

Watson, Lani *The Right to Know: Epistemic Rights, and Why We Need Them*, Routledge London, pp xiii + 109 £44.99 (Hardback).

We are profoundly dependent on one another for epistemic goods: for information about the world, for understanding of complex topics, and for knowledge about our own bodies. These dependencies make us vulnerable: newspapers that spread false information lead to uninformed choices, putative experts that misrepresent complex topics can foster ignorance, and doctors who withhold information can lead to worse clinical outcomes.¹

In *The Right to Know*, Lani Watson makes the case that our intellectual vulnerabilities create the need for epistemic rights. On her view, a doctor who withholds information doesn't only medically harm her patients, she violates their epistemic rights. Watson presents epistemic rights as rights to the provision of epistemic goods. Picking up on the formulation in article 19 of UN declaration of Human rights, Watson suggests that epistemic rights concern the seeking, reception, and imparting of information, creating both positive and negative rights. Her main example is the right to receive information (the eponymous right to know), but the framework has broader application, including

¹ For an intriguing exploration of the right to know about mortality, see <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/585/transcript>.

to rights to inquiry (positive right to seek), rights to privacy (negative right for others not to seek), and freedom of speech (positive right to impart).

Chapter one sets out the background conception of rights drawing on debates in moral and legal philosophy. Chapter two considers the scope of epistemic rights. Watson contends that any agent which has non-epistemic rights also has epistemic rights, argues that one can have a right to know without being able to know, and proposes that epistemic claim-rights correspond to enforceable duties. Chapter three turns to rights violations, focusing on Purdue Pharmaceutical's misinformation about the effectiveness of OxyContin, and Edward Snowden's appeal to the right to know in his defence of leaking. Chapter four considers the harms of epistemic rights violations, arguing that epistemic rights violations both injure and insult, and that they lead to both epistemic and practical harms. Chapter five is more programmatic, building the case for rights-talk in the epistemic domain, arguing that epistemic rights tie together an important set of concerns, while providing a rhetorically effective form of defence against informational harms.

This short and readable book lays out the groundwork for a broader programme of thinking about issues in terms of epistemic rights. It is a welcome addition to the developing literature in applied epistemology.

Joshua Habgood-Coote, University of Leeds