T

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Trust, experts, and the potential side effects of critical thinking

1. *Becoming informed: A challenging duty*[1]

Humans are called upon daily to make decisions that may impact their own health and that of others, the environment, natural resources, and the well-being of people near or far, both in space and in time. For this reason, acquiring information about the near or distant outcomes of our actions is a civic duty that applies to citizens of the globalized world[2]. Acquiring this information also has a prior status as a moral duty, since it is essential to know the circumstances within which our actions take place in order to determine their permissibility[3]. Such information acquisition is part of what characterizes acting in an epistemically responsible manner. It thus involves an active role on the part of the individual[4].

Due to the technological development that has allowed the widespread diffusion of new media, acquiring information and thus making decisions

[1] I am very thankful to the audience of the Prin 2019-2022 seminar "Etica & Tecnologia: Nuove sfide per l'etica applicata" for their useful comments. This paper has drawn great benefit from the advice received, specifically, by professors Mario De Caro, Adriano Fabris and Massimo Reichlin.

[2] Vanderheiden, S. (2016) The Obligation to Know: Information and the Burdens of Citizenship. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 19, 2: 297-311.

[3] Rosen, G. (2004) Skepticism about Moral Responsibility. *Philosophical Perspectives* 18: 295-313.

[4] Watson L. (2019) *Curiosity and Inquisitiveness*. In H. Battaly (ed.) *Routledge Handbook for Virtue Epistemology*. New York: Routledge; 155-166; Hall R.J., Johnson C.R. (1998) The Epistemic Duty to Seek More Evidence. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35, 2: 129-139; Hookway J. (1994) Cognitive virtues and epistemic evaluations. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2, 2: 211-227.

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in a reasoned and conscious way seems to be within everyone's reach. Whoever wishes to study a subject in depth has at his or her disposal an enormous quantity of information, quickly and economically available on the internet. Some scholars have therefore suggested that it is no longer possible to justify careless conduct by appeal to ignorance. The increasing availability of information leads to an increase in the epistemic obligations of individuals, so that if before the spread of the internet ignorance or false beliefs on certain topics could be excused, now we can only speak of culpable ignorance[5].

On the one hand, then, it seems entirely reasonable to expect individuals to actively seek out information as part of meeting the "procedural epistemic obligations"[6] that allow us to determine whether our conduct is permissible. On the other hand, it is good to consider the risks inherent in loading individuals with such a burden. The amount of information to be processed, the cognitive resources required to do so, and the time that needs to be devoted to it are substantial, far beyond what is reasonable to expect of the ordinary individual—incurring the real danger that, when faced with such an onerous duty, individuals will give up[7].

However, and equally importantly, even if individuals were to try to fulfill their information acquisition duties, one must keep in mind that the wide dissemination of misinformation, especially in the new media, exposes them to the risk of being misled. The new media are, in fact, an unprecedented epistemic resource, and are one of the most widely used means of searching for information. The web undoubtedly constitutes a resource, but it is an epistemic environment full of pitfalls, where fake news, conspiracy theories, and very well-designed pseudoscientific information proliferate to the point where they can be difficult to distinguish from scientific informa-

[5] Dennett, D. (1986) Information, Technology, and the Virtues of Ignorance. *Daedalus* 115, 3: 135-153; see also Peeters W., Diependaele L., Sterckx S. (2019) Moral Disengagement and the Motivational Gap in Climate Change. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 22: 425-447; and Vanderheiden, S. (2007) Climate change and the challenge of moral responsibility. *Journal of Philosophical Research* 32: 85-92, who apply this argument to the case of climate change.

[6] Rosen 2004, *op. cit*., p. 301.

[7] Hartford, A. (2019) How much should a person know? Moral Inquiry and Demandingness. *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 6, 1: 41-63; Bradford, G. (2017), *"Hard to Know"*, in P. Robichaud and J.W. Wieland (eds.), *Responsibility: The Epistemic Condition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press; 180-198; Guerrero, A. (2007) Don't Know, Don't Kill: Moral Ignorance, Culpability and Caution. *Philosophical Studies* 136, 1: 59-97.

tion[8]. Thus, a set of meta-skills must be developed to avoid being misled by misinformation on the internet.

It is therefore essential to deal with information in a critical manner, carefully assessing the reliability of the sources and in some cases extending vigilance to the content transmitted; too much trust makes us vulnerable[9]. However, critical thinking must also be exercised in the right measure to avoid falling into another frequent error, to which relatively little attention has been paid so far—one which we could define as a substantial misunderstanding of what it means to think critically and relate to information in an epistemically vigilant way. This error consists in adopting an unjustifiably critical attitude that takes the form of downplaying the testimony of experts and not giving it the weight that should be reserved for it[10].

A large part of the debate on this subject has focused on the admittedly complex problem of properly recognizing experts. Identifying experts may not be easy, and many people end up electing the wrong sources as their epistemic authorities. Furthermore, a number of vices (both epistemic and moral) lead individuals to take an attitude of preemptive distrust of experts and their testimony. Some, for example, displaying tendencies to conspiracy thinking, are convinced that experts are so driven by personal interests or corrupted by powerful institutions that their testimony simply represents the view it is convenient for them to hold; for these reasons, they distrust experts a priori. Others, manifesting a vice that I have elsewhere called "epistemic hybris"[11], think they can easily replace experts, perhaps by doing some research on the web. These individuals consistently reserve the right to investigate matters on their own even where they utterly lack the expertise to do so. In both these cases, individuals elect sources other than official experts as their epistemic authorities.

[8] Pongiglione, F., Martini, C. (2022) Climate change and culpable ignorance: the case of pseudoscience, published online: https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2022.2052994; Thi Nguyen, C. (2020) Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles. *Episteme* 17, 2: 141-161; Croce, M., Piazza, T. (2019) Epistemologia della fake news. *Sistemi Intelligenti*, 31, 3: 439-468; Millar, B. (2019) The Information Environment and Blameworthy Beliefs. *Social Epistemology* 33, 6: 525-537; Rini, R. (2017) Fake News and Partisan Epistemology. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 27, 2: 43-64.

[9] Levy, N. (2022) In Trust We Trust. *Social Epistemology*, published online: https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2022.2042420.

[10] Grundmann, T. (2021) *Facing Epistemic Authorities. When Democratic Ideas and Critical Thinking Mislead Cognition*. In S. Bernecker, T. Grundmann, A.K. Flowerree (eds.) *The Epistemology of Fake News. Oxford: Oxford University Press*; 134-155.

[11] Pongiglione 2022, manuscript under review.

However, it would be hasty to think that the problem lies only in the correct identification of epistemic authority. In fact, even when experts have been correctly identified, it is not a given that individuals know how to relate to their testimony in the right way. In fact, experience has shown that even once "real" experts have been identified, mistakes can still be made in how one relates to their testimony.

In what follows, I will show how the intention to exercise critical thinking sometimes leads to an excess of distrust and suspicion improperly extended even to experts recognized as such by the scientific community and by the individual herself. If a passive or compliant attitude risks allowing the subject to fall into error, so does an excessively critical attitude. Therefore, particular attention will be paid to the need to redefine the role of experts in order to establish a relationship with them that is neither one of passive subordination nor one of unmotivated distrust. Finally, it will be shown how a correct relationship with experts also passes through the exercise of a particular virtue—intellectual humility. In fact, it is this virtue that, by giving individuals the ability to recognize their own competence and epistemic limits, puts them in a position to assign the right weight to expert testimony, especially in relation to their own beliefs as non-experts.

2. *Epistemic vigilance or unjustified distrust?*

Our epistemic duties as citizens of the global world require us to seek information to ensure that our actions do not harm others or ourselves. As we do so, however, we should not passively accept everything we are told without thinking it through—without ensuring, at the very least, that the sources we rely on are trustworthy. In fact, every communicative exchange presents risks; for this reason, our relationship with information sources must always be managed with attention and a critical eye. Not only are there people who intentionally try to deceive us, but there are also many who spread false, biased, or otherwise incorrect information entirely in good faith. Accordingly, the risk of being misled in the process of exchanging and acquiring information is high[12].

[12] Levy 2022, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2; Sperber D., Clément F., Heintz C., Mascaro O., Mercier H., Origgi G., Wilson D. (2010) Epistemic Vigilance. *Mind & Language* 25, 4: 359-393; pp. 359-360.

That blindly trusting a source, no matter how authoritative it seems or is said to be, is not an epistemically sound strategy is widely agreed upon in the literature.[13] Blindly trusting does, in fact, break the minimal rules of rationality. To be sure, we need to trust others when we make decisions in domains where we do not ourselves have expertise—something that happens on a daily basis. But this trust need not be granted blindly. It can start with a check of the reliability of the source itself via word of mouth, references, or titles[14], and it can continue with a closer examination of various elements that can confirm that our trust is well placed[15].

We often lack expertise on the topics about which we need information and are therefore unable to evaluate the quality of that information. In these cases, we can focus on the reasons for trusting a specific source, assessing for conscientiousness and accuracy; this assessment should provide us with prima facie reasons for trust[16]. We then need to consider the reliability of the source in the specific context of the information we need[17]: for example, a doctor may be a good source of information about a vaccine but not about repairing a washing machine.

Some scholars emphasize the need to be vigilant as well with respect to the content of the information itself, even when we lack the expertise to make a sound evaluation. We can be vigilant about information content by assessing it both for internal consistency and for consistency with our prior beliefs[18]. This leads to a more critical attitude toward the testimony of others. Not all scholars agree that the latter type of evaluation is necessary when testimony comes from experts; according to some, once experts

[13] Baghramian, M., Panizza, F. (2022) Scepticism and the Value of Distrust. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*; Grundmann 2021, *op. cit.*; Lackey, J. (2018) Experts and Peer Disagreement. In M.A. Benton, J. Hawthorne, D. Rabinowitz (eds) *Knowledge, Belief, and God. New Insights in Religious Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 228-245; Lynch, M.P. (2016) *The Internet of Us. Knowing More and Understanding Less in the Era of Big Data*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation; Zagzebsky, L. (2012) *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Sperber et al. 2010, *op. cit*.

[14] Lynch 2016, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

[15] Martini, C. (2020) *The Epistemology of Expertise*. In M. Fricker, P.J. Graham, N.J.L.L. Pedersen, D. Henderson (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Social Epistemology*. New York: Routledge, 115-122.

[16] Zagzebski 2012, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

[17] Sperber et al. 2010, *op. cit*.

[18] Lackey 2018, *op. cit*; Sperber et al. 2010, *op. cit.*

have been identified[19], they can be trusted even if the information they convey conflicts with our non-expert opinions[20].

However, the great attention devoted to preventing the epistemic misstep of blind trust has somewhat overshadowed the substantial risk of falling into the opposite excess and ending up adopting an unjustifiably distrustful[21], or at least overly skeptical, attitude towards information, with the result that one extends doubt even to valid content, thus losing sight of the truth (Pritchard 2021, p. 63). A form of distrust can certainly be part of an appropriately critical approach to information. However, once reliable sources have been identified through the exercise of epistemic vigilance, one must know how to relate to their testimony properly—something that is entirely compatible with the exercise of vigilance even over the content transmitted, if this is considered appropriate by the subject.

The relationship of the ordinary person to the expert is not one of epistemic parity, such that the individual reasons of one are equivalent to the testimony of the other. For this reason, the opinion of experts cannot be regarded as just another source of reasons and opinions, to be compared on an equal basis with other opinions coming from non-experts and finally with one's own. To do this would be tantamount to not giving the expertise itself any weight. If it is irrational to trust blindly, it is equally irrational to treat epistemic authority as just another source[22].

Sometimes, in fact, the subject confronting the opinion of experts with respect to a given issue has prior beliefs or a personal inclination regarding the issue. This is the case, for example, for individuals who, although aware of the existence of climate change, have a strong interest in downplaying the threat it poses so as not to feel compelled to change their dai-

[19] It is assumed here that the individual has correctly identified the epistemic authority through the practice of vigilance. Of course, one can also be mistaken in this identification process, and this can occur for a variety of reasons —unwarranted skepticism toward official sources (as suggested in Cassam, Q. (2016) Vice Epistemology. *The Monist* 99: 159-180), pseudoskepticism (an epistemic vice close to conspiracy thinking, analyzed in Torcello, L. (2016) The Ethics of Belief, Cognition, and Climate Change Pseudoskepticism: Implications for Public Discourse. *Topics in Cognitive Science* 8 (1): 19-48), or even the adoption of a novice-oriented conception of epistemic authority, which disposes one to assign authority more readily to those who do not deserve it (Croce, M. (2019) On What it Takes to Be an Expert. *Philosophical Quarterly* 69, 264: 1-21).

[20] Constantin, J., Grundmann, T. (2020) Epistemic authority: preemption through source sensitive defeat. *Synthese* 197: 4109-4130; Grundmann 2021, *op. cit*.; Zagzebski 2012, *op. cit.*

[21] Audi, R. (2011) The Ethics of Belief and the Morality of Action: Intellectual Responsibility and Rational Disagreement. *Philosophy* 86: 5-29; p. 9.

[22] Constantin and Grundmann 2022, *op. cit.*, p. 4110; Grundmann 2021, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

ly choices or actions, and who therefore begin to collect information from the most disparate sources, including unofficial ones, in order to reinforce their view of things (as in the instance described in Robichaud)[23]. In their evaluations, such individuals make the error identified by Grundmann: they treat the opinion of experts as one voice among many, which they then compare on an equal basis to other opinions, not necessarily from experts, and finally to their own, thus indulging in the *Principle of Democratic Reasoning*, the principle that says not to exclude, diminish, or marginalize the weight of any rational person's reasons, including one's own, in assessing the truth of a given proposition—even when one has no expertise to comment on it[24]. The same mistake is made by those who, having learned from the medical community that vaccines against Covid-19 are safe and bring more benefits than harm even to the individual, prefer to follow their own inclination not to be vaccinated, thus assigning a greater weight to their own opinion than to that of the experts (even while recognizing them as such)[25].

This attitude of excessive and misleading criticism of experts can be traced back essentially to two issues: first, a lack of understanding of the role of experts and how they can, and in some cases should, guide our choices; and second, intellectual dispositions such as presumption or overconfidence in one's own abilities and skills. It is therefore necessary to define the correct way to relate to experts and their testimony and to specify the intellectual virtues that are useful in fostering this relationship.

3. *Trust in experts and intellectual humility*

While identifying incorrect ways of relating to expert testimony may seem relatively simple, determining the proper weight to give it is much more complex. One must keep in mind that even experts make mistakes,

[23] Robichaud, P. (2017) Is ignorance of climate change culpable? *Science Engineer Ethics* 23: 1409-1430.

[24] Grundmann 2021, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[25] The reason for this specification is that there are individuals who, skeptical of official institutions and the information they convey, do not regard official experts as epistemic authorities at all, instead assigning epistemic authority to others according to non-objective criteria such as personal inclination or sympathy. Although this too constitutes an epistemically incorrect attitude, it has its own distinctive characteristics, which this essay does not address. Here we are focusing instead on attitudes towards experts the individual recognizes as such, thus assuming that experts have been correctly identified (clearly no small assumption).

that they often have opposing views on the same issue, and that therefore a strategy of deference cannot always ensure epistemic success.

Several theoretical proposals have been advanced to address this problem. Some scholars argue that expert testimony should provide preemptive reasons to trust it in preference to, for example, one's own beliefs, opinions, or intuitions. This proposal, called by Grundmann the *Preemptive View* (PV), is rooted in the idea that the proper attitude to reserve for epistemic authority is indeed one of deference because of the greater likelihood of arriving at the truth by relying on those with objective expertise in a given domain[26]—the so-called *Track Record Argument*[27].

The Preemptive View has received several criticisms. One is that deference to epistemic authority cannot occur unless reliable experts are available; yet finding reliable experts can be challenging and raises additional problems in domains where experts disagree with each other[28]. This objection has motivated the *Total Evidence View* (TEV), which treats expert opinion as one more piece of evidence to be added to and weighed against the others available to the subject, without preemption (this is the proposal of Lackey, *op. cit.*). But even the TEV is not immune to criticism. Suppose we have individuals who are not only incompetent in a certain domain but also unaware of their incompetence. In this case, by adopting TEV they would end up assigning their dubious judgment a weight that it should not have, being likely to lead to erroneous conclusions[29].

Recently, Levy and Savulescu have made a theoretical proposal that can be considered a moderate version of the PV, avoiding some of its main weaknesses. The idea is to recommend deference to epistemic authorities only in cases where there is evidence on which the scientific community converges. Their suggestion is that when the opinions of multiple experts tend to produce consensus within scientific institutions at a certain level, such as the National Academy of Sciences or the British Medical Associ-

[26] It is, of course, not easy to establish what this "objective expertise" consists of. The use of this terminology reflects implicit adherence to a "research-oriented" concept of expertise, which is based precisely on the presence of objective criteria, such as the possession of more evidence in a certain domain; better reasoning skills and expertise in the same; and, finally, the formation of correct beliefs (see Grundmann, T. (2022) *Experts: What Are They and How Can Laypeople Identify Them?* In J. Lackey & A. McGlynn (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Social Epistemology*. Oxford University Press, who supports this definition of expertise, as well as Croce 2019, *op. cit.*).

[27] Constantin and Grundmann 2022, *op. cit.*; Grundmann 2021, *op. cit.*; see also Zagzebski 2012, *op. cit*, who supports a similar view.

[28] Lackey 2018, *op. cit*., pp. 233-234.

[29] Grundmann 2021, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

ation, deference is the most epistemically responsible strategy[30]. Indeed, non-experts have no basis of expertise from which to challenge the scientific consensus, which is why we criticize anti-vaxxers or climate change deniers, who in most cases speak from outside the scientific community without any disciplinary expertise[31]. To be sure, deference is not always the right choice, and it is not always what epistemic responsibility would prescribe, because sometimes experts have divergent opinions on the same issue. In such cases, even people with different expertise can responsibly try to form their own opinions, if they have the minimum skills to do so. This is what happens, for example, in evaluating the greater or lesser effectiveness of public policies on which there is no consensus. In cases like these, an individual may listen to several voices, compare them, and even try to take part in the debate if possessed of skills of some use. For this reason, the attitude to be recommended toward expert testimony varies depending on the context and the skills of the individual[32].

However, one of the prerequisites for Levy and Savulescu's proposal to work is that individuals respect the limits of their own competence. This can be done by carefully evaluating the weight they attribute to their own opinions so as not to presume to equate their opinions with those of experts. This means adopting an attitude of intellectual humility (also called *epistemic* humility). If, in fact, presumption and overconfidence are the vices whereby individuals tend to act without recognizing their own limitations and generally overestimate their abilities and knowledge[33], humility is the virtue that allows people to understand who they are and what their position is in relation to others[34]. Intellectual humility operates in the same way, referring to individuals' attitudes toward their own epistemic condition.

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic has particularly highlighted the risks created by overconfidence and presumption, with various institutions and members of society speaking out on medical issues without having any

[30] Levy, N., Savulescu, J. (2020) Epistemic Responsibility in the Face of a Pandemic. *Journal of Law and the Biosciences*, Advance Access Publication 28 May 2020: 1-17; pp. 5-6.

[31] Ivi, p. 7.

[32] Ivi, p. 17.

[33] Cassam Q. (2017) Diagnostic error, overconfidence and self-knowledge. *Pelgrave communications*: 1-8; Roberts R.C., Wood J.W. (2003) *Humility and Epistemic Goods*. In M. De Paul, L. Zagzebski (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue. Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*. New York: Clarendon Press, 257-279.

[34] Zagzebski 2012, *op. cit*., p. 246; see also Bommarito N. (2018) Modesty and humility. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

expertise to do so. As Erik Agner noted, there have been numerous displays of "supreme confidence" by people with no expertise on issues on which the most experienced scientists were expressing themselves with the utmost caution. Hence the call for the exercise of epistemic humility, the virtue that makes human beings aware of the provisional and incomplete nature of their beliefs[35]. Ian Kidd, drawing on Confucianism, has defined intellectual humility as the virtue that empowers one to be aware of one's limitations, to recognize what capacities one does not possess, and to rely on the teachings of "sages"[36]. Humble people are aware of the fragility of their own certainties[37] and act accordingly, avoiding overconfidence[38].

Described in this way, intellectual humility seems to be the virtue that, if exercised, leads individuals to seek out and trust the testimony of experts in contexts in which they realize they are not competent enough to attribute value to their own beliefs. Accordingly, ordinary people who must decide whether to be vaccinated against Covid-19 and wish to know whether and to what extent vaccine prophylaxis is risky, if they adopt an attitude of epistemic humility, will not give undue weight to their own prior opinions but will rely on the advice of those who have the expertise to speak on the topic. Pritchard also noted that intellectual humility, along with other epistemic virtues such as conscientiousness and honesty, can aid in the difficult task of recognizing and debunking fake news. The intellectual virtues are characterized by the search for a right middle ground, a balance between opposing attitudes, an excess of either of which constitutes a vice. Epistemic humility allows one to identify the right way to relate to sources of information: with a critical eye, yet moderating one's skepticism and thus preventing an excess of it from leading one to discredit reliable sources[39].

Although expressed in different words, Baghramian and Panizza's call for "moderated skepticism" also involves a form of humility and constitutes an invitation to achieve the right attitude toward information. They advocate practicing control and vigilance to avoid ending up in a condition

[35] Agner, E. (2020) Epistemic Humility – Knowing your Limits in a Pandemic. *Behavioral Scientist*, accessed online at https://behavioralscientist.org/epistemic-humility-coronavirus-knowing-your-limits-in-a-pandemic.

[36] Kidd I.J. (2015) *Educating for Intellectual Humility*. In J. Baehr (ed.), *Educating for Intellectual Virtues: Applying Virtue Epistemology to Educational Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 54-70; p. 62.

[37] Ivi, p. 58.

[38] Ivi, p. 62.

[39] Pritchard, D. (2021). *Good News, Bad News, Fake News*. In S. Bernecker, T. Grundmann, A.K. Flowerree (eds.) *The Epistemology of Fake News*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 46-76; p. 63.

of subordination that involves sacrificing critical thinking—yet balancing this with trust in those we ourselves recognize as being in a condition to judge better than we can in a given domain[40].

Conclusions

This contribution does not pretend to pronounce definitively and in full on such a complex and intricate theme as a person's relationships with information and with the testimony of experts.

What I wanted to emphasize is the need to maintain a balance in the exercise of the necessary epistemic vigilance. If not properly calibrated, vigilance can turn into an overly critical attitude, and if fueled by presumption or arrogance, this can lead to the epistemic errors of devaluing the testimony of experts and overvaluing one's own opinion. Exaggerated and unmotivated skepticism towards expert testimony can derive from a misunderstanding of what it means to relate critically to information. This error has received less attention in the literature than its opposite counterpart, the exercise of blind trust. Hence the decision to deepen its analysis. It can also derive from overconfidence and arrogance; hence the call to epistemic humility.

The present reflection was partly inspired by a recent news event. During a demonstration by kindergarten teachers opposed to the Covid-19 vaccine, a national newspaper reported an interview with a teacher who had decided not to be vaccinated, thus losing her job. When asked why she chose not to protect herself, the interviewee said that "a drug whose effectiveness drops so quickly is not a vaccine. And then in my opinion there have been too many adverse events." For the interviewee, "this serum should be a personal health treatment, not an obligation that impairs our rights to health and work." Giving up her salary "is a strong choice, but I do it for my children: it is my duty to educate them to critical thinking. But I feel so bitter; in recent years I have had only praise for my professionalism. Now we are treated like this without having done anything wrong except refusing to do something that affects our health, not that of others" (12/24/2021, G. M. Fagnani, *Corriere Della Sera*).

The epistemic errors in this brief excerpt are numerous: the way she expressed herself on the effectiveness of the drug (with what competence?), the excessive emphasis given to her own opinion ("in my opinion there

[40] Baghramian and Panizza 2022, *op. cit*.

were too many adverse events"), the lack of understanding of the concepts of the rights to work and health, and the (false) belief that the choice to decline vaccination does not affect the health of others. What is most striking is that the interviewee interprets her vaccine refusal as an expression of critical thinking. The case reported is just one example of the many people who refuse the vaccine on the grounds of their purported exercise of critical thinking (useful in this regard is Hobson-West's analysis of anti-vax groups predating the Covid-19 era)[41], showing that they have not understood what it consists of. The aim of this work was therefore to highlight that what is sometimes mistaken for critical thinking is actually an epistemic error that consists in marginalizing the opinion of experts, combined with a lack of intellectual humility.

Abstract

Our epistemic duties as citizens of the global world require us to seek information to ensure that our actions do not harm others or ourselves. As we integrate that information, we should not passively accept everything we are told without thinking it through—without ensuring, at the very least, that the sources we rely on are reliable. This avoidance of excessive trust is the counsel of an epistemically vigilant attitude. However, the intention to exercise critical thinking sometimes translates into the opposite excess: distrust and suspicion improperly extended even to experts recognized as such by the scientific community and by the individuals themselves. If a passive or compliant attitude risks leading individuals into error, so does an excessively critical attitude. We need to redefine the role of experts in order to establish a relationship with them that is neither one of passive subordination nor one of distrust. It will be shown how a correct relationship with experts also passes through the exercise of a particular epistemic virtue—intellectual humility.

Keywords: trust in experts; epistemic vigilance; intellectual humility.

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[41] Hobson-West P. (2007) 'Trusting blindly can be the biggest risk of all': organized resistance to childhood vaccination in the UK. *Sociology of Health & Illness* 29, 2: 198-215.