Medical and Social Diseases: Can the Former Moderate the Latter?

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Abstract. This article describes how medical disease may moderate social disease in an era of globalization.

The current rubric, era of globalization, often denotes an increasing interdependent physical and social world. A threat in such a world is the increasing ease with which medical disease can be transmitted through social vectors. An opportunity in such a world is the need for these social vectors to be appropriately influenced and how such influence may moderate social disease.

As one example, viruses may spread through common social vectors. These vectors include seasonal labor movements, economic and social immigration, immigration for asylum and other refugee movements, tourism, social and cultural ventures for education and collaboration, rapid and uncontrolled urbanization, international commerce including the food trade and various services and commodities, and the many variants of environmental degradation. The more distal routes of transmission may vary in social loading--e.g., coughing, eating, sneezing, sexual practices, drug use and abuse, and so on.

To moderate these social vectors, one might most reasonably engage in collaboration on a global basis with significant state and non-state political actors. Yet, collaboration is often impeded by social processes that are frequently labeled with a metaphor: that of social disease. This metaphor alludes to negative stereotyping, malignant nationalism, ethnic and racial hatreds, xenophobia, and certain variants of false consciousness. The metaphor also can allude to the notion of the individual or group as somehow divorced from the environmental and other consequences of that individual’s or group’s cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral processes.