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EDITORIAL

SCIENCE BETWEEN VENERATION AND DENIAL

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Science is simultaneously one of humanity's most celebrated achievements and one of its most contested institutions. Throughout history, scientific discoveries have transformed human existence by extending life expectancy, improving living conditions, enabling technological innovation, and deepening our understanding of the natural world. Despite its remarkable successes, science has also become the target of skepticism, criticism, and outright denial.

The prestige of science is largely rooted in its historical achievements. The Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century transformed humanity's understanding of nature through the work of thinkers such as Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton. Their discoveries demonstrated that natural phenomena could be explained through observation, experimentation, and mathematical reasoning rather than solely through tradition or religious doctrine.

The Enlightenment further elevated science as a source of progress and rationality. Scientific inquiry became associated with intellectual freedom, social advancement, and human emancipation. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scientific breakthroughs revolutionized medicine, transportation, communication, and industry. The development of vaccines, antibiotics, electricity, aviation, and computing reinforced the perception that science was a powerful engine of progress.

As a result, science acquired significant social authority. Scientists came to be viewed as experts capable of producing reliable knowledge based on empirical evidence. Governments increasingly relied on scientific expertise to address public health challenges, environmental concerns, and technological development. In many societies, science became synonymous with objectivity, truth, and modernity.

The admiration of science often extends beyond recognition of its practical achievements. In some contexts, science is viewed as the most legitimate—and sometimes the only legitimate—source of knowledge. This perspective reflects a profound trust in scientific methods and institutions.

However, excessive veneration can also create problems. Some scholars have criticized what they describe as "scientism," the belief that science alone can answer all meaningful questions. Critics argue that science is exceptionally effective at explaining empirical phenomena but less equipped to address questions of morality, meaning, aesthetics, or spiritual experience.

Alongside admiration, science has long faced opposition and skepticism. Scientific denial occurs when individuals or groups reject well-established scientific evidence despite overwhelming empirical support. Examples include the rejection of evolutionary theory, climate science, vaccination, and, more recently, certain aspects of public health guidance during global pandemics.

Science denial is not simply the result of ignorance. Research suggests that skepticism toward scientific findings often emerges from a complex interaction of psychological, social, cultural, and political factors.

One important factor is cognitive bias. Human beings naturally seek information that confirms existing beliefs while discounting contradictory evidence. Another factor is distrust in institutions. Public confidence in governments, corporations, media organizations, and scientific institutions has declined in many countries. Science denial may also emerge from concerns about the misuse of science. Historical examples such as eugenics, unethical medical experiments, and environmentally harmful technologies demonstrate that scientific knowledge can be applied in ways that produce negative consequences.

The digital age has transformed the relationship between science and the public. On one hand, access to scientific information has never been greater. Academic publications, educational resources, and expert commentary are available to millions of people worldwide.

On the other hand, digital platforms have facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories. Social media algorithms often prioritize engagement rather than accuracy, creating environments where sensational claims receive greater visibility than carefully verified information.

Conspiracy theories represent one of the most significant contemporary challenges to public trust in science. Conspiracy thinking often flourishes during periods of uncertainty, crisis, or social change. Complex scientific issues such as climate change, pandemics, or emerging technologies may generate anxiety and confusion. Conspiracy narratives offer simplified explanations that identify clear villains and provide a sense of certainty.

Scientific institutions become frequent targets because they are associated with expertise and authority.

Scientists may be portrayed as agents of governments, corporations, or hidden interests. Once individuals adopt conspiratorial worldviews, contradictory evidence is often interpreted as further proof of deception, making these beliefs particularly resistant to correction.

Addressing the tension between veneration and denial requires a balanced approach. Public trust in science should not depend on viewing scientists as infallible authorities. Rather, trust should be grounded in an understanding of the scientific process itself. Transparency is essential. Scientists and institutions should communicate uncertainty openly and explain how conclusions are reached.

Scientific literacy also plays a crucial role. Citizens who understand the nature of scientific inquiry are better equipped to evaluate competing claims.

Scientific communication should move beyond one-way dissemination of information and engage with public concerns, values, and experiences.

Healthy skepticism is an integral component of science; denialism is not. The challenge lies in distinguishing legitimate questioning from the rejection of evidence for ideological or conspiratorial reasons.

Science exists in a complex social landscape characterized by both admiration and resistance. The same authority that inspires trust can also generate suspicion, particularly in societies experiencing political polarization, institutional distrust, and information overload.

The relationship between science and society should neither be based on blind faith nor on reflexive rejection. A mature relationship with science requires critical engagement, intellectual humility, and an appreciation of the scientific method as a dynamic and self-correcting process.

Science remains one of humanity's most powerful tools for understanding reality, but its effectiveness ultimately depends on the trust, participation, and critical judgment of the societies it seeks to serve.