

early days of modern oceanography and marine zoology. And in all these reflections, the author still manages to describe the whale and its fate with dignity, constantly reminding us that it is not just an epistemic object but, first and foremost, a living being which escapes those who do not acknowledge that.

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Kevin McCain and Kostas Kampourakis: *What Is Scientific Knowledge? An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology of Science*

London: Routledge, 2019. Pp. 328. ISBN 978-1-1385-7015-3. £36.99 (paperback).

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History of science and epistemology are two fundamental topics in the process of construction of scientific knowledge. Although they both look back along the timeline, the interesting question of delving into contemporary epistemology arises. This way, it is not only the pure research itself that is of interest but also the philosophical approach to it. The epistemology of science is, then, no longer a subject of study relating to the past but becomes, factually, an essential complement to the research of the present. This is where McCain and Kampourakis come in, pioneering a series of discussions that extend contemporary science beyond the experimental/theoretical moment.

What is Scientific Knowledge? An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology of Science is, in the intentions of its authors, an introductory text to enable scholars to approach various questions from the perspective of the philosophy of science. The text both is designed from a didactic point of view and can be used as a stand-alone textbook for a course in the philosophy of science oriented towards contemporary epistemology – and as an interesting collection of different starting points for other epistemological developments, in several directions. The book presents a series of nineteen in-depth chapters divided into four key areas: ‘How is scientific knowledge generated?’ ‘What is the nature of scientific knowledge?’ ‘Does bias affect our access to scientific knowledge?’ And ‘Is scientific knowledge limited?’

The first area is concerned with investigating the processes, the people and their features through which scientific knowledge is generated; the second brings together chapters that describe what the characteristics of scientific knowledge might be; the third area deals with a particularly significant point, namely how bias can play a decisive role in the researcher and the consequent construction of scientific knowledge; and the fourth and final area investigates what limits can be placed on the path towards scientific knowledge. The structure of the text is very coherent and well organized, so that the volume can be used effectively as a whole, considering only one of the four parts, or focusing the researcher’s attention on one chapter in particular.

In the panorama of the history of science and epistemology in particular, McCain and Kampourakis’s collection constitutes an extremely interesting proposal for the

development of an epistemology of contemporary research. The authors successfully take up the challenge of tackling this topic and offer the public a text that can usher in a fruitful trend of philosophical–scientific investigations. Precisely because of its deliberately introductory nature to the question of the epistemology of science, this volume is recommended both to students of philosophy or non-experts and to all those who, working in the fields of science, are interested in approaching and deepening the fundamental debates on scientific knowledge.

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Philippe Fontaine and Jefferson D. Pooley, *Society on the Edge: Social Science and Public Policy in the Postwar United States*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 280. ISBN 978-1-1084-8713-9. £74.99 (hardback). ISBN 978-1-1087-3219-2. £26.99 (paperback).

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Society on the Edge offers historians of social science and public policy a valuable ‘bird’s-eye view’ of research into ‘social problems’ in the US since 1945 (p. 57). The volume features nine chapters written by historians of US social science, each focusing on a different area of research on ‘social problems’: Savina Balasubramanian and Charles Camic contribute a chapter on the family, Andrew Jewett on education, Alice O’Connor on poverty, Leah N. Gordon on discrimination, George C. Galster on ‘the Black ghetto’, Jean-Baptiste Fleury on crime, Nancy Campbell on addiction, Andrew Scull on mental illness and Joy Rohde on war. These chapters are introduced by a thought-provoking chapter by the volume’s editors, Phillippe Fontaine and Jefferson D. Pooley.

Each chapter addresses three central themes. First, they chart how the very ‘problem status’ of different social problems has changed over the course of the twentieth century and the role that social scientists have played in this process. Second, they map the shifting jurisdictions of the different social-science disciplines that have laid claim – sometimes in collaboration, sometimes in competition – to different social problems since 1945. Third, they explore the changing fates of the different explanations and solutions that have emerged from this jurisdictional jockeying and from federal politics, policy making and public debate.

Within the kaleidoscopic landscape of the political, cultural, economic and disciplinary transformations documented by the volume’s contributors, the role of social scientists in defining social problems emerges as a co-productive one. Fontaine and Pooley argue convincingly that we should see social scientists as neither the prime drivers nor the passive bystanders of political change, but rather as participants in a process of ‘mutual shaping that enmeshes social scientists in the politics of American social problems’ (p. 57). The subsequent chapters illustrate the multiple ways this co-productive process has played out in each of the social-problem areas covered.