

## Intuition vs. Expertise

I found this recent essay posted in the blogosphere by a scientist. It's a reaction to the following script one often encounters in communication with people made uncomfortable when science (or some other scholarly discipline) challenges their introspective beliefs and heartfelt intuitions. Here's "the script":

"I'm sick and tired of self-appointed so-called experts and their know-it-all, arrogant attitude. Why don't you people stay out of things you know nothing about? To hear you tell it, you know everything and the rest of us are stupid."

And here is the best response I've ever encountered to it:

"I've seen this script before. At this point I'm supposed to get all humble and apologetic and say 'There, there. We didn't mean to make you feel bad. You're really a good person and a valuable human being and your opinions do count.'

Well I'm tired of playing that game. We're not "self-appointed" or "so-called" experts. *We are real experts.* We're not "authority figures." *We are real authorities.*

It's not arrogance to say what you know professionally. It *is* arrogance to reject expert opinion without having expertise of your own.

If hearing the experts say you're wrong makes you feel bad or stupid, that is your problem, not ours. See a therapist and work on your self-esteem. If you think this is rough on the ego, try getting a paper or grant proposal you've worked on for months rejected, something real experts face all the time.

We don't know everything, but we *do* know more on our subjects of expertise than other people, especially people with no training at all. Unless you have real evidence to back up your opinions, they *don't* count.

If you hear something that conflicts with what you think you know, and you don't bother to check it out, you shouldn't *feel* stupid. You *are* stupid.

If you want to take on the experts but won't spend the time, effort and money to become an expert yourself, you're not just stupid. You're lazy, too.

If you think I'm disrespecting you, you're right. I have no respect for people who are uninformed, get angry when someone contradicts them, but are too lazy to get informed and too cowardly to face failure, criticism, and the possibility they might have to change their minds. You're *not* a good person. Nobody who is lazy and cowardly can be called "good."

Where did you get the idea you're so valuable? There are six billion of us. You're not all that unique. How exactly did you get the notion that you stand so high in the cosmic scheme of things that you have the right to make real experts treat you as an equal without bothering to acquire any knowledge yourself?"