



Reality Check: How Science Deniers Threaten Our Future

By Donald R. Prothero

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The battles over evolution, climate change, childhood vaccinations, and the causes of AIDS, alternative medicine, oil shortages, population growth, and the place of science in our country?all are reaching a fevered pitch. Many people and institutions have exerted enormous efforts to misrepresent or flatly deny demonstrable scientific reality to protect their nonscientific ideology, their power, or their bottom line. To shed light on this darkness, Donald R. Prothero explains the scientific process and why society has come to rely on science not only to provide a better life but also to reach verifiable truths no other method can obtain. He describes how major scientific ideas that are accepted by the entire scientific community (evolution, anthropogenic global warming, vaccination, the HIV cause of AIDS, and others) have been attacked with totally unscientific arguments and methods. Prothero argues that science deniers pose a serious threat to society, as their attempts to subvert the truth have resulted in widespread scientific ignorance, increased risk of global catastrophes, and deaths due to the spread of diseases that could have been prevented.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Geology professor and prolific author Prothero (*Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why It Matters*) takes on the science deniers, including creationists, climate change naysayers, and AIDS deniers. Prothero addresses nine topics for which a segment of the U.S. population rejects well-supported science research and knowledge; for each, he begins with background information and data and then addresses the arguments of the deniers, providing additional data and references. "As scientists, we must be careful when we use words such as 'truth' and 'belief,' because science is not about believing accepted truths, but accepting extremely well corroborated hypotheses about nature that approach truth in the everyday sense." Prothero discusses the impact of corporate and political interests on science, the demonization of Rachel Carson, the credentials of science deniers, the politics of climate change, and the impact of the anti-vaccine movement. He concludes that "the elephant in the room ... the stultifying influence of creationism in U.S. science education." Those who hold opposing views may say that he does not break stereotypes about liberal academics; but he does discuss career scientists and academicians addressing why polarization has occurred. Prothero's treatise will give the science-minded something to cheer about, a brief summary of the real data that supports so many critical aspects of modern life. 39 b&w illus. (Aug.)

Review

"The shabby tactics of science denialists sparked this astute exposition of what we lose when science is sidelined.... Ultimately, Prothero argues, by claiming that clear findings on climate change, biodiversity loss and overpopulation are false, deniers inch us closer to catastrophic planetary tipping points." ?Nature

"Reality Check is an entertaining, thought-provoking, and informative read." ?Reports of the National Center for Science Education

"Strongly recommended for popular-science readers who want better to be able to explain and defend science and scientific methods to others." ?Library Journal

"Prothero's treatise will give the science-minded something to cheer about, a brief summary of the real data that supports so many critical aspects of modern life." ?Publishers Weekly

"Prothero is a skeptic. So am I. When we call ourselves skeptics we mean simply that we take a scientific approach to the evaluation of claims. Science is skepticism and scientists are naturally skeptical because

most claims turn out to be false. Weeding out the few kernels of wheat from the substantial pile of chaff requires extensive observation, careful experimentation, and cautious inference to the best conclusion. Donald Prothero is a scientist's scientist in this regard.... In this volume you will indeed get a reality check on some of the most important issues of our time." ?Michael Shermer, author of The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies?How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths

About the Author

Recipient of the 2013 James Shea Award of the National Association of Geology Teachers for outstanding writing and editing in the geosciences.

Donald R. Prothero is Emeritus Professor of Geology at Occidental College and Lecturer in Geobiology at the California Institute of Technology. He has published 32 books, including *Rhinoceros Giants: The Paleobiology of Indricotheres* (IUP, 2013); *Earth: Portrait of a Planet*; *The Evolution of Earth*; *Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why It Matters*; *Catastrophes!*; and *After the Dinosaurs: The Age of Mammals* (IUP, 2006).

Users Review

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Tammy Robinson:

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