

Wikipedia:Why Wikipedia cannot claim the earth is not flat

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It's not likely you'll ever run across an editor who argues **Why Wikipedia cannot claim the Earth is not flat**. But you may encounter some who'll strenuously maintain that a particular "breakthrough," "notable" or "controversial" idea, belief, or theory deserves more consideration than it has received in the academic world. Using the Flat Earth example (below), this article will examine ten types of arguments commonly used by advocates of fringe concepts and advise the neutrally-minded editor or administrator on how to defuse them.

Contents

Policy and practices

- Wikipedia's role as a reference work
 - Close encounters of the fringe kind
 - Dealing with dedicated fringe advocates
-

Ten types of arguments

- Personalisation
 - Sourcing
 - Balance
 - Conspiracy
 - Reversed burden of proof
 - Gaming
 - Amenability
 - Special pleading
 - Controversy
 - But some of the theory is true
-

Historical note

- See also
 - Notes
-

Policy and practices

It is the stated goal of Wikipedia to mirror the current consensus of mainstream scholarship – in the words of WP:NOT, "accepted knowledge". Self-evidently, the mainstream view of what is *accepted* knowledge in a discipline has the largest following and is such the most die weight in the literature. The encyclopedia does not act as an advocate for or passionately promote pioneering minority theories that are currently controversial (a so-called fringe), even if there is a slim chance beliefs on the margin may eventually gain wide consensus (as happened with the proposals of the **round Earth** in Archaic Periods and continental drift before the mechanism of plate tectonics, two classic examples of cutting edge views once deemed fringe theories that turned out to be justified). Wikipedia acknowledges diverse viewpoints on contemporary controversies but represents them in proportion to their prevalence (or due weight) among serious scholars and reporters with reputations of responsibility and reliability. Wikipedia may in some cases limit its mention of theories understood to be fringe to specific articles about those theories, and remove their mention from other articles, per the one way principle.

In summary, Wikipedia is not a soapbox for people to advocate pet points of view. Nor is Wikipedia in the business of adjudicating which pet points of view have a potential for subsequent wide acceptance in the future. Some marginal theories are *fringe science* and some are *pseudo-science* but Wikipedia is not in the business of calling the shots as to where these stand except where reliable sources clarify those differences. Thus Wikipedia is academically conservative, as is fitting for a standard reference work.

Wikipedia's role as a reference work

The threshold for including material in Wikipedia is that it is *verifiable*, not merely that we think it is true. That is, readers must be able to check that the material has already been published by a *reliable source*. Editors should provide a reliable source for quotations and for any material that is challenged or likely to be challenged, or the material may be removed. Verifiability is one of Wikipedia's core content policies.

Therefore, Wikipedia is *not* worried *per se* about whether the *theory* that the Earth is flat is true. There must be current, reliable and independent sources substantiating claims that the earth is flat. But there are no such sources ^[1] that are current (almost no scientists have thought the earth was flat since about the fourth century BC), that are reliable (reliable sources are reviewed for accuracy) or independent (a journal published by the Flat Earth Society would not be independent^[2]).

If Wikipedia had been available around the sixth century B.C., it would have reported the view that the Earth is flat as a fact and *without qualification*. And it would have reported the views of Eratosthenes (who correctly determined the earth's circumference in 240BC) either as controversial, or a fringe view. Similarly if available in Galileo's time, it would have reported the view that the sun goes round the earth as a fact, and if Galileo had been a Wikipedia (https://la.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vicipaedia:Pagina_prima) editor, his view would have been rejected as 'originalie investigations'. Of course, if there is a popularly held or notable view that the earth is flat, Wikipedia reports this view. But it does not report it as true. It reports only on what its adherents believe, the history of the view, and its notable or prominent adherents. Wikipedia is inherently a non-innovative reference work: it stifles creativity and free-thought. Which is A Good Thing.

Close encounters of the fringe kind

Occasionally, civic-minded Wikipedia editors must act to mitigate, redesign, and sometimes destroy the offerings of users who think that a particular 'breakthrough' or 'notable' or 'controversial' idea or theory deserves more consideration than it has received in the academic world. Since Wikipedia is an open project that "anyone can edit", good editors don't take such offerings personally. They do not automatically view supporters of fringe theories as "the enemy". They know that sometimes these fallacies are propagated not out of malice, but ignorance. Humans are fallible creatures, and there are many more ways to be wrong than right. Science is stodgy, typically not glamorous, and entails hard work. By contrast, speculation is stimulating, easy, and fun. It's more exciting to see yourself as a re-discoverer of ancient truths or in the vanguard of a revolutionary scientific breakthrough. Belonging to a small club with a particular belief can be very fulfilling. The world would be a more exciting place if there were malevolent demons abducting humans. If dead people could send us messages, if exotic plants were able to miraculously cure all disease, if free energy were readily available to anyone, or if our dreams could foretell the future. In addition, popular culture can often confuse the general public with uncritical or credulous presentations of such concepts on the internet, books, radio talk shows, TV, and films. It's little wonder that Wikipedia attracts individuals who feel the encyclopedia should include sympathetic coverage of these types of subjects.

Dealing with dedicated fringe advocates

Unfortunately, Wikipedia can attract some extremely dedicated individuals whose aim is to promote *pseudoscience*, *crankery*, *conspiracy theories*, marginal nationalist or historic viewpoints and the like, together with other theories entirely unrecognised by academia. These enthusiasts often edit primarily or entirely on one topic or theme. They attempt to water down language and unreasonably exclude, marginalize or push views beyond the requirements of Neutral point of view, especially by giving undue weight to their preferred theories.

Such grandstanding is forbidden by a variety of Wikipedia policies and guidelines (Verifiability, Neutral point of view, What Wikipedia is not and Fringe theories are name just a few). These policies, *correctly understood* and *correctly used*, will successfully exclude non-notable or fringe views. But what dedicated fringe advocates to familiar with these policies, and have become expert at gaming them or even using them against neutrally-minded but not expert editors. The latter often find their efforts subverted at every step by advocates who revert war over edits, frivolously request citations for obvious or well known information, argue endlessly about the neutral-point-of-view policy and particularly try to undermine the *undue weight clause*.

This maneuvering and filibustering is soon likely to exhaust the patience of any reasonable person who naturally prefers not to reason with the unreasonable, and who, unlike the advocate, has no special interest or passion other than striving to maintain neutrality. Additionally, by continually engaging fringe advocates in endless argument, you run the risk of turning Wikipedia into a battleground or a debating society. At the present time, Wikipedia does not have an effective means to address superficially polite but tendentious, long-term, fringe advocacy. Some contend that this is a main flaw of Wikipedia, that unlike conventional encyclopedias, fanatics (no matter how amateur or idiotic) can always get their way if they stay around long enough and make enough edits and reversions. ^[3] In this sense, Wikipedia's *commitment to amateurism* (http://they.ecs3/MediaWiki/2006/12/22/Citizenium/) does not always work for the best interests of the project.

Ten types of arguments

Arguments commonly used by fringe advocates to support inclusion of marginal viewpoints against official policies fall into a small number of easily recognizable categories. Here are the top ten approaches that might be used by our alleged Flat Earth advocate to argue that Wikipedia cannot claim "The Earth is not flat":

1. Personalisation

Examples

- Your bias against the earth being flat is too strong to be objective.
- Your arguments against flat earth theory so resemble the arguments of editor X that you must be their sockpuppet.
- The flat earth article is being degraded by those who don't like the flat earth theory.
- Ignoring users with differing opinions does nothing to help the further development of this page.

How to recognise

Personalisation is easily the most common form of attack on neutrally-minded editors. Personalisation is ignoring the basis for inclusion altogether, and making the argument personal. For example, they argue that an editor is biased towards the mainstream, or that editors are ginging up because their arguments are so similar (even though they would be similar – the main argument against the earth being flat is topographical, and it is hard to argue against it without repeating the argument). Or they may claim that you disagree with an editor with a fringe agenda is claimed to be uncivil, a personal attack (violation of No personal attacks), a violation of Do not bite the newcomers or a violation of Assume good faith. It may even be claimed that sources that disagree with the fringe point of view cannot be used if they reflect poorly on any living people who are proponents of the fringe point of view (such as critical book reviews, etc).

How to reply

Ignore any personal attack altogether – and particularly *do not* make a personal attack yourself, however tempting it may be. Also try to ignore the arguments and reasons used by mainstream science itself. Your opponents will love this and turn the talk page into a battlefield of competing claims and counterclaims. Simply stick to the principles: if mainstream science holds that the earth is round, and there are reliable sources establishing this as a fact, that is sufficient.

2. Sourcing

Examples

- Essex local authorities trained employees in flat earth theory in 1993.
- The statement that the earth is flat is reliably sourced from *Flat Earth* magazine, which is peer-reviewed.
- There are published sources (including PubMed) that back up the view that people use Flat Earth theory as an adjunct to their existing qualifications and businesses.
- How do you explain the EXCELLANT [sic] results which the US Army gets by using techniques which are talked about in Flat Earth literature? If it's a bunch of hogwash, then the TRADOC's results should be in shambles. Instead, we have the most successful, motivated force on the planet.
- Since established scientists attended a flat-earth conference, it follows they take the theory seriously.

How to recognise

After you have insisted on the use of reliable sources, supporters of the marginal view will then try to exploit the definition of 'reliable source'. They will argue for the inclusion of material of dubious reliability; for example, using commentary from partisan think-tanks rather than from the scientific literature. Occasionally, they will discover that they can get more attention if they make appeals to authority by presenting supporters who have academic credentials. Typical pseudoscience sources include:

- Dedicated websites (normally registered under a .com or .org – rarely under .edu though there are occasions where this may be possible)
- Dedicated periodicals
- Self-published sources
- Publications made outside the typical scientific presses
- In-house journals (not to be confused with academic journals)
- Occasional peer-reviewed articles - often in more obscure journals

How to reply

Attention to such detail is only warranted if there is third-party mention of this. Pseudoscientific groups making a do-to over a person's academic degrees or honorification should be treated as promotionalism.

3. Balance

Examples

- You must not say 'the earth is not flat' but 'according to critics of the flat-earth theory, the earth is not flat'.
- There should be no criticism of the flat earth theory in the introduction to the article. There is already criticism of the theory in the article, section 94.
- So what if the article on flat earth theory is 250k, and the round earth article only 8k? The answer is not to fix the balance by writing less about the flat earth, that only makes Wikipedia worse, but to add more information about the earth being round.
- Is this an encyclopedia for academics or for the general public?
- Criticism of the flat earth theory should be balanced by criticism of the round earth theory.
- The article lead should begin with a pure definition. Criticism should come second, e.g.: "**Flat Earth** refers to the Earth's flat shape. *Skeptics say the Earth is round.*"

How to recognise

Even when supporters of fringe viewpoints recognise the mainstream view as mainstream and established, and agree that Wikipedia may state the mainstream view without qualification, they will still challenge the relative prominence accorded to the mainstream over the fringe viewpoint, and make all sorts of arguments about balance. It is often seriously claimed that the "N" in NPOV (Neutral point of view) means that no negative or critical or mainstream material can appear at all in the article, since it is not neutral, or that Wikipedia is not for advocacy, and so advocates of 'scientific points of view' should not overstate their case.

It is claimed that the reader will not understand the idea unless it is described without criticism, since Wikipedia is an encyclopedia for the general public, not a technical journal. Reversing this argument, they will state that readers are smart enough to know that fringe ideas are nonsense without including any negative or critical material or sources. They will propose that negative material be forked off into another article, or relegated into a 'criticism ghetto' or criticism section or removed from the Lead section. They may argue that one must always state the idea first before criticizing it, or that any sources that disagree with the fringe point of view cannot be used since they violate the Neutral point of view.

They may claim that any critical or negative material cannot appear in an article since it is biased. Or that any negative or critical material is unusable since it is just opinion and not fact. Some of them will even claim that there are no facts, arguing that if a fringe minority, not present in any reliable sources, disagrees with a widely accepted fact, it violates Neutral point of view to state it as a fact in the article. They may demand that every statement of fact should be attributed, no matter how universally accepted.

How to reply

At the root of these arguments are intentional (or unintentional) misinterpretations of Neutral point of view, particularly undue weight, although certain kinds of deliberate pettifoggng can also be a sign of gaming the system. See #6 below, "Gaming".

4. Conspiracy

Examples

- The flat earth theory has been marginalised by the scientific establishment in order to protect its interests.
- Any scientist who tried to study flat-earth theory would lose his research funding. Dissent is being suppressed by the scientific establishment^[4].
- Rosencrantz was tremendously rude about scientists who claimed the earth was round. If the scientific establishment has marginalized him this is not really surprising.
- As a professional astronomer you have a clear conflict of interest.
- X, Y and Z are hard-line skeptics about flat-earthism. They often publish in skeptics magazines and take a hard line with any approach to any theory which is not empirically verified.

How to recognise

The next tactic is to appeal to your audience about free speech and distrust of censorship and the establishment. All theories that are not generally accepted have a part of the theory devoted to explaining why this is. Fringe theories are no exception. They will claim that *the scientific establishment* is afraid of being proved wrong, and hence is trying to suppress the truth. This is classic conspiracy theory. Their theory is not accepted because the black suits in the Scientific Establishment are not concerned about the pursuit of truth, but are so much more concerned about not rocking the boat in order to protect their vested interests. The round-earth theorists have the backing of the major media who also have vested interests which they must protect. This explains why the discoveries of 'concerned' round the earth into which planes have gone missing, reports of travelers who have looked into the abyss, are receiving no coverage whatsoever by the major newspapers or the major TV networks.

Thus, it is claimed that trying to balance positive content with negative content for due weight is censorship. It is claimed that there is a conspiracy against the fringe position and anyone who opposes an uncritical article about the fringe position is in on the conspiracy, has been bought off, is breaking the rules of Wikipedia, is just plain evil, etc.

It is claimed that if any source that has not written articles that are supportive and uncritical of fringe positions are not suitable as tertiary sources. For example, recently at a controversial article, it was once argued 'Actually, those really should be used as sources on this topic because (to my knowledge) they haven't written anything pro-X, and hence really can't be considered third party'.

How to reply

The easiest reply to these arguments is to humour them. You can agree to their ludicrous claims, but point out that Wikipedia is not here to right wrongs, or address grievances. Point out that if Wikipedia had been around at the time of Galileo, it would have had a duty to report the claims of the Catholic church as well as, without qualification, despite the conspiracy that undoubtedly existed.

5. Reversed burden of proof

Examples

- X's paper on 'scientific fallacies' contains only passing reference to the 'flat earth fallacy'. WP:NPOV says "Even with well-sourced material... if you use it out of context or to advance a position that is not directly and explicitly supported by the source used, you as an editor are engaging in original research."
- "You are taking lack of discussion of whether the earth is flat as evidence an author picks a side on the issue.... The evidence we should consider are those who consider the earth is flat, and those who explicitly reject this view. Sources that remain silent on the issue should be discarded."
- There is no reliable source for the statement that "flat-earthism has entirely been ignored by reliable sources".
- The statement 'there is no scientific consensus for the flat-earth view' has no scientific consensus.
- There has been no serious study of whether the earth is flat since 1493.^[5] Therefore we cannot claim in Wikipedia that earth is not flat, only that a study that in 1493 came to this conclusion.
- X's statement 'informal discussions amongst scientists revealed an almost total absence of awareness of the flat earth theory' is mere opinion. X is using personal experience as evidence. This is not a scientific evidence and is therefore mere opinion.
- You can't say 'modern geologists reject Rosencrantz's theories.' Very few scholars have even read Rosencrantz or care, so don't extrapolate that to the whole field as if they have rigorously investigated his work as a group. (recently from Ancient astronauts).
- "Prove that there are no _____. " You can't prove that there are none, only that we haven't found one yet.

How to recognise

We move to the most powerful weapon in the fringe armoury: the argument from *reversed burden of proof*. Instead of them having to prove that their view is supported by reliable and independent sources, they will shift the burden of proof over to you, so you have to prove either that their view is *supported*, or even that it is *refuted* by reliable and independent sources. This is difficult for two reasons. First, it is always difficult to prove a negative existential statement (which is in effect a claim about everything there is). Second, because science generally ignores pseudoscience, it is often very difficult to find reliable sources that describe some pseudoscientific view as pseudoscientific.

How to reply

This argument is often difficult to address. However, you should always recognise the shifting of the burden for what it is, the second that ball comes thundering down the court at 80 mph. Slam it back. *Insist that the burden is theirs*.

"When two or more theories are in competition, it is common for one of them to be treated as the established position – the default option, as it were – and the others to be treated as challengers. A challenging theory is normally expected to bear the burden or onus of proof. In other words, advocates of the challenging theory are expected to provide highly convincing evidence and arguments before the theory can be taken seriously. To use a different metaphor, it is assumed that the established theory has jumped over a very high hurdle to gain its leading position and that any challenger must jump over an equally high hurdle before being in contention for the remainder of the race."^[6]

Also, in such cases it is legitimate to source from non-promotional descriptions of pseudoscience that can only be obtained from second- and third-party sources. Although most of these sources will not be peer-reviewed simply because science tends to ignore pseudoscience, they are still *independent*. Thus, the following are reliable sources for describing pseudoscience:

- Committee for Skeptical Inquiry
- Encyclopedia of pseudoscience
- An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural (http://www.randi.org/encyclopedia/)
- Skeptics's Dictionary
- Skeptical Inquiry
 - talk:origins archive
- Bad Astronomy
- Quackwatch
- Mainstream media reports
- Skeptical scientists speaking extemporaneously (whether it be in person, letters, personal websites, blogs, etc.)
- Statements from scientific societies

6. Gaming

Examples

- The statement 'The earth is round' has reliable sources in scientific literature. The statement 'If the X is round, X is not flat' is a valid inference that can be sourced from any reliable logic textbook. But 'The earth is not flat' while a conclusion validly yielded by these two reliably-sourced premises, is a violation of WP:SYNTH: "Even if published by reliable sources, material must not be connected together in such a way that it constitutes original research".
- One should use only primary sources. Relying on secondary sources is POV.
- Words like "alleged", "supposed", and "purported" when used to describe the characteristics of the Flat Earth are WP:WTA and unduly prejudice the reader against the subject. Words that can be interpreted ambiguously by the reader (such as "apparent") are better suited to a neutral presentation.

How to recognise

You have kept the marginal and fringe viewpoint at bay for some months or years. But now they have got wise, and expert in the ways of Wikipedia. They have read the policies carefully, and have worked out the various loopholes in it, and the endless games they can play with it.

They now claim that only the proponents of the FRINGE position understand NPOV or NOR or RS, not the experienced editors with tens of thousands of edits, and FAs and GAs to their credit. They will 'wink/lavayer' to try to redefine a FRINGE position as nonFRINGE, or the mainstream position as the FRINGE position instead. They will attempt to use mainly primary sources, and to reject secondary and tertiary sources, or to redefine the preferences for secondary and tertiary sources in policy.

Worst of all, it is now many months since you tidied up the article. You have no inkent interest in the Flat Earth theory, and you have moved on to another area of pseudoscience (let's say the Geocentric theory). But the Flat Earth supporters are interested in nothing else than their pet theory. They will come back when they are gone and revert when you do not notice. The arguments that you successfully rebutted and dismissed, sometimes with extensive references, will be repeated over and over and over, sometimes just with a cut and paste approach. Sometimes they will be presented by the same person dozens and dozens of times over days and weeks and months. They will try to add information that is (at best) peripherally relevant on the grounds that "it is verifiable, so it should be in". They repeatedly use the talk page for soapboxing, or to re-raise the same issues that have already been discussed numerous times. They hang around forever wearing down more serious editors and become expert in an odd kind of way on their niche POV.

They will make a series of silly and time-wasting requests for comment, mediation or arbitration again to try to wear you down. They will add tags repeatedly to well-known material, or material that is fully referenced on wikilinked articles that discuss that point in their debate. Assorted templates branding the article are thrown on the article repeatedly, such as the claim that an NPOV dispute is going on, when it is more accurate to describe the discussion as revolving around some editor's idiosyncratic interpretation of NPOV to satisfy their own personal agenda. Accusations that a group editing the article own the article since they will not change the consensus to satisfy one malcontent are common.

How to reply

If you are unable to discourage a fringe advocate from willfully and knowingly misusing policy you might seek support from the community via mediation or arbitration. However, many fringe advocates thrive on the increased attention and actually welcome these forums as a soapbox from which to further argue their viewpoint. Finding themselves in the spotlight, it is not unusual for dedicated fringe advocates to suddenly disavow any former or present interest/connection with the subject of their advocacy ("Gosh, I don't believe the Earth is flat, I'm just here to uphold NPOV") and profess that they are only fighting "for the good of Wikipedia". The risks of continued involvement with disputes that escalate to this level should be carefully considered, especially if accompanied by obsessive/compulsive behavior.

7. Amenability

Examples

- The flat-earth theory is not amenable to scientific approaches and methods.
- Flat-earth theorists are pragmatic. They are not interested in what is 'true', they are interested in 'what works'.
- Rosencrantz never claimed nor explicitly stated that the Flat Earth Theory is a 'science'

How to recognise

Another way of evading NPOV is to avoid the requirement for reliable sourcing altogether. They will claim that the view in question is simply not amenable to scientific treatment. Source X was from a scientific journal, it attempted to address the Flat Earth theory in a way that science could deal with it. But Flat Earth theory is not amenable to scientific treatment. Source X misunderstood what the theory was really saying. The Flat Earth theory is not something that is really a 'fact' in the scientific sense. (See the archived talk pages of the article *Neurolinguistic programming* for endless repetitions and varieties of this argument).

Or they claim that writing material using the same context as in reliable sources violates NPOV since they are following a "narrative", and we must instead choose facts which no source describes as relevant to allow our readers to decide which "narrative" should be chosen.

How to reply

Stick to your guns. This is merely a philosophically naïve means of evading justification and substantiation. All theories make claims of some sort, otherwise they would not have 'proponents' (a proponent literally 'puts forward' a certain view that is susceptible of truth or falsity). The Flat Earth theory claims that the earth is flat, not round. That is a statement with a binary truth-value. And it is capable of confirmation or refutation, it is verifiable. For example, topography (measuring the distances between defined points on the Earth's surface) shows the shape of the earth. Therefore, the theory is amenable to scientific treatment.

8. Special pleading

Examples

- Scientist X, who claimed the flat-earth theory was nonsense, clearly had not read the literature on the flat-earth theory.
- Scientist X was not trained in flat-earth theory, and therefore could not make an expert judgment.
- The criticisms made by scientist X were valid only against Rosencrantz' version of the flat-earth theory, long since outmoded. They fail to address Guidelntern's improved version of the theory.
- Your arguments assume there is a mainstream flat earth view. There is no mainstream 'flat earth' view, therefore your criticisms are misplaced.
- You haven't read any of Rosencrantz' work.

How to recognise

Special pleading is when the advocates of a fringe viewpoint argue that you have no expertise in the theory (which may, they argue, take years to fully master). You do not understand the theory, and therefore you cannot make your claims. Another version of this argument is to claim there are many different types of theory, and that while version X and version Y are clearly nonsense, the most recent version Z (which of course you have never heard of) is scientifically impeccable. They may even claim there is no such 'version' of the theory, and that you are attacking a *straw man*.

How to reply

The only people qualified enough to understand flat earth theory are those who just happen to support flat-earth theory? Ridiculous. Advocates, promoters, and self-proclaimed "flat-earth theory experts" are not independent, objectiv sources of fact about whether or not the earth is flat, or whether or not flat-earth theory is valid. Also bear in mind that any "new and improved" versions of flat-earth theory must be *notable* enough to have attracted review and comment by independent, objective sources.

9. Controversy

Examples

- The flat earth theory is clearly controversial. This is proof that scientists take it seriously.
- The more controversial or fringe a subject, the less the article should tell the reader what to believe. The reader should be allowed to make up his/her own mind concerning the subject. e.g.: "*Flat Earthism is a highly controversial subject, and its scientific validity is often questioned.*"

How to recognise

Although supporters of the marginal view cannot overcome Wikipedia policies, they will try to distort and alter an article's language in a way that represents their view as less marginal. The most well-known and often-used tactic is to claim that their viewpoint is 'controversial', as though there were a minority but substantial view held by serious scientists or academics, actively engaged by the mainstream, and which is reported as controversial by reliable sources.

They will try to equivoal equivocation in the description of pseudoscience. For example, instead of simply stating: "the Flat Earth theory violates the known laws of geometry", a proponent may argue for the logistical statement: "some geometers claim that the Flat Earth theory violates the known laws of geometry", perhaps adding "but there is considerable controversy over the matter."

How to reply

Pseudoscience should not be described on its own terms. The goal of writing an article on pseudoscience should be to present the ideas that are most commonly seen in relation to that pseudoscientific idea. This means that when writing an article on pseudoscience, popularity of ideas is a major rationale for inclusion or exclusion. Obscure iterations of pseudoscience should be eliminated, even if so-called "experts" in the subject believe such ideas to be of utmost importance. The best way to write an article on pseudoscience is to approach it from the perspective of what topics are most prevalent in the popular culture about the subject.

All claims that are made about observable reality which are directly contradicted by mainstream science must be represented as such. Per the rules of reliable sourcing and not unduly weighing fringe opinions, an article about a mainstream topic should marginalize all related pseudoscientific topics relative to the prominence seen in secondary and tertiary sources about the mainstream topic. A pseudoscientific topic should not be mentioned in an article about a mainstream topic unless there are independent mainstream sources that connect the topics. For example, there are plenty of mainstream sources which describe how astronomy is not astrology, and so a decent article on the former may mention the latter. However, there are no mainstream sources that support special reality which also mention autodynamics, and so a decent article on the former should not mention the latter. This approach is outlined in the guideline WP:NEWAY.

If it is deemed necessary to exclude pseudoscience from a certain article, there should not even be a link to science articles. See also section. Often pseudoscience articles must link to science articles. Rarely will science articles link to pseudoscience articles. That is the principle of one-way linking.

10. But some of the theory is true

Examples

- Rosencrantz claimed many times that the sky is blue, that grass is green. These facts are well-established by reliable sources.

How to recognise

The last weapon in the pseudoscience arsenal is something you cannot deny: parts of the theory may be true. Proponents will ignore the many bogus and patently untrue claims of the theory, and perhaps not even mention them in the article, but will go on at length about the parts of the theory that are true. Often these are platitudinous, or are statements that are better and more clearly covered in reliable sources. Worse, they will cite reliable sources which make these true claims, but which do not mention the fringe theory, as though *they* supported the theory.

How to reply

Rosencrantz may have said that the sky is blue and grass is green but he most likely isn't considered an authority or reliable source for such information. Attention to such details is only warranted if there is significant third-party coverage of them.

Historical note

By the 1950s historians had established that in the High Middle Ages the educated classes had recovered the ancient Greeks' discovery that the world is a sphere, even though their world-view was geocentric, and that the notion that Columbus's voyage was to prove the world round is a piece of fiction introduced by Washington Irving. (See Myth of the Flat Earth.) Although it was presumed before Copernicus that the earth was the centre of the universe, with the sun revolving around it, we now know that the educated classes still understood the earth to be a sphere with gravity acting towards its centre, contrary to the widespread 19th-century assumption that most medieval people believed it to be flat. (For example, the final two cantos of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* assume a spherical earth.) However, this essay uses the flat earth as a metaphor for explaining Wikipedia policy, not to describe any authentic historical controversy.

See also

- Civil POV pushing (essay)
- Creating controversial content (essay)
- Green Cheese Model of Lunar Composition (model pseudoscience article draft in progress)

Notes

- ↑ notwithstanding the Thomas Friedman book, *The World Is Flat*
- ↑ An independent source is one that has no interest, ideological, financial or otherwise, in preferring one view over another
- ↑ This is sometimes known as the "Most Insane Person Always Wins" theory of Internet debate. See **Dogbert**: "Reality is always controlled by the people who are most insane." (**Scott Adams**)
- ↑ Thanks to User:Mastercell
- ↑ Yes, as all pedants know, they already knew the earth was round before 1493. Get a life.
- ↑ Martin, B., "The burden of proof and the origin of acquired immune deficiency syndrome" *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, Series B, Vol. 356, 2001, pp. 939-944

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This page was last edited on 14 November 2017, at 20:21.