

Lockdown Sceptics

Stay sceptical. End the lockdown. Save lives.

All material taken from LockdownSceptics.org, an anti-lockdown website created by Toby Young.

COVID-19 and the Infantilisation of Dissent

12 May 2020. Updated 5 June 2020.

by Freddie Attenborough

Emotion words. The role they were playing in the media/political response to the COVID-19 outbreak first became apparent to me on Monday, 27th April. That was the day Boris Johnson returned to work following a period of convalescence from his COVID-19-related illness. Speaking outside No. 10, he announced that he was (as his press team no doubt suggested he put it in order to resonate with the salaried classes) “back at his desk”. His statement contained all the usual Churchillian allusions. We were thanked for



our “effort and sacrifice” and our “sheer grit and guts,” particularly in relation to “collectively shielding our NHS”. Ultimately, though, strip away the rhetoric and what were we being given? A pretty bleak message.

Continue staying at home, obey the lockdown and wait for the government to tell you when you can pick up whatever pieces remain of your lives, jobs, careers and companies. No sense of a timeline (however “phased”) for ending the lockdown; no sense of an ending to this period of unprecedented economic national self-harm; no sense of the certainty that our economy – and the people and businesses who make that economy tick – need in order to get back to generating the wealth and prosperity that publicly-funded institutions like “our NHS” need in order to do their job.

How should we “feel” about this? As a matter of fact, during his statement Johnson claimed already to know how we felt about it. “I ask you,” he said at one point, vamping the camera with the same type of nauseatingly faux sincerity that Tony Blair once made his calling card, “to contain your impatience.” Impatience. Did you know you were impatient?

Personally, I thought I was “intensely sceptical of the government’s strategy” or “thinking about different ways to manage a pandemic”, or maybe even, in moments of self-aggrandisement, “intellectually dissenting”. Apparently not, however. Those of us who have done our best to research, read widely and think carefully about how it might be possible to, you know, defeat COVID-19 without ending up jobless, business-less and in rent or mortgage arrears, are apparently “impatient”. One wonders how much of this type of thing British people will be able to stomach. Our

Lockdown Sceptics

Stay sceptical. End the lockdown. Save lives.

economy is set to shrink by 13% this year, its deepest recession in three centuries. Public borrowing is set to surge to a post-WWII high. In the April-June period alone, economic output could plunge by 35%, with the unemployment rate more than doubling to 10%. At least 21,000 more firms went under in March 2020 compared with the same month last year – a year-on-year increase of 70 per cent. Does any of this make you feel “impatient”? I’d imagine it might make you feel quite a few other things, most of them unprintable. But you will also undoubtedly be “thinking” quite a lot of things too. That’s the point from which this article jumps off.

“Ultimately, though, strip away the rhetoric and what were we being given? ... no sense of an ending to this period of unprecedented economic national self-harm; no sense of the certainty that our economy – and the people and businesses who make that economy tick – need in order to get back to generating the wealth and prosperity that publicly-funded institutions like “our NHS” need in order to do their job”

Emotion words are dangerous things when it comes to democracy and democratic politics. The word “impatient”, for instance, suggests a tendency to be quickly irritated or provoked by something. It is, in that sense, the emotional response of the infantile and the immature (hence the common, everyday phrase, “impatient as a child”). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the neat rhetorical affordances of Boris Johnson’s phrase weren’t lost on those mainstream media types still fighting their last-ditch, tin-pot battles against Brexit or indeed any other social action that has even the slightest whiff of perceived nativism about it. Thus, in the days following Boris Johnson’s first speech, we find the Guardian (of course) citing Fionnuala O’Connor approvingly (6th May) to the effect that, “[UK] Ministers of slim talent have bumbled through daily briefings and now big-business Conservative donors are impatient to reverse a shutdown so contrary to Brexiteer dreams”.

Elsewhere, the BBC’s Jenny Hill described Angela Merkel (6th May) emerging from a “stormy session with Germany’s regional leaders who were so impatient to restart their local economies that some had already announced plans to relax restrictions before the meeting even began”. Those leaders, she noted with a condescendingly elitist nudge and a wink, “got their way and many Germans will no doubt be delighted at the

prospect of beer gardens and Bundesliga”. Beer gardens and Bundesliga – such a wonderfully middle-class, Islington dinner party euphemism for “the AfD-fancying great unwashed”. Meanwhile, the Guardian’s own entry into this impromptu “make lockdown critics stand in metonymically for nativists” competition (6th May) read as follows: “On Wednesday, chancellor Angela Merkel announced the latest gradual reopening of large shops, schools, nurseries, and even restaurants and bars – seemingly bowing to a growing impatience with lockdown restrictions that was manifesting itself in political pressure from the leaders of the 16 federal states, the mass tabloid Bild, and growing conspiracy theory-driven protests across major cities.” Lockdown critics: impatient, ill-educated... and also, it turns out, possibly unhinged too.

Of course, this is all to hang a lot of analytic weight off just one word. True enough. So, it’s probably worth noting in passing that emotion words have proliferated elsewhere in media/political responses to COVID-19. Terrified, scared, anxious – all have recently been pressed into action within the public sphere. But here, let’s briefly consider the word “fearful”. Its implications of a purely emotional response to an external stimulus helps it perform much the same rhetorical work as “impatient”. In his 10th May speech to the nation, for example, Boris Johnson was at it again, imputing certain emotions to his audience. “There are millions of people,” he declared, “who are both fearful of this terrible disease, and at the same time also fearful of what this long period of enforced inactivity will do to their livelihoods and their mental and physical wellbeing.”

Lockdown Sceptics

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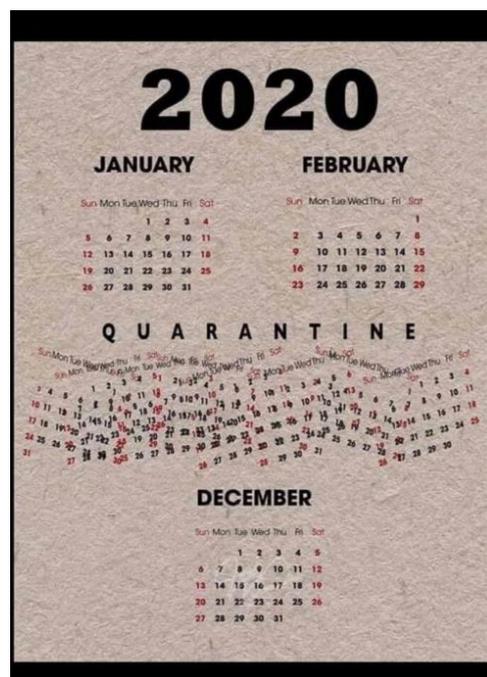
Again, did you know that you are fearful? And even if you did... is that all that you are? I would say that I'm "concerned" about what happens as the lockdown is phased out; that I'm "studying" all the available epidemiological/medical/scientific evidence to the best of my (admittedly limited) ability; and that I'm also "planning" for ways in which my business can respond to what will undoubtedly be a fluid, rocky and rapidly-evolving situation. Concerned, studying, planning – these are action descriptions, not emotion words. True, they might be tinged with emotion, but fundamentally, deep down, each of these actions constitute a rational, cognitive response to an external stimulus. Indeed, they point to the type of cognitive work that individuals in any fully-functioning democracy need to undertake all the time – lockdown or no lockdown.

Does this imputation of certain types of feeling to the voters of the UK matter? I think it does. It was the American sociologist Arlie Hochschild who, in the 1980s, first argued that emotional cues may be among the most important cues in social interaction. Feelings, as we all know, are a kind of pre-script to action. That much is obvious. It is internal behaviour that we engage in that prepares us to act externally. In days gone by, you got angry (feeling) and then smashed things up (action); now, you get angry (feeling) and you engage in passive-aggressive social-media one-upmanship with your followers (action).

There is, then, a clear link between how we feel and how we act. But Hochschild went on to point out that in modern societies, there is much more to feeling than just some simple kind of inner authenticity. Her research into modern labour markets made clear that the feelings of individual employees were something that companies were increasingly seeking to own, and, in owning, control. People weren't just buying an airline ticket anymore, they were buying the simpering smile of an airline hostess; similarly, people weren't just buying a hamburger, they were buying a friendly encounter and the server's cheery exhortation to "have a nice day now!" Employees were being (badly) paid as much for aligning their emotion management with the needs of their employer as they were for their physical labour.

In complex mass societies, governments also tend to put a surprisingly large amount of work into ensuring not only that the actions, but also the emotions, of the population are aligned with the norms and expectations that they've set across multiple different settings. Some of that is right and necessary, of course – we shouldn't "hate" foreigners, just as children shouldn't "trust" strangers and we should all feel "disgust" when we see prejudice in action. But what we also find is that modern government increasingly involves the repositioning of issues that would once have been seen as intellectual and cognitive issues as emotional phenomenon. This matters to and for democracy. If something political like a society's overall response to the threat of a pandemic is seen – as it should be seen – as an intellectual issue then it requires debate, argumentation, criticism and negotiation. In the end, of course, there might turn out to be arguments that are more workable, viable and plausible than others.

But everything here depends on continuing debate, negotiation and compromise between equals. On the other hand, if something political starts to be seen as an emotional issue, then there's a definite tendency for the subsequent interaction to become laden with unequal power relations: the government and its appointed representatives announce a position or perspective, and then get to position everyone's subsequent response on an emotional spectrum from usefully "docile" and "happy" to unhelpfully "immature", "infantile" or, of course,



Lockdown Sceptics

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“impatient”. Here, then, there’s only ever one argument which is workable and plausible (the government’s argument, of course) and a series of emotional responses to that argument which are either acceptable or unacceptable. In some ways, this is weirdly akin to a doctor-patient interaction on a psychiatric ward. Whatever you say to your Doctor, your words are never taken at face value, and only ever taken as the channel to some deeper emotional malaise that you yourself can’t see.

“I ask you to contain your impatience.” “There are millions of people... who are both fearful of this terrible disease, and at the same time also fearful of what this long period of enforced inactivity will do to their livelihoods.” These might seem like small, unimportant little snippets of what are, after all, “just” speeches. Indeed, it might seem like the real action, the big important stuff, is happening somewhere else. But when the Prime Minister of the UK imputes to the voting population feelings like “impatience” or “fearfulness” over something as important as the country’s response to COVID-19 it matters in deep, politically fundamental ways. His

choice of words subtly starts to establish feeling rules for what should actually be issues of intellectual debate and discussion. We move from differing forms of cognition and argumentation to “good” and “bad” types of emotional response. Happily clapping the NHS every week? Virtue-signalling one’s love for key workers on social media?

Good emotion. Useful emotion. But we shouldn’t forget that it’s also politically docile emotion. In this new political economy of emotion that Boris Johnson and others seem to be proposing, however, there’s also bad emotion. Here, a lot of us – lockdown sceptics in particular – no longer need to be listened to. We need to grow up. We’re not “sceptical” about the way in which the lockdown is continuing without any clear sense of an ending in sight; we haven’t “proposed” a dissenting virological or epidemiological viewpoint; we haven’t “deconstructed” elements of the computer code used to model the outbreak’s impact on society; we aren’t “advocating” for free speech in an era of unparalleled censorship; we’re not “intellectually opposed” to the idea of state power being wielded on this scale for such a prolonged period. In each and every case, we’re “impatient”. In this way, the dissent and debate that’s necessary to a fully functioning democracy is quietly repositioned at the end of the emotional spectrum marked as “infantile” and “immature”.

The Left-Wing Case Against Lockdowns

14 May 2020

by Mr Alexis FitzGerald

“In every one of those little stucco boxes there’s some poor bastard who’s never free except when he’s fast asleep and dreaming.”

George Orwell

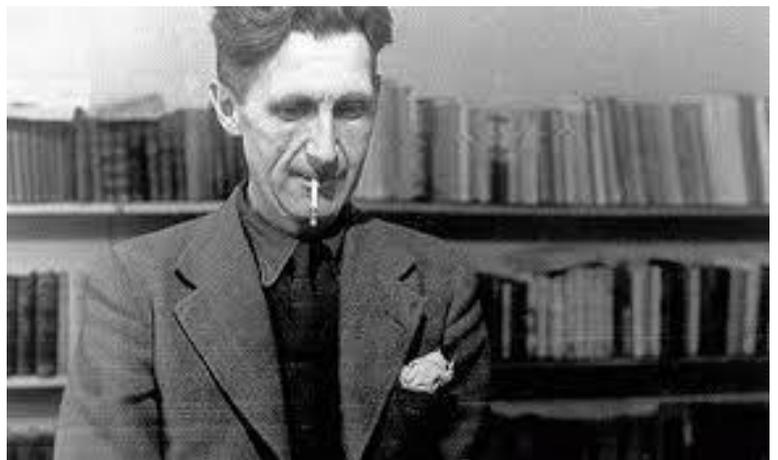


Lockdown Sceptics

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I consider myself to be left-wing on virtually every political topic: I am a socially-liberal social democrat who believes in a strong social safety net, high-quality public healthcare for all, robust environmental protections (including shifting to renewable energy sources immediately and protecting half of the globe for nature), restorative justice, legal abortion and reducing inequality and corporate influence over politics. I despise Donald Trump and believe Brexit was a huge mistake. I am firstly presenting my political biases in order to dispel the caricature that has emerged of lockdown sceptics as being all right-wing, Trumpian Brexiteers. I think this labelling has been very unfortunate and misguided, as I too believe that the lockdown policy in response to Covid-19 has been an utter and complete disaster, and that most of the left have gotten this issue completely wrong. I will argue that the position of the lockdown sceptic really should be a more naturally left-wing cause to adopt, and those on the left should not be distracted by the reflexive partisan politics and virtue signalling that has taken over so much of the debate around lockdowns.

The left should be interested in protecting working class and marginalised people and shielding them from economic hardship and exploitation, first and foremost. However, by many reasonable projections, these lockdown policies are delivering us into the worst economic depression in world history, and this will certainly negatively affect working class and marginalised people more than anyone else. Small businesses are being swallowed up by the thousands by large multinational corporations like Amazon (very much like a novel virus, sweeping through our populations and killing off the weakest among us), and automation has now taken on a whole new impetus for these companies.



There will be few jobs left to return to for those furloughed by this lockdown, and there will be no resources to invest in worthy left-wing causes such as better public healthcare and vaccines, renewable energy systems, public transport, universal basic income, upskilling of the workforce, etc. We have developed complete tunnel vision on one cause of death, and forgotten or relegated all of the other causes of human death and suffering. We are now casually discussing the possibility of new famines in Africa and India and of economic bailouts three times the size of the 2008 economic crash, after just one month of lockdown. These outcomes are by no means guaranteed by the appearance of Covid-19 itself. This is the shocking result of lockdown policy, and a stark reminder of how disastrous public policy can be in the wrong hands. The economy is not just some toy for the ultra-rich (although aspects of it can be, e.g. stock markets), it is also crucial to the continued prosperity and flourishing of average working families.

Therefore, the flippant dismissal of economic concerns by some on the left is a massive mistake, the consequences of which will be suffered for generations, and the weight of which will fall particularly on the shoulders of young people like myself. This has never been about life versus money, it has always been about life versus life.

In our current media climate, it is not often mentioned that national and international lockdowns in response to a virus outbreak are completely unprecedented in world history, and that this is for good reason. Not even in war time did Western governments impose such severe restrictions on citizens' personal liberties (churches and schools largely stayed open in the United Kingdom during World War II). And it is not just our liberty that we are losing, but our livelihoods and our young people's futures.

Lockdown Sceptics

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It will be young people and struggling working-class families who will bear the burden of the economic aftermath of this policy and who will have to pay back these forced Covid-19 subsidy loans that are being thrust upon us after being forced out of work by government fiat, through economic depression and inevitable austerity over many years. Multi-billion-dollar socialism for mismanaged corporations and banks will certainly continue unabated, and ordinary people will be made to foot the bill once again, just as we did in 2008. If we continue with varying levels of lockdown until the end of the summer (and perhaps beyond), we are guaranteed to have destroyed generations of human potential. We on the left should have seen this coming months ago, and we should actively be resisting the lockdowns which caused it.

Given that national lockdowns have never before been attempted and are so extreme in nature, the onus falls upon governments implementing them to provide overwhelming and inarguable evidence and data to justify this policy and to prove its efficacy beyond any reasonable doubt. However, it is clear that governments and public health officials have completely failed us in this regard. You just have to take a look at the Worldometers data for Covid-19 that anyone can access in order to make comparisons between different countries to see how our governments and public health officials have failed.

However, there are other scientists and scholars presenting this with more sophisticated statistical analyses which I highly recommend reading, such as Wilfred Reilly's recent articles on the topic. For example, Sweden had 2,763 infections per million, and 343 deaths per million as of 12th May 2020. These statistics are quite similar to my own country, the Republic of Ireland, with a much higher 4,739 infections per million and a similar 303 deaths per million, also as of 12th May; yet Ireland has been in full lockdown for some seven weeks at this point – a fellow European country with a similar population, similarly dense cities, similar age profiles in the population and similar sizes and densities of nursing homes.

Sweden never introduced a national lockdown, but rather maintained strong recommended (rather than government-mandated) social distancing measures while attempting to shield the most vulnerable. Sweden kept its economy open and kept its populace as calm and rationally-informed as possible in the face of this crisis, and has recently been praised by the World Health Organisation for their efforts in tackling the crisis in a long-term sustainable fashion. Sweden also has a much lower death rate than Belgium, Spain, Italy, UK, etc.

Those who like to point out that other Scandinavian countries have lower deaths per million seem to forget that Sweden is simply further along the infection curve than these neighbouring countries, and thus that they have not saved any lives but rather delayed the death sentences of those vulnerable people in their populations by a mere few weeks or months – a delaying strategy which could be considered to be socially destructive in itself. And all the while, detractors conveniently forget all those European countries that have fared the same or much worse than Sweden according to the numbers.

This is replicated virtually everywhere when you compare countries or US states in lockdown to those non-lockdown, social-distancing countries or US states such as South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Nebraska, Wyoming, etc. Therefore, social distancing appears to be doing almost all of the work for us in terms of controlling the spread of the virus. These are live experiments that we are witnessing before our eyes which show us that lockdown is not even working

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Lockdown Sceptics

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well in terms of our public health, and for some bizarre reason governments and their health advisors are completely ignoring them and not learning any lessons from them.

Every week of lockdown that goes by is digging us further into a deep hole of economic turmoil which will take us years to get out of. The evidence for the efficacy of lockdowns is simply not forthcoming, and therefore the policy is utterly unjustified – however much we may imagine it to be. Lockdowns were first instituted when we had no hard evidence to hand, only models (which have since turned out to be wildly out of sync with reality), and the policy has not been re-evaluated in any serious scientific way since this time.

For some strange reason, many people (particularly on the left) appear to want the Swedish model to fail, and the bizarrely-negative media coverage they receive should simply be ignored. In normal times, Sweden is held up as a model country on the left for virtually everything from health care to prisons to immigration policies. Suddenly, they are now viewed as the pariah of the world, being run by semi-fascistic leaders who should be (as one Twitter user noted) “carted off to the Hague” – presumably for crimes against humanity. This level of irrational ire could only be caused by those who are frustrated that the Swedes have not panicked and have instead taken a smart, long-term, balanced, middle-ground approach and have thus succeeded by the numbers while respecting their citizens’ basic liberties and livelihoods, which are also essential to living a decent life. And I really think we should be doing the same.

Furthermore, the lockdowns are almost certainly bad for our public health. Covid-19 is not by any means the only thing that kills people. Many people are now too scared to go to hospitals to get important treatments, tests and surgeries that are certainly losing us lives to undiagnosed cancers, heart issues, etc. Where our healthcare systems cannot cope with Covid-19, we should immediately have funded and expanded our capacity (e.g. with temporary hospitals) rather than locking down society. Our mental health problems, stress, addiction and abuse levels are increasing. Furthermore, it is a well-known sociological phenomenon that suicides – particularly amongst men – increase when a recession puts them out of work for extended periods of time. And our immune systems are weakening.

“We are a social primate, and our immune systems evolved over millennia to be kept strong by continual exposure to microbes via social contact and being outdoors, thus developing in us an immunity from many different diseases.”

We are a social primate, and our immune systems evolved over millennia to be kept strong by continual exposure to microbes via social contact and being outdoors, thus developing in us an immunity from many different diseases. Therefore, being inside our homes for weeks or months, away from other people and dousing every surface with bleach and sanitiser is almost certainly detrimental in the long term for our immune systems. There are guaranteed to be many novel microbes and diseases other than Covid-19 to which we need to develop an immunity as a species through continued social contact. When lockdowns are finally released, we may see a surge of new infections of various kinds due to this weakening of our immune systems. Recently we have seen that 66% of new Covid-19 cases in New York are of



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people who have been locked down for weeks, according to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. This indicates that either the virus is much more widespread in New York than was previously thought, and/or that the weeks of lockdown have significantly weakened locked-down New Yorkers' immune systems, making them much more vulnerable to the virus – and other illnesses.

Furthermore, if the economic collapse continues, we may expect new famines in Africa and India that could threaten many tens to hundreds of thousands of lives, if not more. And this is not to mention the fact that we are losing vast sums of tax money and borrowing power every day by paying large proportions of our national populaces to stay home. This is money that we *could* be investing in our public health care systems in order to increase capacity, improve treatments and facilities, fund new government vaccines and antibiotic development programmes, etc.

So it is very likely that with all these added “lockdown deaths” and the catastrophic loss of public money to spend on health care and vaccines, we are producing a significant net loss of life which will by far outweigh any lives that one might claim to have been saved by the lockdowns (which is a questionable claim at best, as we have seen). Surely it cannot now be the case that Covid-19 deaths are the only deaths that matter anymore? Looking at all causes of death and suffering in this world together, an intelligent person should conclude that lockdowns are definitively a net-negative policy for our society and for the globe.

One might think that – at the very least – this lockdown experience would have dramatically improved our sense of national societal solidarity, reflecting the tired and facile comparisons with war time conditions. But even this has been dealt a serious blow by the lockdowns. We are now being primed by our governments, media and public health officials to behave like misanthropic, obsessive-compulsive hypochondriacs who are to regard any other person as a potential viral infestation to be avoided at all costs. Just picture the viral force-field that surrounds people in public health infographics on social distancing. The most basic activities of a social primate like us are now considered to be forms of contagion-ridden, death-spreading evil.

I must point out that no such moralising inanity around viruses is entertained when it comes to influenza, which spreads through social contact and kills many tens of thousands worldwide every year. This is because contagion is usually understood to be an inescapable part of life as a social primate and not something one can feasibly control beyond a reasonable degree, such as by staying at home (and/or wearing a mask) when one feels sick, and by maintaining basic hygiene. Things other than life itself are indeed valuable to us – including social contact – and we often take minor risks with our lives for this very reason. Living one's life is simply inherently risky.

I wish I could say this were hyperbole, but unfortunately, I cannot. Barriers that are usually lowered between citizens in times of collective crisis are in fact being raised higher, both physically and emotionally. The invented two-metre distance must be maintained at all times, and in my experience, people don't smile at, or talk to each other lest they are breached by the viral force-field around each human infestation. International solidarity is also waning.



Lockdown Sceptics

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We are being told to consider anyone arriving from abroad as a potential disease vector who must lock themselves away for two weeks, despite the obvious logical interjection that you are just as likely to get Covid-19 from your local supermarket (in virtually every major country in the world now) as you are from someone arriving from Brazil or South Africa or Nigeria or India or Turkey – with the possible exceptions of those two global hotspots, New York and northern Italy.

A recent protest occurred in late April 2020 at a port in Dingle, Co. Kerry, in the south-west of Ireland, by Irish fishermen who were outraged that a boat originating from Spain would arrive on our shores bringing us our seafood dinner, lest they also bring us their contagion. So, to add insult to injury, the lockdown measures have been disconcertingly well designed to accentuate the worst misanthropic aspects of our character, undermining our national and international solidarity and exacerbating base xenophobia.

“The death rate for the virus is simply far lower than we originally believed it to be at the beginning of the crisis.”

We have to start thinking much more reasonably, rationally and maturely about the death rate from Covid-19 and the kinds of risk levels that different people and age groups experience. The death rate for the virus is simply far lower than we originally believed it to be at the beginning of the crisis.

Randomised serology testing studies carried out in multiple countries in Europe and in the US have shown that from c.4–15% (and even 30% in some cases, depending on the study) of our national populations in Europe and the US

either have Covid-19 or have had it recently. And it is becoming increasingly apparent that the virus has been around for quite a bit longer than we previously believed: France recently reported a confirmed case of Covid-19 from December 2019.

Any honest analysis of the statistics around this virus (rather than self-serving and scaremongering anecdotes about the tiny number of younger people who have died from this disease) will show that it is an exceptionally ageist one. If you are under 65 and without any major pre-existing conditions (such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, etc.), your chances of dying from Covid-19 are extremely slim; and for people under 30, your chances are infinitesimally so. If nursing homes had been adequately protected from Covid-19 in Ireland, our death rate would be one third of its current rate. Therefore, keeping the entire work-force and all schoolchildren – children are almost entirely immune to this virus – locked up at home is a completely crazy strategy to adopt.

As Lord Sumption has pointed out, we are all perfectly capable of assessing our own personal levels of risk based on our age, health, who we live with, etc. and of adjusting the way we live our life accordingly. Some may want to keep working from home or staying isolated or cocooned, while some vulnerable people may want to take a risk with their own lives by ending their isolation because they value things other than life itself, such as being able to spend time with their loved ones. We don't need an incessantly-intrusive nanny state telling us which friends we can and cannot meet, when and where we can go outside, whether or not we are allowed to exchange goods and services between consenting parties, etc.

“We are all perfectly capable of assessing our own personal levels of risk based on our age, health, who we live with, etc. and of adjusting the way we live our life accordingly.”

This sense of fundamental personal liberty – which I had hoped would be strong on the left – appears to be depressingly absent, and in its place there exists a kind of docile supinity and subservience to state power and lab coats. All but forgotten is Benjamin Franklin's stark warning to us from 260 years ago, that “[t]hose who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety”. This is more relevant

Lockdown Sceptics

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than ever today. Some governments are using this lockdown as an excuse to undermine democratic institutions and norms, and in some countries even to seize full dictatorial-decree powers (such as Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary), while others are using it as an opportunity to loosen environmental protections (such as in Slovenia).

Ultimately, the decision as to whether or not we prolong the lockdown is not a scientific or public health decision. It is a political, public-policy and economic decision. Public health science can – and *should* – inform these decisions, but they are ultimately political ones, and politicians hiding with cowardice behind public health officials will eventually be seen for what they are. Now more than ever, we need politicians who are willing to show leadership and a steady, rational hand in a crisis – something that has been noticeably absent throughout this period.

Some like to claim that all of these negative outcomes would have happened naturally in any case because of the virus itself, but this could not be further from the truth. Lockdown policy, combined with panic-inducing, clickbait-oriented and scaremongering media coverage, has caused much of the damage we are experiencing. This is a government- and media-induced insult to add to the injury of the virus itself.

“Lockdown policy, combined with panic-inducing, clickbait-oriented and scaremongering media coverage, has caused much of the damage we are experiencing.”

My biggest fear is that governments and citizens will continue to defend the lockdown policy (operating on a kind of sunk costs fallacy) and will never realise or admit how much damage it has done (ascribing all the damage to the virus rather than to the lockdown policies), and will then repeat this policy *ad infinitum* every time a new outbreak of Covid-19 or some other contagion occurs. *We simply cannot survive as a civilisation in this way.* Governments should step forward and admit honestly that the lockdown policy was a mistake, and that they were simply acting as best they could without available evidence at the time – evidence which, increasingly, we have at our finger-tips.

These governments should shift immediately to a Swedish or similar model – for instance with a policy of mandatory mask-wearing in public or crowded spaces – and those of us on the left (as well as those in the centre who are still supporting the lockdowns) need to realise this necessity.

At the very least, even if we do not have the wisdom and rational forethought at this time to end these lockdowns as soon as is humanly possible, then I sincerely hope that we will regain enough of our collective rational minds in the coming months in order to realise how destructive these lockdown policies have been, and to make certain that we never again repeat this strategy. Three similarly-sized pandemics were experienced by humanity during the 20th century, and we will continue to face this challenge in the future.



Lockdowns were never implemented then. They were wise to avoid it, and we would be wise to learn from them.

Lockdown Sceptics

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The Fatal Hubris of Professor Lockdown

6 May, 2020.

by Toby Young in The Critic.

It wasn't an attractive 38 year-old that brought down Neil Ferguson

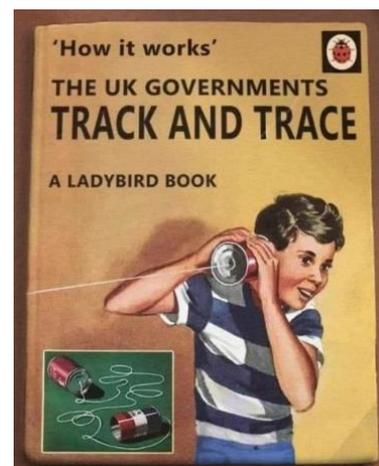
Following the resignation of Professor Neil Ferguson, I'm fascinated by the details about Antonia Staats, the woman he is having an affair with. According to the *Telegraph*, which broke the story last night, she lives in a £1.9 million house in south London with her husband and two children and has an "open marriage". Guido has dug up a podcast she did on March 31st (now offline), 24 hours after visiting Professor Ferguson, in which she complains that the lockdown is putting a strain on her marriage. But it's her politics I'm really interested in. The *Telegraph* has her down as a "left wing-wing campaigner", a reference to the fact that she campaigned against leaving the EU and is a long-standing environmental activist who supported Greta Thunberg's climate strike. Many of the papers included this picture of her standing outside Number 10 delivering a petition to the Prime Minister about ending fossil fuel subsidies:



Some people have asked what the relevance of Ms Staat's politics is. The answer, obviously, is that her politics are likely to be Professor Ferguson's politics – and we know that he co-authored a paper in 2016 warning of the terrible consequences of leaving the EU and we can see from his Twitter feed that he's not exactly a Tory. For instance, he sent the following tweet to the Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran when she won Oxford West and Abingdon in 2017: "Great news – so happy to wake up to hear you won! Fingers crossed that last night means at least a softer Brexit."

The reason for looking into the political affiliations of the scientists and experts who've been advising governments across the world during this crisis is that it may throw some light on why those governments have made such poor policy decisions. Will the vast majority of those advisers turn out to be left-of-centre, like Professor Ferguson? I'm 99% sure of it, and I think that will help us to understand what's happened.

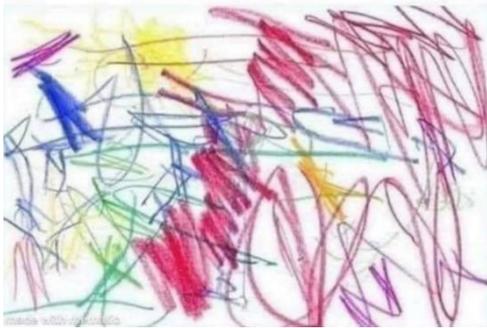
I don't mean they've deliberately given right-of-centre governments poor advice in the hope of wrecking their economies for nefarious party-political reasons or because they're members of Extinction Rebellion and want to destroy capitalism. Nor do I believe in any of the conspiracy theories linking these public health panjandrums to Bill Gates and Big Pharma and some diabolical plan to vaccinate 7.8 billion people. I have little doubt they've acted in good faith throughout – and that's part of the problem. The road they've led us down has been paved with all the usual good intentions.



Lockdown Sceptics

Stay sceptical. End the lockdown. Save lives.

Leaked copy of government plan to reopen the economy.



The mistakes these liberal policy-makers have made are depressingly familiar to anyone who's studied the breed: overestimating the ability of the state to solve complicated problems as well as the capacity of state-run agencies to deliver on those solutions; failing to anticipate the unintended consequences of large-scale state interventions; thinking about public policy in terms of moral absolutes rather than trade-offs; chronic fiscal incontinence, with zero inhibitions about adding to the national debt; not trusting in the common sense of ordinary people and believing the only way to get them to avoid risky behaviour is to put strict rules in place and threaten them with fines or imprisonment if they disobey them (and ignoring those rules themselves, obviously); arrogantly assuming that anyone who challenges their policy preferences is either ignorant or evil;

never venturing outside their metropolitan echo chambers; citizens of anywhere rather than somewhere... you know the rest. We've seen it a hundred times before.

More often than not, the "solutions" these left-leaning experts come up with make the problems they're grappling with even worse, and so it will prove to be in this case. The evidence mounts on a daily basis that locking down whole populations in the hope of "flattening the curve" was a catastrophic error, perhaps the worst policy mistake ever committed by Western governments during peacetime. Just yesterday we learnt that the lockdowns have forced countries across the world to shut down TB treatment programmes which, over the next five years, could lead to 6.3 million additional cases of TB and 1.4 million deaths. There are so many stories like this it's impossible to keep track. We will soon be able to say with something approaching certainty that the cure has been worse than the disease.

Neil Ferguson isn't single-handedly responsible for this world-historical blunder, but he does bear some responsibility. His apocalyptic predictions frightened the British Government into imposing a full lockdown, with other governments quickly following suit. And I'm afraid he's absolutely typical of the breed. He suffers from the same fundamental arrogance that progressive interventionists have exhibited since at least the middle of the 18th Century – wildly over-estimating the good that governments can do, assuming there are no limits to what "science" can achieve and, at the same time, ignoring the empirical evidence that their ambitious public programmes are a complete disaster. At bottom, they believe that nature itself can be bent to man's will.

"More often than not, the "solutions" these left-leaning experts come up with make the problems they're grappling with even worse, and so it will prove to be in this case."

It isn't an attractive, 38 year-old woman in a red dress that has brought down Professor Lockdown. It's a nucleic acid molecule in a protein coat.

