

Pathological Skepticism And Pseudoskepticism

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<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Pseudoskeptic>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudoskepticism>

The terms Pathological skepticism and Pseudoskepticism were coined in the early 1990s in response to members of skeptic groups who apply the label of "Pathological Science" to many fields which are actually protoscience.

Protoscience is a term sometimes used to describe a hypothesis which has not yet been tested adequately by the scientific method, but which is otherwise consistent with existing science or which, where inconsistent, offers reasonable account of the inconsistency.

It is normal scientific practice to posit alternate explanations (or theories) for observed phenomenon, to experiment, and to adopt the theory that best predicts the behavior.

Scientific evidence is often indicative rather than overwhelming, and many theories are based not on any single piece of evidence, but on accumulated weight of evidence, or simply on accumulated lack of evidence to the contrary.

Pathological science is the process in science in which "people are tricked into false results ... by subjective effects, wishful thinking or threshold interactions". The term was first used by Irving Langmuir, Nobel Prize-winning chemist, during a 1953 colloquium at the Knolls Research Laboratory.

Pseudoskepticism (pathological skepticism) is closed-mindedness with deception. It is an irrational prejudice against new ideas which masquerades as "legitimate" skepticism.

A person under the sway of pathological skepticism will claim to support reason and the scientific worldview while concealing their strongly negative emotional response against any questioning of contemporary accepted knowledge.

The primary symptoms of pathological skepticism are the presence of scorn, sneering, and ridicule in place of reasoned debate.

In their arguments, pseudoskeptics will freely employ logical fallacies, rhetoric, ridicule and numerous other intellectually dishonest strategies of persuasion which are intended more sway an audience rather than to expose truth.

Logical fallacies are errors in logical arguments which are independent of the truth of the premises. It is a flaw in the structure of an argument as opposed to an error in its premises.

Recognizing logical fallacies in practical arguments may be difficult since arguments are often structured using rhetorical patterns that obscure the logical connections between assertions.

Logical fallacies may also exploit the emotions or intellectual or psychological weaknesses of the interlocutors. Psychological ploys such as use of power relationships between proposer and interlocutor are typically used to subvert actual logic.

Humorous criticism or outright ridicule, appeals to patriotism and morality, appeals to ego and other similar tactics are typically applied to establish necessary intermediate (explicit or implicit) premises for an argument.

Indeed, logical fallacies very often lay in unstated assumptions or implied premises in arguments that are not always obvious at first glance.

By definition, arguments with logical fallacies are invalid, but they can often be cast in such a way that they fit a valid argument form. The challenge to the interlocutor is, of course, to discover the false premise which makes the argument unsound.

The term pseudoskeptic is most commonly encountered in the form popularized by Marcello Truzzi, where he defined pseudoskeptics as those who take the negative rather than an agnostic position but still call themselves 'skeptics'.

Prior to Truzzi, the term "Pseudskepticism" has occasionally been used in 19th and early 20th century philosophy.

The term pseudoskepticism characterized by Truzzi in 1987, was in response to skeptic groups who applied the label of "Pseudoscience" to fields which Truzzi thought might be better described as protoscience.

Truzzi attributed the following characteristics to pseudoskeptics:

- * The tendency to deny, rather than doubt
- * Double standards in the application of criticism
- * The making of judgments without full inquiry
- * Tendency to discredit, rather than investigate
- * Use of ridicule or attacks in lieu of arguments
- * Pejorative labeling of proponents
- * Presenting insufficient evidence or proof
- * Assuming criticism requires no burden of proof

- * Making unsubstantiated counter-claims
- * Counter-claims based on plausibility rather than empirical evidence
- * Suggesting that unconvincing evidence is grounds for dismissing it

Pennsylvania State University Folklorist David J. Hufford uses the term "Radical Skepticism" to describe the unexamined prejudices and preconceptions which he argues are embraced by many -perhaps most - academic scientists.

Regardless of whether the term Pseudoskepticism or Radical skepticism is applied to the phenomenon, the outcomes are the same. Because the inductive dimension of scholarship is often less implicitly presented for scrutiny, the systematic bias of this tradition operates almost invisibly.