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The strange facts they aren't telling you about expertise

If only I could have simply read this book, as you can, rather than having to write it instead! My life would have been so different!

To learn the information and understanding contained herein, all you have to do is read the pages that follow. By contrast, I was only able to learn it through many years of being lied to, many years of wrong turnings and confusions. And meanwhile even now the vast majority of people, even most of those with doctorates and professorships, remain in profound ignorance of what you will learn here. And there is no school or university anywhere on the planet that will teach you this information, for reasons that will become obvious in later pages. And many millions of people continue to be greatly harmed in consequence of their ignorance of these matters. Very likely including some of your own friends and family, or even (unknowingly!) yourself.

Most of the millions of cases with which this book is concerned are conditions other than autism, but that a- word gets much mention herein because the research about it opens a surprising door to also understanding what is causing the other conditions.

I should meanwhile point out that I am not alone in having changed my mind about various things:

“Like most people, and almost all doctors, I just believed what the ‘experts’ said. I have long since learned my lesson.”

– Malcolm Kendrick M.D. in *Doctoring Data*

“It wasn’t until I retired and began reading in more depth that I realised just how ‘brainwashed’ many doctors are”

– Paul Travis M.D.

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“If this is the expert why can't he answer my questions?”

– Suzanne Humphries M.D., author of *Dissolving Illusions*

“Among all our contemporary experts, physicians are those trained to the highest level of specialised incompetence for this urgently needed pursuit.”

– Ivan Illich in *Medical Nemesis* (1975)

And the following further quotations will be useful here to advance your understanding of some key facts about expertise. (“Peer review” is the system by which science bureaucrats decide which scientific discoveries are allowed to be published in “scientific” journals.)

“There are many problems with the peer review system. Perhaps the most significant is that the truly imaginative are not being judged by their peers. They *have* none! what has been demonstrated by this study is reviewer and editorial incompetence. In my Nobel lecture, I published the initial letter of rejection by the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* of work that was to prove to be of fundamental importance to the development of radioimmunoassay.”

– R.S. Yalow, Nobel Laureate in Physiology/Medicine

“The concept of peer review is based on two myths..... [of which the second is] that in those rare instances in which someone who is exceptional does appear, the ordinary scientist always instantly recognises genius and smooths its path. No one who knows anything at all about the history of science can believe for one second in either myth.....” “Peer review is an open invitation to the crooked....”

– David F. Horrobin, Editor, *Medical Hypotheses*

“....a gravely pathological situation, calling for further serious inquiry and radical remedy.”

– John Ziman, H. H. Wills Physics Laboratory, Bristol

Those quotations are from Harnad, ed., (1982), as detailed in the reference list at the end of this book.

Note that in the preceding sentence I have included a reference to a source (“Harnad, ed., (1982)”). If you are to make good progress in learning to unpick the true expertise from the sham, then you will need to learn to pay attention to such references, also called citations. I'll say more about this further on. Meanwhile here's two more quotes you might usefully ponder (Smith, 2014; Horton, 2000):

“Things are badly wrong with journals and the research they publish.” “The problem doesn’t arise from amateurs dabbling in research but rather from career researchers.”

– Richard Smith, editor of the British Medical Journal

“We know that the system of peer review is biased, unjust, unaccountable, incomplete, easily fixed, often insulting, usually ignorant, occasionally foolish, and frequently wrong.”

– Richard Horton, editor of the Lancet

In later chapters I will show you actual detailed examples of things which in this first chapter I only suggest or assert as being true.

I should also mention here that in my experience most people, even the highly-qualified, are too much prone to categorise both things and people into false simplistic categories of “good” or “bad”. For instance, some people declare as their expert knowledge that “mercury is a *toxin*”, categorically *bad* for health, and that the only acceptable level of mercury is zero. And yet the real zero here is the amount of evidence they cite in support of that notion – a notion of which I will show the theoretical and evidential precariousness further on.

No less unsoundly, the persons and institutions involved in some matters covered in this book tend to get categorised as either evil deceivers whose claims are consistently lies or else wonderful saintly heroes whose information is consistently truthful. Depending on which side we are hearing from in this warfare of words, either the official authorities are evil and the dissidents are heroes, or else it is those quack dissidents who are evil and the vilified official experts are heroes for actually working hard to help reduce illness. Again, I consider the reality to be altogether more complicated and that there is truth and falsehood and honesty and treachery to be found in all quarters to some extent. This is not a book of “our side” versus “theirs”.

With these preliminary comments out of the way, I will now move on to the main content here.

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Information relating to many aspects of health and illness is available from many books, websites, and other sources. But there is radical disagreement on many important points.

So wise persons will necessarily find themselves asking the question of how they should decide between these conflicting assertions.

Some will think I am posing a rather stupid question here. It is obvious, they will reason, that the views of a person with a relevant

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doctorate or professorship must outweigh the views of a person with only meagre qualifications or none. And that a peer-reviewed report in a prestigious scientific journal must outweigh the assertions of a group of ordinary people who consider themselves victims of some sort of medically-caused harm. The hierarchy of such expertise is well-known, with professor ranking above PhD doctorate ranking above graduate ranking above non-graduate and suchlike.

Do you see how that makes sense? Well, if you do, then you might wish to consider the facts of Lysenkoism in Stalin's Russia.

Trofim Lysenko is now universally understood to have been a charlatan, a purveyor of pseudo-science rather than of genuine biology and agricultural science. And yet for three decades he and his acolytes prevailed unchallenged in all the universities and institutes of the great USSR, honoured as the most distinguished professors and so on. So it must have been they that were surely the experts, just as for instance Professor Simon Baron-Cohen must be the real autism expert today as he is the head of the Autism Research Centre at Cambridge University. Meanwhile, the genuinely outstanding geneticists, agronomists and other biologists were either executed or sent to slave-camps in the bone-chilling wastelands of Siberia. Or perhaps they surely weren't the experts, rather the charlatans. You aren't going to find the true, most outstandingly distinguished scientific experts recognised only as statusless barely-surviving salt-miners, are you? And yet the great biologist Vavilov, who created the first ever seed bank, starved to death in prison. This corruption of science did not end until years after the death of Stalin, by which time the false science of Lysenko had caused immense damage to Soviet agriculture.

But could it be that Lysenkoism was just something that happened in a peculiar far-off country 70 years ago, under a totalitarian regime in the grip of a false ideology – whereas of course now we have the modern uncorrupted world in which everything has been sorted into its proper place? Well, I invite you to consider some further historical facts which I have excerpted from the book *Genius* by the late Prof. Hans J. Eysenck, the most-cited-ever scientist (back then at least). The excerpts are in the frame below.

Planck's experience with other leading physicists was no different. ...  
"I found no interest, let alone approval, even among the very physicists who were clearly connected with the topic. Kirchoff expressly disapproved. I did not succeed in reaching Clausius. He did not answer my letters, and I did not find him at home when I tried to see him in person in Bonn. I carried on a correspondence

with Carl Neumann, of Leipzig, but it remained totally fruitless” (Planck, 1949, p.18). “... A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”

.... even after the publication of *De Revolutionibus* most astronomers retained their belief in the central position of the Earth; even Brahe (Thoren, 1990) whose observations were accurate enough to enable Kepler (Caspar, 1959) to determine that the Mars orbit around the sun was elliptical, not circular, could not bring himself to accept the heliocentric view. Thomas Young proposed a wave theory of light on the basis of good experimental evidence, but because of the prestige of Newton, who of course favoured a corpuscular view, no-one accepted Young's theory (Gillespie, 1960).

....

Similarly, William Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood was poorly received, in spite of his prestigious position as the King's physician, and harmed his career (Keele, 1965). Pasteur too was hounded because his discovery of the biological character of the fermentation process was found unacceptable. Liebig and many others defended the chemical theory of these processes long after the evidence in favour of Pasteur was conclusive (Dubois, 1950). Equally his micro-organism theory of disease caused endless strife and criticism. Lister's theory of antiseptics (Fisher, 1977) was also long argued over, and considered absurd; so were .... . [ ] Priestley (Gibbs, 1977) retained his views of phlogiston as the active principle in burning, and together with many others opposed the modern theories of Lavoisier, with considerable violence. Alexander Maconochie's very successful elaboration and application of what would now be called 'Skinnerian principle' to the reclamation of convicted criminals in Australia, led to his dismissal (Barry, 1958).

Another good example is Wegener's continental drift theory, which was given short shrift when he first announced it (Wegener, 1915), but which is now universally accepted. .... most geologists rejected it out of hand. Many of them refused to take it seriously and simply ignored it.....

Here I will rather cite in a more detailed manner a particularly interesting case, that of Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis (Slaughter, 1950). .... An almost ten-fold reduction in mortality might have been expected to provoke praise, interest and imitation. Nothing of the kind. .... Professor Klein, his boss, driven by jealousy, ignorance and vanity, put all sorts of obstacles in Semmelweis's way, underhandedly prevented his promotion, and finally drove him from Vienna.

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Another victim of mindless medical orthodoxy was the great Andreas Vesalius, who pioneered modern anatomy 450 years ago. .... Embittered by the harsh condemnation of his work, Vesalius gave up scientific work, burnt his notes, .... Vesalius was made to undertake a pilgrimage to Jerusalem .... he was shipwrecked and perished.

.... it would be quite wrong to imagine that this is the sort of thing that happened in ancient, far-off days, and that nowadays scientists behave in a different manner. .... It is odd that books on genius seldom if ever mention this terrible battle that originality so often has when confronting orthodoxy.

[Excerpted from pp 148-152 of Eysenck (1995).]

(One of the numerous cases which Eysenck did not mention here was that of Ludwig Boltzmann, whose discovery of statistical thermodynamics – fundamental to most modern technology – was ridiculed by professors for ten years till he took his own life.)

It should be apparent from these facts that a similar situation to Lysenkoism, in which the foremost experts were likewise sidelined and oppressed into obscurity by second-rate “distinguished experts”, has prevailed in many times and places throughout history. And should we be so confident that our here-and-now scientific communities are somehow different? In this book I will present evidence and reasons to the contrary.

For that purpose let us first step back to the important basics of how our world, of us and knowledge and other people, works. About the first thing we learn as a child is the immensely important fact that some people are more knowledgeable (expert) than others, and that the way to get on in life is to learn from those more knowledgeable people. We learn this on our first day at school, but we learn it before then from our parents, and indeed, arguably we have already been programmed to assume it by our genes.

And thus we start our climb up the Ladder of Knowledge. The child learns from the teacher. The teacher learns from the college lecturer. The college lecturer learns from the university teaching professor. The teaching professor learns from the research professors. But at this point, the sequence breaks. From whom do the research professors learn? Do they receive Tablets of Truth handed down from God?

Well of course the research professors learn directly from the reality don't they? The history researchers learn from direct studying of dusty ancient archives and muddy archeological excavations, and likewise the medical researchers learn from direct

studying of the reality of healthy and unhealthy people and the molecular processes involved. Or is it really so simple?

One reason it might not be so simple could be that the researchers are not well-engineered truth-discovering robot devices, but instead human beings with dodgy psychologies sometimes deflected from the truth by personal motivations and quirks and societal incentives or pressures. In connection with those distorting factors, it could be useful to consider how persons come to become research professors (e.g. “Principal Investigators”) in the first place, or how they get selected. So let us examine a further notional ladder up from childhood, this time the ladder of developing expertise, or at least the ladder of growing authorisation.

The way it works in the UK is similar in essence to most other modern countries. A child progresses through school up to age 16 to take GCSE exams, and only after success in those exams can they move on to take A-levels, and only after success in those further exams can they enter a university to take first year exams, and only after success in those first-year exams can they take second-year exams, and only after success in those second-year exams can they take their finals exams to get a first degree, and only after success in the first degree exams can they then progress to a masters degree, and only after success in the masters exams can they enter to study for their doctoral “thesis”, and only after success in their doctoral thesis (which is the obligatory minimum qualification to be a researcher) can they progress to a postdoc position, and only after that can they hope to become a lecturer or thereafter a professor.

Many people talk about the “top universities” and the “best graduates”, as if this system is self-evidently a well-founded means for selecting the best minds for the job. But is it? In reality, there is reason to believe that something has gone very wrong here. And yet this system of “meritocracy” is rarely if ever subjected to any coherent criticism or even questioning. And that could be because it is in the nature of the resulting society that those in a position to be heard and to be influential are those who have themselves found success in that “meritocratic” selection process, and consequently are strongly inclined to admire it. The awarding of a degree can be seen as a biasing bribe, incentivising its recipient to believe that it is some sort of valid indicator of their hard-earned intellectual superiority over others less deserving.

The exams system does indeed at first appear to make sense. It is rather obvious to any child that their parents and teachers do indeed have more knowledge and understanding than themselves, and are not teaching them a load of rubbish. And it is rather obvious to the child that those exams do indeed give fair indications

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of those who have “worked harder” and or learned more or less of what they are being taught, or have become more or less skilled in solving mathematical problems, playing musical instruments and so on. I recall my own pride / smugness about my own easy excellence in grammar school exams, and my notion that anyone who didn't have a maths A-level must be somehow mentally handicapped. I'm glad that gas heating fitters are required to score 100% in their exams. The system of exams clearly works in many ways as an essential component of seemingly every advanced civilisation in memory.

And yet.

Scientific research is very different from maintenance of gas heaters. Ideally the gas fitter will confine their creativity to dealing with the customer, and will do the actual technical work with resolutely uncreative rule-following avoidance of interesting experimentation in your home. By contrast, competent research requires extreme creativity, at every turn thinking up the questions that no-one has ever asked before, and questioning every sacred assumption they have dutifully learnt. Myself being a person to whom scientific research was as inevitable a “career choice” as composing must have been to a Beethoven or Bach, I recall only too well the BPS advice booklet saying that research posts would require the “highest intellectual standing”. And yet it made no attempt to unpick that psychological atom into its sub-component electrons or protons.

In all manner of respects, our modern societies have far advanced from one or two thousand years ago. And yet the fundamental social mechanism of selection by exams is virtually unchanged over those millennia, except in that writing and box-ticking now predominates over face-to-face viva-voce interrogation and defence.

What talents do exams measure? Arguably they almost entirely measure the ability to learn the facts and notions and standard skills being taught. They reflect the ability to read, remember, recall, and rewrite, with sufficient speed and facility between 9am and 1pm on one particular hot summer day not of one's choosing. But you don't have to take my word for it, because here it is “from the horse's mouth”:

*“As a Cambridge medical graduate it always saddened me to see so many able-minded people struggle through our medical course. The sheer volume of information we were expected to memorise was mind-boggling.”* (Gundroo, 2014)

*“The medical curriculum is so overloaded with information that you just have to learn what you hear, as you hear it.”* (Humphries & Bystrianyk, 2013)

*"I was good at exams, and so I bloody well should have been. The system was set up for people like me – thorough, plodding, uncreative, capable of taking in great mounds of received wisdom and regurgitating them, undigested, unquestioned, unprocessed in three-hour bursts of neat handwriting."* (Mangan, 2014)

*"The school system is now finely focussed only on exam success and the exam game has very very little to do with success in real life. In business and other parts of the real world the skills that get you on in chosen area are ones such as:*

- *admitting you don't know something and going out to find it out;*
- *finding someone who knows more than you and working with them to create something bigger and better;*
- *going out on a limb, flying a few kites, taking a bit more time over the really difficult issues.*

*In an exam situation this is either called cheating or will ensure you fail. Life is very very rarely like an exam situation – it is surprisingly a lot more like the coursework that is being consigned by Gove and his fellow conservatives to the scrap-heap."* (Edwards, 2014)

((Some readers are claiming that the information quoted above is out of date, so I'll add yet more here. Firstly some words from the brand-new book *"So You Got into Medical School... Now What?"* (Paull, 2015): *"...the sheer amount of information..."*; *"A popular analogy likens the medical student's efforts to absorb all the information presented in class to trying to drink from a fire hose."* *"Every medical student feels the strain of information overload. So what to do with the colossal amount of information being forced upon you daily?"* And finally some latest words from a 16-year-old (Vogt-Vincent, 2015): *"Suddenly, the creativity I'd brought to all my school projects wasn't accepted anymore. Instead I had to memorise facts and statistics."* *"One bad result makes you a failure. Success is measured by how well you remember".*))

And meanwhile what talents are required for excelling in genuinely scientific research and discovery? Arguably the ability to question one's prior learning and assumptions, to creatively think of new questions and possibilities, and to make reasonable judgements of what is more likely to be truer or more credible or effective.

And now, what talents are required for obtaining a doctoral PhD qualification? Generally the candidate has to be able and willing to stick for several years to a particular project or at least field of research, and at the end of it produce a sufficiently long sequence of words to impress the existing experts, while not contradicting any established beliefs too uncomfortably.

And what talents are required for functioning as a competent researcher? Arguably the best researcher is one who is constantly

open to the possibility that the line of research they are following may not be the best, and so they should dump it and move to something better. And they should learn to present their work in not too many words. Because whereas the PhD thesis will fail if it isn't more or less book-length, in contrast the journals demand that their papers be kept below a rather tight length. For instance as the geniuses at the Lancet state, "If you can't express your idea [and by implication a useful amount of evidence and explanation] in less than 1500 words it probably isn't a *Hypothesis* [and so we will bin it]". (And note that you have just now read the 4108<sup>th</sup> word in this book, and Chapter 2 is approx 12,600 words, and Chapter 7 is approx 18,000 words.)

In my experience, the predominant intellectual shortcoming of the human race is not deficient ability to *learn*, but instead is deficient ability to *unlearn* that which has already been learnt in error. Once your brain has got a faulty notion etched into its neurons, it can be much harder for that faulty notion to be removed and a corrected notion to be substituted in its place. And the education and selection systems of exams strongly favour uncritical learning unencumbered by too much inefficiency-creating doubt giving capability for unlearning.

There probably hasn't been any research on the question, but it seems rather self-evident anyway that a disposition towards questioning and doubting of information would tend to interfere with the headlong rush of hyperactive memorising which has evidently become a prime preoccupation of those in the business of supposedly nurturing the world's greatest intellectual excellence. It's a bit like a cycle race going up a mountain pass, in which having no brakes on your bike would give you a faster time up the hill. And yet in a real world which includes the corresponding downhills your bike without brakes would soon result in your death rather than any time records.

Thus the extreme relentless selection of supposed excellence falsely defined in terms of hyperactive learning would also be extremely selective *against* any talent for *unlearning*.

And it is arguably that *unlearning* ability which is the path to wisdom and to competence as a great researcher and discoverer, and hence a great true expert. I see so many persons of high intelligence who have taken one or more intellectual wrong turnings early on and consequently ended up far from the truth they thought they were heading towards. Their "super-bike" without brakes left the road to reality on one of those downhill bends.

One of the most important wrong turnings appears to be that "fact" which we learn first and most persistently. That is that the

experts, namely the more “qualified” more senior people, know best and that any less-qualified inferiors who challenge them can be dismissed as wrong. All through childhood and formal education we get reinforced in that notion. And those of us who are awarded degrees and the like are all the more strongly reinforced (effectively bribed) into this cultist belief. All this time we lack a proper appreciation of the flaws in the Ladder of Knowledge pointed out in the preceding paragraphs here. The thing is that some of what we learnt from our teachers may have been wrong, because the researchers or discoverers it came from were wrong in the first place.

In conclusion then, there is reason to believe that our academic selection procedures, far from selecting the most suitable intellects for research careers, ironically instead block at every turn those most talented to be researchers and discoverers. Producing even a great discovery does not in the slightest require being able to read at the highest speed, learn “facts” at highest speed, recall at high speed, wake up and attend a course or exam before 10 am yesterday, or stick at completing a rubbishy boring thesis with sufficient tenacity.

The greatest genuine creative geniuses would be particularly unlikely to be found getting firsts in such centres of hyperactive parroting excellence as Oxford and Cambridge medical schools.

A display of particularly excellent parroting at Portland State University can be seen in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r7cwWegXCU> (which you may also find by websearching for [ conference devolves into chaos ]).

To the extent that any competent researchers still manage to emerge through the multi-hooped talent-excluding system described above, they still then face the social context of the research career.

I see a certain personal irony in my writing those words. Measuring the carbon content of steel samples has been an important function in hi-tech societies, and my father W. E. Clarke F.R.I.C. invented a means of doing it without need for an oxygen supply, in respect of which some people in India wrote in appreciation. At other times I had heard him express regret that much of his work at the cast iron research association had been under commercial confidentiality.

At age 16-17 we grammar-school pupils had to choose what degree subjects we would apply to universities to study, and discuss it with the headmaster. I was superbly talented in maths and physics and so the headmaster was very concerned at my wish to not study science of the maths/physics/chemistry sort. My reluctance was based on a vague notion as a very naïve youth that a career as a

scientist entailed being a cog in the wheels of machinery controlled by others for not necessarily the purposes one would choose oneself. And not so many decades after the Hiroshima atomic bombing it seemed to me that the main problems were in social rather than physical sciences. Meanwhile of course many thousands of my contemporaries did just carry on getting further entangled in those social mechanisms and ultimately becoming visible as “distinguished” cogs therein.

I don't believe that many people go into medical research with an intention of becoming charlatans. But, like my abovementioned contemporaries, they probably don't really understand what they are getting into. This is especially the case in respect of medical schools. Getting into med school is thought of as the highest achievement of a school-leaving university applicant. Just about any normal 17-year-old would assume that med school is where you learn the truth, and most useful truth, about health and illness. They are rarely told the crucial fact that med schools long ago became the pawns of the hugely-profitable big pharma industry. Rather than institutions of education, they should properly be recognised as institutions of propaganda brainwashing for corporatised medicine (that is patented drugs and expensive surgical technologies). (I won't give any sources in proof of these points here because if you don't want to believe them they have anyway been well-explored by others elsewhere such as Healy (2012) and Gotzsche (2013) and my main concern in this book is to show my own new contributions to knowledge rather than encyclopedise the work already done by others. But note the Cambridge medical graduate's comment above here for a very large hint that the students may not be operating in higher scepticism mode during their “higher education”.)

It does appear that a lot of what students learn in medical schools is true, but I've also seen a remarkable amount of deathly claptrap emerging therefrom, and I would hesitate to make a judgement of which is the greater in volume or impact.

I am told that the corruption of medical students already begins in their first days, with freebies and inducements of various sorts being handed to them by corporate interests. No less importantly, how best to succeed at med school? To conveniently agree with most of what your professors tell you, or instead to challenge them as mistaken? And how did they get to be professors anyway? (see above and below).

I've never been enrolled in a medical school course, but someone who has, and indeed graduated therefrom, is Dr Malcolm Kendrick. And on page 194 of his excellent book *Doctoring Data* (Kendrick, 2014) he makes it clear that the students are very

emphatically taught that they must never question the existing “knowledge”, or else their career will come to a bad end. (And this sort of thing doesn't end on graduation. David Healy, author of *Pharmageddon*, was dismissed from a professorship due to telling people of the evidence that antidepressants were causing suicides; they have also caused America's epidemic of “gun” massacres and probably the suicide airliner crash in France.)

Having successfully completed the 20-year high-jumping marathon of exams and got your PhD doctorate at last, you still have no chance of being recognised as a *leading expert* until you have first developed a sufficiently extensive and impressive *publication record*. And the published items have to be not self-published but instead accepted by “leading” “prestigious” “peer-reviewed” journals or else they don't count at all in the authoritarian bureaucracy-loving pecking-order competition that is institution-alised academia.

Building up your publication record usually requires some succeeding in the “peer preview” system of assessing research grant applications, and invariably requires sufficient succeeding in getting your publications accepted into journals through the “peer-review” system of volunteers the journals operate. And it helps if your publications don't later get “retracted” – retrospectively asserted to be unfit for publication.

There is so much wrong in this context, so much fallacy, that it is difficult to know where to start on demuddling it.

The mythology is that genuine science is that which comes from universities and is published in peer-reviewed journals, while anything else is merely unproven rubbish from a nobody. The universities were all personally founded by God/Allah for the accurate enlightenment of His subjects, and peer-review involves sending verification emails up from the universities to Heaven and back.

In reality, human beings tend to gather into convenient ideological lobbying groups (universities and their departments) and devise systems for efficient back-stabbing of rivals and for mutual back-scratching of collaborators (“peer-review” and “peer-preview”).

Not the least of the myths about “peer review” is that scientific publication has just about always used it. In reality “peer review” did not exist until recent decades, with the rise of the mass-production professionalised publish-or-perish career “publication record” corporatised science that now dominates every field. Einstein's ultra-famous non-professional publications were not subject to “peer review” (so we'd better dump them in the trash for a start). Indeed when one of his later papers was sent to a reviewer Einstein objected and got another journal to publish it instead

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(without “peer review”).

“Peer review” and “peer preview” have a number of severe faults in common. But basically, if you have made a great discovery, you can only get it meaningfully published (or get a research grant to progress it) if your anonymous deadly enemy rivals first give their anonymous endorsement of it being worth the bother. Consider the following scenarios which are *precisely* analogous to how the so-called “peer-review” system works in scientific publishing.

The Uruguay football team are selecting their players for the 2014 World Cup, and they obtain an anonymous peer-review from Wayne Rooney who anonymously says that Suarez is really lacking in any ball-kicking skill and not talented enough to play in a national team. (Oh, but it was from an expert unpaid peer volunteer!) So Suarez receives a letter telling him he’s not hot enough to participate in international football.

The Democrats party are selecting their presidential candidate and obtain an anonymous peer-review from Hillary Clinton which anonymously tells them that Barack Obama is far too foolish and incompetent to ever function as a US president. (Oh, but it was from an expert unpaid peer volunteer!) So Obama receives a letter telling him he hasn’t qualified for the presidential contest.

Wimbledon are sorting out who should play the 2014 games and they seek an anonymous peer-review from Venus Williams who anonymously says that Maria Sharapova is really past it and not remotely competent to play tennis any more. (Oh, but it was from an expert unpaid peer volunteer!) So Sharapova gets a letter saying that she isn’t good enough at tennis and won’t be allowed to play there.

A record label seeks an anonymous peer review from Mick Jagger which anonymously informs them that Paul McCartney really has no talent for music such as is worth making recordings of. (Oh, but it was from an expert unpaid peer volunteer!) So McCartney gets a letter telling him his music isn’t good enough for recording.

A classical music recording company seeks an anonymous peer review from Karajan who anonymously says that his contemporary Sir Georg Solti is vastly overrated and his conducting is worse than an average drunk. (Oh, but it was from an expert unpaid peer volunteer!)

The international chess federation are sorting out the upcoming championships and obtain an anonymous peer-review from Bobby Fischer who anonymously informs them that Kasparov is too thick to play chess even with babies. (Oh, but it was from an expert unpaid peer volunteer!)

And the means by which the genuinely most excellent science gets published (or more likely is *prevented from getting published*) (in any meaningful form) is exactly like those examples above.

You may of course think that those examples are bonkers. But yes, indeed the “peer review” system is an absolutely stark raving bonkers way for supposedly selecting the best discoveries in science for publishing.

Consider it from another angle. You may have heard of the Olympic Games, in which the world’s top sportspeople compete. Anyone who attends or watches the Olympics can see for themselves who runs the fastest, jumps the highest, and so on. They can see for themselves what the scores are and who is actually the world’s greatest. Meanwhile there could be what we might call the “Science Olympic Games”. To be a champion in the Science Olympics is a much more important achievement than all those sports golds and silvers put together. A great scientist’s work is creative and valuable whereas no-one really needs high jumpers and fast runners (who can’t even do that after about age 30 anyway). And yet, the way the “science olympics” (aka “peer review”) works is rather peculiar. That’s because – we are required to believe – the only persons capable of “seeing the score” and discerning who is the champion are the deadly rivals of that potential champion. So it’s exactly like as if Wiggins could only win the 2012 cycling gold medal if Cavendish testified that Wiggins had indeed been faster than himself. And what any “non-qualified” person claimed about who cycled fastest was of no consequence.

Now let’s have a guess as to why the great scientific geniuses of the past ceased to keep emerging at exactly the same time as corporatised “peer-reviewed” science developed.

Peer reviews are not 100% bad. I have been invited to do six myself and in the process seen the reviews from six others, and also seen numerous reviews of my own papers including of course the ones which got them accepted. Often the unpaid volunteer peer reviewers do contribute to improving published papers and weeding out defective ones. But that positive is utterly outweighed by the vast negative that my examples above here should make clear. The most important thing in science publishing is that the most groundbreaking discoveries should not be completely suppressed from entering the scientific discourse and public record. And yet that outrageous outcome is what the so-called peer review system is perfectly set up to achieve. It is completely unaccountable and wide open to abuse and that abuse very regularly happens as I will show you in detail further on. And I remind you of the five quotations at the start of this chapter.

Not only is there that problem of corrupt hostile rivals suppressing great discoveries, but also there is the problem of even well-meaning “peer” colleagues being unable to make the mental adjustments to appreciate great new “paradigm shifts” replacing flawed conventional wisdoms with radically improved ways of seeing the same things. And there are also bad commercial reasons for disfavouring inconvenient discoveries.

Another fault of the peer review system is in the opposite direction, giving favourable treatment to outright rubbish. I myself was requested to peer-review a paper about the “Fractional Autism Triad Hypothesis”. I recognised this (non-)concept as the complete and utter dis-logicality it was and explained this in detail in my review (Clarke, 2012). But strangely the other two reviewers went on about how “important” and “valuable” the paper was and that it should therefore be published. (The editor decided to refuse the paper despite those two favourable reviews, presumably because of my own outrightly terminal critique.) The problem is that the “expert” specialists on the “Fractional Autism Triad Hypothesis” would be those working as specialists on that same particular pseudic theme and therefore inclining to say(/?pretend?) what “important” “valuable” research it was. I think the editor was canny enough to see that my own, “non-fractional”, viewpoint about autism would mean I could give an alternative (if not entirely disinterested) view of the matter. So you can see that not only can the peer review system hideously block the most important discoveries, but it meanwhile can allow through the most timewasting of rubbish unchallenged if there is a professional community of publish-perish “specialists” to support it.

My comments above about peer review don't come out of a vacuum. Numerous *published* authors have complained about the absurdity of the system. (I'm also such a published author myself I should make clear.) Numerous articles have been published discussing the same, such as for instance Eysenck & Eysenck (1992) and Horrobin (1990). Others have commented how Einstein would have had no chance of getting his famous works published nowadays. And here are the words of Dr. Marcia Angell, the editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine* for 20 years:

*“It is simply no longer possible to believe much of the clinical research that is published, or to rely on the judgment of trusted physicians or authoritative medical guidelines. I take no pleasure in this conclusion, which I reached slowly and reluctantly over my two decades as an editor of The New England Journal of Medicine.” (NY Review of Books, January 15, 2009)*

A further severe problem in medical research is a huge hostility to new ideas. There has accumulated an enormous amount of data (e.g. 98,000 studies of glutathione alone) and yet a great paucity of presentation of ideas to tie it together into meaningfulness. And yet the vast majority of putatively “scientific” journals in the medical sphere still will not even consider publishing anything theoretical or even marginally theoretical. For instance I noticed that some studies of distance from highways were suggesting that traffic pollution was causal of autism, and so I sent to Simon Baron-Cohen’s journal a “Brief Report” of data showing that the increase of autism was rather obviously unrelated to the increase of vehicle miles travelled, rendering that theory highly improbable. It made sense for me to briefly mention in that report my proposed explanation in terms of indoor mercury vapour from parents’ amalgams. And yet Dr Baron-Cohen would only publish it if that were cut out and the readers left in the dark as to what the explanation could be.

This theory-hostile perversion of science was complained about more than fifty years ago by the great medical discoverer Emmanuel Revici (1961)(who lived to be 101 by the way):

*“... the relationship between theory and experimentation has been progressively distorted. An unrestrained exaggeration of the role of the experiment, the erroneous view that pure facts represent the aim of research, has led to an entirely unbalanced approach”; “data alone do not generate ideas”; “science cannot progress without theory”.*

A symptom of this anti-theory perversion is that many academics routinely abuse the word “*hypotheses*” to refer to what are in reality *theories*. I shall elaborate about this in a later chapter.

Anyway, let’s imagine that at last you have got your PhD and wish to apply for a research grant. A problem is that the money comes from a big grant-making institution which in turn gets its money from the most profit-making medical industries of patented drugs and surgery and high-tech in general. Not the least of those huge profit-making lobbies is dental amalgam (50% neurotoxic mercury), which is inserted in millions of teeth every year partly because the use of other materials requires much more skill and patience of the dentists (so they can’t earn as much). And an equally huge profit-making industry is psychiatric drugs (such as antidepressants, antipsychotics, and sedatives), the increasing use of which might just possibly have a huge amount to do with the health consequences of those same profitable amalgams, as you may see in a later section here.

If you seek to study a question which is inconvenient or embarrassing for the funding sources, or study it in an inconvenient way, you are liable to get your funding refused or terminated. Just one example of many of this corruption in the US government's NIH has been detailed by Cathy DeSoto (2014).

You might think that medical research charities would help by funding research that is not attractive to commercial or professional objectives. To some extent that may happen, and yet by the time a charity gets big enough to make a significant impact it easily becomes prey to entryism and the forces of the vast wealth of the medical corporations and professional unions, for whom a million dollars is peanuts. And just imagine the huge extent you could influence things with even just one such "peanut". Another part of the problem with the charities is that even if they are controlled by well-meaning non-research people, those non-professionals then just naively assume that they should look for guidance exclusively from the professional "proper experts" anyway – so they end up as just more of the same anyway. Gotzsche (2013) has some further discussion of the corruption of medical research charities, not least the telling observation that they frequently campaign stridently for the government to find the money for an expensive new drug but never campaign for the manufacturers to reduce the price (duh?!).

And if you try to get journals to publish such inconvenient research, you will find the editors of the journals refusing to accept it. (Further on I will show you some of the cheap rubbish that issues from those journals in that connection.)

And even if they do accept it, the authors (and editors) are liable thereafter to be bullied into "retracting" it – of which I'll show you more further on here.

A further testament to the abysmalness of the "peer review" / "publication record" system for discerning the "leading experts" is the case of Peter Higgs, the 2013 Physics Nobel Laureate. He is widely thought of as being the greatest living physicist, having forty years ago predicted the "Higgs boson", only recently confirmed. And yet he and others have commented that if he had come a generation or more later, he would have had no career at all, because he did not have a sufficiently high output of publications to remain qualified for a research post.

The last few pages here have been less than entirely positive about the peer review system. As a matter of fairness I should perhaps point out that my unflattering evaluation is not universally shared. Some prominent organisations such as the Royal Society say of peer review only how valuable and important it is to the advancement of science. Well, they would do, because they are the

organisations of the corporatised hierarchised science establishment, and the peer review system does a “great” job of favouring their “correct” “sensible science” establishment views and rejecting everything else, so their enthusiasm is to be expected? So far in this book I have quoted six people including a Nobel prizewinner and the editors of the three most prestigious journals (Lancet, BMJ, and NEJM) all speaking very condemnatorily about peer review. The institutional establishment’s only response to these highly-qualified critics is to ignore their comments and pretend they don’t exist. This is typical “cherry-picking” behaviour, of which I will say more further on here.

Anyway let’s suppose that at last you have got some publications of outstanding discoveries accepted in peer reviewed journals. Surely you are *now* qualified as a *leading expert* at last!? But no, because you still don’t have a *citation record*. Such a citation is when researcher B’s paper cites (i.e. mentions) researcher C’s paper as being relevant to their own. Effectively researcher B thereby gives a career “point” to researcher C (even if actually they are citing them as being flawed rubbish – yes please don’t blame me for this crackpot system). Published papers have typically 30 to 200 such citations (references) listed at the end.

This citation ranking system is basically as bonkers as the peer review system. It’s like waiting for Venus Williams to give Sharapova a point, for Rooney to give Suarez a point, for Bobby Fischer to give Kasparov a point, and so on. But why the hell would a hostile rival want to bother to give you *any* points? Especially if you have made a massive discovery but are a “nobody” in the field. Or even more if you are a “nobody” who has somehow managed to publish something embarrassing or inconvenient to others in that line of business. You have to bear in mind that modern health research is extremely competitive, with many times more “postdocs” constantly coming up than there are jobs for them to get.

And there is a *very special sort of citation* which has a vital importance here. Under the lunatic publish-or-perish system, there are so many papers getting published that researchers do not have time to ponder even all those papers which have been peer-reviewed and PubMed indexed even in or relevant to their own specific field such as autism or bipolar. So they often have to rely on “review articles” to provide an overview of a particular question, or at least provide them with a decent reading list – and especially when they are newly entering the field. Those review articles cite (or at least are *supposed to cite* and *assumed to cite*) all the relevant previous papers and books on that subject, for instance on .....

.....“theories of autism”.

In a later chapter here is reprinted a theory of autism which was published in a peer reviewed journal in 1993. You can see that it is a substantial document. The editor HJ Eysenck, the most-cited-ever scientist (back then at least) wrote that it was “*well-worth publishing*”, and Bernard Rimland, the founder of Autism Research Institute and Autism Society of America and demolisher of the Bettleheim “refrigerator mothers” theory and pioneer of the modern bio-genetic concept of autism, wrote of it as “*excellent*”, “*fine work*” and “*Robin P Clarke is one of those rare souls with the ability to assimilate and synthesise large amounts of information and generate new and interesting ideas*”. It is the only autism theory to actually explain *why* autism exists, and to explain the presence of such strange features as the handflapping and unusual facial symmetry and spinning without dizziness, and to do that in terms of well-established biological concepts. And it was back then the only paper to indicate the relevance of gene-expression, whereas now just about everyone recognises that gene-expression is absolutely central to the causation of autism. It already recognised that many genes and environmental factors contributed to the causation. And much more. And not a single fault of reasoning or evidence has been raised in the two decades since - which is very exceptional for any psychiatric theory (as they just about always have something clearly wrong with them). The point is that this theory was and is not just some speculative lightweight drivel to be rightly ignored without even a mention.

Review papers (reviewing for instance the existing autism theories) are usually authored only by the topmost “leading experts” in a field, effectively as guidance or teaching documents for other upcoming researchers. And this comes in the context of the comment of the physicist Planck in 1949 that:

*“ ... a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”*

(a notion since confirmed by Azoulay et al. (2015).)

And of course that new generation will only become “familiar with it” if the older generation of “leading experts” bother to let them know it exists anyway.

Lorna Wing [1928-2014] has been widely considered a hero of autism research, and supreme leading expert. She kindly wrote to me a letter in which she stated: “*As a social psychiatrist I do not have the expertise to comment on your [supposedly] genetic theory of autism.*”

It is in that context that she nevertheless found herself somehow able to have the expertise to write and publish the key overview reviews of theories of autism causation. In her reviews she did not even mention the existence of that 1993 paper. And that can hardly be because it was just any old rubbish that could rightly be dismissed with a wave.

Perhaps the preceding paragraph is giving an impression of bad faith by Dr Wing. Which might not be justified. The thing is as I said earlier that people are very poor at un-learning their previous faulty learning. And Dr Wing's overview reviews adopted a standard form of neatly sorting the autism theories into "genetic theories", "environmental theories", and "psychological theories" - which was all very well until a certain Clarke came along and proposed to upset this tidy arrangement with a theory which was genetic *and* environmental *and* psychological *and* also molecular *and* evolutionary *and* at the level of actual weird symptoms. Any decent theory does need to address all of these. But it did not fit in with Dr Wing's pre-existing conceptual scheme, and to make matters worse had at its centre an entirely novel concept of "general suppression of gene-expression" (antiinnatia), which is not always a wise thing to do. Basically being too far ahead of one's time may be worse than being behind it. And if a person can't understand something they are liable to assume the error lies in that which they don't understand and consequently assume it can be ignored as rubbish anyway. Especially if they are already being worshipped as the leading expert. Such is the repeated history of science as indicated in those excerpts from Eysenck's book. I recall Rimland's words over the phone that "You should be celebrating that your work is being ignored". Which would be fine if I was a computer rather than a would-be member of society with a don't-bother-marrying-after-date attached.

Subsequent to the honourable non-mentions by Dr Wing and others, I have encountered various people reasoning along the lines of "Baah baah, no-one else is trotting over to your corner of the field so I don't see any reason why I should either, baah!". This does of course indicate independent-minded thinking on their part.

If I were to present you with a new painting, or new music video, or new style of coat, you would not respond by saying "But I'm not an expert on coats (or music or art) - what do the experts think?" And yet that is exactly how "non-experts" invariably respond to the presentation of a great new scientific discovery: "What do the experts think?". But then why would any "distinguished expert" have any motivation to admit that he had been out-"experted" by some nobody other person's work? So what should you seriously

expect by way of answer to “What do the experts think?”? In the face of such a comprehensive “Catch-22” situation, where neither “experts” nor “non-experts” are willing to grant any recognition, hence logically no-one is, it is not really surprising that so many great scientific discoveries have had such a struggle to gain any recognition. Or that creativity research professor Dean K Simonton (1989) wrote:

*“what I worry about most is whether all the commotion of big science obscures the voices of a few homeless people who are today's versions of the great geniuses of old.”*

I will have more to say about these stone-age selection systems in the later chapter about what changes could be made.

### **And so the Ghost of Lysenko lives on**

Again I think we should be wary of embracing false absolutist stereotypes. Not everything the medical establishment says is untrue, and not everything it advocates is harmful. My own experience is that there are some professors who do indeed talk much sense and probably are the genuine leading experts in their fields, even in aspects of health science. But there are also too many of whom the reverse is the case. In the preceding pages here I have described the abysmal systems of selection and suppression which make that just about inevitable. The processes are very much still in place which enable control by a medical establishment of charlatans and suppression of any dissidence from certain established dogmas. This situation has been extensively written about by for instance Henry Bauer in his book “Dogmatism in Science and Medicine” (Bauer, 2012), and numerous earlier books cited therein.

A recent article by Aseem Malhotra (2014) indicates that medics are far from uniformly mindless dogma-following parrots. But on the other hand, at least in respect of certain important questions there appears to be near-absence of dissidence from the official quackery.

And I will show you in later sections the detailed workings of the powerful system which completely prevents any successful challenge to the false expertise, no matter how utterly absurd its defences may be and no matter how gigantically scandalous its misconduct may be.

Finally here I recommend an informative article by a professor of medicine which you can find on the web titled “Academia Suppresses Creativity” (Southwick, 2012).