

R E V I E W

world is as it is because if it were not, we would not be here. To my mind this type of argument comes, historically, at the wrong moment. Today we are beginning to see how deeper physical ideas, for example unification of the forces of physics, can lead to predictions of formerly inexplicable dimensionless numbers, and can help to solve intractable cosmological problems such as the formation of galaxies and the isotropy of the Universe. This is the wrong moment to abandon ourselves to the mysticism of the anthropic principle.

To say that our existence is bound up with every aspect of nature and with the whole history of the Universe is to restate a poetic truth which permeates the writings of Lucretius and Goethe. But to talk of a multiplicity of worlds of which this one is selected by our existence is metaphysical bunk. I believe that there is and could only have been this Universe and that it is in no way designed or tuned for our convenience. Indeed the fact that human beings have evolved in this Universe may well turn out, in the long term, to be bad luck for the rest of the Universe.

Michael Rowan-Robinson

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The cult of the Expert

by Brian J. Ford

Hamish Hamilton, pp 194

£5.95

It is not possible to review this book. How can anyone solemnly review a hilarious attack on Experts (the capital is deliberate and satirical), a valuable, if not pioneering, attack on jargon, and on phoney research, on rotten logic and ridiculous conclusions and much else that drives anyone with a bit of common sense and literacy up the wall? Brian Ford has mounted a whole herd of hobby horses, one by one, being, if I may use the phrase, at the end of his tether, and the sound of galloping feet is music.

I was once at a press conference when in answer to a question, a scientist said, pursing his lips and gazing at the ceiling in a sagacious manner, "I do not think that

I can advance any absolute quantitative data on that." He meant he didn't know. The author's burden is that categorises an Expert. He doesn't bloody know, but he can fool most of the people all the time and especially the young who, according to Brian Ford, are "less literate, less educated and more demoralised than any generation in living memory".

A certain number of us can recognise the Expert in politics, of course, and express our feelings easily enough, even if they are signalled only as a two-fingered gesture at the pontificating idiots on television. But is is a different matter when the Experts are scientists, complete in the *de rigueur* outfit that is kindly delineated by Brian Ford in a sketch that splits a man down the middle, the other half showing the accoutrements of a witch doctor.

He also provides valuable advice on how to get grants, how to write scientific papers and what training to embark on, all matters that should be taken seriously by anyone ambitious to become an Expert. It will pay, for there is nothing more certain than that, having reached the position of an Expert on something, you will overnight become an Expert on everything. Hushed audiences, money, TV appearances, the status of personality, even lovable and lucrative irascibility, may be yours, as long as you can talk or write without meaning and erect towering viable theories on slim or no grounds at all.

It would be a good idea to keep the book handy. It is packed with examples and anecdotes that, quoted, might help in the war of deflation, waged with far too few weapons and troops. I was glad to see that Brian Ford takes a sideswipe at one of my favourite targets, such words as "conferee", "attende" and "standee". They are painful to any sensitive reader, and particularly to this writee. Unfortunately the wounds we can inflict are not fatal.

The trouble with the book is that the people who need to, will not read it or, if they do, will not take it seriously. It will make those who do take it seriously laugh. The paradox is uncomfortable.

Roy Herbert