

Honors 292

Dr. Brown

Assessment 1-Pseudoscience

Length Requirement: 3-5 pages

Due: February 14th

In Richard Feynman's "The Value of Science," he concludes by extolling, "Doubt is not to be feared but welcomed and discussed." For Feynman, science is a great progress born out of ignorance. "The idea that no one really knew how to run a government," he says, "led to the idea that we should arrange a system by which new ideas could be developed, tried out, and tossed out if necessary."

"If we want to solve a problem that we have never solved before, we must leave the door to the unknown ajar," he says.

In that spirit, I want you to embark on a journey into one of the less reputable realms of science. In this assignment, I want you to find one pseudoscientific theory to investigate. We'll do some work together to discuss possible topics, [but this list](#) is a place to start. To keep you from spiralling to far down into the seductive pull of the unscientific, we'll do this assignment in parts.

1. Narrate your journey. I'm curious about what you know about this topic before you begin and I'm interested in how you begin investigating. Go where your curiosity takes you. Track down leads. Ask all kinds of questions. But make sure you tell me about that journey. Talk about where you end up. What kinds of publications, organizations, websites, pamphlets, Reddit pages, etc do you end up reading?

2. Thoroughly explain the theory or practice. Be as fair and specific as possible.
Think of it this way: write me “an anatomy of a theory.” How does it work?
Summarize it as clearly as possible. Imagine that I’ve never heard of this theory and you’re explaining what it is and how it works. This will lead you to the next part.
3. How is it not...science? I know you will want to tell me what quackery it all is (or maybe you end up in a place you didn’t expect). For now, though, help me see where things go awry, scientifically. What parts of it employ sound science? Where does the scientific become...unscientific? Where does it take its leaps?
This article is a good place to start ([link](#)).
4. What cultural need does it fulfill? In this section, I’m granting you license to speculate about the reason the pseudoscientific theory exists. However, I want you to develop your explanation as much as possible. I get that contrails/chemtrails are incredibly visible, for example, and people have a need to explain them. Why do they explain them in the way they do? What cultural itch does this psuedo-scientific theorizing scratch?
5. Reflect. In this last section, I’d like you to reflect on your investigation. You might discuss what this journey taught you about the difference between Science and Pseudoscience. You might talk about how this journey challenged you and what you thought you knew before.

Notes:

- This assignment is based on a really cool essay prompt created by my friend and colleague Dr. Jeff Newberry. You can check out him and his work here: ([LINK](#))

- The essay will conform to MLA research and formatting guidelines. If you need a refresher, check out this helpful resource: [\(LINK\)](#)

- Important Dates:

Two Weeks Before: Email me your topic proposal. You'll get a short note back from me to either move forward or reconsider.

The Week of the Due Date: Peer Review. You should have a draft reflecting your very best work. We will talk about how to share this with your group later.