

Anti-Vaxxer Bill Maher Preaches the Importance of Knowledge



By Alex Berezow, PhD — November 4, 2016



Credit: Angela George/Wikipedia ^[1]

Recently, Bill Maher instructed America on the importance of knowledge. He's right, of course, but he's a rather imperfect messenger: Listening to him is like receiving a lecture from Bill Clinton or Donald Trump on the importance of marital fidelity.

Mr Maher's [monologue](#) ^[2] provided some insight into his political viewpoint. It was illuminating for two reasons, but probably not in the way Mr. Maher would hope for.

First, he accused people who disagree with his political views of being lazy and engaging in "false equivalence," an [entirely fictitious logical fallacy](#) ^[3] that is an intellectually feeble attempt to shut down debate. Essentially, if at any point in a debate one participant does not like a counterpoint made by the other participant, he can claim "false equivalence" and then pat himself on the back for his wit.

This tactic is not only anti-intellectual but also subversive. The reason is because it perpetuates the thoroughly false notion that those who disagree with us do so not out of differences in values or beliefs but because they are fundamentally illogical. Such a sentiment is neither conducive to public debate nor scientific inquiry.

Second, Mr Maher says that Americans aren't stupid, but that they apply their brain power to silly things like sports and tacos instead of more important topics like politics. Again, he's right, but coming from a man who rejects vaccines and Western medicine, it is also rank hypocrisy.

Mr Maher has chosen to fill his neurons with pseudoscience. He continues to be one of the most visible and influential anti-vaxxers. While bizarrely claiming to be pro-vaccine, in 2015, [Mr Maher praised Robert F. Kennedy, Jr](#)

[4] for publicizing the myth that vaccines cause autism.

Mr Maher has also questioned the germ theory of disease, a bedrock of medical microbiology. As its name implies, the theory says that pathogenic microorganisms are responsible for infectious disease. Not so, says Mr Maher. [According](#) [5] to him, "That's another theory that I think is flawed... it's not the invading germs, it's the terrain." In other words, germs don't make people sick; it's lifestyle that makes a person sick.

Obviously, there is a tinge of truth to that. Certain behaviors can make a person more or less susceptible to infection. [Regular exercise](#) [6] may reduce the likelihood of catching a cold. But, as David Gorski [explains](#) [7], the idea that a healthy lifestyle will prevent all infectious disease is utter nonsense. In fact, that sentiment earned Mr Maher a [classic rebuke](#) [7] from Bob Costas: "Oh, come on, Superman."

Belittling the life-saving advances of medical microbiology is not sufficient for Mr Maher. Indeed, he is "[not into Western medicine](#) [8]."

He apparently is not into biomedical research, either, as Mr Maher is a supporter of PETA. In an [article](#) [9] praising the organization, he defames animal research scientists by claiming "dogs and rabbits are treated as though they were pieces of lab equipment." Though he attempts to paint scientists as monsters, in reality, animal research is conducted as humanely as possible and with extensive oversight.

Though occasionally funny, Mr. Maher is not half as clever as he imagines himself to be. The dangerous gibberish that he spouts as enlightenment, combined with his complete lack of self-awareness, means the irony of his latest diatribe was entirely lost upon him. Unfortunately, far too many Americans still tune in, letting their worldviews be shaped by a fool posing as a wise man.

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Maher#/media/File:BillMaherSept10.jpg

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-HDsmJbm_E

[3] http://www.realclearscience.com/blog/2014/02/every_disagreement_is_now_a_logical_fallacy.html

[4] <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/04/24/bill-maher-anti-vaxxer-the-real-time-host-sides-with-robert-f-kennedy-jr-during-bizarre-interview.html>

[5] <http://scienceblogs.com/insolence/2007/10/16/is-bill-maher-really-that-ignorant-part/>

[6] <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-11664660>

[7] <https://www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/germ-theory-denialism-a-major-strain-in-alt-med-thought/>

[8] <https://www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/oh-come-on-superman-bill-maher-and-western-medicine/>

[9] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bill-maher/peta-ingrid-newkirk-free-the-animals_b_1464990.html