

If you're inclined to doubt science, why not start with the germ theory of disease? After all, isn't it implausible that illness, death, and even mass epidemics are caused by tiny invisible organisms that invade our bodies? And what's the evidence for that, really? Just the findings of scientists who can get big grants from NIH to study these so-called bacteria — not to mention studies financed by Big Pharm which makes a lot of money with supposed cures — and the views of doctors whose professional status and incomes are pumped up by their use of chemical antibiotics to treat diseases. And don't forget about the massive government spending for sanitation and water treatment to eliminate "germs," and the extensive regulation of the food industry, Big Government in action!

The germ theory of disease was a 19th century creation of men like Pasteur and Lister.

Even after it gained general acceptance, not everyone was convinced. I was planning to write a parody of climate denial in terms germ denial. I assumed everyone would agree that germ denial was ridiculous. But we live in a world where parody is difficult. As it turns out, there actually are germ denialists who accept that germs exist but don't think they're the real cause of disease. Rejection of the germ theory is found across the political spectrum, including some believers in alternative medicine, not to mention those like Christian Scientists who have theological reasons to reject it.

So far as I know, there aren't many people who think that bacteria and viruses don't exist at all and are just optical illusions created by microscope lenses. But there are a significant number who deny their medical importance. Some think that bacteria and viruses are a symptom of disease rather than a cause, finding a hospitable environment in the ill patient.

Others admit that they cause the symptoms of disease, but think that the "real" cause is some weakness in the body's defenses, thus making vaccines and other preventive measures pointless. Of course, there's a small grain of truth to that, since lower immunity or other health conditions do make infection easier. But that's hardly a reason for rejecting vaccines or antibiotics.

The germ theory has been rock solid science for over a century. It's hard to know what lesson to draw in terms of climate denialism. On the one hand, you could find this to be grounds for despair — no matter how strong the science or how visible the practical benefits of a scientific theory, there will still be people who reject it. On the other hand, these people are only the fringe, so maybe someday we will be able to get the vast majority of the public to understand that germs cause disease, the earth goes around the sun, species evolve — and yes, greenhouse gases do cause climate change.