impossibility a priori and to convert reasonable doubts into unreasonable incredulity. When understood in this manner, SBM can be viewed as a kind of skeptical medical imperialism, an excess of science that muddles its own subjective and biased values with being scientifically factual. Do not schizophrenics also apply twisted reasoning and logic in order to convince themselves about the truth in their hallucinations?

From the standpoint of quantum physics, which may arguably be acknowledged as a gold standard among modern hard sciences, implausibility is never a certainty. Nor should it be used as a yardstick to banish and ignore something that might only have a slight possibility of being true. In physics, it is always worth pursuing further. But rules of proof in Skepticism do not follow sound scientific inquiry.

We can review a case of applying the Skeptics own "plausibility" criteria to a medical legal decision that SBM proponents have fervently criticized. It is an excellent example of how Skeptics' irrational beliefs in fact trump rational plausibility.

Skeptics and pro-vaccine advocates alike were appalled at the US Court of Federal Claims' August 2007 decision to award damages for [vaccine-induced autism to the family of Hannah Poling](#), a 19 month old toddler who received five vaccines during a single pediatrician visit. Prior to the case, the Court's rulings under the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program relied solely on the "preponderance of evidence" (i.e., EBM's criteria) for assessing causation for vaccine-injuries. In other words, subjective testimonies, for example by the parents of vaccine-injured children, were excluded from the evidence. However, the Court changed its rules to include "plausibility," and this is what led to the Court's conclusion that it is biologically "plausible" that vaccines and their toxic ingredients can trigger adverse conditions leading to autism. This was the Court's ruling regarding Hannah Poling.

To further appreciate Skepticism's culture, we might wish to consider the words and writings of former Skeptics who have turned against the movement and its underlying New Atheism, which popular Skeptic organizations including SBM have aligned themselves with.

PZ Myers, a biologist at the University of Minnesota, has a reputation for being one of the more belligerent militant celebrities in the Skeptic movement. Myers along with Skeptic Jerry Coyne and astrophysicist Sean Carroll were largely responsible for the censoring of biologist Rupert Sheldrake and alternative-historian Graham Hancock from the TED talks. However even the Skeptic movement has become too much for Myers. In his [public statement](#) on Free Thought Blogs to announce his resignation from the movement, he wrote, "it is clear that 'scientific skepticism' is simply a crippled bugged version of science with special exemptions to set certain subjects outside the bounds of its purview."

"Skepticism has no sacred cows, " writes Myers, "I was also annoyed by the skeptic movement's appropriation of the term "scientific" all over the place... except that it's a "science" that doesn't make use of accumulated prior knowledge, that abandons the concept of the null hypothesis [the assumption that there is no relationship between variables in a population selected for statistical data collection], and that so narrowly defines what it will accept as evidence that it actively excludes huge domains of knowledge. It is toothless science that fetishizes "consumer protection" over understanding."

In effect, Myers is accusing the Skeptics of "false-belief" reasoning, the curse of their perception of plausibility.

Massimo Pigliucci, an evolutionary biologist and philosopher now teaching at City College of New York, is a former prominent Skeptic and columnist for the Skeptical Inquirer magazine. [Pigliucci too has withdrawn](#) from the "skeptic and atheist movements (SAM)". He notes that the movement "has become a somewhat inhospitable environment for philosophical dialogue." It "worships celebrities who are often intellectual dilettantes, or at the very least have a tendency to talk about things of which they manifestly know very little." He also accuses the movement for having been saturated with "groupthink" and a narcissistic regard for its own intellectual stubbornness "that is trumped only by religious fundamentalists." Finally, Pigliucci identifies a crucial problem that we too have encountered in Skeptic websites, blogs and notably Wikipedia, which is an atmosphere of "public shaming and other vicious social networking practices any time someone says something that doesn't fit [their] own opinions all the while of course claiming to protect "free speech" at all costs."

Fortunately, SBM literature has been for the most part unsuccessful in breaching the halls of the medical establishment. One of SBM's early projects was the Commission for Scientific Medicine and Mental Health (CSMMH), which published the Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine. The journal, [which claimed](#) to be "the only peer-reviewed journal devoted exclusively to objectively analyzing the claims of alternative medicine," a statement repeated in its entry on Wikipedia, has nevertheless been ruled as extremely one-sided and biased by the National Library of Medicine. Based on a Freedom of Information request we filed with the National Library of Medicine to acquire correspondence between the journal's editors and the NIH, we learned that at least on three separate occasions the journal was denied inclusion into the National Institutes of Health's Medicine/PubMed registry of reliable medical and healthcare publications. Consequently, SBM's attempts to keep its public relations hoax of "scientific evidence" through a journal were short-lived. The Commission seems to now be defunct and no longer operative.

Careful readings of SBM diatribes, essays and opinion pieces raises serious doubts about the sanity of its authors. During a talk at a [National Capital Area Skeptics' gathering](#), when asked by an audience member why a Skeptic lecturer defended genetically modified foods, the speaker made the disingenuous reply that “all foods are genetically modified” — a likely reference to the now fully discredited and fallacious “substantial equivalence” hypothesis made in the 1990s, which argues that genetically engineered crops are no different than their natural counterpart.

There are many positions that SBM authors take that are simply negligent to the extreme. Many of these views are mere blindness and a biased stubbornness to deal with the reality of the nation's health crises. It is always easier to remain ignorant than to learn something outside your church or belief system. One in particular is SBM's strong support for opioid medications. Although, [SBM proponents acknowledges](#) the opioid crisis as a horrible failure of the drug industry and federal regulators, their only solution is for more responsible usage of these life-threatening drugs. This was stated in Skeptic diatribe against an effort by Oregon State's Health Authority to counter the opioid epidemic of injury and death by having Medicaid cover non-drug based treatments for pain relief such as “acupuncture, chiropractic, massage therapy and other alternative treatments.” This was a clear example of SBM supporting the drug industry's financial interests. Two years earlier [SBM Skeptics criticized](#) similar efforts in Ohio to combat its opioid crisis. Although there is an enormous body of peer-reviewed literature clearly proving the efficacy of non-pharmaceutical therapies to substantially reduce pain, because these therapies are outside Skepticism's very narrow view of accepted medical practice, state health officials' efforts to find a way to counter this national catastrophe are being chastised for having been seduced by quackery.

During the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, SBM authors have walked consistently in goose-step with Anthony Fauci and the federal health agencies and sometimes seemingly acting as the government's medical shock troops. They regard themselves as the watchdogs to safeguard institutionalized medical tyranny from its retractors. SBM denounces outright Ivermectin's effectiveness in treating early SARS-2 infections despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In fact, SBM proponents have even questioned the ethics for conducting clinical trials using Ivermectin. They support Covid-19 vaccination across all age groups and undermine mRNA vaccine's adverse effects, rising myocarditis rates, sudden heart attacks, the documented cases threatening pregnancy. And despite a Pfizer executive admitting before a European Union commission hearing that the company never tested its vaccine for the presentation of viral transmission, the SBM blogosphere continues to promulgate the dangerous myth of the vaccine's ability to do so. Reading SBM literature is the classic story of garbage in, garbage out.

Aside from SBM's dogmatic war against non-conventional medicine, there is a more disturbing goal in SBM's agenda.

Lecturing at the 2015 annual Northeast Conference on Science and Skepticism, SBM founder [Steve Novella outlined](#) the definition and mission of Science Based Medicine and its standards for determining the legitimacy of medical therapeutic protocols. Among SBM's goals, Novella listed 1) lobbying efforts and advocacy for “science-based” legislation, 2) to better market SBM on the internet, and 3) educational efforts to inform the public about science-based medicine in general and “skepticism.”

SBM also sees itself in the business of consumer protection. [In an article](#) entitled “SBM on Wikipedia in Every Language,” the author introduces the Society for Science-Based Medicine

(SfSBM) initiative to create an SBM Wiki on the internet that would complement Wikipedia. The society's strategy is clearly intended to function as an offensive propaganda machine to proselytize its stark materialistic ideology. SBM has had extraordinary success in making its presence felt on the internet, particularly on Wikipedia entries. SBM-affiliated groups such as the Guerrilla Skeptics on Wikipedia have composed approximately nearly 1,000 entries infused with classical Skeptic derogatory language and content that are viciously biased against non-conventional medicine and natural medicine's leading proponents. Equally worrisome is SBM's close kinship towards Wikipedia's founder Jimmy Wales' Skeptical disdain towards alternative medicine.

Despite SBM's many efforts to become more effective in converting mainstream media and social networks to its version of extreme medical reductionism, it has remained marginal and unrecognized by the major conventional medical associations and institutions. With very few exceptions, SBM's leaders are intellectual lightweights with unimpressive publishing histories. Outside of the Skeptic community, they are largely ignored as invited keynote speakers at professional medical or scientific conferences outside of the Skeptic community. Their message is too extreme and regressive for medical authorities and prominent medical journals. Perhaps because of its many internal fallacies and flaws, SBM has had no other alternative for making its presence felt except to take advantage of the internet's weaknesses to get its message out to the public.

But it is SBM, and now also Skepticism in general's entry into consumer advocacy that should most outrage the public. In 2018, Skepticism's flagship organization the Center for Inquiry [filed a lawsuit](#) against CVS pharmacies in the District of Columbia for presumably deceiving customers by selling homeopathic remedies, notably the cold/flu remedy Oscilloccinum. The suit, which continues in the court, sets a dangerous precedent that we would expect from an ideology that embraces a doctrine of scientific materialism and is determined to replace the freedom of medical choice with a homogeneous regime advocating for a one-size-fits pharmaceutical-based structure for treating all disease.

There is evidence that SBM operates under the guise of a "consumer protection" organization. One of SBM's founders serves as a scientific advisor for the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH). ACSH calls itself a consumer advocacy organization and claims to support evidence-based science. However, its platforms and projects are radically pro-industry and advocate for genetically modified foods, nuclear power, vaccine mandates, natural gas and the deregulation of toxic chemicals. Practically every Trustee member has direct ties to large corporations. Attorney [Gary Ruskin at US Right to Know identified](#) the ACSH as a front group for the "tobacco, chemical, fossil fuel, cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries." A Mother Jones report uncovered that in 2012, ACSH donors included Chevron, Coca-Cola, Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation, Bayer Cropscience, Procter and Gamble, Syngenta, 3M, McDonald's, and tobacco giants such as Altria and Phillip Morris. The Council has also cemented ties with the Koch family, the owners of Koch Industries and the major funders of the Randian pro-industry American Legislative Exchange Council or ALEC.

Consequently, the most radicalized contingent of SBM Skepticism is an informational enterprise acting on behalf of ACSH's efforts to protect and secure the corporate financial interests that are being threatened by cheaper and natural health practices.

We need to ask why SBM spends most of its attention on discrediting and disparaging alternative medicine and making attempts to lobby against funding for these therapeutic modalities, including common sense nutrition. In the meantime, billions of dollars are wasted annually by the insurance industry and a medical cartel that wants to keep patients

dependent upon prescription drugs, many of which have little scientific basis for being statistically effective, let alone safe. How many herbs have received black box warnings compared to corporate drugs? This is one reason why SBM's pretension to be a responsible consumer advocate is a ruse. SBM, as with modern Skepticism in general, is a scam ideology with all of the familiar anthropological trappings of a religious cult. If SBM placed more attention on the serious health risks of just a single common over the counter drug, acetaminophen or Tylenol, imagine how many people it would save compared to its fear mongering about supplements such as Vitamin C and Omega-3 fatty acids.

Fortunately, scientific discovery will eventually pass by Skeptical medicine as non-conventional medical practices not only become more popular among patients, but also more widely accepted by the next generations of physicians. While Skeptical science grips American medicine in a deathly vice, this is not the case in most of the world.

Indeed, SBM's mission may remind us of the ancient Greek story about Sisyphus — a mythological moron, so filled with his own intellectual hubris and skills at trickery that Zeus condemns him to eternally roll a boulder up a hill in the depth of Hades. Sisyphus is a fitting mascot for the SBM cult. But don't credit us with this analogy. In fact, SBM has rightfully referenced Sisyphus as a worthy logo for its movement. Our mission is to continue to debunk SBM's Skeptical intentions thereby adding more weight to its boulder. In time Sisyphus will hopefully be exhausted and roll back into the fires of the underworld.

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