

PHILOSOPHY

BOOK OF THE YEAR (2020)

29.09.2020

Science Fictions by Stuart Ritchie / Kings College, is the clear winner. From the introduction

As this book will show, though, that system is badly broken. Important knowledge, discovered by scientists but not deemed interesting enough to publish, is being altered or hidden, distorting the scientific record and damaging our medicine, technology, educational interventions and government policies.

Huge resources, poured into science in the expectation of a useful return, are being wasted on research that's utterly uninformative. Entirely avoidable errors and slip-ups routinely make it past the Maginot Line of peer review. Books, media reports and our heads are being filled with 'facts' that are either incorrect, exaggerated, or drastically misleading. And in the very worst cases, particularly where medical science is concerned, people are dying.

I couldn't praise the book more than other reviewers

“A highly readable and competent description of the problems facing researchers in the 21st century... An excellent primer for anyone who wants to understand why and how science is failing to live up to its ideals.”
–Wired

“Excellent... A fascinating study... Sure, some scientists are corrupt. Some are negligent. Some are biased. But that does not mean we need less science. It means we need better science. That’s why books like this are so important.”
—Evening Standard (London)

“We should listen to this warning about how neophilia and hype is ruining research... Ritchie has a gift for turning boring statistical processes into thrilling detective stories.”
—The Times (London)

“A desperately important book. Stuart Ritchie’s much-needed work brilliantly exposes the fragility of the science on which lives, livelihoods, and our whole society depend. Required reading for everyone.”
–Adam Rutherford, author of *A Brief History of Everyone Who Ever Lived*

Amazon has a great review of [Serguei Patchkovskii](#) who wrote ([full length](#))

The book offers a rather good catalogue of problems plaguing the scientific enterprise today. Every practicing scientist will recognize much of what Stuart Ritchie is writing about – sometimes in his or her colleagues, and quite frequently in the mirror. The collection of anecdotes on scientific mishaps, missteps, and outright fraud, which one finds in the book, is also rather entertaining and educational.

[... it] mostly ignores the well-fed elephant in the room: the perverse economics of the modern science, and the closely related misuse of the higher-education system. A lot, and in some fields the most, of the grunt work work in science is done by students (graduate and undergraduate) and post-docs. Both groups are routinely underpaid and under-rewarded, under the guise of being trained and educated. Both are also being held in check by the implied promise of the future academic career and well-paying jobs stemming from it – but for the vast majority of them, there will be no academic career, and no stable science job. [...]

Worse, some of the proposed solutions would make it significantly harder for an honest scientist – which is really the majority of scientists, perverse incentives notwithstanding – to do their work, while barely inconveniencing a fraudster willing to break the rules if it benefits him.

Overall, I don't regret paying my money for this book – but just barely.