

Read it and Judge for Yourself

by Martin J. Walker - 6.1.08

On the [Guardian Comment is Free](#) (CiF) internet pages on Saturday January 5, there was an exchange about my recent short book, [Cultural Dwarfs and Junk Journalism: Dr Ben Goldacre, Quackbusting and Corporate Science](#). As I pointed out in the pre-publication publicity this was the fourth book I have written which follows the growth of the corporate science lobby and the intervention of vested interests in medical and science policy. This Lobby has grown more influential and become more effective since New Labour came to power in 1997.

I have no intention of joining in this hand-grenade bun fight on the internet pages of *The Guardian*. I am a part of the serious opposition to the corporate science lobby and have no intention of getting involved in vituperate exchanges on their turf. As in the paper itself, on the CiF site, the editors and owners of the Guardian sit back surveying the wreckage that Goldacre is causing without the feeling the need for any critical intervention.

I have chosen to make my remarks about the exchanges on (CiF) and the whole position of the Guardian newspaper, in the Zeus newsletter and the One Click site. I would be pleased if people were to circulate this brief defence of my book on as many sites as possible.

I am under no illusion about the problems inherent in tackling the subjects that I have chosen to investigate and write about. The people and organisations I have looked at are immensely powerful and care nothing about using any tactics to foreclose the opposition. When I wrote and then published [Dirty Medicine](#), Duncan Campbell, at that time a member of the Campaign Against Health Fraud (now called HealthWatch), managed with the judicious use of solicitors letters that I had already answered and nullified, to frighten retailers into not stocking the book, some journals into not publishing reviews and finally the books printers into not printing a second edition. The 'straight' world published no reviews of the book, and it was effectively left uncommented upon in all the 'straight' media. Years after its publication Jerome Burne managed to get a story in the *Guardian* magazine that looked in an unbiased manner at the content of the book.

I did find out not long after the book was published that lobbying organisations and orthodox medical Institutions and groups, especially those that contained lobby members, had decided on a policy of not mentioning the book in any manner. As it happened the then Chair of HealthWatch, Thurston Brewen, did give notice of another strategy which was then being resolved. Speaking after a radio programme with one of the other participants who asked about the book, he said venomously that it was a 'Nazi book'. At the time, I couldn't really understand this but later when Duncan Campbell told an interviewer that I was funded by pharmaceutical companies, I began to catch on.

The lobby will first do anything to avoid any critical mention of my work, if they fail in this they will try and dismiss it with outrageous lies while refusing to address the content. In 2003, I wrote [SKEWED](#), a book predominately about those people and organisations who have suggested that people with ME, CFS or Gulf War Syndrome had 'false illness beliefs' and were actually mentally ill. I called a press

conference launch for this book at a London Hotel and though some fifty activists and interested parties attended, only one journalist from the Ecologist turned up and he later refused to write a review. It occurred to me after this that the psychiatric members of the industrial science lobby have immense power.

My book [*Brave New World of Zero Risk*](#), likewise received no reviews in the 'straight media'. Which brings me to the publication last Tuesday of my latest book *Cultural Dwarfs and Junk Journalism: Ben Goldacre, quackbusting and corporate science*. This book evidently presented new problems for the corporate science lobby, because as in all good political confrontations, the tidal wave of disgust at Goldacre and the *Guardian* had grown over the last couple of years with the *Guardian* pursuing a kind of *Animal Farm* policy of complete support for Goldacre that allowed no critical dissent on its pages.

It was no surprise to me that after only two days of the book being on the Slingshot site, there had been almost 3,000 (after 5 days 5,000) downloads and on other sites the number of downloads had been even greater. Nor was it any surprise that I immediately received a number of emails from individuals who were grateful that I had published their point of view that had previously been all but censored. But I still wondered what the *Guardian* would do about the book, because after all a major part of it criticised the newspaper for allowing Goldacre to write propaganda for industrial interests without a murmur about journalistic standards.

On Saturday January 5, I found out what the *Guardian* would do. Under the guise of some kind of democratic intervention in the newspaper, they now have Comment is Free (CiF), a slogan that is meant to suggest that the *Guardian* has thrown open its pages to anyone who would wish to make critical comment. In effect it is quite the opposite, for the internet site actually estranges serious critics from the content of the newspaper itself. Nothing in CiF has any effect upon editors or provokes any real public response on behalf of the newspaper.

On January 5, CiF was almost entirely preoccupied with an exchange about *Cultural Dwarfs*. In this exchange, of course the *Guardian* escaped without a scratch, which after all is one of the purposes of CiF. What stands out most however, is that those who were determined to wreck my reputation and destroy any understanding of the book, did what they do best, misrepresented the book and tried outrageously to draw attention away from its content.

There were two types of response on the CiF, those who supported my work and more specifically for the arguments that I put forward in the book, submitted measured rational pieces. Those who for whatever undisclosed reason were ultra critical of the book's publication, who would not countenance any of its content, refused to offer any discussion of this content. While one might well have expected this, it was the poisonous way in which they tried to deflect attention that proved that they were people with some maligned purpose, who, and one has got to be honest about this, suffer varying degrees of mental incapacity.

There follows some of the comments of this later group. This comment below appears to be confusingly the mildest of the destructive strategists

*"Thanks for the posting the link to the "Slingshot publications" book, Clifford G Miller
- but I'm confused:*

The book you recommend to us refers to what it describes as: "the unproven science of HIV and AIDS-related illnesses", and describes the much-ridiculed AIDS denialist Peter Duesberg as "one of the world's leading virologists"... The book also seems to contain an endorsement of the conspiracy theorist Matthias Rath, who has campaigned against the public provision of anti-HIV drugs in South Africa and whose website speaks for itself. Do you really think that a book like that deserves to be taken seriously?"

I have noticed recently that critics of my work have frequently turned to an argument, which when boiled down, amounts to this: Walker is an HIV & AIDS denialist, therefore we should believe nothing he writes. I find this approach very interesting mainly because it is founded on absolute untruth and can only be built using specious false arguments.

While I was writing my book *Dirty Medicine* and afterwards I worked with campaigning gay organizations that questioned the licensing, prescription and use of the drug AZT which was manufactured at that time by the Wellcome Foundation. AZT was, as many people have pointed out, a classically 'bad' drug. With others I campaigned against the marketing techniques used by the Wellcome Foundation that persuaded gay aids groups, often with generous grant funding to back and promote AZT.

As for the argument that HIV doesn't *cause* Aids related illnesses, I never have aligned myself with any argument that denies a link between the HIV virus and later AIDS related illnesses. I could however follow enough of the science to understand that the matter is exceptionally complex and there are no simple explanations as to how HIV came to be in the public health pool, how it is passed between people, who is affected by it and who is not and finally whether or not co-factors exist that give rise to some people dying very quickly while other continue to be 'long-term survivors' for decades after testing positive. As a skeptic I obviously feel the need to ask and find answers for such important questions.

In relation to South Africa and AIDS, I am utterly opposed to the pharmaceutical companies using the poor of Africa as fodder for pharmaceutical experiments of any kind, or to them off-loading useless or unregulated out of date drugs in African countries. And as any sane person would, I tend toward the argument that it is prevention: sanitary public conditions, good water and nutrition and a relief from poverty that have to be the first building blocks in conquering disease in Africa or anywhere else in the world.

But why should I feel the need to explain my point of view on such matters? Perhaps it is sufficient just to comment on this contributor's last line (Do you really

think that a book like that deserves to be taken seriously?) Presumably he actually means 'Do you really think a book like that deserves to be read?' Perhaps it might be better just to burn the internet.

The comment above is one of the best thought out and most rational of those that appeared against the book on the CiF site. If we want to know how the tree swinging corporate science advocates who are In Bed With Ben reason through the question, we have to look at someone like Sukie Bapswent:

That book, of which I have just read the first 30 pages, is an absolutely huge load of balls. The author, just like you Clifford, is incapable of engaging on the same terms as Dr Goldacre's almost invariably watertight, evidence based analysis. Furthermore, it is rife with heresy, paranoia and conspiracy, second guessing, ad hominem attacks, and unpleasant insinuations. In short, it is a crock of shit. Enjoy.

Well what can I say Sukie, I'm certainly glad you enjoyed the first 30 pages what you'll have to say about the rest of the book hovers on the edge of my mind as one of the great questions facing post industrial civilization. Have a happy life and may all your projects be crocks of shit as worthwhile as mine.

Unfortunately Sukie forgot to pen her end point criticism in that first contribution, the one that goes like a spear to the heart, and that she had been instructed by her masters to put at the beginning. After further thought she contributed a PS:

Oh, and badly written, and grammatically moronic.

I wonder where we would be without scientific commentators of such acumen and intellectual perspicacity. Oh, and such good writers. I began to phrase a question asking what a 'moronic grammatically' was but then I thought, 'I can't descend to this at my age it gives me back pain'.

I particularly enjoyed this contribution from Briscorant with its cloudy post modern feminist style. I find the theory about 'spurned lovers' fascinating and wish that Briscorant would contribute a quick monograph on the subject to a serious literary journal.

The e-book referred to, won't help you understand the issues either. It is based on two dishonest methods of argument.

First, it regards scientific comments, as merely political statements: ie arbitrary pronouncements driven mainly by a person's political views and allegiances. This is simply a dishonest way to view science, which teaches, and expects, high regard for the truth. See the first conclusion, first paragraph.

The second is ad hominem - ie attack an opponent's position, not by addressing the issues, but by attacking the opponent's character. This is obvious from a quick scan of the document. Again, not helpful for making progress in human understanding of things.

I've occasionally encountered stuff like this before. The authors tend to be spurned lovers, and cheated-on partners. There's a pretence at rationality, but the text rambles, the viciousness and bitterness blaze clear. Most such authors, however, are wise enough to tear it up afterwards. They do not footnote, add nine appendices, then publish on the internet.

I will just say in passing that I haven't been spurned in a long while, although these readers constantly running from the content of my work does make me feel in a kind of post-modern experiential way, a little like being rejected, could it be that this is what steers my style, am I a masochist?

The prize for propaganda, however, must go, to Professor Colquhoun late of London University.

Aha I see Martin Walker's self-published free book has been mentioned. With friends like Walker, the alternative medicine industry certainly has no need of enemies. I have never seen so many errors of fact in such a short document. It promises to unearth a great conspiracy, but fails to unearth anything.

One of the more amusing bits is that Walker seems to think that the Wellcome Trust make AZT. The Trust does not, and never has made any drug.

Colquhoun says that everything I say about him in my book is wrong. The problem is I hardly say anything about him. What I do say is linked to a) his attacks on Patrick Holford the independent nutritionist and b) an article that Colquhoun wrote in the science mag *Nature*. As seems common with these skeptical types he says nothing about these substantive issues.

I have spent years correcting others who have said that the Wellcome Trust rather than the Foundation manufactured AZT and I have never held or expressed this view myself. So why oh why does a recently retired professor of pharmacology from a major European University need to distort what I write in my book? Surely he is familiar with the simplest academic processes in which one references, critiques and then rebuts apparent mistakes in articles, papers and thesis material; perhaps not, maybe this kind of academic rigor doesn't apply to scientists or perhaps the use of academic method has been the victim of recent public sector cuts. But hey, let's not forget, these people are just trying to destroy me, not constructively discuss my book or a set of ideas held by thousands of people who hold different views to theirs.

Just before we leave the Professor, I must update you on his current retirement campaign against Patrick Holford. I heard recently that he has a special 'operations room' in the cellar of his house, where he barks out instruction to a secretary person as he walks round a campaign table with his hands clasped behind his back.

Peeved that so many alternative health practitioners and others wrote to the provost of UCL about his derisory web site, causing him to make alterations to it, he has now written to the University where Patrick Holford is a visiting lecturer asking to be supplied with all the information about his activities there. Colquhoun is clearly trying to get Holford thrown off the University faculty. Well, I for one am just so glad that the great and the good of our academics don't get involved in personal attacks.

For a refutation of even this simply misinformation about the Wellcome Foundation on the CiF site, I have to thank the campaigning lawyer Clifford Miller, one of the two or three people who rose throughout the debate, to the aid of my book.

Professor Colquhoun is sadly misinformed when he claims "Walker seems to think that the Wellcome Trust make AZT". And in being so misinformed, This casts doubt on everything else David Colquhoun claims about the Martin Walker book. And I cast further doubt on his claims here. Walker said no such thing. And Walker is not wrong. Walker actually referred to "the Wellcome Foundation drug company" and not to "The Wellcome Trust". The Wellcome Foundation is the pharmaceutical company established by Sir Henry Wellcome and his business partner Silas Mainville Burroughs and which has evolved into GlaxoSmithKline. It was Burroughs Wellcome which claimed AZT could prolong the life of patients with AIDS and a Burroughs Wellcome Company filed for a patent on AZT in 1985.

My book was defended as well by John Stone, who always raises clear questions in need of clear answers which he rarely gets. He has been writing to the Guardian for some time questioning Ben's Bent Science column but Guardian editors, like Eunuchs at the harem door don't even pass his messages on.

One very clever contributor, whose identity is unknown to me made a contribution in the form of an unedited short piece of my book which specifically referred to Goldacre. This put questions in the public domain which were not to be answered by any other contributor. I did find this way of sneaking round the censures very intelligent. For those of you who haven't yet read my book, I reproduce this taster below:

Apricotston January 5, 2008 1:50 PM. This is what Martin J Walker has to say about Dr Goldacre:

"The most empathetic and forgiving of us were imagining that Ben was a junior doctor in a heavily pressed casualty unit in an inner City area. If Ben was dealing with the dirty life and death of motor accidents, shootings and drug-related deaths in north-east London for example, perhaps he might be forgiven his hard bitten views, and his anti airy-fairy concerns about people affected by electric air waves, chemicals and bad vaccines.

It appears, however, that he has always been a post-grad clinical research worker, now possibly studying for a Phd at King's College, the home of the psychiatric school of 'all-in-the-mind aetiology'. In all probability Goldacre has been at this University Hospital since taking his MA, and was probably attached to it when he was taken on by the Guardian.

If this is the case, most probably he doesn't see patients, except when he passes them in the corridor at the Maudsley as he makes his way to the Liaison Psychiatry Unit within the Institute of Psychiatry, where he is studying under the Prince of Spin Professor Simon Wessely, the head of the Liaison Psychiatry Department. Wessely is an advisor to the Science Media Centre and on the Advisory panel of the US American Council on Science and Health, one of the most heavily funded pro industry lobby groups in the world.

The really good thing about Liaison psychiatry is that you can blend all kinds of social issues with lots of mad-cap psychiatric ideas that work well for industry. Liaison psychiatry is a form of psychiatry in which the psychiatrist informs unsuspecting ordinary citizens who report to hospitals with organic illnesses that they are actually mentally ill. This diagnostic ability is particularly acute when the Liaison psychiatrist meets up with anyone who has suffered an environmental illness, a chemical insult, or any industry-related illness.

For some time now, King's College has been deeply involved in the programme of spin designed by industry and the New Labour government. However, as is evident from the involvement of Goldacre there, the relationship between The Lobby, the University and the hospital, is not simple. As well as Wessely's role, ex-Revolutionary Communist Party members have also played a part in bringing vested interests to the college. Together with pseudo-scientific research into mental illness and environmentally caused illness, King's is deeply involved in risk analysis for various controvertial environmental factors."

I have no faith at all in the Guardian or its ability to put its house in order. To me, the questions that I raise about Goldacre in my essay are significant matters about the role of journalists in these days of much spun information. I think these questions should stand serious intellectual scrutiny and the outcome of this investigation form ethical rules for journalists and their contact

with, or their writing about commercial vested interests, whether they be connected with mobile phones or genetically modified crops.

That the editors and owners of the Guardian refuse to get involved in proper public scrutiny of these questions, speaks volumes about their cynicism, their political agenda and their regard for truth.

Clearly Ben and his Bent Science column will exist for many years to come. If my book has managed anything, in the present climate, I will be happy that it has affected people in the way it clearly affected, *Principled*:

Principled January 5, 2008 4:38 PM

Clifford Miller, I did manage to view the book you recommended by Martin J Walker at <http://www.slingshotpublications.com/dwarfs01.pdf>

thanks to your direction to the site. The mind boggles at the intricacies of the vested interests and relationships Walker says underpins the output of Ben Goldacre and other journos. I enjoy reading Bens' works but must admit from now on I will endeavour to read them with a slightly wider vision.

That and I would advise a slightly suspended sense of belief! But while the readers of the Guardian might be this intuitively fair minded we know now that Goldacre and his editors have no similar aspirations and they will stay rooted to Bent Science and continue to by-pass the views, feelings and critique of anyone who does not toe the industry line.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jan/05/1>

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