

Review of Henry Bauer, *Dogmatism in Science and Medicine: How Dominant Theories Monopolize Research and Stifle the Search for Truth*
Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2012, Pp. v, 293.
Ron Westrum, Eastern Michigan University

This is a most worthwhile book. Henry Bauer has taken on the important question: What role do knowledge monopolies play in modern science? In a sociological study, he draws the consequences of this hegemony. It is disturbing reading. Written in a passionate but well-researched way, Bauer shows the dangers that powerful groups in mainstream science pose to open inquiry and an open society.

A knowledge monopoly is a school of thought whose powers are sufficient to crush dissent. Many means are used to reinforce the dominant perspective. If research is to be done, that research must support the dominant perspective. Research that does not support the dominant perspective is seen as incompetent. Since deviant research is suppressed, the dominant perspective's views appear obvious and unopposed. In some cases, opposition to the dominant view appears unthinkable and irrational. One thinks of Freud's example of the person who proposes that the moon is full of jam — others do not bother to argue with that person, because the proposer is considered crazy. Accordingly, rather than trying to reason with those who dissent, the agents of knowledge monopolies try to keep their critics from speaking at all. Since monopolies may be more common than one might think, this could mean that dictatorial behavior toward critics in science is becoming common.

That science might have knowledge monopolies may come as a surprise. The growth of consensus is usually seen as a good development for science; Bauer shows how, on the contrary, that consensus can be forced and illusory. Consensus may instead represent a situation in which other opinions are simply not heard. As Bruno Latour wrote in *Science in Action*, entrepreneurs in science strive to sell their constructions. If they are successful, however, the temptation to squelch dissent or competition may result in a monopoly.

One of the great virtues of the book is good case-studies, telling examples of scientific misbehavior by elite practitioners. Among the examples that he uses are the HIV/AIDS and human influences on global warming. His intimate and detailed knowledge of the cases is helpful here. Bauer ought to know, since he has argued a very different view of the HIV/AIDS relationship from the mainstream, and thus has been subjected to a great variety of pressures to change his views. In each case he shows how opposing views have been silenced and marginalized, even when those who hold them may themselves be eminent. Bauer shows the very ungentlemanly tactics that are used to prevent the opposition from getting access to journals, conferences, funding, and press coverage. Knowledge monopolies seem to operate like the famous Indian Juggernaut: those who get in the way are crushed or put aside.

A major device for maintaining consensus is peer review. "Peer review amounts to testing new claims against the conventional wisdom, and the conventional wisdom tends

to shrug off anything that contradicts it” (123). Bauer points to the well-known fact that editors often know how a particular reviewer will react to a particular article. Rather than a “blind” choice, it is often an intentional one. (The same is often true of book reviewers.) Bauer is at his best when he is discussing why conflicts of interest in reviewing are typically dismissed as unimportant. He suggests that, contrary to the ordinary view, conflicts of interest are quite important, and “apparent” conflicts of interest are in fact often serious issues.

One of the best case-studies in the book is Chapter 3, “A case of public censorship: Elsevier and *Medical Hypotheses*.” Here he shows that eminent bacteriologist Peter Duesberg’s attempt to correct a serious allegation about him in the *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome* in 2008 was turned aside. Duesberg then tried to publish a suitable reply in *Medical Hypotheses*, a journal for irregular results in medicine. But an on-line version of his article led to publisher Elsevier removing the print version from the publication. The publisher took action without notifying either editor or review board. In the end, even the editor of *Medical Hypotheses* would end up leaving the journal. Apparently Elsevier was threatened with more important sanctions, and acted quickly to squash its problem. So much for free speech, and gentlemanly courtesy (people should always be granted a chance to defend themselves where they are attacked).

Overall, I find Bauer’s arguments convincing and his examples disturbing. Particularly in medicine, it would seem, science has gotten too close to commercial enterprise, and it has not been able to distance itself. And the concentration of power is a problem. It is a problem when actions in science remind one too much of Kafka. The behavior of the powerful knowledge monopolies and their toadies, sycophants, sergeants-at-arms moves science from an ethos of open inquiry to one of “keeping the faith.” Keeping the faith is never good for science when it blocks inquiry.

A few minor quibbles. It would be much to Bauer’s advantage to bring in the concept of groupthink, and it would provide additional support for many of his arguments. Some of the behavior that Bauer describes reflects a “groupthink” mentality, but this concept is never mentioned and Irving Janis’s book *Victims of Groupthink* does not appear in the references.

Similarly the index is present, but inadequate. Somewhere in the text it mentions “stages of conflict of interest,” but I could find no entry about this in the index. Somehow I had missed this the first time around, and then could not use the index to find it.

Finally on page 165 there is a statement about the historical incidence of fraud. Bauer feels that the incidence in the past has been lower. But has it? Stephen Brush wrote a famous essay (which Bauer does not cite, although I am sure he knows of it), called “Should the history of science be rated X?” This would suggest a different view.

Contact details: rwestrum@emich.edu

Westrum, Ron. 2012. Review of *Dogmatism in Science and Medicine: How Dominant Theories Monopolize Research and Stifle the Search for Truth*. *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 1 (10): 10-11.
<http://wp.me/p1Bfg0-tf>