

Scientific Evidence vs. Expert Opinion: A False Alternative?

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Abstract: We live in an ‘expert culture’. By routine we rely on experts for many decisions, estimates, or choices in both private and public life. Paradoxical as it might sound though, we also live in an ‘expert-wearied’ (or even ‘expert-despondent’) culture. Expert knowledge is perceived as elitist and sometimes unaccountable to ordinary citizens. Besides, experts’ opinions are still deemed ‘opinions’ and they can often hardly compete for accuracy of judgement or evidence with alternative, more objective, methodological tools of knowledge acquisition. So, should experts be consulted, and for what reasons? Should they be trusted, and under what circumstances? What role should they be asked to play in modern democratic societies? These contested questions will be addressed in this article by first formulating a philosophical background that will allow me to contextualise expertise in contexts of use. I will then revisit this background with the help of an example of public policy debate.

Keywords: Expertise, Production/use of knowledge, Judgement call, Relevance.

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