

Short reiteration on peer review, Internet research, and resources

I think that it's necessary to reiterate the major points that I have made in my past three blog posts after a few interactions I have had over the past week. Therefore, I summarize briefly and more pointedly the most important arguments that I have made in those three blog posts yet with different explanations. Hopefully, this will be clearer and bolder for anyone that doesn't have the time or doesn't feel the need to read my previous three lengthy posts. Note that my usage of "you" is very generic. I am not targeting any one individual.

This blog post is more direct.

Peer review

Since anyone out there, perhaps with no genuine expertise, can spread their own viewpoint on a specific subject via self-published books, self-distributed pamphlets, and especially via the Internet, there is a need that anyone who professes to know about an academic subject learn how views and theses (scholarship), as well as hypotheses and theories or models (sciences), become genuinely elevated to accepted, standard points of view. Let us not confuse "hypothesis" with "theory" as it is commonly done in colloquial English as in, "That's just a theory!" A theory is much more than just a hypothesis and a set of observations. You may believe whatever you please. But then you should be more careful about it if you know that you are not learned in a specific subject even though you may still have a belief, an impression or an opinion about it. I am fully aware that I do not know much about mathematics, geology or many other fields of study. I do know a little about biology and virology. But I recognize my limits. So, when I do recognize my limits, I stay quiet or I state that I am not qualified to give an informed opinion—in which case, I only ask questions. I do not sprint around the Internet and around the city proclaiming that I understand some data about virology better than virologists simply because I read several books and watched several YouTube videos—and perhaps from questionable sources!

Therefore, you can have your own belief and view about XYZ. But you should not sprint around the Internet and argue that you somehow discovered something new or that you have rediscovered something that has escaped the most specialized experts in a specific field, and that all other scientists and scholars out there are wrong (and are into some Illuminati conspiracy!) only because you became convinced that you are the one who has correctly understood the [controversial]

subject. If you want to sprint this way, then you should be going through some kind of recognized academic review and criticism to validate if you are not the one who is erroneous in your judgments and in your handling of the data (if it's even the correct data or even data at all); and doing so takes years, not just a few weeks or months. If you are indeed right and you are a master of the evidence as you proclaim, then you should be able to persuade other experts in the field that you have a better understanding and viewpoint. If you do not want to do this, or you cannot do this (as I myself cannot), then you should be more reserved about your claims. I have actually witnessed minority viewpoints in Biblical Studies (and Food and Nutrition Science) during the past 10 years become more elevated to an accepted and recognized status in academia. The researchers, scientists, and scholars who have done this have appropriately gone through academic review and criticism before their views received a wider hearing and a more accepted status. Some of them have even become a standard view in the latest academic community on that particular subject. Therefore, again, if you are correct, you should be able to convince others with data and persuasive arguments. Alternatively, you can become like me: learned and informed (not perfect!) about the areas I have actually studied through the most up-to-date literature and communities of scientists and scholars over the past dozen years.

Peer review is not perfect, it has its flaws—especially in the sciences—but it remains critical for any amateur researcher, student, or professional academic. It is not true that we are all together from various countries into some supposed widespread conspiracy to hide the truth from common people. Most of the established knowledge we have in almost all disciplines is all pretty secure. Of course, there are particular technical details and peculiar viewpoints that are debated, some more obvious than others. But for the most part, peer-reviewed literature and academic conferences where specialists gather to exchange papers/viewpoints remain important to *consider* before jumping to extremist, opposing conclusions.

Academic research, resources, and the Internet since 2006-2008

When doing research, you must consider the latest data and viewpoints. Sometimes, scientific and scholarly understanding becomes adjusted by recent discoveries and reassessment of data. But it's only seldom that some widespread "fact" becomes adjusted due to recent discoveries (e.g. Pluto is no longer considered a planet of the Solar system since 2006). The reason why you must absolutely become acquainted with the latest data and viewpoints via recognized literature is that we are now living in a fast-paced world. We can fly, we can drive, we can communicate by phone, webcam, email, and text message. Scholars and scientists can exchange viewpoints

faster, debate more efficiently faster, produce books and articles faster. We have software and other technology that allow us to review data and arguments faster and more accurately. Resources that were only available in paperback or hardcover in the past are now available in digital format and can be read while being on the train, or in the subway, or on the bus. We have expert interviews, podcasts, YouTube videos, blogs, and websites.

Let me say it more pointedly once again: **You must learn to become familiar with the latest and greatest data and viewpoints from the past 12 years because of the Internet and modern technology. Viewpoints, theories, and claims get reviewed and refuted faster than before.** Just because you read some older books or free resources online that seem convincing and you are not aware of its actual, present status in academia, and you are not aware of the most recent data and arguments does not make your understanding correct. You need to absolutely consider the latest data and academic viewpoints *before* you jump to [wild] conclusions, especially if what you are studying is not your area of expertise and if you have no credentials at all. Then, if you are correct, you should address and refute the latest arguments if you get into academics. Then, you will become more respected and get a wider hearing from amateurs, students, professors, and other recognized specialists if, again, you get into academics. Otherwise, do like me: become an informed student or an informed independent researcher and share your learned experience by using the latest and greatest literature in the respective specialized fields. It takes years, not months! Ditch the idiosyncratic, unrecognized, refuted points of view.

It is incorrect to *insist* that you are right, and then state that scientists and scholars are not trustworthy simply because some scientists and scholars in the past have been wrong. No kidding Dick Tracy. We all know that. However, that is actually a non-sequitur. It is not because scientists and scholars (humans!) are sometimes wrong that suddenly *everything* is flat-out wrong and becomes disproved; and that suddenly you are the one who becomes automatically correct, especially if you have no credentials and no recognized status in academics whatsoever. There are plenty of novel viewpoints, or minority viewpoints, that have survived criticism and that have slowly and steadily become elevated in status by following the right process. You can do the same, if you get into academics and if you are serious about it. It is the Internet that has allowed anyone to more easily spread nonsensical viewpoints, and a lot of them have already been refuted many times over in the past. It is only the uninformed (as I once was in 2006-2007) that fall into these trappings and become convinced of already-refuted points of view. It is normal; they do not know (as I once did not know in my particular fields).

What is most alarming is that a lot of bold individuals out there think that scientists and scholars are into some grand conspiracy to betray and fool us all; and since some of them have been wrong in the past, therefore we should ditch all science and scholarship out the window and only rely on ourselves and other like-minded people. Yet, these very same individuals who react this way are the ones who cherry-pick expert literature (and non-expert literature) from the Internet whenever it serves their viewpoint or their purpose but all at the same time only demonstrate misunderstanding and unacquaintance with the respective field or discipline.