

Editorial

Inequalities in scientific publishing – highlighting the current scenario

In this editorial, we seek to discuss in general terms the scenario in which are embedded the regional platforms that publish the scientific output in open access in Brazil, Latin America and the Caribbean. In order to, from this point, describe some of the ethical conflicts that directly and indirectly affect periodicals, given that this process also directly affects the field of bioethics. Such considerations are based on a presentation given at a round table at the *XI Congresso Brasileiro de Bioética* (XI Brazilian Congress of Bioethics), held in September in Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, in which the relationship between bioethics and inequality was investigated.

The decision to present these reflections in this editorial stems from the idea that it is important to think critically about some points that illustrate inequalities in scientific publication between core and peripheral countries, such as Brazil. It is considered that such an understanding may help to comprehend the complex framework that supports the dissemination of local and regional production, and to find answers to the dilemmas inherent in the condition of being a peripheral country. It is expected that this process can stimulate the performance of institutions, journals, editors, reviewers, authors, professors, researchers and students, encouraging them to persist in the design and implementation of public policies, strategies and tactics, dedicated to gradually overcoming inequities.

Before turning to the discussion of the topic, it is important to mention that even in September the *Revista Bioética* received an A1 mention in the 2013-2014 evaluation of the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* - CAPES Higher Education Personnel Training Coordination in the fields of Philosophy/Theology, Philosophy subcommittee, which brought us great joy. It was also registered noteworthy improvement in Public Health and Medicine II¹. With respect to such recognition, it is worth noting that the academic community dedicated to the study, research and teaching of bioethics has proved to be a supportive partner in this achievement. Therefore, it behoves us to thank - once again - the helpful contributors that, following our request, have been acting as peer reviewers and authors of the published articles.

Outline

In early August 2015, the Brazilian scientific editors were in an uproar. In late July, the American Jeffrey Beall published in his blog “Is SCIELO a publication favela?”². In this article, Beall advocates that articles published in open access platforms have no value and that almost no one reads them. Defending methods and work processes adopted by commercial publishers, Beall defends the idea that only commercial publishers would provide a satisfactory “neighbourhood” for the dissemination of scientific knowledge. According to the author, some open access platforms, such as SCIELO and REDALYC are “publication favelas”, which do a bad job in the assessment of indexed journals and the dissemination of published content.

Although the blog page of the American librarian and associate professor at the University of Colorado is considered by many as an authority on the matter³, the negative response to his publication among Brazilian publishers was rapid. Between 7th and mid-August, over 150 scientific editors joined in a petition⁴ rejecting



the text. Many criticized the article arguing that the author's position was "biased", "provincial", "colonial", "uninformed" and even frankly "ignorant". In this defence of SCIELO, it was stated that this platform, largely supported in Brazil by the FAPESP initiative, is the most important and innovative political, managerial, technical and academic program in the evolution of publishing and the national and international visibility of Brazilian journals, as well as journals from the majority of the 15 countries that are members of the SCIELO Network ⁴.

The network consists of South Africa, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Spain, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Uruguay and Venezuela ⁵, and receives financial contributions from local and public institutions ⁴. Adopting a cooperative and innovative model - Open Access (OA) has proved to be an important tool to overcome negative discrimination against scientific publications originating from these countries ⁶. With decentralized platforms for the publication of scientific knowledge, which allow the release of research, from different areas of knowledge, developed in Latin America, Spain and Portugal. SCIELO and REDALYC have a leading role in Latin America, as recognised by a paper published at the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC): it is one of the most progressive regions of the world in terms of open access ⁷.

Latin American, and especially Brazilian, pioneering in the development of the SCIELO model dates back two decades ago, and happened as a result of meetings of experts, promoted by FAPESP ⁸ and by BIREME/PAHO/WHO, encouraged by the publication of the article "Lost science in the third world" ⁹, which points to the limited international visibility of scientific production from the region. The result of those meetings confirmed that only a small fraction of the national periodicals (with the means for international indexing) was effectively accepted.

Given these results, FAPESP started, on an experimental basis, the SCIELO Program, which was rapidly adopted by other countries in the region, starting with Chile. A substantial difference between the SCIELO and REDALYC model and the model diffused by international editors, which had dominated the academic market until then, relates to the purpose of the platform and its strategy to provide access to interested parties. While the Latin American platforms work with open access, the platforms developed by leading international scientific publishers are largely characterized by being a business, a trade that involves selling access to published articles to institutions or researchers.

This means that the commercial platforms hold the copyright on published articles; they charge to receive, review and publish as well as to give readers access to the articles. The open access platforms, in general, allow the total or partial reproduction of published works provided authorship and source are cited. As defined by the adoption of the access attributes of the Creative Commons (CC) system, open access seeks to remove both the barriers to entry, the reuse of content and, thus, has the potential to transform them and formalize them as public goods that can contribute greatly to the progress of research, innovation, education and informed public policy ¹⁰.

It should be noted that open access was one of the initiatives taken by Latin American and Caribbean institutions designed to offer an alternative to promote scientific research from peripheral countries and, at the same time, to respond to the recommendations of the World Conference on Science, organized by UNESCO in 1999 in Budapest ¹¹. That conference reiterates the importance for countries to make efforts to reduce the scientific and technological gap between core and peripheral countries, as confirmed by later documents ¹².

The importance of open access to disseminate scientific knowledge has been recognized by researchers, libraries and international bodies such as UNESCO. Its

merit is to facilitate the publication and dissemination of academic content and promote the visibility of projects and research groups from developing countries, which, for various reasons, find difficulty publishing in conventional media. Without claiming to exhaust the subject, we will endeavour to answer these questions.

Point by point

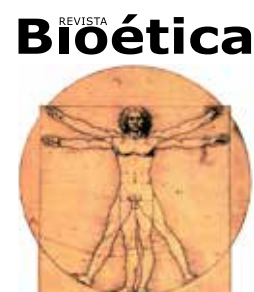
The advent of individualism in modern times definitively consolidated the gap between the collectivist dimension and individual perspective. The notions of equality and freedom that emerged strongly at the beginning of this period gave rise to the resurging discrepancy between these two worldviews. Since then the collectivist dimension and the individualistic perspective began to give specific meaning to the notions of freedom and equality, outlining different strategies to achieve them.

Both worldviews arise from the same sentiments of desire, need and willingness to achieve the “good life” (or quality of life, as defined by human rights), and are based on the same aspirations. However, the freedom to undertake the quest to achieve such a condition, given the characterization of what would be the attributes of such a “good life” and the necessary process that should be followed to reach it, reveal diametrically opposed ethical perspectives.

At the extreme of the collectivist dimension, equality tends to be interpreted as an end, an inalienable right and ideal standard applied through community rules or through a social pact that provides equal opportunities for individuals, groups, sectors and populations to access a good life, but is intended to ensure equal rights for all. At the extreme of the individualistic perspective, equality also stems from the social pact. However, in this case, equality is the means through which each individual exercises their “natural” right to seek a good life and, thus, distinguish themselves – by their own initiative - from others. In the first case, freedom refers to the guarantee of equality for all and, in the second case, it is an indispensable element to ensure opportunities for each individual.

Naturally, the interpretation that the adherents of each of these visions of freedom and equality have, compared to those who choose the opposite perspective, is a marked lack of wisdom and a mutual disregard. Although in principle both sides consider that the opposite view is based on a “selfish” position, each side adds different negative attributes to this underlying sentiment. Those who adopt the individualistic perspective call their opponents “whiners” and say they seek to gain benefits without having truly strived for them. Those who share the collectivist dimension classify those who follow the opposite position as “exploiters”, who obtained benefits improperly, through expropriation ensured by the use of force.

As a consequence, for individualists, the requirement of a universal standard of equality goes against empirical reality, which is driven by individual effort and fitness towards individual success. The existence of equality among all would be selfish because it undermines our civilized norms, which should guarantee everyone, without distinction, the ability to independently secure a good life for themselves. As for the collectivist, the individualism of the opposing perspective is ostensibly selfish, because it disregards the fact that we live in a society with equal rights to enjoy a good life, inherent to civilized norms, which should be extended to all without distinction, regardless of any individual trait. This dichotomous panorama, outlined in general lines, paint the scenario which incorporates the challenge we set ourselves to reflect on.



Joining the dots

Currently, the primary difference between rich and poor countries is due to their status as producers or consumers of technology. More importantly, than the absolute material wealth that each may have, is that their ability to produce or their need to consume technology determines their position on the podium of nations.

In this scenario, undoubtedly, science stands out by highlighting the necessary resources to generate technology, which unfolds into wealth and power. As a result of the colonialist role of the British Empire (in America, Africa, Asia and Oceania), and with the United States becoming the leading world power after World War II, as well as being one of the main countries in research development, English has overtaken other languages as the preferred language for science and scientific communication. Today, English has become the 'lingua franca' of international communication. Add to this the fact that new technologies are named in English and, because of the possibility of international dissemination, this same name is used in a similar manner worldwide.

Because the first companies organized to publish and disseminate research findings also used that language, the importance of English grew in the scientific field in such a way that, currently, to seek recognition it is not only indispensable to publish, but to publish in English.

The fact that English has become an almost indispensable requirement for scientific communication gives societies in which English is currently the first or second language a natural advantage over others, even if knowing a language does not ensure that someone has attended school, or guarantees a comprehension of scientific logic or even the ability to produce technology, which are also factors of exclusion. But having the language consolidated in daily life is an indisputable advantage in scientific dissemination. Countries where English is neither the national language nor the second idiomatic option do not have the same advantage.

With regard specifically to academic publications in developing countries, the conflict about the use of local languages or English is intensifying. To fulfil its objective of providing international visibility to local scientific production, the regional databases, such as SCIELO and REDALYC, need to join the major international editors, who make many requirements (including an increasing use of English in published articles) to make the collections of the peripheral countries available on their platforms.

Obviously, this imposition has a direct impact on indexed journals. In fact, the requirement to publish in English can make the scientific production of the region known in the core countries. English publications put authors on the radar of international publishers, which begin to insistently invite them to publish in their journals. There are also invitations to republish articles, translating them into English, which would "assure" higher visibility. This "evidence" of increased output visibility as a function of the language in which it has been published is related to the economic dimension. When authors publish in English, they often receive, in addition to the publishers' invitation, information about translation enhancement services, in which it is explained that it is possible to "improve" a text so that it looks like it has been done by a researcher whose native language is English. This communication class common to researchers from peripheral countries is a reflection of the business dimension.

In addition to this circumstance, one must consider that "the quality journals from Brazil have been, increasingly, publishing scientific papers of other countries"¹³, although the reverse is not necessarily true. So, the need for "internationalization"

with regard to publication in English ends up motivating Brazilian journals to publish foreign authors, which leads the journals to devote editorial resources from poor countries to make the work of researchers from rich countries available. This situation fuels even further the inequality in scientific dissemination among core and peripheral countries proving, once again, that equally treating those who are unequal can establish further inequality.

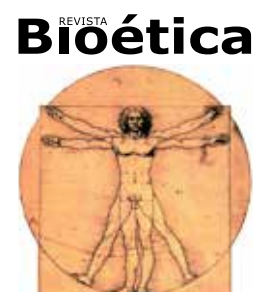
A proposal presented in a public notice from CAPES in October 2014 reinforces the view that this matter can, even with the best of intentions, be potentially conflicting. CAPES coordination planned to support the internationalization of Brazilian journals by hiring a foreign commercial publisher who would be able to improve the placement of some national journals (identified by CAPES as the “best” in their field) in the international rankings. In response, SCIELO and the Brazilian Association of Science Editors (ABEC) issued a statement that this strategy would increase the gap between these and others journals, and, worse yet, prioritize once more the support of international companies and of commercial proposals that go against the alternative proposal, which was originated in Latin America, to promote the dissemination of knowledge¹³. Given the situation above, CAPES has reconsidered the proposal.

Although not even the regional databases have identified the following prerequisites as interrelated issues, this analysis considers that the requirement to publish in English could be related to another request that the regional indexes have recently made to periodicals. Journals have been asked to change the license for reproduction of published works. This request is believed to be also due to an internationalization stipulation. Until the middle of this year, most Brazilian magazines adopted (at the advice of SCIELO) the license CC BY NC that allows the total or partial reproduction of content as long as the author and source are cited, but restricting the reproduction for commercial purposes. The request that editors received in an institutional communication from SCIELO suggested changing the license mode for CC BY, which retains the same prerogatives but admits reproduction with financial objectives¹⁰, once again indicating the importance of this international business.

As seen, to awaken confidence in published articles, encourage their acceptance and contribute to their internationalization, concerns much more than the replication of standards and criteria and the requirement of technical proficiency. It requires the delicate process of creating a scientific communication system that communicates with the world and - effectively - promotes the dissemination of locally produced science. In other words, that implies the difficult (but not impossible) task of finding the balance between the pressures and rules of the market and the characteristics and needs of societies, and those of educational and research institutions of the peripheral countries.

Sewing another story

Ethics is not a gift; it is learnt, and can only be truly substantiated through the process of living in a social environment in which ethical standards are reproduced in everyday practice. It is essential that individuals, groups, segments and populations in all societies and communities take their destiny into their own hands and make the present and future a result of their own choices. In order that these expressed preferences can go beyond the selection of brands and products in the market (reaching values and principles indispensable to the reproduction of what these societies consider as a “good life” and quality of life), it is essential to promote



education, not only to ensure actual knowledge domain, but mainly to make every human being agents of their own lives, capable of living in a emancipated, rather than paternalistic, way. This is what the bioethics philosophy advocates, in which freedom is understood to be in close partnership with equality in the broad sense of human rights, which covers all, without distinction, ensuring both learning and critical knowledge, allowing choices to flourish.

This appeal to collectively build knowledge in a way that is not inflexible nor pluralistic, through bioethics, is an attempt to highlight the problems affecting the scientific output of peripheral countries. In this report, it is noted that, despite initiatives such as SCIELO and REDALYC, the prejudice still exists, as Beall's post shows. Although critical, this analysis is limited to pointing out antagonistic perspectives, without delving into other fundamental aspects of hegemonic ethnocentrism, such as the subsumption of the native languages in their own national contexts, which have been discussed in the de-colonial option¹⁴.

The idea of "*libertarianism*", which guides the collective imagination of the North refers to the ability to "negotiate freely" without interference or state regulation. In this model, the "heroes of liberty" play the role of the "winners", "rich", and "successful", which contrasts with the "losers", "poor" and "unsuccessful", as we are labelled. Our claims are considered as the grumbling of those who did not have the strength to win and want to "throw a tantrum". For us, Latin Americans, this rating seems more like a tricky manoeuvre.

This is the picture of a mutual lack of wisdom, of the inability to see others as they perceive themselves and to understand how they perceive us, so that we know how to position ourselves and how to respond in the best and most convenient way. It is essential to understand what role we are expected to play, so that we can pick the best, or maybe the "least worst", of the strategies towards self-determination. What we believe is what we want to be, we feel we should be, and we hope to become.

It is necessary, however, to be aware that, to achieve what we dream, feel and believe, we must, today, take the steps that lead to this condition. The future will come inexorably but what it holds depends on what we do now. With the belief that in this journey we will keep counting on the support of our readers, authors, collaborating reviewers in 2016. We say goodbye with our traditional wishes of "have a good read". To this, we add the wish that next year our country can overcome adversity and move towards ethics and social justice.

The editors

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