



# **Beyond the Hoax: Science, Philosophy and Culture**

*Alan Sokal*

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When physicist Alan Sokal revealed that his 1996 article, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," published in *Social Text*, was a hoax, the ensuing scandal made the front page of the New York Times and caused an uproar amongst the post-modernists he had so hilariously-and convincingly-parodied.

Now, in *Beyond the Hoax*, Sokal revisits this remarkable chapter in our intellectual history to illuminate issues that are with us even more pressingly today than they were a decade ago. Sokal's main argument, then and now, is for the centrality of evidence in all matters of public debate.

The original article, (included in the book, with new explanatory footnotes), exposed the faulty thinking and outright nonsense of the postmodernist critique of science, which asserts that facts, truth, evidence, even reality itself are all merely social constructs. Today, right wing politicians and industry executives are happily manipulating these basic tenants of postmodernism to obscure the scientific consensus on global warming, biological evolution, second-hand smoke, and a host of other issues. Indeed, Sokal shows that academic leftists have unwittingly abetted right wing ideologies by wrapping themselves in a relativistic fog where any belief is as valid as any other because all claims to truth must be regarded as equally suspect. Sokal's goal, throughout the book, is to expose the dangers in such thinking and to defend a scientific worldview based on respect for evidence, logic, and reasoned argument over wishful thinking, superstition, and demagoguery of any kind.

Written with rare lucidity, a lively wit, and a keen appreciation of the real-world consequences of sloppy thinking, *Beyond the Hoax* is essential reading for anyone concerned with the state of American culture today.

## **Beyond the Hoax: Science, Philosophy and Culture Details**

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# From Reader Review Beyond the Hoax: Science, Philosophy and Culture for online ebook

## David says

This book is about postmodern relativism, pseudoscience, "alternative" medicine (like homeopathy), and religion. As one of my housemates pointed out to me, it's everything I hate, in one book!

Which made me think. Indeed, everything that truly irritates me intellectually *is* linked, by a blatant, even belligerent, disregard for reality, rationalism, and empiricism. And that's what irritates Sokal, too. And people who say science is a limited white male way of thinking, which cannot properly evaluate the efficacy of homeopathy or the truth claims of Christian doctrine - well, they're wrong, and they don't understand science. At all.

Sokal does a good job of laying out this argument for science, in a careful way that is just as respectful as one should be. That is, name-calling and denigration are not used, but no silly idea is spared skewering, even those claiming the "religion" exemption.

It was interesting for me to learn that one of Sokal's main goals behind the hoax was to help left-wing goals. He wasn't particularly worried about postmodernism in academia - it's silly, and hurts the humanities, but wasn't actually threatening science. But he does think that relativism and denigration of science hurts liberal goals, despite postmodernists generally being liberals themselves. After all, if there is no right way of knowing, and science is just one opinion among many - well, who's to say universal health care would help people? Or that there were ever actually slaves in the US? Or that DDT should be banned?

Everyone in the US - even the Amish - makes at least some use of the fruits of science. The vast majority of the people are perfectly happy to fly in jets and listen to their ipods, as long as they're not forced to face the implications of all that science. They pick and choose where to use science itself, keeping it away from whatever indefensible pet theories they have (be it aliens or gods). This isn't good. And Sokal explains why.

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## David says

In this work, Sokal provides a very detailed annotation to his 1996 spoof "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity". This article was chock-full of scientific absurdities and approving quotes of utter nonsense from leading science studies scholars. Yet it was accepted and appeared in a special issue of a leading postmodern journal. Sokal's annotations, which appear here for the first time in print, reveal in jaw-dropping detail the depth of his spoof -- virtually every paragraph and every footnote of the original article had either scientific nonsense or unjustified claims that should have been detected had the article truly been reviewed by anyone with even a modicum of technical knowledge, or even by a reviewer who merely checked Sokal's references carefully. But because the overall tone was friendly to trendy postmodern relativism, and because Sokal skillfully spoofed the style of the genre, it was accepted.

The annotated copy of the article would be worth the purchase price of this book, but Sokal goes much further. He includes several other articles and essays, some appearing here for the first time, that underscore

the pervasiveness of scientific nonsense masquerading as serious academic scholarship. Sokal notes that this is far more than an epistemological debate, or even a liberal-conservative issue. If solid critical thinking and empirical analysis is dismissed or devalued, then modern society is at the mercy of every half-baked fringe movement from astrology to "field balance" medical practices (the latter have actually been taught in some American nursing schools). What's more, to the extent that it embraces extreme cultural relativism, the academic world becomes powerless to counter movements such as creationism, intelligent design and global warming deniers.

As a parting shot, Sokal takes aim at organized religion. Here he relies mostly on Harris' recent book "The End of Faith", and so his scholarship is not as original or as insightful as the earlier part of the book. Furthermore, this part suffers from the weakness that several of the items Sokal highlights, such as the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, are no longer literally believed by most college-educated adherents. But Sokal does make a valid point that religion must examine and update beliefs based on modern scientific knowledge -- to ignore or dismiss the advance of modern science is a formula for decline and irrelevance.

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### **Peter Mcloughlin says**

The Sokal Hoax in the nineties happened when Alan Sokal, a physicist, had a paper published using trendy terms from postmodern discourse and a ton of citations from well known post-modern philosophers it was a paper purposely put together to be profound sounding gibberish and it fooled the editors of social text. The right got a few talking points back then from it in the news and it has largely been forgotten since.

Sokal was not a conservative. he was a person of the left. He published to paper because he worried about postmodern philosophers putting forth a form of relativism and science is just one way of "knowing". This was meant to give formerly oppressed peoples a voice and have their ways of "knowing" given respect. As an academic fad postmodernism seems like frippery from happier times.

The problem is that the corrosive relativism and alternate ways of "knowing" is given way to "Alternative Facts" of Trump and co. Postmodernism as movement will be forgotten but it corrosive philosophy became the perfect ammo for its political enemies. I don't think postmodernists were hoping to give voice to Brietbart or Fox but the tools of moral relativism and alternative facts was going to be used by the people with the biggest megaphone and in America it is the well funded right. It was not a result intended by the postmodernists but in the sleep of reason arise demons.

It appears the BBC was thinking the same thing I was. I found this video about ten minutes ago. I wrote the review before I found this video 3/19/2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5ydF...>

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### **Koen Crolla says**

Pretty disappointing. This is a collection of essays, of which the first is an annotated version of the hoax paper and the rest is largely uninteresting.

The problem with arguing against postmodernists and relativists is that nobody is a postmodernist or

relativist because they genuinely don't understand scientific epistemology; they're postmodernists and relativists because they're intellectually dishonest and want to ``win" arguments or be fashionable. *Everyone* understands why these people are full of shit, and laying it out is, to use an expression one of them used in a more reprehensible context, breaking a butterfly on the wheel. It may be a particularly shitty butterfly, but that doesn't mean it's at all interesting to break.

The fact that the arguments in favour of positivism are pathetically easy doesn't mean Sokal doesn't fuck them up sometimes, though (mostly through sloppiness), and though he protests repeatedly that he is a leftist and a feminist — which I don't doubt he really believes — he repeats several shitlord memes simply because those he believes to be his opponents disagree with them.

So all in all, meh. *Beyond the Hoax* would have made an acceptable series of blog posts or newspaper column, but I expected more from a book.

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## **Fiona says**

The only aspect of the Sokal Hoax I was aware of before I read this book was that the hoax article Sokal wrote about physics was submitted to a publication that did not subject articles to peer review. This seemed to me to make the hoax not quite as damning for the social sciences as opponents of poststructuralism and postmodernism claimed, since it was really more embarrassing for the editors of the journal than the entire academic field of the cultural analysis of science.

I found Sokal's critique of the pervasive influence of poststructuralism on the social sciences compelling and even-handed, in contrast to other more hysterical attacks from within the social sciences (e.g. Windschuttle's *The Killing of History* and Roger Sandall's *The Culture Cult*). However, my high school level science education did mean that I found some chapters incredibly baffling:)

While I think that humanities academics can analyse how culture influences scientific knowledge, such analysis needs to be underpinned by a sympathetic knowledge of the scientific discipline under investigation. Similarly, scientists need to be aware of how cultural biases can unconsciously influence their work and what we subsequently come to think of as scientific fact. Sokal is clearly sympathetic to such ideas and is at pains to make clear that his attack is on critiques that demonstrate an ignorance of, and even hostility toward, the scientific field studied.

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## **Kirk says**

It took me two tries to get through this book. While I agree with Sokal on virtually all issues, this is a loosely collection of essays that range from great to merely so-so.

I learned of the Sokal Affair in college, and it helped to crystallize why, as a liberal and scientist in training, I was so bothered by some of the rhetoric coming from the academic left. Sokal draws firm lines, defending the legacy of the Enlightenment from the relativism of the post-modern left and the faith-based dogmatism of the religious right.

While the hoax come of age in the 90s and this book was released in 2004, the statements are still relevant today. He cautions about the consequences of undermining support for liberalism, rationality and

empiricism. He warns of consequences - presaging by a decade the trend of facts-blind nationalism on the right (in the US, India, Europe and elsewhere) and the continued undermining of liberalism and rational discourse by the left (captured by several recent articles, notably penned by Haidt and Chait).

For me this book is notable for what it represents - a salvo in defense of facts, truth and rational discourse. While I wholeheartedly endorse his mission, this book was rather hit and miss.

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## **Gideon says**

Oh I want this...

Damn post-modernists.. Between them and the positivists, and the 'let's make everything science" crowd, they pretty much ruined the Academy.

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## **Lobstergirl says**

The largest chunk of this book is actually his other book, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*. The first chapter is an annotated text of the article that constituted the big hoax in the journal *Social Text*. And the original article of course had footnotes, so this one has double footnotes. It's exhausting to plow through, and Sokal's style is very self-congratulatory, full of humble-brags and inside jokes.

Another vast chapter is a book review of Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* and Michael Lerner's *Spirit Matters*. I'm certainly happy that we have atheists in the world. We need them, just like we need opposition to all majority movements. They shouldn't be discriminated against. But Sokal's equating of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc. with the Heaven's Gate and other cults (they're all, equally, superstitions) got old very fast. Sokal criticized Harris's book for being epistemologically sound but politically lacking, which was interesting because Sokal's critique of religion was much the same. He praised Lerner for his efforts not to be condescending toward the religious right, and he seemed to think he himself was also not being condescending, but insisting your way is the only enlightened way and calling every major religion superstition is pretty much the definition of condescending. It may work well for you among other academics, but you're going to alienate 80% of everyone else.

Sokal had so many people advising him on the book and reading manuscripts I'm surprised no one told him how wordy he was. Maybe all of them are wordy too. Nearly every single thought he had needed to be expanded with a footnote. I believe the phrase "It goes without saying that..." occurred close to 9,433 times. If it really does go without saying, why did you say it? If I recall, in his other book he had the equally annoying habit of saying things like "Needless to say, this is so obvious it doesn't need elaboration" and then not elaborating, when it actually wasn't obvious to me. Writers, here's a piece of advice. Say those things that to you are obvious. They won't be obvious to everyone. Say them simply, in one sentence. Then move on.

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## **Liam says**

Sokal protests that this is not a collection of B-sides, so to speak, but a continuous whole, even if its parts were previously published separately. Unfortunately the consistency is not the same all the way through, and this was not a text which was designed to be read from cover to cover in the same way that the previous book, *Fashionable Nonsense*, was. Many sections seem as if they were a pouring-out of paragraphs clipped from sessions at the library, with minimal commentary.

When Sokal draws conclusions he has an honest perspective about things, for example he reviews the literature of "Post-Modern Nursing" but comes to conclusion that such things are as marginal as they sound from the phrase itself. For another example he reviews the cross-section of New Age Healers and straight-out Post-Modernists, and finds less than he expected. This is admirable in itself, but seems to say that this book was hardly deserving of the lofty sounding title on the front cover.

Rather than creating any unique persepective on "Science, Philosophy and Culture," Sokal merely adds his 2p on issues as broad as atheism, homeopathy, Kuhn's "Structure of Scientific Revolutions." Only for the hard-core fans. The hight may be the first chapter: a kind of "director's commentary" on the original hoax-article. The dual-footnotes are sometimes difficult to negotiate but contain a lot of nuggets which are worthwhile.

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## **Ugh says**

The blurb doesn't give much away, so I'll fill you in on the content as I go along:

Chapter 1 (60-odd pages plus bibliography) is a reproduction of Sokal's 1996 publication in social science journal 'Social Text', which he later revealed to be deliberately composed of ambiguity, misused terms, and quotes of what Sokal considered to poor science or else total nonsense. The reproduction is also accompanied by commentary from Sokal in the form of annotations. That means your attention is divided three ways: to the article, to the footnotes to the article, and to the annotations. This works pretty well, and I think is probably better than if the article had been reproduced as a stand-alone piece which was then followed by the commentary, but I did get a bit tired at times of having to move my attention around the pages all the time. You don't get the same satisfaction you get from just going at a chunk of text and blasting through it.

In terms of content, this chapter is reasonably interesting (for someone with very very little previous experience of social science or post-modern deconstructivism and what have you), but I did get a bit bored before the end. To be fair, it probably didn't help that I was often unable to discern the nonsense from the partly or entirely sensical until I read the explanatory comment for that particular bit, because this meant that I spent a fair amount of time in a pretty clueless state. But then, if the editors of *Social Text* were fooled, and they were supposed to be experts, what hope did I have? Most of the comments are quite interesting or funny, but I was quite glad to finally finish the chapter.

The rest of part 1 (which constitutes around one third of the book) is comprised of comment on the hoax and what it did and didn't demonstrate. This and the rest of the book are presented in the more familiar text-and-footnote format, so are less of an effort to read. Plus, they're pretty interesting.



However, it was parts 2 and 3 that I had highest hopes for, once the attraction of reading the hoax had lost its initial shine, and I think these parts are the most interesting overall. Part 2 consists of 2 essays on science and philosophy, and part 3 of 3 essays on science and culture. In truth, the two essays from part 2 and the first from part 3 are pretty similar, and in fact certain paragraphs from the different essays are repeated word-for-word not just once but a couple of times between the different essays. I didn't exactly feel cheated by that, because the meat of the essays IS different, but I did think it was just a teeny bit rich for Sokal to talk in the preface about how much it annoys him when academics release compendiums of essays that have bugger all to do with each other but try to pass the volume off as a coherent whole, only to then go to the opposite extreme and actually repeat content over and over again! But it's a minor gripe.

To wrap it up, the final 2 essays on politics and religion were the most accesible for me, but also the most familiar and least revelatory (but still intereting).

So what did I think of the book? Well, I hadn't realised that it was going to be about the attempts of certain groups to attack science for the very thing that makes it worthwhile - i.e., its objectivity - and if I had realised that it was going to be about that (a topic that would have struck pre-BTH me as being pretty much irrelevant to serious science), then I would probably have been less inclined to buy it. However, in the course of reading the book, I did come around to the idea that these groups, although small, do have quite a bit of influence, so I'm glad that I did decide to take it home. It IS a bit repetitive, and the analysis is never really all that deep, mostly coming in the form of quotes from other works that Sokal then briefly comments on or to which he supplies comment from other sources, but then, Sokal never attempts to hide the fact that with these essays he's sticking his nose into areas in which he's not a specialist, and I felt that, although a little shallow, his analysis was always very fair and often quite insightful. Plus, he comes across as a very likeable guy, and at times his comments or the sources he's selected are actually very funny.

I'm only giving this three stars, but they're a very happily granted three stars. I wouldn't want to give the wrong impression of the book by giving it a higher score, because it is a lot of pages on quite a niche topic, and because the actual input from the author constitutes only so much of the book, and contributes only so much insight, but it's a book that I for the most part really enjoyed reading, and I find myself liking and admiring Sokal himself rather a lot too.

Overall: recommended, but only for those who've read this far and haven't sighed yet or skipped along. Three and a half stars if I could...

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## **Mark Edon says**

Much more than I expected in more ways than one.

I expected the text of the Sokal Hoax, exposing anti-reality post modernism, but the extensive footnotes where a bonus.

Then there was plenty of food for thought exploring more examples that started from merely doubting the existence of a real world and the equality of all points of view when it comes to matters of fact but progressed into the direct promotion of nonsense beliefs at the expense of science and to the detriment of innocents.

I was particularly dismayed to spot yet another ocean of alternative silliness lapping at the shores of

rationality in the form of Rogerian nursing.

Finally I was delighted to find a perspective on the Politics of the Left at challenged my previous views and seems to make good sense. With a bit of luck this might even lead me to changing my mind about some things, for good, evidence based reasons of course.

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## Kerem Cankocak says

'?akan'?n Ard'?ndan' Sokal vakas'?ndaki tart??malar? toplayan bir kitapt?r. Kitab'?n ilk bölümünde Social Text'te yay?nlanan makalenin tam metni ve aç?klamalar? sa?l?-sollu yer almaktadır. Di?er bölümleri ise bilim ve bilim felsefesi tart??malar?na ayr?lm??t?r. Kendisini 'Sol görü?lü' olarak niteleyen Sokal en çok sol çevrelerdeki bilim dü?manl???n?n tehlikelerine dikkati çekmektedir. Kitapta, Sokal Vakas? tart??malar?n yan?s?ra, Bilim Felsefesinin kadim sorunlar? da ele al?nmaktadır: Popper'c? bilim felsefesinin ele?tirisinden, Kuhn'un "bilimsel devrimlerine", Feyereband' ?n "yönteme kar??" s?na kadar, son dönem bilim felsefesi tart??malar?na de?inen Sokal, bu tart??malar kar??s?nda bilim insan?n?n konumunu irdeler.

"Burada amaçlar?mdan biri de Sol içinde be?eri bilimlerle u?ra?anlar ve do?a bilimcileri aras?nda do?acak bir diyaloga küçük bir katkıda bulunmakt?r; ço?u ilk gruptan gelen baz? iyimser beyanlara ra?men, "iki kültür" zihniyeti aras?ndaki fark belki de son elli y?lda oldu?undan daha fazla aç?lm??t?r....Do?a bilimcilerin postmodern aptall?ktan korkmas? için pek neden yoktur (en az?ndan k?sa süreli?ine); söz oyunlar?, toplumsal gerçeklerin titizlikle incelenmesinin yerini al?nca bundan en çok ma?dur olanlar tarih, sosyal bilimler ve sol siyasettir..."

## Türkçe Bask?ya Önsöz

Alan Sokal, Türk okurlar'?n yabanc? olmad??? bir isim. Jean Bricmont ile birlikte yazd?klar? kitap 2002 'de Türkçede 'Son Moda Saçmalar Postmodern Ayd?nlar'?n Bilimi Kötüye Kullanmalar?' ba?l???yla yay?mland?. New York Üniversitesinde Teorik fizik profesörü olan Alan Sokal, 1996'da Social Text isimli bir postmodern dergiye saçma bir makale gönderir. Fizik kuramlar'?n bilerek çarp?tt??? ve saçma bir ?ekilde sundu?u bu makalesini Social Text basar ve ard'?ndan Sokal bunun bir ?aka oldu?unu, postmodern dergilerin her türlü saçma makaleyi bast?klar?n? ispatlamak için bu yola ba?vurdu?unu aç?klar. Sonras?nda büyük bir tart??ma ba?lar, postmodern felsefeciler ile bilim adamlar? aras?nda. "Bilim sava?lar?nda"nda yeni bir sayfa aç?lm?? olur ve Derrida gibi ünlü postmodernistler ile Weinberg gibi Nobel ödüllü fizikçilerinin de dahil oldu?u sert tart??malar ya?an?r. Dü?ün tarihine 'Sokal vakas?' olarak geçen bu olay?n devam? ?akan'?n Ard'?ndan'?n ilk k?sm?n? olu?turuyor. Kitab'?n ikinci bölümü ise detayl? bir bilim felsefesi tart??mas? içeriyor. Son olarak üçüncü bölümde Sokal, bütün bu tart??malar?n akademik düzeyde kalmad???n?, asl?nda bunun politik bir mesele oldu?unu, günlük hayattan örneklerle anlat?yor. Bu son k?s?m kitab'?n en politik k?sm?.

Alan Sokal, bir teorik fizikçiden beklenmeyecek ölçüde politik birisi. Farkl? makalelerinden derledi?i bu kitab?nda da, s?k s?k "kendi alan? olmayan" bu konulara politik nedenlerle girdi?ini vurguluyor. Toplumsal olaylar, topluma ili?kin olgular, k?saca her tür politik söylemin be?eri bilimcilerin tekelinde oldu?u günümüzde, Sokal gibi pozitif bilimcilerin bu ç?k??lar? bize göre çok önemlidir. Sokal'?n en çok vurgulad??? "bilim dü?manl???" ve "bilimlerin postmodern yazarlar taraf?ndan kötüye kullan?m?", son tahlilde akademik bir mesele de?il, politik sonuçlar? olan ciddi bir toplumsal olgudur. Bu olguyu görmek için

çok uzaklara gitmeye gerek yok, Internetten Türkçeye çevrilmi? kitaplar? tarad???m?zda hemen kar??m?za ç?k?yor. Ülkemizde postmodern yazarlar? Türkçeye kazand?rma konusunda geni? bir ittifak göze çarpmakta: Liberalli?e terfi etmi? eski tüfek solculardan anar?istlere, prestijli üniversitelerin Sosyoloji bölümlerinden dini kitaplar basan yay?nevlerine kadar hemen herkes postmodern yazarlar? (özellikle Frans?z olanlar?) ba?r?na basm?? durumda. Örne?in Baudrillard'?n neredeyse tüm kitaplar? Türkçeye çevrilmi?, Feyerabend birçok farkl? yay?nevi taraf?ndan defalarca yay?mlanm??. Bu ilginç olguyu nas?l aç?klamal?? ?üphesiz ilk akla gelen aç?klama bu fikirlerin 'moda olu?lar?'. Bu kadar geni? bir dü?ünce yelpazesindeki ayd?nlar?n, bu kitaplar?n içeriklerinde uzla?t?klar?n? varsaymak ilk bak??ta olanaks?z gibi görünüyor. Moda konusu, Alfa Yay?nlar?n?n Bilim-Felsefe dizisinden ç?kartaca??m?z ilk dört kitaptan biri olan 'Mem Makinesinde' ayr?nt?l? olarak ele al?n?yor. Susan Blackmore, bir çe?it kültürel genler olan "mem"lerin nas?l taklit yoluyla kendilerini kopyalatt???n? detayl? bir ?ekilde inceliyor. Ama 'postmodern memlerin' kendilerini kopyalatarak ço?almas? bir sonuçtur. Peki bu memlerin ba?ar?l? olmas?n?n ard?nda yatan s?r nedir? Neden son y?llarda 'fa?ist bilim', 'paradigma', 'sömürgeci bat? bilimi', 'gerçeklik görecelidir', 'bilim toplumsal bir in?ad?r' tarz?ndaki memler ba?ar? kazand?? ??te Sokal, bu postmodern yazarlar?n söylediklerinin bu kadar geni? bir çevrede ilgi çekmesinin nedenlerini ara?t?r?yor kitab?nda. Bir bilim adam? titizli?iyle postmodern argümanlar? masaya yat?rarak, bu yanl?? argümanlar?n izini Kuhn ve Feyerabend'in eserlerine kadar sürüyor.

Sokal'a göre ba?ta gelen etmenlerden ilki "tembellik", çünkü "perspektivizm ve radikal toplumsal in?ac?l?k, politik olarak kendini adam?? fakat entelektüel aç?dan tembel insanlar için fazlas?yla do?al bir felsefe ...". Günümüzde en sevilen kavram paradigma. Herkesin 'kendi paradigmas?' var. Oysa gerçek bilim yapmak zor. E?er her?ey bir yorum ve kanaat meselesiyse, zaman?m?z? neden ciddi biçimde fizik, biyoloji ve istatistik ö?renmeye harcayal?m ki? Tembelli?in yan? s?ra ak?l-d???l??a duyulan ilgi, bilimin 'otoriterli?inden' korku,...vb gibi etmenler de var. Özellikle Türkiye gibi bilimsel formasyonun zayıf oldu?u ülkelerde bunlar daha da bask?n hale geliyor.

Sokal'?n amacı, genel anlamda kan?t ve mant??a duyulan sayg? olarak özetledi?i bilimsel bir dünya görü?ünü savunmak. Ama bu sadece akademik bir savunma de?il, ayn? zamanda politik bir savunma. Kitaptaki tezler her ne kadar akademik düzeyde de olsa, sonuçlar? politik. Sokal bütün bu tart??malar?n akademik düzeyde kalmay?p, dünyam?z? da etkiledi?ini vurguluyor. Bilim dü?manl???n?n, görecili?in ve sahte bilimlerin en büyük zarar?n?n, özellikle Türkiye gibi "Ayd?nlanman?n modas? geçmi? oldu?u varsay?lan i?inin henüz tamamlanmad??? Üçüncü Dünya ülkelerinde" görüldü?ünü söylüyor. Sokal kitab?n son bölümünde bu zararlara örnek olarak Hindistan'? seçmi?. Ancak Hindistan' da ya?ananlar?n bir k?sm? Türkiye'de de ya?anmakta ve ya?anma tehlikesi var.

Alan Sokal'?n bu kitab?n?n, Türkiye'deki postmodern modan?n yol açt??? zararlar?n telafisine yönelik önemli bir tart??ma zemini yaratmas?n? umuyoruz.

Kerem Cankoçak, Eylül 2011

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## Dominic Pakenham says

This book was divided into three parts, and the thread that connected them was not sufficiently well wrought to give the sense of a seamless reader experience: I'm not sure how the whole thing was compiled; but, as a reader, it's tedious to have to find the same argument repeated (word-for-word) in several successive chapters. Presumably Sokal wrote a series of essays, all of which concerned the worst excesses of postmodernism, and someone persuaded him to stitch them together to create a book. In itself, this was a fine idea, I think. However, if you're going to head down that road, it's a little disrespectful to your potential readership not to make the ride as linear and as smooth as possible, rather than leaving us feeling as though

at any given moment, the page might collapse into a black hole and send you back forty pages to an earlier rehearsal of some specific idea.

Having said that, it was a great read.

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## **Evangelos says**

Got this for the hoax essay. There's other interesting essays too, although sometimes repetitive. I skimmed through some them, didn't read through. I'll go back to the annotations for the essay later.

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## **John says**

Alan Sokal is best known in the academic world for his overly-clever hoax. In 1996 he published an essay in *Social Text*, a postmodern journal, full of ridiculous "postmodernist" statements about quantum physics. His goal was to make fun of literary and cultural critics who had been taking on the scientific establishment by questioning its methods of seeking truth. The postmodernist perspective (actually, to be fair, one perspective), in a crude nutshell, is that truth and knowledge are relative and vary depending on culture and social structure. In any event, Sokal created a firestorm with his hoax.

In the ensuing 12 years, Sokal offered reflections on this episode and has added a number of essays critical of the critics of science. This book consists of several of these essays, as well as a laborious annotated version of the original piece that made him famous (or infamous, depending on one's perspective).

Although the book is worth reading for Sokal's interesting critiques of what he calls Science Studies, there are numerous problems that result in a less than stellar product (especially given the prestigious publisher, Oxford U Press). First and most obvious, this is perhaps the worst edited book I've ever read. The number of redundancies across chapters is astounding and very annoying. Was Oxford in a rush to put this out for some reason? Did Sokal refuse to work with an editor?

Second, whereas Sokal is on solid ground when offering critiques of science studies from his perspective as a physicist, and though he seems to have mastered well the epistemological literature that is relevant to these studies, he goes well off track in later chapters when he attempts to tackle what he calls "superstition" (read "religion"). Here he simply rehashes arguments that have been made much more convincingly by Dawkins and other proud atheists. It seems that Sokal felt at pains to be even handed by attacking postmodernists as well as what he considers conservatives (which seemed to encompass all believers, irrespective of his use of the term "liberal Christian").

Perhaps most annoying, though, is that Sokal, even if he has done an admirable job cutting the legs out of postmodern science studies, offers no sense of what the scientific method offers. He assumes that the reader is on his side and perhaps understands the method, so he didn't feel the need to offer a positive evaluation or argument favoring this approach to knowledge generation. This may have been his thinking, but I thought it came off as arrogant. In the end, even though I was amused by the "Sokal hoax" and its aftermath, the book disappoints on many levels.

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