Assignment 3: Trust in Science

In this paper I will be discussing a dilemma that scientists of developed countries face: Do we have an obligation to try to reduce vaccine hesitancy in third world countries where there is a considerable distrust in science? That is, should we subdue disagreements and thus enhance the epistemological asymmetry (Beatty, 52) for the sake of the safety of the more vulnerable developing nations?

One could try to weigh the objective benefits doing so would yield. As Covid-19 is an internationally wide-spread disease, and people are bound to travel, one could argue that to ever fully circumvent new variants and gain control, it is a necessity that we reach out and help.

It can also be argued that there is a moral obligation. The west has expectedly (but justifiably) been distributing doses in their own nations first, thus unfortunately giving the near-expired "leftovers" to the global south (Mallapaty, 175). This inequity causes for many a feeling of inferiority, and thus makes people more hesitant to take the vaccine. Western social media can also be named as a cause for some of the distrust.

However, it is entirely understandable to take care of yourself before others, and you cannot hold scientists entirely accountable for all the spreading of misinformation on social media.

Disagreements will inevitably happen, especially within the quickly moving science of vaccinations for new viruses. Yes, it may reduce vaccine hesitancy in the short-term if the scientists of developed nations were to suppress disagreements, but for how long? Recommendations change out of necessity, meaning that these disagreements will make their ways to the public at some point. In developing nations, there is a much lower percentage of English speakers, meaning that many most likely will not change their minds if they truly feel distrustful of the vaccine, whether the scientists report their disagreements or not.

I believe Mallapaty put it nicely when he described that opportunities to be vaccinated should be incorporated into our everyday lives, that it mustn't be a stand-alone issue (Mallapaty, 175). Rather than being dishonest, we should work towards changing the status-quo and have Covid-19 vaccines be treated more like any other vaccines, even if that is indeed a giant task to undertake.

References

- John Beatty, 2006, Masking Disagreement Among Experts
- Smriti Mallapaty, 2022, Researchers Fear Vaccine Hesitancy in Developing Nations