

Counterknowledge by Damian Thompson.
Atlantic Books 2008.

Counterknowledge is my favourite book of the year, so far, not just because I agree 100% with every word that the author writes, but because it is a superbly written, engaging and funny rant against all the aspects of 21st century society that most infuriate and enrage me, and, I suspect, many others like me.

The subtitle of the book is 'How we surrendered to conspiracy theories, quack medicine, bogus science and fake history', and this is a hefty hint that the author is going to knock off their perches some of the wilder, whackier and weirder opinions, approaches and ideologies that so bedevil modern life.

Damian Thompson starts by explaining what counterknowledge is, defined as 'misinformation packaged to look like fact – packaged so effectively, indeed, that the twenty-first century is facing a pandemic of credulous thinking'. He then turns his guns on a range of subjects, including, inter alia, creationism and the pseudo-theory of so-called Intelligent Design, revisionist pseudo-history, Holocaust denial, the traduction of medicine, notably the MMR scandal, homeopathy and the diet industry and the way in which truth has been turned into a relative rather than an absolute concept.

For anyone with concerns about the way modern society is developing, for anyone whose liberal inclinations and intellectual openness make them fearful of the impact of paranoid thinking on our culture, for anyone whose sees multiple extremisms and cultural myopias colliding with devastating effect, Counterknowledge is a book to stiffen the sinews and a bible of information to prick balloons and deride and diminish the enemies of openness and free speech.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh