

Morten Tolboll

Anti-intellectualism and Anti-science (The Matrix Dictionary)

I have put anti-intellectualism and anti-science into one entry since anti-intellectualism's target both is philosophy and science.

Anti-intellectualism is hostility to and mistrust of intellect, intellectuals, and intellectualism commonly expressed as deprecation of education and philosophy, and the dismissal of art, literature, and science as impractical and even contemptible human pursuits.

Notable anti-intellectual philosophies include pragmatism, positivism, and Bergsonism, which advocate distrust of reason and promote feeling and emotion over thought, intuition over logic, immediate action over critical consideration, and results over means.

Anti-intellectuals present themselves and are perceived as champions of common folk—populists against political and academic elitism. They tend to see educated people as a status class detached from the concerns of most people, and feel that intellectuals dominate political discourse and control higher education. In short: popular culture is permeated with anti-intellectualism.

New Age is in that sense clearly a part of the popular culture, you might even say that New Age is the top ideology of popular culture. But in my [Pop Culture Files](#) I seek to bring Popular culture to philosophy, in order to show that many of the most popular themes in pop culture actually have very deep philosophical implications, which not at all are anti-intellectual and must be said to be in direct opposition with New Age.

The danger in anti-intellectualism is easily seen when one consider what it has been used for. Totalitarian governments manipulate and apply anti-intellectualism to repress political dissent. During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the following right-wing dictatorship (1939–1975) of General Francisco Franco, the reactionary repression of the White Terror (1936–1945) was notably anti-intellectual, with most of the 200,000 civilians killed being the Spanish intelligentsia, the politically active teachers and academics, artists and writers of the deposed Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939). In the Communist state

of Democratic Kampuchea (former Cambodia in Indochina of Southeast Asia), (1975–1979), the Khmer Rouge régime of Pol Pot condemned most of the non-Communist intelligentsia to death in the Killing Fields.

Susan Jacoby's new book *The Age of American Unreason* might be viewed as a kind of sequel to Richard Hofstadter's 1963 classic, "Anti-Intellectualism in American Life." A cultural history of the last forty years, *The Age of American Unreason* focuses on the convergence of social forces—usually treated as separate entities—that has created a perfect storm of anti-rationalism. These include the upsurge of religious fundamentalism, with more political power today than ever before; the failure of public education to create an informed citizenry; and the triumph of video over print culture. Sparing neither the right nor the left, Jacoby asserts that Americans today have embraced a universe of "junk thought" that makes almost no effort to separate fact from opinion.

Combining historical analysis with contemporary observation, Susan Jacoby dissects a new American cultural phenomenon - one that is at odds with the American heritage of Enlightenment reason and with modern, secular knowledge and science.

With mordant wit, she surveys an anti-rationalist landscape extending from pop culture to a pseudo-intellectual universe of "junk thought." Disdain for logic and evidence defines a pervasive malaise fostered by the mass media, triumphalist religious fundamentalism, mediocre public education, a dearth of fair-minded public intellectuals on the right and the left, and, above all, a lazy and credulous public.

Jacoby offers an unsparing indictment of the American addiction to infotainment--from television to the Web--and cites this toxic dependency as the major element distinguishing the current age of unreason from earlier outbreaks of American anti-intellectualism and anti-rationalism. With reading on the decline and scientific and historical illiteracy on the rise, an increasingly ignorant public square is dominated by debased media-driven language and received opinion.

At this critical political juncture, nothing could be more important than recognizing the "overarching crisis of memory and knowledge" described in this impassioned, tough-minded book, which challenges Americans to face the painful truth about what the flights from reason has cost them as individuals and as a nation.

Jacoby singles out their attraction to the pseudoscience of social Darwinism in the post-Civil War period, noting that the popularity of this ideological rationale for "untrammelled capitalism" demonstrated the susceptibility of intellectuals to irrationalism, the confusion of sociology with hard science, and the dangers of a little

knowledge: “Many Americans possessed just enough education to be fascinated by the late-19th-century advances in both science and technology, but they had too little education to distinguish between real scientists and those who peddled theories in the guise of science.” Jacoby rightly identifies pseudoscience and religion as two “critical ingredients” of unreason since then. Indeed, they often work in tandem: The “sciences” of mind cure and New Thought flourished, and Mary Baker Eddy “discovered” Christian Science in the 1860s. Then came Scientology, the “science” of positive thinking, and, more recently, New Age healer Deepak Chopra’s nonsensical references to quantum physics (see the entries on [The Matrix Conspiracy Fascism](#) and [Deepak Chopra](#)).

Anti-science is a position that rejects science and the scientific method. People holding antiscientific views do not accept that science is an objective method, or that it generates universal knowledge. They also contend that scientific reductionism in particular is an inherently limited means to reach understanding of the complex world we live in.

But this is a misunderstanding of science, since reductionism is a philosophical and not scientific point of view. The sciences ask limited questions about Man, or questions about specific sides of the human life. Such questions are then solved by experimenting, collecting systematical observations and from them draw up theories. The sciences collect systematical experiences and throw out theories, that can be tested through new experiences, or serve as the best explanations.

So, one crucial principle in science is, that a certain theory has to have falsifiability or refutability, or said in another way: it has to be testable. Another crucial principle is the use of abductive reasoning (inference to the best explanation).

Is it testable whether God exists or not? No! Is it testable, that the human consciousness only consists in some physical-chemical reactions in the brain, or that it only is a social construction? No!

Is the best explanation for crop circles, that they have been made by extraterrestrials? Although it is undoubtedly true, that strange patterns are sometimes found in cornfields (crop circles) - it doesn’t follow that they *must* have been made by extraterrestrials. There is a wide range of far more plausible alternative explanations of the phenomenon, such as that they have been made by pranksters.

Reductionisms are philosophical, political, religious/occult theories, that seek legitimacy by claiming, that they are scientific theories, while the fact is, that they either not is testable/able to be falsified, or that they abuse the use of abductive reasoning.

And towards this might be added that there are two versions of reductionism. This is important since it seems that these two versions are in war with each other:

The first version for example claims that Man fully can be described and explained with the methods of natural science. This happens in various forms of Naturalism, Positivism and Behaviourism.

The second version claims, that psychology, sociology or history can give the total and superior understanding of, what a human being is. These viewpoints are described respectively as Psychologism, Sociologism and Historism. It is particular this version which openly claims to be a supporter of anti-science, and accuses the other part of being reductionistic, and demand so-called alternative sciences.

The first version is mostly the supporter of scientism and pseudoskepticism. Scientism is a term generally used to describe the cosmetic application of science in unwarranted situations not covered by the scientific method. Pseudoskepticism (or pseudoscepticism) is a term referring to a philosophical or scientific position which appears to be that of skepticism or scientific skepticism but which in reality fails to be so.

But both sides are examples of reductionism and are therefore examples of pseudoscience. Pseudoscience consists of statements, beliefs, or practices that are claimed to be scientific and factual in the absence of evidence gathered and constrained by appropriate scientific methods. Pseudoscience is often characterized by the following: contradictory, exaggerated or unfalsifiable claims; reliance on confirmation bias rather than rigorous attempts at refutation; lack of openness to evaluation by other experts; and absence of systematic practices when developing theories. The term pseudoscience is often considered pejorative because it suggests something is being presented as science inaccurately or even deceptively. Those described as practicing or advocating pseudoscience often dispute the characterization.

The demarcation between science and pseudoscience has philosophical and scientific implications. Differentiating science from pseudoscience has practical implications in the case of health care, expert testimony, environmental policies, and science education. Distinguishing scientific facts and theories from pseudoscientific beliefs, such as those found in astrology, alchemy, medical quackery, occult beliefs, and creation science combined with scientific concepts, is part of science education and scientific literacy.

It is clear that the first kind of reductionism (scientism) are more accepted than the other openly antiscientific versions.

The reductionisms observe Man from fragmented viewpoints, for example as organism, as physical-chemical system, as society being, as psyche, as producer and user of language and meaning. But what becomes of the wholeness? What unites all this knowledge to a total image of Man? The reductionisms' explanations of this always end up as philosophical shipwrecks. Reductionisms are *philosophical* viewpoints, which under cover of being science seek to answer the question of Man, or reality as such. But no single branch of science gives anything else than a limited perspective on Man or reality. If the reductionisms should be taken seriously, then they shall contain a unifying perspective on all knowledge about Man.

What can be a serious problem in the future, is that a new kind of pseudoscience is trying to unite New Age pseudoscience with some of the pseudoscience of reductionism (See The Matrix Dictionary on [Richard Dawkins](#)).

Anti-science views have been amplified by the political wave of populism that is sweeping not only over America but also Europe. Populism is the key factor in the election of Donald Trump as the President of US. The key elements of this kind of populism are anti-elitism and nativism, which can translate into anti-immigrant views. The role of globalization in the creation of not only economic but also knowledge inequality has amplified these feelings of resentment (see my article [The Confabulation of Trump](#)).

Populism is a mode of political communication that is centred around contrasts between the "common man" or "the people" and a real or imagined group of "privileged elites", traditionally scapegoating or making a folk devil of the latter. Populists can fall anywhere on the traditional left-right political spectrum of politics, and can often be characterized as centrist where populists portray both bourgeois capitalists and socialist organizers as unfairly dominating the political sphere.

Political parties and politicians often use the terms populist and populism as pejoratives against their opponents. Such a view sees populism as demagoguery, merely appearing to empathize with the public through rhetoric or unrealistic proposals in order to increase appeal across the political spectrum.

Populism is most common in democratic nations. Political scientist Cas Mudde wrote that "Many observers have noted that populism is inherent to representative

democracy; after all, do populists not juxtapose 'the pure people' against 'the corrupt elite'?"

Another facet of the politicization of science is the effect of the postmodernism movement, which occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century, but has roots back to the Sophists in ancient Greece. I have characterized postmodernism as the intellectualism (or rather anti-intellectualism) behind New Age and the Self-help industry (see my article [Constructivism: the Postmodern Intellectualism behind New Age and the Self-help Industry](#)).

This movement represents a distrust of the Enlightenment principle of rationality. Although the term *postmodernism* has traditionally been applied to the humanities, it has broad implications for attitudes toward science, promoting the idea that truth is contextual, depending on one's culture, education, and life experiences. This attitude is misplaced when dealing with scientific facts. Journalism has a great role in promoting the "other side" of disagreements regarding scientific issues, even when the weight of evidence overwhelmingly supports one conclusion. This mistakenly gives opinion the same weight as fact.

One of the unfortunate results of postmodernism is that individuals see scientific issues in ways that fit their preconceptions and make them comfortable. As individuals mature, they may gravitate toward the political party whose views they share on other nonscientific issues. The public's gravitation to biased television reporting, social media, and Internet resources that fit their worldview as sources of information on scientific issues further calcifies their opinions. To see this in the New Age movement is especially disturbing, because New Age at the same time are promoting spiritual issues, which in that way are being deeply distorted. It is namely so, that when you make a google search on spiritual issues, you will almost inevitable end up on a New Age promoting site. Related to this is the Matrix Dictionary entry on [The Illusion of Knowledge](#).

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