

Venue:	Doody's Book Review Service
Title:	Book Review: Alternative medicine: a critical assessment of 202 modalities, 2 nd edition, Edzard Ernst
Date:	2022
Type:	Book Review
Author(s)/ Presenter(s):	Thomas Braem
Abstract (or Book Review):	<p>Description: This book critically assesses 202 alternative medicine modalities of health care. It utilizes a "thumbs-up, thumbs-down" rating of five different aspects of each modality - plausibility, efficacy, safety, cost, and risk/benefit balance. This is the second edition, last published in 2018.</p> <p>Purpose: This book attempts to critically evaluate the scientific basis of numerous alternative medicine modalities. These are worthy objectives and a useful exercise. The objectives are met, but with a very strong negative perspective to nearly every modality.</p> <p>Audience: The book is written for any reader interested in alternative modalities of health care. The needs of the audience are met, but with a great deal of bias from the author. The author is a credible authority on the subject based on his credentials and publications. However, many of the references he uses to support his claims are his own publications. This would seem to hold less credibility than the publications of other authorities, as there would be little possibility of an opposing viewpoint.</p> <p>Features: The book presents a very brief description of 202 healthcare modalities that would not be considered traditional Western medicine. Each brief description is followed by a "thumbs-up, thumbs-down" evaluation of the modality based on five assessments regarding plausibility, efficacy, safety, cost, and risk/benefit balance. This creates a very quick reference for individuals interested in a brief introduction to a modality from a Western medicine perspective. The author seems to have a strong bias against alternative medicine modalities in general, and this does seem to create a somewhat imbalanced review. He also avoids any mention of the ineffectiveness, dangers, harm, and deaths caused by traditional Western medicine and the over-prescription of pharmaceuticals for</p>

most disorders. There also seems to be an inconsistency in the review of different modalities, which is the biggest shortcoming of the book. There are numerous examples of this. For example, the author states that chiropractors overuse diagnostic imaging but fails to mention that many Western medical practitioners and dentists do the same. He states that most research shows antioxidants and vitamins do not prevent disease but gives a high assessment of the plausibility and efficacy of both. Laughter therapy receives high marks in all five assessments after stating that many of the proposed outcomes are not well-documented as claimed. On the other hand, nearly all individual Chinese medicine practices (acupuncture, Tui na, etc.) receive low assessments across the board when he states that the evidence for them is not well-documented. He then gives Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) a high grade for plausibility after giving low assessments to each individual modality that is considered part of TCM. This creates a sense of inconsistency in the evaluations.

Assessment: This book presents a quality review of different modalities by someone who seems to be biased against most non-traditional Western medicine practices. I am not familiar with the first edition, so am unable to comment on whether a second edition is justified or not.