

Introduction

Pragmatism and the philosophy of expertise

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Scientific expertise is a most distinguishing feature of contemporary societies. There is likely not a single relevant problem affecting our communities that does not present some sort of entanglement between societal and scientific or technological components. The enormous complexity of public problems requires that all the best knowledge available be gathered and used in making decisions about which policy is preferable. Accordingly, the role of scientific experts comes to the fore, alongside the concerns that the extensive reliance on expertise may conflict with democratic principles and values.

Though in recent years the problem of scientific expertise has received considerable attention from sociologists, political scientists, and communication scholars, the philosophy of scientific expertise is still a relatively inchoate field of inquiry. The present issue aims to develop some conceptual tools for analyzing and clarifying the notion of scientific expertise, as well as for understanding the role of scientific experts within the processes of democratic deliberation and the relationships between scientists, scientific experts and citizens.

The four essays presented here differ in many respects, but they share a commitment to pragmatism as an approach to social epistemology and philosophy of science. Pragmatism is less a set of substantive ideas than a method for reformulating philosophical problems. The insistence on the centrality of the category of practice; the primacy of context over philosophical abstraction; the semantic function of the pragmatic maxim; the rejection of the fact-value distinction; the adoption of a transactional perspective on epistemological and ontological questions; these are the pillars of the pragmatist philosophical methodology.

The Focus originates from an international workshop on the philosophy of expertise held in Pisa on November 29, 2019, with participants coming from Europe and the US. The articles selected for this Focus were originally presented at the workshop, and then further elaborated in the light of the subsequent discussion. I hope that the essays here collected may help to contribute to the ongoing debate over the notion of scientific expertise, so as to establish pragmatist philosophy of scientific expertise as a distinctive and easily recognizable line of thought.

