

For the past several weeks we have seen more than ever why we need experts. It is absolutely fine to have uninformed opinions. We all have thousands of them. But we should no mistake our uninformed opinions for knowledge. And real knowledge takes expertise, and expertise takes years and years of training and hard work. It doesn't come from watching the news or reading a few articles and then making up your mind. Since we ourselves cannot be expert in everything, we have to decide whether to trust those who are experts or to persist in our contrary views. And as we are seeing now, in some areas expertise is a matter of life and death. In other pressing areas (climate), it may mean the survival of the human race and the planet.

Most areas of expertise are not that significant in terms of history or human life. But the same principles apply. My view is that pPeople really shouldn't work desperately hard to convince others about something that they really don't know anything about. I'm not saying that we should be somehow *forced* to accept our contrary view, and mindlessly accept whatever the experts are telling us. You can think pretty much whatever you like, as far as I'm concerned, about most things. I continue to think the 1984 Tarheels were the best college basketball team of all time, experts be damned. But for more important matters, if you try to convince others of your uninformed views, that almost never leads to something good.

Most of us are experts in one thing or another - maybe not world-class experts, but extremely knowledgeable. That's one reason I don't think affirming expertise is at all elitist - the charge that is often made against it, though not so much right now, at least in one rather serious area of our lives over the past few weeks. An expert doesn't need to claim to be a superior human being because of their expertise. They aren't a superior human being. They simply know more than most people, or in some cases than virtually everyone, about one thing or another.

I'm an expert on all sorts of things that most people know almost nothing about, nearly all these things connected in one way or another with ancient Christianity (the Greek scribal tradition of the Gospel of John; the history of early Christian persecution; the interpretation of the Acts of Pilate; lots and lots of things). So what? I have no idea how my toaster works or how to repair a timing belt or how to determine the distance in light years of the nearest sun or almost anything about Genghis Khan or the history of the interpretation of Beowulf or The list reaches to infinity.

And for that reason I don't give people advice about how they ought to do these things or what they ought to think about them.

Why is it, though, that when it comes to matters of history and religion so many people think that anyone's opinion is as good as anyone else's? Even when these matters cross over into the realms of science? You wonder if that's true? If there really are lots of people who know nothing about a topic and try to convince others to share their ignorance, thinking that they actually do know the truth?

OK, then, think about the beginnings of the universe and the origins of life.

As happens with frustrating regularity, I received an email recently from someone wanting me to read their book. Sent me the book electronically, as well. In the email the person wanted to spark my interest and so included the opening line of the book:

[The idea that existence, with all its complex order, unity, inherent creativity and](#)

intelligence, arose from an unintelligent, random and mechanical process like the Big Bang and evolution and that humans magically evolved from an organic soup of amino acids is just nonsense, crap, BS, not true.

My first thought was, “Good god....” My second thought was: why do people who know nothing about a topic pronounce on it? I mean it’s fine to think that everything the experts have shown in, say, astrophysics or geoscience, is completely wrong. But do you really want to try to go toe to toe with them?

I responded to this person by asking what his expertise is. He doesn’t have any advanced training, but he did do an undergraduate degree with a double major in biology and computer science. OK, fair enough. I suppose an outside might think, “Hey, he took a bunch of biology courses in college, so he surely knows what he’s talking about, right?”

Yeah, not right. My field is nowhere NEAR as complicated and technical as the “hard” sciences. But there’s not a double religious studies / computer science major in the universe who would be able to understand just my dissertation, let alone any of the hard-core research I’ve done since then. It would take lots and lots of explaining even to give them an idea what it’s *about*. But they wouldn’t be able to understand it from the inside – only on the outside based on the best explanation I could come up with to simplify it for them. And that would mean that there is NO WAY on God’s green earth that they’d be able to *assess*, *analyze*, or *critique* it.

So why do people do that with matters of science? Again, it’s *FINE* not to believe in the Big Bang if you don’t want to, or to think that there is simply no way to explain the beginnings of life without believing in a Creator. Sure – believe what you want. But why would you write a *book* trying to convince people that science is wrong when in fact you haven’t been trained in the field and cannot understand it from the inside, but only know what others have told you who have had to overly simplify it just for you to get a sense of it (for example, on the most basic level, the math)?

In any event, I normally try to be very polite to people when I respond to them. But I have to admit, this kind of exchange really gets to me. And so I decided to tell him what I really thought.

Just a response to the first statement. Anyone who has no credentials or expertise who says that the most intelligent human beings on the planet- who have spent their entire lives devoted to the difficult work of mastering a subject of such major complexity as cosmology or astro-physics — are in fact spouting “nonsense, crap, BS,” in my opinion, should actually learn the field before attacking it.

He responded to me by pleading with me to read the book. I read the beginning, got the thesis, and, well – if I want to know about the Big Bang, I think I’ll talk to a cosmologist instead. When it comes to stars, climate, or viruses, I really want to know what experts think.



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