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date: Aug 11, 2022, 5:20 PM

subject: Ivermectin: Why is the Administrative State willing to kill you?

**Ivermectin: Why is the Administrative State willing to kill you?**

Liberalism’s endgame, public health despotism, Scientism, Big Tech

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Heretic filmmaker Mikki Willis has compiled a thirteen-minute video which bluntly and explicitly documents the deeply disturbing modern parable of collusion between US Health and Human Service elites, corporate media, the medical-pharmaceutical industrial complex, and big tech to block the use of Ivermectin in the US and developed western nations for treating COVID-19 disease.  Although currently embargoed for general distribution, since various clips featuring my own comments over time are included in the montage, I received a copy early this morning together with a request that I not circulate but quickly review for technical accuracy.

Mikki and his team are among the most important media leaders and contributors in the global “resistance” to COVID tyranny, and when he requests something, I try to do everything I can to accommodate.  So, I took the time to watch, review and approve while frantically packing to leave Dublin after traveling to participate in the “Making Sense” Health Conference, Ireland 2022 over the last couple of days.  As happened when I first reviewed Robert F. Kennedy Juniors’ book “The Real Anthony Fauci”, I was (and still am) deeply affected by the video.

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I have lived through Ivermectin propaganda and active blocking of COVID early treatment options over the past two years, have traveled and testified with Drs. Peter (McCullough), Paul (Marik) and Pierre (Kory) in so many meetings, saw first-hand and personally experienced the suppression of Ivermectin manuscripts, data and meta-analyses which have been so thoroughly documented by Pierre and Dr. Tess Laurie. I lived through the (successful) efforts of FDA/CDER to block the ability of the DTRA/Department of Defense team which I worked closely with to advance comparative testing of famotidine *versus* famotidine + celecoxib *versus* famotidine + celecoxib + ivermectin treatment from including any treatment arm that involved ivermectin in the inpatient and outpatient randomized clinical trials for which we sought FDA allowance to proceed.  My chronic long COVID (exacerbated by two doses of the Moderna mRNA COVID product) was successfully treated with Ivermectin by Dr. Meryl Nass, who subsequently lost her license to practice medicine for the sin of effectively treating COVID outpatients with Ivermectin.  I know Ivermectin works for treating this disease, and if (in an alternative reality) it could have been deployed in the USA and western nations, I am completely convinced that the needless wasting of hundreds of thousands of lives could have been avoided.  Parents, co-workers, relatives (brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins), and even some children, all gone forever under horrible and abrupt circumstances.  I know on both a personal and an intellectual/professional level that the burden of avoidable carnage and ongoing disability is profound.

But something about seeing the shocking history of this sordid tale of Administrative State-mediated murder of hundreds of thousands of US Citizens all rolled up into a thirteen-minute video montage hit me like yet another “brick to the head”, with about the same velocity and impact as reading/editing Bobby’s amazing book.  If I have learned anything from my intellectual awakening since that fateful call from Dr. Michael Callahan on January 04, 2020, it has been the power of video and alternative media. Granting that the (substack) pen is mightier than the sword, and an (internet meme) picture is worth a thousand words, a well edited video montage is worth ten thousand and can cleave straight through cranium like a Samurai.  If the infamous three-hour long Rogan/Malone podcast is a slow truth dagger that can penetrate the guarded mind, Mikki and his team fire depleted uranium slugs wrapped in full metal jackets.

Receipt of which slugs over thirteen minutes via eyes and ears left me a bit stunned, as Jill and I scrambled to pack and make our way through the byzantine tangle of security state screening required for international travel.  Suffice to say, I may have thought international travel through Portuguese and Italian airports was inefficient, but Ireland in close cooperation with the US Border Protection Service has developed international airport screening inefficiency to a level to which Portugal and Italy can only aspire.

Somewhat traumatized by the experience, I boarded in a state of moderately advanced anxiety, and proceeded to work my way through four of the most insightful essays concerning the COVIDcrisis that I have read to date.  Composed over the last two years and published online at [“UnHerd”,](http://www.unherd.com/) these monographs provide deep philosophical, psychological and political insights as well as indictments of the

* expanding failure of modern liberalism, the
* corruption at the core of the administrative state, the
* impact of big tech, the
* chronically corrosive role of race politics, and the
* devolution of science into Scientism.

Each is deserving of careful reading and consideration.  Read together, they complement and extend the insights of

* Mattias Desmet’s “Psychological Basis of Totalitarianism”,
* Peter and Ginger Breggin’s “COVID-19 and the Global Predators: We are the Prey”,
* Irving Janus’ “Victims of Groupthink”, and
* Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret’s “COVID-19: The Great Reset”

to yield an increasingly granular picture of the complex emergent phenomena which I refer to as  
 the COVIDcrisis,  
 which has resulted in millions of avoidable deaths, damage to children which may require generations to recover from, and currently ongoing cascading failure of western governments and economies.

Many speculate that the Banker/Investor/Globalist Overlords who infest the World Economic Forum, own the central banks of most countries (including the US “Federal Reserve”), and functionally control the major investment funds (Blackrock, State Street, Vanguard and their affiliates) are actively pursuing a depopulation agenda.  The theory goes that these elites support various 20th century eugenicist and Malthusian ideals, goals and objectives, and believe in their authority, ability and responsibility to advance centralized globalist solutions via authoritarian means to yield a utilitarian (greatest good for the greatest number) global command economy ideal under their unilateral leadership. A European Union -like WEF/United Nations fusion run by technocrat bankers and economists who act on behalf of a very small number of hyper-wealthy owner-elite families. A hereditary aristocracy. Beneficiaries of “multigenerational wealth” spanning centuries. The phrases “you will own nothing and be happy”, “The elderly are useless eaters”, “excess labor”, “Who controls the food supply controls the people; who controls the energy can control whole continents; who controls money can control the world”, “We are on the verge of a global transformation. All we need is the right major crisis and the nations will accept the New World Order” and many others are often cited to account for what appears to be a bizarre set of public health policies which appear to have driven excess death and disability during the COVIDcrisis.  Most of us who cling to the idea that fundamental concepts of morality and ethics should drive public policy are instinctively repelled by the possibility that the financial and political elites could think this way.  But it is increasingly hard to otherwise account for the observations provided by our lying eyes and ears.  The “conspiracy theorists” who advance a globalist death cult explanation may or may not prevail in the end, but they are certainly enlarging the Overton Window, and the writings and mutterings of Klaus Schwab and Bill Gates are providing the receipts.  As is the “Monkeypox/Moneypox” public health emergency fearporn/clown car.

The profound tragedy of the parable of Ivermectin is just one example illustrating the consequences of a deep rot which has pervaded western “Democracy”, and the authors at “[UnHerd](http://www.unherd.com/)” are doing a great job documenting the causes.

In considering the essays listed below as applied to the United States, please keep in mind that the US is not a democracy at all, but rather a Republic (“if you can keep it”) specifically designed to avoid the many pitfalls of “Democracy” foreseen by those who designed the US Constitution (which document intentionally makes no mention of “Democracy”).  “Democracy” is yet another term and concept which has been twisted, weaponized and exploited in the longstanding effort to control information and thought.

[**The new public health despotism**](https://unherd.com/2021/10/the-new-covid-despotism/)

*Draconian rules are suppressing our humanity*

[**Big Tech’s threat to democracy**](https://unherd.com/2021/06/big-techs-threat-to-democracy/)

*Can the US government tolerate the existence of a rival within its territory?*

[**How race politics liberated the elites**](https://unherd.com/2020/12/how-race-politics-liberated-the-elites/)

*If society is taken to be inherently oppressive, the notion of a common good disappears*

[**Covid was liberalism’s endgame**](https://unherd.com/2022/05/covid-was-liberalisms-endgame/)

*Liberal individualism has an innate tendency towards authoritarianism*

The author of **this cluster of truthbombs** is **Matthew B Crawford**, a senior fellow at the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture.  At the beginning of his essay on “The new public health despotism”, Matthew provides us with a window into his personal context, his writing style, as well as his political and social worldview.

“I should say where I am coming from. I live in the Bay Area, the deepest blue region in the country. I may be responding to different social facts from the ones readers are observing where they live. Right now, in the spring of 2022, I would estimate that a quarter of people walking around Berkeley are masked outdoors. I would like to understand this. Whatever they are doing, it is not “following the science”.”

“I live in the Bay Area, in a county where the vaccination rate is in the mid-80s. In late July, I was dropping my younger daughter off for a soccer day camp each morning. It was 10 kids running around an open field. They wore masks for six hours each day, and it was about 85° that week. Telling my fully vaccinated daughter to put that thing on, I felt compromised for participating in the charade. The old Scots Irish belligerence started welling up.

Rules are meant to codify some bit of rational truth and make it effective. These days, we find ourselves in situations where to do the genuinely rational thing might require breaking the rules of some institution. But to do so is to invite confrontation. You may go through an internal struggle, deciding how much resistance to put up. To insist on reasons is to be ornery, and you want to be sociable. You tell yourself, there is no point in being confrontational with staff at the YMCA who are themselves simply carrying out orders. There is nobody visible to whom you can address your reasons, nobody of whom you can demand an account.

After a year and a half of this, going along with it starts to become habitual. If you defy the mask order and are challenged by somebody doing their job as instructed, chances are you’re going to back down and comply, which is worse than if you had complied to begin with. Even if you strongly suspect fear of the virus has been stoked out of proportion to serve bureaucratic and political interests, or as an artefact of the scaremongering business model of media, you may subtly adjust your view of the reality of Covid to bring it more into line with your actual behavior. You can reduce the dissonance¬ that way. The alternative is to be confronted every day with fresh examples of your own slavishness.”

The following is intended to provide a brief introduction and overview to the most recent of these essays, as the complex interwoven (and at times redundant) logic and examples require that each essay, like a fine wine, be given time to be consumed, examined, and mature in the mind of each reader.

[**Covid was liberalism’s endgame**](https://unherd.com/2022/05/covid-was-liberalisms-endgame/)

*Liberal individualism has an innate tendency towards authoritarianism*

At the core of each of Crawford’s essays is the classical tension between alternative answers to the philosophical question of the nature of man and how to organize society, and in particular the tension between Hobbes view of man’s need for governance by the Leviathan (often referred to as the Administrative State) versus Locke and his view of man as a rational, self-governing creature.  In this examination of public health despotism, he uses this dialectic to frame his analysis.

“Our regime is founded on two rival pictures of the human subject. The Lockean one regards us as rational, self-governing creatures. It locates reason in a common human endowment — common sense, more or less — and underwrites a basically democratic or majoritarian form of politics. There are no secrets to governing. The second, rival picture insists we are irrationally proud, and in need of being governed. This Hobbesian picture is more hortatory than the first; it needs us to think of ourselves as vulnerable, so the state can play the role of saving us. It underwrites a technocratic, progressive form of politics.

[The Lockean assumption has been quietly put to bed over the last 30 years](https://unherd.com/2021/10/the-new-covid-despotism/), and we have fully embraced the Hobbesian alternative.”

Crawford’s introductory paragraphs provide the framework for the analysis:

“Throughout history, there have been crises that could be resolved only by suspending the normal rule of law and constitutional principles. A “state of exception” is declared until the emergency passes — it could be a foreign invasion, an earthquake or a plague. During this period, the legislative function is typically relocated from a parliamentary body to the executive, suspending the basic charter of government, and in particular the separation of powers.

The Italian political theorist Giorgio Agamben points out that, in fact, the “state of exception” has almost become the rule rather than the exception in the Western liberal democracies over the last century. The language of war is invoked to pursue ordinary domestic politics. Over the past 60 years in the United States, we have had the war on poverty, the war on drugs, the war on terror, the war on Covid, the war on disinformation, and the war on domestic extremism.

A variation on this theme is the utility of moral panics ­— spiritual warfare —  for pursuing top-down projects of social transformation, typically by administrative fiat. The principle of equality under the law, which would seem to be indispensable to a liberal society, must make way for a system of privileges for protected classes, corresponding to a moral typology of citizens along the axis of victim and oppressor. Victim dramas serve as a permanent moral emergency, justifying an ever-deeper penetration of society by bureaucratic authority in both the public and private sectors.

Once this pattern of government by emergency snaps into focus, one experiences a Gestalt shift. The self-image of the liberal West — as based on the rule of law and representative government — is in need of revision. Our society’s response to Covid brought this anachronism to mass awareness.

The pandemic brought liberalism’s deeper contradictions into plain view. On the one hand, it accelerated what had previously been a slow-motion desertion of liberal principles of government. On the other hand, Covid culture has brought to the surface the usually subterranean core of the liberal project, which is not merely political but anthropological: to remake man. That project can come to fruition, it seems, only with a highly illiberal form of government, paradoxically enough. If we can understand this, it might explain why our embrace of illiberal politics has met with so little resistance. It seems the anthropological project is a more powerful commitment for us than allegiance to the forms and procedures of liberal government.”

While not specifically referencing it, Crawford appears to anticipate the growing chorus from ruling elites, WEF, and militaries which support the logic of a fourth industrial revolution based on the idea that there is need and ability to engineer human-machine hybrids to advance and accelerate human evolution – the logic of transhumanism.  A logic for which these groups assert that 20th century consensus regarding bioethics is an anachronism.  He goes on and dives into the underlying trends which have lead us to the current medical situation.

“The Nineties saw the rise of new currents in the social sciences that emphasize the cognitive incompetence of human beings, deposing the “rational actor” model of human behavior. This gave us nudge theory , a way to alter people’s behavior *without having to persuade them of anything.* It would be hard to overstate the degree to which this approach has been institutionalized, on both sides of the Atlantic. The innovation achieved here is in the way government conceives its subjects: not as citizens whose considered consent must be secured, but as particles to be steered through a science of behavior management that relies on our pre-reflective cognitive biases.

This is one front in a larger development: an intensifying distrust of human judgment when it operates in the wild, unsupervised. Sometimes this takes the purely bureaucratic form of insisting on metrics of performance and imposing uniform procedures on professionals. “Evidence-based medicine” circumscribes the discretion of doctors; standardized tests and curricula do the same for teachers. At other times, this same impulse takes a technological form, with algorithms substituting for individual judgment on the grounds that human rationality is the weak link in the system. For example, it is stipulated that human beings are terrible drivers and must be replaced in a new regime of autonomous vehicles. The effect, consistently, is to remove agency from skilled practitioners on the grounds of incompetence, and [devolve power upward toward a separate layer of information managers that grows ever thicker](https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2019/05/algorithmic-governance-and-political-legitimacy/). It also removes responsibility from identifiable human beings who can be held to account for their decisions. Such mystification insulates various forms of power, both governmental and commercial, from popular pressures.

Needless to say, this sits ill with the Enlightenment idea that governing authority is grounded in our shared rationality, accessible in principle to every citizen and capable of articulation. Technocratic progressivism in fact requires the disqualification of experience and common sense as a guide to reality and installs in their place a priestly form of authority, closer to the Enlightenment’s caricature of medieval society than to its own self-image.

It also requires a certain human type which, fittingly enough, looks like a caricature of the medieval personality: a credulous, fearful person. This brings us to the Hobbesian anthropological program.

How are we to understand the dramatically different responses of our society to the Spanish flu of a century ago and to Covid today? There is an inverse relationship between the severity of these pandemics and the severity of measures to control them. Clearly, Covid acquired some of its emergency energy from the ambient political crisis dating from 2016, which put the establishment on a war footing. But it also slotted nicely into the more general politics of emergency that is the unacknowledged core of technocratic progressivism and is further advanced today than it was in 1918.”

“In 2020, a fearful public acquiesced to an extraordinary extension of expert jurisdiction over every domain of life, and a corresponding transfer of sovereignty from representative bodies to unelected agencies located in the executive branch of government. Notoriously, polling indicated that perception of the risks of Covid outstripped the reality by one to two orders of magnitude, but with a sharp demarcation: the hundredfold distortion was among self-identified liberal Democrats, that is, those whose yard signs exhorted us to “believe in science”.

In a technocratic regime, whoever controls what Science Says controls the state. What Science Says is then subject to political contest, and subject to capture by whoever funds it. Which turns out to be the state itself. Here is an epistemic self-licking ice cream cone that bristles at outside interference. Many factual ambiguities and rival hypotheses about the pandemic, typical of the scientific process, were resolved not by rational debate but by intimidation, with heavy use of the term “disinformation” and attendant enforcement by social media companies acting as franchisees of the state. In this there seems to have been a consistent bias toward scientific interpretations that induced fear, even at the cost of omitting relevant context.

If all of this strikes you as illiberal, it should. Yet in another sense, the central role of fear in politics has an impeccable liberal pedigree in the thought of Thomas Hobbes. This brings us to the deeper, anthropological project of liberalism.

First, in what sense is Hobbes a liberal? He is certainly no advocate of limited government, and the regime he imagines is basically monarchical. It is liberal in the sense that it is founded on consent. But it turns out this consent depends on a re-education program that reaches quite deep and is never finished.”

**Regarding Science as Authority**

“The pandemic has brought into relief a dissonance between our idealized image of science, on the one hand, and the work “science” is called upon to do in our society, on the other. I think the dissonance can be traced to this mismatch between science as an activity of the solitary mind, and the institutional reality of it. Big science is fundamentally social in its practice, and with this comes certain entailments.

As a practical matter, “politicized science” is the only kind there is (or rather, the only kind you are likely to hear about). But it is precisely the apolitical image of science, as disinterested arbiter of reality, that makes it such a powerful instrument of politics. This contradiction is now out in the open. The “anti-science” tendencies of populism are in significant measure a response to the gap that has opened up between the practice of science and the ideal that underwrites its authority. As a way of generating knowledge, it is the pride of science to be falsifiable (unlike religion).

Yet what sort of authority would it be that insists its own grasp of reality is merely provisional? Presumably, the whole point of authority is to explain reality and provide certainty in an uncertain world, for the sake of social coordination, even at the price of simplification. To serve the role assigned it, science must become something more like religion.

The chorus of complaints about a declining “faith in science” states the problem almost too frankly. The most reprobate among us are climate sceptics, unless those be the Covid deniers, who are charged with not obeying the science. If all this has a medieval sound, it ought to give us pause.

We live in a mixed regime, an unstable hybrid of democratic and technocratic forms of authority. Science and popular opinion must be made to speak with one voice as far as possible, or there is conflict. According to the official story, we try to harmonize scientific knowledge and opinion through education. But in reality, science is hard, and there is a lot of it. We have to take it mostly on faith. That goes for most journalists and professors, as well as plumbers. The work of reconciling science and public opinion is carried out, not through education, but through a kind of distributed demagogy, or Scientism. We are learning that this is not a stable solution to the perennial problem of authority that every society must solve.

The phrase “follow the science” has a false ring to it. That is because science doesn’t *lead* anywhere. It can illuminate various courses of action, by quantifying the risks and specifying the tradeoffs. But it can’t make the necessary choices for us. By pretending otherwise, decision-makers can avoid taking responsibility for the choices they make on our behalf.

Increasingly, science is pressed into duty as authority. It is invoked to legitimize the transfer of sovereignty from democratic to technocratic bodies, and as a device for insulating such moves from the realm of political contest.

Over the past year, a fearful public has acquiesced to an extraordinary extension of expert jurisdiction over every domain of life. A pattern of “government by emergency” has become prominent, in which resistance to such incursions are characterized as “anti-science”.

But the question of political legitimacy hanging over rule by experts is not likely to go away. If anything, it will be more fiercely fought in coming years as leaders of governing bodies invoke a climate emergency that is said to require a wholesale transformation of society.”

“In [*The Revolt of the Public*](https://www.abebooks.co.uk/9781732265141/Revolt-Public-Crisis-Authority-New-1732265143/plp), former intelligence analyst Martin Gurri traces the roots of a “politics of negation” that has engulfed Western societies, tied to a wholesale collapse of authority across all domains ­— politics, journalism, finance, religion, science. He blames it on the internet. Authority has always been located in hierarchical structures of expertise, guarded by accreditation and long apprenticeship, whose members develop a “reflexive loathing of the amateur trespasser”.

For authority to be really authoritative, it must claim an epistemic monopoly of some kind, whether of priestly or scientific knowledge. In the 20th century, especially after the spectacular successes of the Manhattan Project and the Apollo moon landing, there developed a spiral wherein the public came to expect miracles of technical expertise (flying cars and moon colonies were thought to be imminent). Reciprocally, stoking expectations of social utility is normalized in the processes of grant-seeking and institutional competition that are now inseparable from scientific practice.

The system was sustainable, if uneasily so, as long as inevitable failures could be kept offstage. This required robust gatekeeping, such that the assessment of institutional performance was an intra-elite affair (the blue-ribbon commission; peer review), allowing for the development of “informal pacts of mutual protection”, as Gurri puts it. The internet, and the social media which disseminate instances of failure with relish, have made such gatekeeping impossible. That is the core of the very parsimonious and illuminating argument by which Gurri accounts for the revolt of the public.”

“Now, science is primarily organized around “knowledge monopolies” that exclude dissident views. They do so not as a matter of piecemeal failures of open-mindedness by individuals jealous of their turf, but systemically.

The all-important process of peer review depends on disinterestedness, as well as competence. “Since about the middle of the 20th century, however, the costs of research and the need for teams of cooperating specialists have made it increasingly difficult to find reviewers who are both directly knowledgeable and also disinterested; truly informed people are effectively either colleagues or competitors.”

Bauer writes that “journeymen peer-reviewers tend to stifle rather than encourage creativity and genuine innovation. Centralized funding and centralized decision-making make science more bureaucratic and less an activity of independent, self-motivated truth-seekers.” In universities, “the measure of scientific achievement becomes the amount of ‘research support’ brought in, not the production of useful knowledge”. (University administrations skim a standard 50% off the top of any grant to cover the “indirect costs” of supporting the research.)

Given the resources required to conduct big science, it needs to serve some institutional master, whether that be commercial or governmental. In the last 12 months we have seen the pharmaceutical industry and its underlying capacity for scientific accomplishment at its best. The development of mRNA vaccines represents a breakthrough of real consequence. This has occurred in commercial laboratories that were temporarily relieved of the need to impress financial markets or stoke consumer demand by large infusions of government support. This ought to give pause to the political reflex to demonize pharmaceutical companies that is prevalent on both the Left and the Right.

But it cannot be assumed that “the bottom line” exerts a disciplining function on scientific research that automatically aligns it with the truth motive. Notoriously, pharmaceutical companies have, on a significant scale, paid physicians to praise, recommend and prescribe their products, and recruited researchers to put their names to articles ghost-written by the firms which are then placed in scientific and professional journals. Worse, the clinical trials whose results are relied upon by federal agencies in deciding whether to approve drugs as safe and effective are generally conducted or commissioned by the pharmaceutical companies themselves.

The bigness of big science — both the corporate form of the activity, and its need for large resources generated otherwise than by science itself — places science squarely in the world of extra-scientific concerns, then. Including those concerns taken up by political lobbies. If the concern has a high profile, any dissent from the official consensus may be hazardous to an investigator’s career.

Public opinion polls generally indicate that what “everybody knows” about some scientific matter, and its bearing on public interests, will be identical to the well-institutionalized view. This is unsurprising, given the role the media plays in creating consensus. Journalists, rarely competent to assess scientific statements critically, cooperate in propagating the pronouncements of self-protecting “research cartels” as science.

Bauer’s concept of a research cartel came into public awareness in an episode that occurred five years after his article appeared. In 2009, someone hacked the emails of the Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia in Britain and released them, prompting the “climategate” scandal in which the scientists who sat atop the climate bureaucracy were revealed to be stonewalling against requests for their data from outsiders. This was at a time when many fields, in response to their own replication crises, were adopting data sharing as a norm in their research communities, as well as other practices such as reporting null findings and the pre-registration of hypotheses in shared forums.

The climate research cartel staked its authority on the peer review process of journals deemed legitimate, which meddling challengers had not undergone. But, as Gurri notes in his treatment of climategate, “since the group largely controlled peer review for their field, and a consuming subject of the emails was how to keep dissenting voices out of the journals and the media, the claim rested on a circular logic”.

One can be fully convinced of the reality and dire consequences of climate change while also permitting oneself some curiosity about the political pressures that bear on the science, I hope. Try to imagine the larger setting when the IPPC convenes. Powerful organisations are staffed up, with resolutions prepared, communications strategies in place, corporate “global partners” secured, interagency task forces standing by and diplomatic channels open, waiting to receive the good word from an empaneled group of scientists working in committee.

This is not a setting conducive to reservations, qualifications, or second thoughts. The function of the body is to produce a product: political legitimacy.”

“There appears to be a pattern, not limited to climate science-politics, in which the mass energy galvanised by celebrities (who always speak with certainty) strengthens the hand of activists to organize campaigns in which any research institution that fails to discipline a dissident investigator is said to be serving as a channel of “disinformation”. The institution is placed under a kind of moral receivership, to be lifted when the heads of the institution denounce the offending investigator and distance themselves from his or her findings. They then seek to repair the damage by affirming the ends of the activists in terms that out-do the affirmations of rival institutions.

As this iterates across different areas of establishment thinking, especially those that touch on ideological taboos, it follows a logic of escalation that restricts the types of inquiry that are acceptable for research supported by institutions and shifts them in the direction dictated by political lobbies.

Needless to say, all this takes place far from the field of scientific argument, but the drama is presented as one of restoring scientific integrity. In the internet era of relatively open information flows, a cartel of expertise can be maintained only if it is part of a larger body of organized opinion and interests that, together, are able to run a sort of moral-epistemic protection racket. Reciprocally, political lobbies depend on scientific bodies that are willing to play their part.

This could be viewed as part of a larger shift within institutions from a culture of persuasion to one in which coercive moral decrees emanate from somewhere above, hard to locate precisely, but conveyed in the ethical style of HR. Weakened by the uncontrolled dissemination of information and attendant fracturing of authority, the institutions that ratify particular pictures of what is going on in the world must not merely assert a monopoly of knowledge, but place a moratorium on the asking of questions and noticing of patterns.

Research cartels mobilize the denunciatory energies of political activists to run interference and, reciprocally, the priorities of activist NGOs and foundations meter the flow of funding and political support to research bodies, in a circle of mutual support.

One of the most striking features of the present, for anyone alert to politics, is that we are increasingly governed through the device of panics that give every appearance of being contrived to generate acquiescence in a public that has grown skeptical of institutions built on claims of expertise. And this is happening across many domains. Policy challenges from outsiders presented through fact and argument, offering some picture of what is going on in the world that is rival to the prevailing one, are not answered in kind, but are met rather with denunciation. In this way, epistemic threats to institutional authority are resolved into moral conflicts between good people and bad people.

The ramped-up moral content of pronouncements that are ostensibly expert-technical needs to be explained. I suggested there are two rival sources of political legitimacy, science and popular opinion, that are imperfectly reconciled through a kind of distributed demagogy, which we may call scientism. This demagogy is distributed in the sense that interlocked centers of power rely on it to mutually prop one another up.

But as this arrangement has begun to totter, with popular opinion coming untethered from expert authority and newly assertive against it, a third leg has been added to the structure in an effort to stabilize it: the moral splendor of the Victim. To stand with the Victim, as every major institution now appears to do, is to arrest criticism. Such is the hope, at any rate.

In the unforgettable Summer of 2020, the moral energy of anti-racism was harnessed to the scientific authority of public health, and vice versa. Thus “white supremacy” was a public health emergency — one urgent enough to dictate the suspension of social distancing mandates for the sake of protests. So how did the description of America as white supremacist get converted into a scientific-sounding claim?

[Michael Lind](https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/the-covid-class-war-heats-up-michael-lind) has argued that Covid laid bare a class war, not between labor and capital, but between two groups that could both be called “elites”: on one side, small business owners who opposed lockdowns and, on the other, professionals who enjoyed greater job security, were able to work from home, and typically took a maximalist position on hygiene politics. We can add that, being in the “knowledge economy,” professionals naturally show more deference to experts, since the basic currency of the knowledge economy is epistemic prestige.”

“The spectacular success of “public health” in generating fearful acquiescence in the population during the pandemic has created a rush to take every technocratic-progressive project that would have poor chances if pursued democratically and cast it as a response to some existential threat. In the first week of the Biden administration, the Senate majority leader urged the president to declare a “climate emergency” and assume powers that would authorize him to sidestep Congress and rule by executive fiat. Ominously, we are being prepared for “climate lockdowns”.”

**Regarding “The Wisdom of the East”**

“Western nations have long had contingency plans for dealing with pandemics, in which quarantine measures were delimited by liberal principles – respecting individual autonomy and avoiding coercion as much as possible. Thus, it was the already-infected and the especially vulnerable who should be isolated, as opposed to locking healthy people in their homes. China, on the other hand, is an authoritarian regime that solves collective problems through rigorous control of its population and pervasive surveillance. Accordingly, when the COVID pandemic began in earnest, China locked down all activities in Wuhan and other affected areas. In the West, it was simply assumed that such a course of action was not an available option.

As UK epidemiologist Neil Ferguson said to the Times last December: “It’s a communist one-party state, we said. We couldn’t get away with [lockdowns] in Europe, we thought… and then Italy did it. And we realized we could.” He added that “These days, lockdown feels inevitable.”

Thus, what had seemed impossible due to the bedrock principles of Western society now feels not merely possible but inevitable. And this complete inversion happened over the course of a few months.

Acceptance of such a bargain would seem to depend entirely on the gravity of the threat. There is surely some point of hazard beyond which liberal principles become an unaffordable luxury. Covid is indeed a very serious illness, with an infection fatality rate about ten times higher than that of the flu: roughly one percent of all those who are infected die. Also, however, unlike the flu this mortality rate is so skewed by age and other risk factors, varying by more than a thousand-fold from the very young to the very old, that the aggregate figure of one percent can be misleading.”

“Public opinion matters in the West far more than in China. Only if people are sufficiently scared will they give up basic liberties for the sake of security – this is the basic formula of Hobbes’s Leviathan. Stoking fear has long been an essential element of the business model of mass media, and this appears to be on a trajectory of integration with state functions in the West, in a tightening symbiosis. While the Chinese government resorts to external coercion, in the West coercion must come from inside; from a mental state in the individual. The state is nominally in the hands of people elected to serve as representatives of the people, so it cannot be an object of fear. Something else must be the source of fear, so the state may play the role of saving us. But playing this role requires that state power be directed by experts.

Early in 2020, public opinion accepted the necessity of a short-term suspension of basic liberties on the supposition that, once the emergency had passed, we could go back to being not-China. But this is to assume a robustness of liberal political culture that may not be warranted. Lord Sumption, a jurist and retired member of the UK’s Supreme Court, makes a case for regarding lockdowns in the West as the crossing of a line that is not likely to get uncrossed. In an interview with Freddie Sayers at *[UnHerd](https://unherd.com/2021/03/lord-sumption-civil-disobedience-has-begun/)*, he points out that, by law, the government has broad powers to act under emergency. “There are many things governments can do, which it is generally accepted they should not do. And one of them, until last March, was to lock up healthy people in their homes.”

He makes the Burkean observation that our status as a free society rests, not on laws, but on convention, a “collective instinct” about what we ought to do, rooted in habits of thinking and feeling that develop slowly over decades and centuries. These are fragile. It is far easier to destroy a convention than to establish one. This suggests going back to being not-China may be quite difficult.

As Lord Sumption says, “When you depend for your basic freedoms on convention, rather than law, once the convention is broken, the spell is broken. Once you get to a position where it is unthinkable to lock people up, nationally, except when somebody thinks it’s a good idea, then frankly there is no longer any barrier at all. We have crossed that threshold. And governments do not forget these things. I think this is a model that will come to be accepted, if we are not very careful, as a way of dealing with all manner of collective problems.” In the US as in the UK, the government has immense powers. “The only thing that protects us from the despotic use of that power is a convention that we have decided to discard.”

Clearly, an admiration for Chinese-style governance has been blossoming in what we call centrist opinion, in large part as a response to the populist upsets of the Trump and Brexit era. It is also clear that “Science” (as opposed to actual science) is playing an important role in this. Like other forms of demagogy, scientism presents stylized facts and a curated picture of reality. In doing so, it may generate fears strong enough to render democratic principles moot.”

“We accept all manner of risks in the course of life, without thinking about it. To pick one out and make it an object of intense focus is to adopt a distorted outlook that has real costs, paid somewhere beyond the rim of one’s tunnel vision. To see our away out of this — to place risks in their proper context — requires an affirmation of life, refocusing on all those worthwhile activities that elevate existence beyond the merely vegetative.”

**In conclusion…**

“Perhaps the pandemic has merely accelerated, and given official warrant to, our long slide toward atomization. By the nakedness of our faces we encounter one another as individuals, and in doing so we experience fleeting moments of grace and trust. To hide our faces behind masks is to withdraw this invitation. This has to be politically significant.

Perhaps it is through such microscopic moments that we become aware of ourselves as a people, bound up in a shared fate. That’s what solidarity is. Solidarity, in turn, is the best bulwark against despotism, as Hannah Arendt noted in *On The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Withdrawal from such encounter now has the stamp of good citizenship, i.e., good hygiene. But what sort of regime are we to be citizens of?

“Following the science” to minimize certain risks while ignoring others absolves us of exercising our own judgment, anchored in some sense of what makes life worthwhile. It also relieves us of the existential challenge of throwing ourselves into an uncertain world with hope and confidence. A society incapable of affirming life and accepting death will be populated by the walking dead, adherents of a cult of the demi-life who clamor for ever more guidance from experts.

It has been said, a people get the government they deserve.”

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