



**Book workshop with Katherine Furman
on her manuscript *Going it Alone***

Friday, January 20, 2023, circa. 9.30-16.00 (details t.b.c.)
Faculty of Philosophy, Room t.b.c.

Book abstract

It is typically accepted that as laypeople we should defer to the experts on the topics of their expertise. There is a division of epistemic labour in society: no one person can know everything, so we split up the epistemic tasks between us. This is a useful social practice because collectively we can know everything worth knowing, even if no one of us can individually know it all. This is why we have experts – they are simply those who have been allotted the task of knowing certain very specific things on our behalf. If all is going well, we should defer the experts. But what if all is not well?

This is a book about cases where individuals or groups don't trust the experts. Cases of (apparent) disagreement within the expert community. Cases of public suspicion about the values underlying expertise. Cases of public distrust in the political structures that convert science into policy. How do ordinary people, without advanced scientific training, navigate a terrain of suspicion? When do they resist? And when is resistance appropriate?

Methodologically, this book is an exercise in street-level philosophy. Instead of starting with abstract, philosophically ideal circumstances, it begins with real historical cases of people attempting to figure things out for themselves: AIDS denialism in South Africa in the early 2000s, communities resisting Ebola interventions in West Africa during the 2013 – 2016 epidemic, and self-trained American abortionists in the 1960s.

Overall, the argument is that we should not dismiss those who resist the experts as obvious irrational or irresponsible. Rather, we must pay close attention to the contexts of distrust.

Confirmed commentators

Andreas Schmidt, Jan-Willem Romeijn, Leah Henderson, Lisa Herzog

Bio

Katherine Furman is the Philosophy, Politics and Economics Lecturer at the University of Liverpool. Prior to this she was the director of the MA in Health and Society at University College Cork in Ireland. She works broadly on Philosophy and Public Policy, with a special interest in relationships between experts and laypeople, values in science, and health policy development. She did her PhD in Philosophy at the London School of Economics on AIDS denialism in South Africa.