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Book review

Evan Selinger and Robert P. Crease (eds.), *The Philosophy of Expertise* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). XXpp. ISBN 0231136447, £\$49.50 (hbk). DOI: 10.1177/0963662508090577

A book on the philosophy of expertise is overdue. This one collects fifteen previously published essays. It is hard to imagine a single academic reader who would encounter these in the course of normal subdisciplinary work: they represent a wide range of philosophical sub-specialties – epistemology, ethics, phenomenology, moral philosophy, and the philosophy of technology – but also law, varied approaches to the social study of science, and what one might best call humanistic social criticism. Some of the essays are lengthy and exacting – philosophy for philosophers; others are brief programmatic statements, and many lie somewhere between. All are accessible to a non-philosopher. Some are classics – Harry Collins' and Rob Evans' 2002 call for a third wave in science studies, Scott Brewer's careful examination of the grounds laypersons might have for accepting expert testimony in courts of law (1998), Stephen Turner's historical-philosophical delineation of the multiple kinds of expertise that citizens confront and their implications for democracy (2001). In other cases, the authors – e.g. Hubert Dreyfus, Paul Feyerabend, Steve Fuller, Peter Singer, Alvin Goldman, Don Ihde, and Edward Said – are well-known contributors to debates pertaining to aspects of expertise, though the selections presented do not adequately represent the richness of their positions (I cannot, however, suggest any alternatives of reasonable length).

The essays are divided into three sections: The first deals with the problem of trust, the second with the character of embodied expertise, and the third, 'Contesting Expertise', with power and expert elitism. The first section is the strongest, if the least convergent; the last, where many of the essays are brief and the authors are better represented elsewhere, is weakest. The essays in the second section are the most convergent, with Dreyfus's phenomenological approach to expertise drawing most of the attention. It is here that the editors are most

intimately involved; they are co-authors of one chapter, while Selinger and John Mix co-author another.

This matter of convergence is important. However welcome a volume on the philosophy of expertise, it remains unclear what should be its central questions – the laundry list the editors give (p. 4) seems both broader than the range of the chapters, and arbitrary. The term "expertise" remains variously understood; the works presented here were not written as contributions to any single well-recognized problem but are the products of erudite scholars in many tents who, for the most part, seem neither to be aware of one another nor to feel an obligation to be so – a complaint Said makes about his own area of literary studies. The editors are hesitant to impose an agenda. The result, however, is that the reader comes away with little sense of any clear-cut debates in a field, and much more with a sense of being as befuddled by the philosophical expositors of expertise as one is by the experts themselves.

Notwithstanding the variety, however, there is a commonality to the approaches taken in most of these chapters, but one that is also problematic. That is, expertise falls within the domain of knowledge. Accordingly, its philosophy is seen as an extension or adaptation of the philosophy of science to embrace odd kinds of knowledge (e.g. parenting, driving, or plumbing), or more orthodox kinds in odd contexts, e.g., serving as a witness in an adversarial legal system. That perspective is appropriate but incomplete, for it neglects the complementary problem of decision-making. That is, the epistemic problems outlined here may not be matched by corresponding problems of making private or public decisions. Thus Brewer's careful analysis of what warrant there might be for a lay-person to believe an expert witness is detached from the question of the grounds that lay people *do use* to accredit an expert as authoritative. This is an empirical matter, and surely one about which experienced trial attorneys know a good deal, but it is no less amenable to philosophical analysis. In short, it would seem that a philosophy of expertise is as much a philosophy of politics as a matter of epistemology. But questions of the relations of experts to publics are not well conceived solely in terms of 'Contesting Expertise',

the heading used in this book. In this collection the expertise-as-politics theme is developed only in Turner's 'What is the Problem with Experts?' and in Julia Annas's 'Moral Knowledge as Practical Knowledge', which treats the problem of expertise in the Platonic dialogues. Annas points out that for the ancients, expert knowledge included the virtue of appropriate application with clients in communities. There is a good deal of that sort of expertise still hanging about; certainly expectations of a mix of knowledge and virtue guide one's relations with auto mechanics and dentists, as well as climate scientists and economists.

This is a pioneering volume. I hope that it will be followed by monographs, and articles that will take up the issues presented here, and push them into new contexts. My suspicion is that 'expertise' is too variously used to serve as a single subject of inquiry; but that 'the roles of experts' – effectively the agenda laid out in Turner's essay – is an important focus for the work of philosophers and political theorists. That theme would build from, though not foreground, many of the issues represented here.

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Elizabeth Leane, *Reading Popular Physics: Disciplinary Skirmishes and Textual Strategies* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007). 208pp. ISBN 0 7546 5850 3. US\$99.95, £50.00, DOI

Researchers looking at popular science books seem to be popping up everywhere, stemming from a diverse range of disciplines. These scholars are not just interested in 'pop sci' as a cultural phenomenon, but apply the texts as case studies for a multitude of sociological, philosophical, literary and communication issues. To such a growing motley crew, Elizabeth Leane's *Reading Popular Physics* is a welcome addition to scholarship. As it turns out, it is also a generally engaging book, with several inventive and convincing new takes on the subject.

Leane's chief aim is to apply literary analysis to the study of popular science texts, and her treatment of the more literary aspects of popular

science writing are arguably the most inspiring aspect of the work. Questions of fictional references and devices can be slippery issues for science studies, but Leane shows understanding of much of the current work on the subject and provides some development of thought. She takes Haynes' (1994) typology of the scientist in Western literature, and applies it to the images scientists present of themselves, loosely following Jurdant's (1993) notion of popular science as the 'autobiography' of science. As Leane suggests, Richard Feynman makes for a particularly clear example due to his tendency to mythologise his own history by the repeated telling of anecdotes. Leane argues Feynman constructs a popular image for himself of the 'social naïf'. Behind stories of asking for lemon *and* cream in his tea is an image not only of a comical absent-minded professor, but also of "the boy who saw the emperor's nakedness; one who can debunk unnecessarily or cruel social practises in order to find the efficient, true and (morally) right way ahead" (p.151). This section on the 'characters' of popular science also develops the familiar idea of the scientist as a detective to offer the more specific notion of the Private Investigator. For the Chaos scientists Leane focuses on, she argues the Chandler-style outsider can provide a more suitable metaphor than a 'Holmesian' deductivist (p.148). Arguably, this does not develop analysis of the scientist a great distance beyond Merton's norms, but I do think it is worth focusing our attention on the way scientist-writers construct themselves in reference to fictional characters, and do so as part of rhetorically building appearances of epistemic capital.

Leane does, however, take a reasonably long time to get to this, as much of the first half of the book seeks to convince the reader that popular science books make for an interesting topic. She provides an overview and history of the field which some may consider useful, but I am not entirely sure what for exactly. As Leane herself emphasises, the popularisation of science is enormous field; and it can be hard to draw meaningful generalisations. There are a host of overlapping definitions and agendas at work here. This is part of what makes it such an interesting area to research, but it also can take space to define and introduce your parameters – space which here might have been better deployed for Leane's personal analysis of specific texts, which I thoroughly enjoyed. My chief problem with the introductory section was that it was