

American Lysenko

by J. Scott Turner

The Real Anthony Fauci: Bill Gates, Big Pharma, and the Global War on Democracy and Public Health, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., 2021, Skyhorse, pp. 934, \$18.00 hardcover.

To get this expeditiously out of the way, I am not a fan of Robert F. Kennedy Jr, nor for that matter of the Kennedy clan. I suppose it's hereditary. My father, who hailed from the western suburbs of Boston, was familiar with the Kennedys and their antics: "Irish gangsters" was his preferred epithet. I think he learned that from *his* father. My father and I are scions of a long lineage of New England artisans and craftsmen (apparently starting with the *Mayflower* colonists, according to my cousins), who were perpetually at odds with the Irish Catholic immigrants that were coming to dominate Protestant Massachusetts.

Sins of the fathers notwithstanding, I harbor a home-grown skepticism about the man. There's Kennedy's well-known history of radical environmentalism, "anti-vaccine activism, and conspiracy [theorizing]," in Wikipedia's words. Ordinarily, I would never have picked up his book, *The Real Anthony Fauci*. Why bother, was my attitude? But

a couple of years ago, as the world was emerging from the COVID-19 debacle, I found myself ensconced at a remote research station, with little access to internet and other distractions. So, more out of boredom than anything, I picked up Kennedy's book just to see what he had to say.

I'm glad I picked it up, though, because *The Real Anthony Fauci* is, in its own way, a remarkable book. Not a perfect book, mind you, but a worthwhile book nevertheless. I will come to the shortcomings anon. First, the virtues.

Kennedy begins his book with an exhaustive dissection of the many faults and failures of the public response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Being able to draw from recent memory, most readers will be familiar with his case: the mendacious reporting; the undue prominence given to demonstrably simplistic predictions of contagion and death; the evasive responses of the public health establishment; the failure to adapt to emerging demographic patterns of ill-

ness and mortality; the egregious fiddling with statistics; the denigration of prophylactics like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin; the undue emphasis given to untested vaccines of dubious effectiveness; the suppression of dissenting scientists and physicians—all of this, and more in service to a cult of “science” papered over by a thin veneer of *faux* “expertise.” It was not our finest hour, to say the least.

In his book, Kennedy does not simply repeat that sorry history. Rather, he systematically lays out the failures in excruciating and well-documented detail. The book’s more than 1,700 endnotes are helpfully accompanied by links that allow readers to check his claims for themselves. Some of these were amusing (an old *60 Minutes* clip of Mike Wallace making a CDC bureaucrat sweat over the swine flu panic), most links were to news articles and scientific journal articles bolstering his text. This attention to detail makes *The Real Anthony Fauci* perhaps the most thoroughly researched book about the debacle of COVID-19. Inevitably, some of the links in the version I read were dead. No matter, each chapter ends with a QR code and web link to updated endnotes. If a reader wants to dig into a claim, Kennedy’s not throwing up any obstacles.

What made *The Real Anthony Fauci* stand out for me was what followed from his dissection of the COVID-19 fiasco. He goes on to make a compelling case that the shenanigans unleashed during the pandemic were nothing new, nor could they be explained as the work

of well-meaning public servants feeling their way forward in a climate of uncertainty and crisis. Rather, the COVID-19 response followed a well-honed template that had been developing over the course of decades, beginning in the 1980s with the emerging “gay plague” of AIDS, and continuing to the present. The book is a compelling indictment of our public health bureaucracy and its long history of protected incompetence, mismanagement, and “science-free medicine,” verging into outright corruption and malfeasance.

The *bête noir* of Kennedy’s narrative is the eponymous Anthony Fauci, MD. He directed the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID, one of National Institutes of Health) from 1984 until his 2022 retirement. He is one of Washington’s longest-serving, and most-generously rewarded civil servants. In the prevailing narrative, Anthony Fauci has been painted as the hero of COVID, the self-identified embodiment of “science” standing at the ramparts against the hordes of crazies, yahoos, and vindictive Republican senators who dared to oppose him. For this, he enjoys a generous retirement marked by numerous accolades, prestigious awards (including a presidential Medal of Freedom), a best-selling autobiography, and many other blandishments, rising at times to near idolatry. As my South African friends like to describe it, Anthony Fauci has landed with his ass in the butter.

Kennedy has a different portrait of Anthony Fauci to paint. In Kennedy’s view, he is the point man for a vast net-

work of collusion between the pharmaceutical industry, the national science bureaucracy (of which the NIH is a major player), and corrupt politicians. The currency that unites them all is ... well ... currency. Pharmaceutical companies love royalties that stream from patentable medicines (particularly ones where sales can be forced through government mandates). Bureaucrats love capturing streams of federal revenue to justify their agencies' existence. Politicians love laboring under the illusion (delusion?) that throwing money at a problem is the same as solving a problem.

If it were only garden-variety venality at work, Kennedy would be breaking no new ground with this book. What he adds is yeoman's work aplenty in building the case that science and the public interest actually play vanishingly small parts in shaping public health policy. Rather, public health is shaped largely by a well-crafted and well-rehearsed playbook of ginned-up pandemic panic (or "pandemic porn" as Kennedy describes it). This is used routinely to stampede the public into "urgent action," with the aim of unleashing generous streams of public money that do little to protect public health, but mainly enrich the public health bureaucracy and their partners in the pharmaceutical industry.

COVID-19 was not Anthony Fauci's first rodeo. Kennedy goes on to document the pandemic porn playbook in action in many outbreaks of novel infectious disease, of which COVID-19 was only the latest. This played out

prominently in the AIDS epidemic, but has also been brought to bear for a host of other infectious diseases, including swine flu, avian influenza, Ebola, Zika, and others. Compared to the NIH's dire predictions, these have often come up as damp squibs, of little consequence for most peoples' lives. For some, actual harm has resulted. The common outcome in all these instances, Kennedy asserts, has been aggrandizement of bureaucratic fiefdoms and juiced-up royalty earnings that not only sweeten corporate profits, but also enrich well-placed NIH bureaucrats.

Where actual science threatens to undermine this scheme, Kennedy paints a darker side to the pandemic playbook: concerted campaigns of intimidation and retribution, various shady schemes to hide the conflicting interests at play in supposedly independent review and approval panels, verging at times into what looks a lot like racketeering. In short, Kennedy paints Anthony Fauci as the biomedical equivalent of Vito Corleone: a wily infighter, aggrandizer, holder of grudges, the practitioner of cold vengeance, all in the pursuit of money and power. Where Vito Corleone laundered his criminality in olive oil, Anthony Fauci laundered his under the cloak of Public Health. Kennedy pulls no punches.

Does he make his case? The conventional defense of Anthony Fauci points to him as the honest broker public servant doing his best to bring science to bear in high-stakes situations marked by uncertainty and danger. So what

if he got some things wrong in the COVID pandemic, defenders ask? He was doing his best, and we should cut him slack.

Kennedy takes that defense apart plank-by-plank, exposing an array of troubling contradictions. What was behind the demonization of prophylactics like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin, which were cheap, readily available, and in the right circumstances, effective? Why were the scientific judgments of respected scientists like Jay Bhattacharya and Scott Atlas suppressed by a defamation campaign coordinated by Anthony Fauci and his NIH superior, Francis Collins? Why the stonewalling of the origin of the COVID-19 virus, even though it was clear very early on that it was bioengineered? What were the machinations behind the rush to COVID vaccines, which escaped the usual protocols for safety and product testing? Kennedy's broad historical sweep makes it hard not to pose some serious questions about our whole public health bureaucracy. For nearly fifty years, these concerns have largely been swept under the rug. Kennedy gives us a look under the rug, and the picture is definitely not pretty.

At the same time, Kennedy's case suffers from his deep and long-standing immersion in progressive pieties and politics. Foremost is his demonization of the entire pharmaceutical industry, which he consistently paints as greedy and cynical jackals, and whose reliable monkey is Anthony Fauci. To Kennedy, profits seem to be a Bad Thing, corporate Original Sin. If only pharmaceuti-

cal companies would forgo profits, all would be right, he seems to be arguing. The sin is only compounded, in Kennedy's view, when it is committed in collusion with government.

He's not entirely consistent in his indignation, though. He argues persuasively that the collusion between the public health bureaucracy and Big Pharma poses an existential threat to core civil liberties and constitutional rights. He's not wrong about that, and at times, Kennedy sounds almost Republican in his defense of the Constitution. Yet (despite his recent ever-so-slight pivot on the matter), he seems fine with collusion between government and favored players in the energy industry. Swap out Big Climate for Big Pharma, and Kennedy's progressive blinders are brought into stark relief.

Aside from that, I think Kennedy mischaracterizes Anthony Fauci: he is not so much Vito Corleone as he is Trofim Denisovitch Lysenko. What? Some background is in order.

Lysenko was the 1930s Soviet agronomist who rose to dominate Soviet agriculture, to its ultimate detriment.¹ Like Anthony Fauci, Lysenko was not a particularly good scientist. Nevertheless, he rose to the top ranks of Soviet science, largely because his unconventional theories of genetic inheritance were congenial to Stalinist dogma. He also was a skilled political infighter who came to embody "the science" for Stalin and the Politburo. That put him in a position of authority, from which he wrought enormous damage to Soviet agriculture.

Lysenko also was the point of the spear of the increasing politicization of Soviet science. The Stalinist ideological purges were not limited to the Trotskys and Bukharins of the political class, but extended to practitioners of “bourgeois science” as well. The most prominent scientist caught up in those purges was the geneticist Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov, who was a loud and strident critic of Lysenko’s views on heredity. With the backing of the Politburo and Uncle Joe, Vavilov was arrested in 1940 on trumped-up charges of sabotaging Soviet agriculture. A death sentence followed, which was later commuted to twenty years of hard labor in the Gulag. It was a distinction without a difference, though: Vavilov could not endure the harsh conditions in the Gulag, and died a prisoner in 1943. Vavilov was posthumously rehabilitated in 1955.

Lysenko’s name frequently crops up these days as an avatar of “crackpot science” and as an object lesson in the dangers of politicized science. That’s about half right. Usually, Lysenko’s name is trotted out by “the brights” as a cudgel to be wielded against conservatives: who is more “anti-science” than conservative Republicans, right?² Just like Lysenko! The “crackpot science” accusation against Lysenko is starting to fall apart, however, and this is bringing his life and career into a different focus.³ Lysenko’s toxic legacy is no longer “crackpot science,” but rather his subversion of science to an overweening political class bent on the relentless pursuit of power. Lysenko, in short, was

less a crackpot scientist than he was a Stalinist thug.

Is this sounding familiar? Reading Kennedy’s extensive cataloguing of Anthony Fauci’s career, eerie parallels with Lysenko’s begin to emerge. Mediocre scientist? Check. Skilled political bureaucrat? Check. Bends science through a network of scientific fellow travelers who can be trusted to keep the grift going? Check. Indifferent to the inefficacy and actual harm inflicted by his remedies? Check. Willingness to silence and destroy others who dissent from his agenda? Well, let’s explore that.

The most troubling aspect of *The Real Anthony Fauci* was Kennedy’s documenting how Fauci and his NIAID cabal have crushed the normal process of science: of objectivity and open discussion of alternate views centered at all times on reliable data. Those are the only things about science that have social value, really. Yet, they are conspicuous in their absence from Anthony Fauci’s NIH, claims Kennedy. Normal checks and safeguards are treated as inconveniences to be circumvented. Nominally independent approval boards and review panels are salted with scientists whose livelihoods depend upon continued NIH funding. Those who try to restore integrity find themselves the object of campaigns of character assassination and marginalization to render their voices ineffective.

Kennedy has the receipts, and they date back a long way. He documents how, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jay Bhattacharya and the other signa-

tories of the Great Barrington declaration drew the wrath of the NIH establishment, even though the declaration was based on sound science, and in hindsight, was correct in its claims. It's not just Kennedy claiming this, by the way. In his book about his service on the President's COVID Task Force, Scott Atlas independently confirms the political shenanigans of Anthony Fauci's minions, again to the detriment of science-based data-driven policy.⁴

There is another troubling parallel between Fauci's and Lysenko's careers: the willful destruction of scientists who bucked their agendas. In Lysenko's case, it was dubious theories of agronomy that sent him and his critics on a collision course. In Fauci's case, it was dubious theories about the connection between the disease AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and its supposed cause, HIV (the Human Immunodeficiency Virus) that set him on his own collision course with prominent scientists, the most prominent being the esteemed Berkeley virologist Peter Duesberg.

As the AIDS epidemic was first unfolding, Peter Duesberg challenged the prevailing consensus that HIV was the cause of AIDS. His case was exhaustive, science-based, and hard to refute.⁵ This drew the ire of Anthony Fauci and the growing army of scientists whose livelihoods depended upon HIV being the cause of AIDS. For those scientists, careers and research funding depended upon there being a connection. For Anthony Fauci, a connection was nec-

essary to secure the supremacy of the somnolent NIAID over other NIH institutes over AIDS policy. Peter Duesberg's contrary scientific claims threatened both.

For his audacity, Peter Duesberg's career was ruined. After coming out as an HIV skeptic, he was cut off from any research funding from the NIH, he was abandoned by colleagues whose livelihoods would be threatened by supporting him, he narrowly avoided being censured by UC Berkeley. In short, Duesberg became the Vavilov of virology.

Of course, death in the Gulag is nothing compared to one's grants drying up. Even so, Duesberg's story has many parallels to Vavilov's. Lysenko did not act alone, for example: he had staunch allies among fellow scientists who avidly participated in the isolation, marginalization, and ruination of scientists who questioned Lysenkoist orthodoxy. Anthony Fauci didn't act alone either: he had the eager cooperation of many scientists who were threatened by anyone questioning AIDS orthodoxy. In the end, Vavilov was more than Lysenko's victim, he was to be made an example to others to fall into line with the orthodoxy or else. Duesberg suffered a similar fate for crossing AIDS orthodoxy.

Here is where Kennedy's book falls short most seriously, in my opinion. While he makes a persuasive case that Anthony Fauci and the NIH comprise a nexus of corruption, he nevertheless views the problem through thick pro-

gressive lenses, and I think that leads him to a fundamental misdiagnosis of the real problem. Kennedy seems to think that, if only better ethical rules could be put into place, if only science could be directed to the right political causes, if only Anthony Fauci and his minions could be held to account, then all would be well.

They won't be better, though, because the real problem runs deeper, and here is where the parallels between Fauci and Lysenko come into sharper focus. In the 1950s, the federal government launched an experiment to make American science more like science in the Soviet Union. The experiment gained momentum during the Cold War, as the USA and USSR embarked on their competitive program of nuclear weapons development.⁶ The launch of Sputnik in 1957 added urgency to the program. As a result, we have effectively Sovietized American science. Science and scientists are now explicitly harnessed to politically-defined ends in ways that would have been inconceivable even a few years previously. Success in science is now tied to how effectively scientists promote those ends. No longer is it discovery but political utility that is the benchmark for success, and there is a vast bureaucracy in place that keeps everyone in line and focused.

In such a system, Lysenkos will inevitably arise. What Kennedy has actually catalogued is the rise of an American Lysenko, Anthony Fauci. In a regime of Sovietized science, however, Lysenkoism is not an anomaly, but a normality.

We see this in many mini-Lysenkos that pop up everywhere that science can be dragooned into advancing progressive pieties: in climate change, transgenderism, science decolonization, and others.

And this leads to the logical, obvious, but painful solution to the problem facing American science: it has to be de-Sovietized. This will mean splitting science away from its Lysenkoist commissars and the networks of money and power that prop them up. Can scientists do it? The case of our most prominent American Lysenko, the "real Anthony Fauci," indicates it will be very, very difficult.

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2. P.J. Hotez, *The Deadly Rise of Anti-science: A Scientist's Warning* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023).
3. L. Graham, *Lysenko's Ghost: Epigenetics and Russia* (Harvard University Press, 2016).
4. S.W. Atlas, *A Plague Upon Our House: My Fight at the Trump White House to Stop COVID from Destroying America* (Bombardier Books, 2021).
5. P.H. Duesberg, *Inventing the AIDS Virus* (Regnery Publishing, 1998).
6. A.J. Wolfe, *Freedom's Laboratory: The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020).