

**WELCOME TO THE GREAT DISILLUSIONMENT** | *Jonathan Cook*  
**JUST LIKE LIVING UNDER THE BUBONIC PLAGUE** | *Ute Lotz-Heumann*  
**COME IN, NUMBER THREE** | *Philip A. Farruggio*

# ColdType

ISSUE 205

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

May 2020

## Bill Gates: Chipping the Hand of God

*Joe Allen doesn't believe Gates is the Antichrist, or even evil – just another Alpha Dork tracing chemical trails through our hi-tech antfarm, leading us where he wants us to go*  
*(See Page 12)*





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■ WRITING WORTH READING

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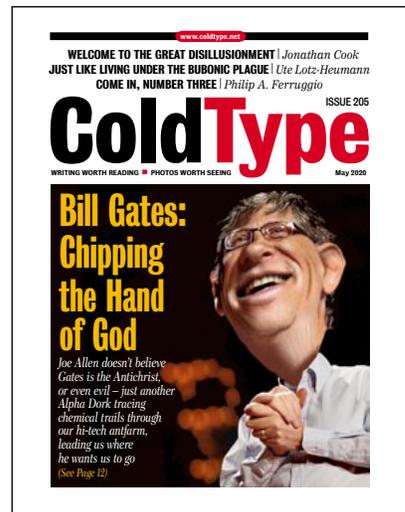
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■ ANDREW FISCHER

## *A brief history of toilet paper*

After six weeks of the Great Covid-19 Toilet Paper Shortage, I have finally been able to buy a four-roll package. To immortalise the event I offer this essay on the history of the product, starting at the very... well, starting somewhere near the present day.

I remember when I first saw the Charmin Bears on television. I had several questions. First: why in heck were they blue? I suppose some team of Madison Avenue geniuses ran a survey and found that blue bears had the highest positives in their test group of random TP buyers. Or maybe they were just trying to match the blue on the plastic wrapper.

I don't know about anyone else, but I prefer a more realistic colour of butt-wiping bear. Which leads artfully to the next question: why would anyone imagine that bears could even hawk TP successfully?

Did it hinge on that hoary/hairy reply to an obvious question: "Does a bear poop in the woods?" I guess the geniuses figured that everyone has heard that expression, therefore everyone must know that a bear does poop in the woods (unlike birds, foxes and weasels), ergo the



Art: Chris Doehling / 123rt.com

bear was a solid choice as a TP emissary. Add the tale of Goldilocks' trio and various cartoon bears, and I guess it was an easy decision....

Question number three: why are these mammals so in love with Charmin TP? Well, it's soft. Hmm, what exactly are they talking about? Most people I've polled don't use TP on their *faces*. Charmin's also more absorbent. No poll-ee would respond to that one.

Also, one Charmin commercial's voice-over artist states breathlessly that, "no one likes bath tissue that leaves pieces behind!" No comment. In any case, it's clear that the Bear Family members have an unhealthy fetish going on or have been

smoking the stuff instead of using it as intended.

Onward. According to Wikipedia, the first use of TP was during the 6th-century, when China's "official scholar" penned the following: "Paper on which there are quotations or commentaries from the Five Classics or the names of sages, I dare not use for toilet purposes". (Modern research indicates this paper was used for wrapping delicatessen cold cuts.) Later, during the Tang dynasty (618–907 AD), an Arab traveller to China noted: "[The Chinese] do not wash themselves with water when they have done their necessities; they only wipe themselves with paper". I guess

they didn't have stalls, either – how else would the visitor know? – but it does sound like proof positive of oriental TP ingenuity.

During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644 AD), it was recorded that a whopping 720,000 sheets of toilet paper approximately 2-by-3 feet were produced annually for the imperial court at the capital of Nanjing. From the records of the Imperial Bureau of Supplies of that same year, it was also recorded that the Hongwu Emperor's imperial family alone received 15,000 sheets of special soft-fabric toilet paper, and each sheet of toilet paper was scented! Sounds like the imperial family had that era's version of Charmin and, as always, the rulers never fail to have better stuff than the rest of us.

In other parts of the world, wealthy people used wool, lace or hemp, while the less fortunate were often content to poop-pollute rivers and then use a hand. (Usually their own.) Some favoured rags, wood shavings or stones (ouch!), or the Nature's Delight collection (with or without bugs) – leaves, grass, hay, moss, ferns, parsnips, etc. Also used were clay, sand, seashells, and corncobs. (Our ancestors doubtless ate the corn off the cobs first, which then passed through their systems, and then resulted in considerable demand for used corncobs – hey, it was the precursor to modern recycling!) Meanwhile, back in ancient Rome, a sponge-on-a-stick (loofah precursor) was common, and after use placed back into a pail of vinegar (transforming it into balsamic). Some sources mention pebbles

carried in a special bag, dry grass and the smooth edges of broken pottery jugs.

Back to the paper path. Expanded printing techniques in the 17th-century provided Everyman (I don't want to even think about Everywoman in this context) with an affordable means to do you-know-what. A body just had to finish reading a book's chapter or a magazine and he'd have a week's worth of TP. (More recycling!) They used old newspapers, too, but had to be careful, since the ink could plaster a "page one" story on your British bum.

In 1857, a clever guy named Joseph Gayetty created modern TP, humbly dubbing it "Gayetty's Medicated Paper". Some sources say the sheets contained soothing aloe, but it's not clear that they contained any actual medication. (Tuck's Medicated Pads, however, do contain medication – the scary sounding "witch hazel".) A man named Seth Wheeler was first to get US patents for TP and dispensers for it around 1883. In 1890 the Scott Paper Co. started selling it in the now familiar, slowly but surely shrinking rolls. It wasn't easy to get the public to buy the product, however, apparently because the plebes were embarrassed by bodily functions.

By the 1900s widespread indoor plumbing required something more flushable than Sears Roebuck catalogue pages. In 1928 a company successfully birthed the world's first Charmin "bathroom tissue", with packaging featuring the silhouette of a woman instead of a cartoonish bear. Perhaps a

bare woman would have been even more successful. Print ads soon had TP blurbs with endorsements from plumbers, as well as doctors.

Many refinements to TP were made over the course of the 20th-century. A seminal event was the day it became "splinter free" at some point in the 1930s or '40s. Before then, I suspect many people longed for the old Roman sponge-on-a-stick and vinegar bucket. Softer, two-ply rolls were introduced in Britain in 1942. This was the start of TP's Golden Era, and we now have base rolls, ultra rolls, recycled rolls, regular rolls, big rolls, giant rolls, mega rolls, dinner rolls, tootsie rolls, rolls royce, etc.

In 1973, Johnny Carson commented on the Tonight Show about comments made by a congressman who warned of the possibility of a TP shortage. Naturally consumers rushed out and bought excessive quantities of it, causing an actual shortage in the US for several months. In 1978 a poll found that Mr. "Please Don't Squeeze the Charmin" Whipple was the third most well-known man in the United States (far ahead of even Ronald McDonald).

Wet wipes were first introduced in the 1990s in the United Kingdom. They were advertised as flushable, but unfortunately doing so just made plumbers flush with cash. (Of course the flushable claim was considered mere puffery, not a consumer fraud – just like the "serving suggestions" on packaged foods.)

At least seven-billion rolls of toilet paper are now sold annually in the United States – about

two rolls per person every month. (Vegans use more.) There have been shortages in Venezuela for at least a decade. Concerned, its government “appropriated” a toilet paper factory in a misguided attempt to issue more rolls to the masses. As usual, central TP planning didn’t work well.

Today, as we all know, shortages of TP exist around the globe due to the current coronavirus crisis, due to panic buying and

hoarding. Maybe it’s time to break out the good ol’ corn cob.

– Sources: [wikipedia.com](http://wikipedia.com), [mentalfloss.com](http://mentalfloss.com). **CT**

**Andrew Fischer** is an accountant and author of two books.

*Purgastories, a collection of short stories, is available at amazon.com.*

*He enjoys his fiancée and designing board games; the latter can be downloaded at no charge from [boardgamegeek.com](http://boardgamegeek.com).*

risks. Now we thank workers in hospitals and nursing homes, those who prepare food, deliver mail and drive trucks “for their service”. Groceries are offering hazardous duty pay.

Not for long.

After it’s deemed safe, furloughed bank analysts and efficiency experts will return to their climate-controlled corporate suites to resume their job: maximising the short-term returns of equity investors. They will pour over Excel spreadsheets displaying payroll records, draw the capitalist conclusion and issue their usual recommendations that salaries be reduced, hours lengthened and benefits curtailed in service of company bottom lines. With the hazard of coronavirus gone, the extra \$2 an hour will vanish as well. Those who care for the infirm and make our dinners will return to their previous state of diminished socioeconomic status, a role reinforced by orders to wear ugly frocks adorned by ID badges. No longer heroes, zeroes once more to be ground up by the gears of the machine – certainly no thank-you or scheduled shouts of gratitude from open windows.

Desperate to avoid a Soviet-style economic collapse, politicians of both parties graced the unemployed with an extra \$600 a week for a national average total weekly jobless benefit of \$947. That’s roughly the same as the national median income.

Here too, we will return to normal.

Once the ruling elites have

## ■ TED RALL

# Don’t worry. Everything will get back to normal!

When will things get back to normal? Everyone is asking. The economic lockdown prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a mass unemployment shock, forced countless businesses into bankruptcy and is driving many Americans crazy.

But this shall pass. The good old days will be back.

The coronavirus worried city officials. Tens of thousands of New Yorkers were sleeping “head-to-toe in dormitory-style shelters” for homeless people that were “vectors for wide-spread Covid-19 infection”. So New York’s mayor invited some of the homeless to move out of shelters and off the streets into some of the city’s 100,000 vacant hotel rooms at city expense. New

Orleans, Los Angeles and San Francisco have followed suit.

Do not worry! Tourism will resume, hotels will full up and those rooms will be needed for capitalism’s winner class. The homeless will resume their rightful place on the streets and/or crowded into squalid shelters. With an average life expectancy of 50, they will die bereft and alone, their bodies unclaimed before being dumped into mass graves. No more fear that their vulnerability to virus imperils us, no more there-but-for-the-grace-of-God sympathy, no recognition of coexistence. It will be as it was in February 2020.

Covid-19 replaced the post-9/11 pantheon of heroic workers – cops, firefighters and soldiers – with employees who earn far less while taking much bigger

determined that the danger of collapse and with it the loss of their real estate and securities assets has passed, they will order their pet Congressmen to allow expanded unemployment benefits to lapse. Those who are out of work will again try to make do with \$347 a week, taxable. When they fail, which is inevitable, the jobless will be slammed with months of back rent and mortgages, plus interest and late fees, plus all the other bills that had been deferred yet unforgiven by landlords, telecoms and other owner-class types during the Covid-19 lockdown. Homelessness and poverty will skyrocket.

Like before.

Fear not. Factories will go back to cranking out Yobama ac-

tion figures, mint-flavoured condoms and Mercedes SUVs that retail for \$220,000 while getting 12 miles a gallon. Choked highways will slow to a crawl. Skylines will plunge back under a sea of haze.

Coyotes and mountain lions will scamper back into the mountains. The birds will fly away again.

No one will check on grandma or grandpa. There won't be any need. **CT**

*Ted Rall is the political cartoonist at ANewDomain.net, editor-in-chief of SkewedNews.net, a graphic novelist and author of many books, and an occasional war correspondent. He is the author of the biography "Trump," to be published in July.16.*

the world of ideas that no one will ever pay a price for their dreadfully wrong policy pronouncements as long as those pronouncements are consonant with the goal of enhancing the reach of the power elites.

When their supposed wisdom proves to be folly, the strongest correctives we ever get are endless variations of Ron Ziegler's famously disembodied and agentless, "Mistakes were made".

We are now undergoing what is arguably the largest social engineering project in the history of the contemporary world .

For?

A disease whose lethality in the US is still 10,000 people short of the flu season of two years ago, and whose overall death toll amounts to 200,000 people – the overwhelming number of whom were in their seventh, eighth and ninth decades of existence and thus had already lived quite full lives – out of a world population of nearly eight-billion.

If someone had asked you before this current wave of infection began if you'd have been willing to trade pay cuts, pension cuts, the massive destruction of jobs (many of which will never come back), the destruction of long-held and spiritually vital social customs, not to mention a massive additional mortgaging of our children's financial future and a huge increase in daily spying on citizens to "defeat" a bug that has, for all the graphic and largely de-contextualised vignettes about its horror, is actually relatively mild plague, what would your response have been?

Does this seem like a deal that

■ THOMAS S. HARRINGTON

## *It's time we challenged the impunity of the experts*

Remember those experts who told us repeatedly about the WMDs in Iraq? Remember the experts in 2008 who told us that Russia had attacked Georgia when it was, in fact, just the opposite? Remember as recently as a few weeks ago when Anthony Fauci was alarming us all with talk about several hundred thousand corona deaths? Or how that Ferguson guy at the Imperial College in London scared Boris Johnson into adopting a stricter lockdown

by talking about a half a million British deaths?

Oliver Wendell Holmes once famously said that no one has the right to gratuitously "Shout fire in a crowded theatre". And yet in the last few years it has become completely acceptable to do much worse, and in much more socially consequential ways, and not only not have to face any responsibility, but possibly gain a permanent spot on the lecture circuit.

For some time now there has been a tacit agreement in

anyone sane person, especially adult person who is, in my view, duty-bound to place a higher value on the life possibilities of the young over those who have already lived a full life, could ever mindfully embrace?

And the above-sketched calculus does not even include all the additional deaths that will undoubtedly be generated by our experts' economy-destroying "solutions" to the problem of the virus, deaths that of course won't be breathlessly counted or even catalogued in the press, but that that, in all likelihood will quickly and silently outstrip the additional deaths generated by the virus.

If someone had laid out that deal for you, I suspect that would have responded with a very firm, "No Thanks!"

But that's what we've signed on to.

And it wouldn't have been possible to "sell the deal", just as it wouldn't have been possible to sell the series of wars that have ruined the Middle East and killed millions, without those wonderful exaggerated predictions of the "experts".

Any bets as to whether these experts who have just driven us off another cliff, and whose profigate verbiage makes starting panics in theatres look like child's play, ever be held accountable? I doubt it.

No, to be an "expert" in the service of power today is to never be held accountable for the disasters your words provoke and enable.

There will no doubt be those

who, reading what I have said, will accuse me of flippantly condemning the elderly to death. I will simply remind them of what I have said and written from the beginning of this crisis: that in light of the statistics from places like Italy and Spain where it has hit hardest, the prime focus of all prevention efforts should have been precisely on protecting and serving the people that this disease overwhelmingly targets, the elderly. And that, moreover, that the best way to do so is to allow those whom this disease does not mortally threaten in significant numbers, which is to say almost



Photo: Cottonbro/Pexels.com

everyone under 50 (please spare me the anecdotes and look at the overall statistics), to keep the society running at a more or less normal speed.

Do you really think that a nursing home existing in a skeletally staffed society can do a better job of caring for its inhabitants than one operating in a society at more or less full speed? I don't.

A second objection will no doubt come in the form of "Who are you, oh arrogant

one, to speak blithely about who shall die and who shall live?" The underling premise of this "critique", if you can call it that, is that no one has the right to make decisions that might provoke or hasten the death of others.

Well, I've got news for you. Our governments, mostly with our assent, are constantly, and quite baldly and consciously, making choices that result in the hastening death for others. Every time it is decided to spend money on war rather than say, clean drinking water, health care, housing and education for our fellow citizens, or when they calculate how many young GIs or innocents citizens from country X.Y, or Z must be sacrificed fulfill strategic goals of the country's elites, this is being done. So, why is it now beyond the pale to mention such trade-offs?

Could it be that we fear that such an open discussion of trade-offs in the present matter might lead to our having to mindfully engage with the hidden life and death choices that we as a collective make all the time?

The third objection will be that I am placing a higher value on the lives of the young than the old. Well, on this one I am absolutely guilty. You will seldom meet anyone who venerates the wisdom of the elderly more than I have and do. And one of the most powerful teachings that I have received in talking and being with the mindful elderly – as opposed to those many aged who, in the sway of consumerism's cult of youth, seek to deny the passing of time

and the wisdom it brings – is the importance of letting go of one’s self-importance, of realising that in a necessarily finite life, there comes a time when the fight for personal survival and gain must give way to the practice of nurturing those who are still in the most difficult and defining years of the existential struggle.

I will go even further, and I say this as someone much closer to old age than to youth. I think it says something quite serious and negative about the general health of a society when the interests of the old regularly trump the interests of the young in our political processes.

We used to talk smugly about the pitiful Soviet gerentocracy in the ’70s and ’80s and how it could no longer minimally respond to the demands and desires of the people it ruled.

Well, look at us now as the best we can manage for the upcoming presidential elections are two doddering septuagenarians, bought by the cash of other doddering septuagenarians, pursuing policies, under the cover of a modestly-sized health care crisis, whose only sure outcome will be the further enserfment of our children. **CT**

*Thomas S. Harrington is an essayist and Professor of Hispanic Studies at Trinity College in Hartford (USA) who specialises in Iberian movements of national identity Contemporary Catalan culture. In addition to his academic work in Hispanic Studies, he is a frequent commentator on politics and culture in the US press and a number of Spanish and Catalan-language media outlets.*

the past can be found.

The Volksbund tends the graves of 2.7 million dead in 46 countries. “Every single biography is a warning,” the organisation said in a statement

Christian Reith, a student working on the project told the *Times*, “Time is running out. The last witnesses and even their next of kin soon won’t be able to tell about it anymore. So it is important to record these individual perspectives of the war and its consequences for posterity.”

On May 8, the 75th anniversary of VE Day, the Allied nations that fought Germany and Italy will be celebrating and event they believe ended Nazism and Fascism forever. However, 2020 is seeing the return of those creeds in different parts of the world, especially in countries that were under the control of the Soviet Union between 1945 and the late 1980s and early 1990s.

As the generation that elected Adolf Hitler to power in January 1933 dies away, Germans have seen their own recent history through the prism of guilt, responsibility and atonement.

In May 1985 West German President Richard von Weizsaecker called the defeat of Hitler Germany’s “day of liberation.” Another key moment came in 2004 when then Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder marked the 60th anniversary of the attempt to kill Hitler by describing Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg a “hero.”

Not all Germans see the Nazi era (1933-1945) that way. Alexander Gauland leader of the fast

■ TREVOR GRUNDY

## Hitler’s ghost blocks German search for truth

Seventy five years after the end of the World War II, Germans are being asked to overcome their reluctance to dwell on their nation’s role in two world wars.

The Volksbund, German’s war graves commission, is asking families to send in personal accounts from the war fronts so historians can write about the feelings, emotions, the sufferings and the anguish of men and wom-

en whose after-war treatment has long since been ignored.

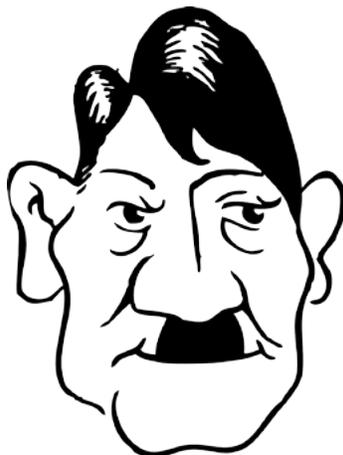
In a *Times* report from Berlin on April 25, David Crossland said the war biographies project is aimed at stoking the interest of younger generations and deepening the Volksbund’s co-operation with schools. The organisation’s archivists believe the time is now right for Germans to clear out old desks, drawers, cupboards and attics to see what treasures from

rising far-right Alternative for Germany not so long ago played down the Hitler period in German history as “a speck of bird poop”, while another AfD leader Bjoern Hoecke suggested that now is the time to stop atoning for the country’s Nazi past.

But most young Germans have a hunger to know about their past – knowledge open to anyone in Britain, USA and other parts of the world, but long denied them because of a fear that if they read *Mein Kampf* or books about the period written by those who built first the Nazi economic miracles in the mid-1930s and then the Nazi war machine, they would be captivated and rush to the nearest shop to buy a brown shirt and an armband.

Laetitia Zinecker, a 28 year old business student at Berlin’s Free University, told a Canadian journalist researching neo-Nazi infiltration into German educational institutions, “Our history shapes who we are still today. It’s important that schools continue to teach about the past so that it will not be forgotten.”

In his book *On the Natural History of Destruction*, published by Carl Hanser Verlag in Germany in 1999 and by Hamish Hamilton in UK, the great German writer Winfried Georg Sebald said the world knows next to nothing about the way Germans survived the Allied bombing raids on German cities towards the end of the war, when more than a million tonnes of bombs were dropped by the Allies on 131 German towns and cities. Six hundred thousand civilians died and 3,5- million



Art: Pixabay.com

German homes were destroyed.

Throughout the war, 60,000 British civilians were killed in German bombing raids.

“Yet”, writes Sebald, “German writers have been strangely silent about this mass destruction.”

Why?

In the foreword to his book, he says, “The inadequate and inhibited nature of the letters and other writings sent to me showed, in itself, that the sense of unparalleled national humiliation felt by millions in the last years of the war had never really found verbal expression, and those directly affected by the experience shared it with each other nor passed it on to the next generation.”

The writer born in Germany in 1944, but who died after a car accident in Norfolk in 2011, said in his first major non-fiction work, “The plan for an all-out bombing campaign, which had been supported by groups within the Royal Air Forces since 1940, came into effect in February 1942, with the deployment of huge quantities of personnel and war materials. As far as I know, the question of whether and

how it could be strategically or morally justified was never the subject of open debate in Germany after 1945, no doubt mainly because a nation which murdered and worked to death millions of people in its camps could hardly call on the victorious powers to explain the military and political logic that dictated the destruction of the German cities.”

Now, 75 years after the war’s end, it seems possible to warm up and then open the taps and let long frozen water come out of them. We need to know about the lives of ordinary Germans, about the lives, the feelings, the thoughts or ordinary men women and children for the most part were totally innocent of the crimes committed by Hitler and his advisers.

We must know what they experienced and what they felt as their towns and cities were being flattened. The memories of those who were there are as important, if not a great deal more so, than the opinions of historians often with axes to grind and publishers (often with political agendas) to please.

As one of the more aware characters in Louis de Bernieres novel *Captain Correlli’s Mandolin* remarked: “The ultimate truth is that history ought to consist only of the anecdotes of the little people who were caught up in it.” **CT**

*Trevor Grundy is an English journalist and author of Memoir of a Fascist Childhood published by William Heinemann, London in 1998*

■ JOE ALLEN

# Bill Gates: Chipping the Hand of God

*I don't believe he's the Antichrist, or even evil. He's just another Alpha Dork tracing chemical trails through our hi-tech antfarm, leading us where he wants us to go*



**W**HY are superstitious Americans so creeped out by surveillance? The new drones hovering overhead, donated by those generous Chinese innovators at DJI Enterprise, are obviously there for our own good. Cameras in urban areas are just another

tool to root out elusive crimes, such as armed robbery or social distancing violations. Big government and even bigger businesses need watchful eyes to achieve full optimisation. Those tracking cookies on your web browser only help corporations provide a better experience. How can Alexa make you

happy if she doesn't know you?

During the present pandemic, the location data on your phone is critical for contact tracing. Eventually, a vaccine for Covid-19 will save everyone, but it will require precision. The only way medical authorities can be certain you've had all your shots is to attach

records to your body. This is easily accomplished with nanotech tattoos. According to a December 2019 article published in the notorious conspiracy rag *Smithsonian Magazine*, this innovative solution is being developed with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Or perhaps you could get a good old-fashioned chip in your palm. RFID implants are becoming quite fashionable in places like Sweden, where tech companies such as Biohax International have already chipped thousands. For purely rational people, bio-tracking and mass surveillance are matters of public health and administrative efficiency. If you aren't doing anything wrong, there's nothing to worry about. So what are you afraid of?

**F**ear of the Beast is a longstanding religious quirk with a more recent secular strain. Edward Snowden warned us about the digital Panopticon back in 2013. Heidi Boghosian's meticulously researched *Spying on Democracy* appeared that same year, informing anyone who cared to listen that we're being tagged, tracked, and herded towards an unknown fate. A decade earlier, Derrick Jensen's *Welcome to the Machine* sent an army of eco-warriors running for the hills – where you can still find them on Facebook. The alarm had already been sounded in 1995, with Unabomber Ted Kaczinski's explosive *Industrial Society and Its Future*. Our fear of an inescapable Earthly Power is so primal, you can trace it back to the hallucinations of ancient Hebrews.

True to form, suspicious Chris-



Art: 123RF.com

*It's no surprise that zealots are once again calling Bill Gates the Antichrist. At the very least, they believe he's doing the Devil's IT work*

tians see signs of the Antichrist in all of this. Alongside the Eye in the Pyramid, '90s memes of a horned Bill Gates are being resurrected. On a metaphorical level, these inchoate suspicions are correct. While the modern worldview progresses toward a scientific universe – open to infinite technological possibilities – the Christian cosmos remains structured by an age-old myth.

Paradoxically, I suspect this religious constraint, however fictive, might keep Christian communities free from technocratic control. From their starting point in sacred scripture, paranoid Christians have converged with organic purists, anarchist Luddites, and the secular proponents of civil liberty. The same is true of retrograde Hindus and fanatic Muslims who refuse to

bow to the biometric Leviathan. If you value diversity, the stubborn resistance of the religious fringe should be an inspiration – even if it's based on myth.

For two millennia, Christendom has projected the Apocalypse onto its future. This mythic narrative, deriving from the psychedelic saga that concludes the Bible, depicts an unholy entity who takes command of all the world's nations, amazes the people with healing miracles, and rains fire from the heavens like mushroom clouds. This demigod creates a world system where any citizen who wants to buy, sell, or trade must be tagged like cattle with the number of the Beast.

This horror story looms over today's renegade churches, just as it did the ancient congregations. The omens were just as obvious during the fall of the Roman Empire as they were during the bubonic plague outbreak of 1666. It's like a bad trip that never ends because it's always just beginning. Today, the perennial End Times are unfolding on your smartphone. Don't forget to charge your battery.

**T**echnocracy is a nightmare for traditionalists, so it's no surprise that zealots are once again calling Bill Gates the Antichrist. At the very least, they believe he's doing the Devil's IT work. The awkward software mogul stands accused of locking us up so he can vax our brains out. If you're good, he'll let you back outside with a microchip in your palm. Don't struggle, though, or he may have to stick it where the sun don't shine.

To be fair, Gates probably brought this caricature on him-

self. His coronavirus manifesto, in which he trademarks the present crisis as “Pandemic 1”, takes an authoritative tone that would be merely irritating if the man wasn’t so influential. In it, he declares that traditional gathering places – such as churches – should be shuttered until a vaccine can be delivered. The lost soul, if such a thing exists, shall find no quarter.

From the moment Covid-19 triggered the lamest cosmic freakout in history, Gates has appeared on every major news network issuing royal decrees. On April 2, he weighed the value of congregation on *CBS This Morning*, “Which activities, like schools, have such benefit and can be done in a way that the risk of transmission is very low? And which activities, like mass gatherings, may be ... more optional? [U]ntil you’re widely vaccinated, those may not come back at all.”

Mass gatherings? As in temples, synagogues, and mosques? No one will miss those. No one who counts, anyway. Three days later, he told *Fox News* viewers, “It’s fair to say that things won’t go back to truly normal until we have a vaccine that we’ve gotten out to basically the entire world.”

The Gates Foundation is pumping out money left and right to produce this miracle vaccine. Being the single largest donor to the World Health Organization, ol’ moneybags also exerts an enormous influence on government policy from North America to Asia, so you might as well “shelter in place” until your shot arrives.

As freedom-loving Americans sit and stew behind closed doors, we’re approaching peak paranoia. You can see this in a recent



Art: 123RF.com

*If history is any guide,  
tech companies  
will sell us our  
salvation, with  
government support,  
whether we like it  
or not*

WhiteHouse.gov petition, issued on April 10, calling for an investigation into the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. According to the authors, Gates is exploiting the present pandemic to institute forced vaccinations, bio-tracking, and ultimately, radical population reduction. The petition currently has 470,000 signatures. That’s almost five times the government’s requirement for a response.

This hysterical reaction to media-induced mass hysteria is largely driven by environmental attorney and anti-vax nature boy Robert Kennedy, Jr. (Yes, he’s the son of liberal martyr, Bobby Kennedy.) Big Vax enthusiasts have smeared Junior with buzzwords like “discredited”, “disproven”, and “pseudo-scientific”, but these days, I’m

as skeptical of the issuer of such terms as I am the target.

Kennedy’s views include the notion that modern industry is destroying the Earth’s ecosystem. He also believes Oswald didn’t act alone, and that vaccines aren’t as safe as Big Pharma claims. In early April, he wrote, “Gates’ obsession with vaccines seems fueled by a messianic conviction that he is ordained to save the world with technology and a god-like willingness to experiment with the lives of lesser humans.”

While Kennedy exaggerates the tragic news of vaccine-strain polio outbreaks in India’s slums, the disaster was covered by such outlets as NPR and *The Guardian*, albeit with less alarming numbers. However, neither of them mentioned the Gates Foundation’s involvement.

Suspicion of mass vaxxing cuts across religious cultures. Medical workers have been attacked by Boko Haram in Nigeria, and pushed out by the Taliban in Afghanistan. As highlighted in the new Netflix documentary *Inside Bill’s Brain*, there’s a prevalent suspicion among certain radical Muslims that the vaccines are a covert sterilisation campaign. Clearly, these people hold insane beliefs but, as I watch my Western kinsmen lazily chew their factory farmed cud, I honestly wonder who’s crazier.

Whatever Bill Gates’s intentions may be, the two-time “richest man in the world” is certainly a control freak. He insists that all of our problems can be solved by technology – especially *his* technology. If history is any guide, that means tech companies will sell us our salvation, with government support, whether we like it or not.

From what authority does Bill derive his imperial power? According to his boosters, it's his biologically superior brain. His cognitive capacity and memory recall are legendary. Because he can hold vast amounts of information in his pulsing dendritic branches, and because that information is more isomorphic with reality than anyone else's, we should do what he says. Period.

Pick any technocratic project, however implausible, and there you'll find Million Dollar Bill, doling out cash and flexing his brain: artificial intelligence, industrial automation, nanotechnology, gene-editing, geo-engineering, shit-fired toilets in Africa, polio vaccines in India, foolproof nuclear plants in China, and an all-powerful one-world computerised antfarm where all mouths are fed, all choices are tracked, and any dissent is unthinkable. That's our boy.

The demonisation of Bill Gates may come off as tacky, but it represents a metaphysical tension at the heart of modern society. The devout hold faith that, in the end, powers beyond this world will save us. But tech innovators will never be content to wait on miracles. They're actively creating higher powers here and now. AI bots may not be angels, but if you've got a "smart city" to run, they get the job done.

To be clear, I don't believe Bill



Art: 123RF.com

*Brainy Bill wants to save humanity according to his scientific vision. I want to be left alone to make my own decisions*

Gates is the Antichrist, or even evil. He's just another Alpha Dork tracing chemical trails through our hi-tech antfarm, leading us where he wants us to go. The problem for me isn't "good vs. evil". It's simply a conflict of interests. Brainy Bill wants to save humanity according to his scientific vision. I want to be left alone to make my own decisions – even if they're dangerous. Let me fight germs on my own terms, bro.

Bill Gates is a single node on a vast network of super-rich Alpha Dorks, along with Jeff Bezos, Ray

Kurzweil, Mark Zuckerberg, and whoever makes those frustratingly realistic sexbots. Their ambitions would be tolerable if we could just escape the downstream effects of their global system.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, Amazon, Google, and Facebook have seen their prospects soar while their pitiful competitors are demolished. Microsoft is currently the world's top corporation, weighing in at a whopping \$1.3-trillion. Pro-wrestling matches have more uncertain outcomes than the "free market" in a global lockdown.

As a Sequoia Capital tech investor recently told *The Hour*, "Like the killing off of the dinosaurs, this re-orders who gets to survive in the new era. It is the shock that accelerates the future that Silicon Valley has been building."

These cyborgs are working towards a planet-wide roboticised biodome that looms over us like a gigantic silicone boob squirting GMO soy milk down our helpless gullets. Some call it "altruistic universalism". I call it tedious. If humanity can't opt out of your dystopic dream – however rosy it may look through your Microsoft HoloLens – you might as well be the Antichrist. **CT**

*Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. Most days, he's based out of tour buses and far-flung hotels.*

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# Permanent lockdown

*People have been shut out of most of the UK's open land for centuries. It's time this changed*

**I**n the name of freedom, the UK has been exposed, to a greater extent than any other European nation, to a deadly pandemic. In his speech in Greenwich on February 3, Boris Johnson lambasted governments that had “panicked” about the coronavirus, inflicting “unnecessary economic damage”. His government, by contrast, would champion our right to “buy and sell freely among each other”.

But as always, the professed love of freedom among those who represent the interests of the rich in politics is highly selective. If the government valued freedom as much as it says it does, it would do everything in its power to maximise the liberties we can safely exercise, while protecting us from harm.

In other words, it would take up the call to open London's golf courses to public access. As the author and land campaigner Guy Shrubsole has discovered, there are 131 golf courses in Greater London, covering 11,000 acres. But they are open only to members, while millions of people swelter in tiny flats or edge round each other

in minuscule parks, desperate for a sense of space and freedom. It would take up the call for private schools to open their playing fields and extensive grounds. It would open London's locked green squares, and designate other tracts of private land in and around our cities for public access.

But a core purpose of Conservatism is to defend private property from public use, and to extend private ownership and exclusive rights into realms previously enjoyed by all. And no form of wealth is more fiercely contested than land.

**T**hroughout the history of these isles, exclusion from the land has been a major source of social conflict. It remains so today. In March, Boris Johnson extolled the “ancient, inalienable right of free-born people of the United Kingdom”. But before the pandemic began, his government proposed to criminalise trespass in England and Wales. This is the opposite policy to Scotland's, where there is now a comprehensive right to roam.

Last November, Boris Johnson announced an expansion of police powers to stop and search people without grounds for suspicion. These powers have long been perceived by people of colour as a form of collective harassment in public places, impinging on their free movement. Black, Asian and ethnic minority people are on average eight times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than white people.

Some young black men have the sense of living in a permanent state of partial lockdown. The government's own assessment shows that an expansion of stop and search powers has “at best, only minimal effects on violent crime”. In fact, as a primary cause of both the 1981 and 2011 riots, the policy is likely to exacerbate it.

Until 1984, police stop and search powers were exercised under the remarkably brutal 1824 Vagrancy Act. Beggars, hawkers, sex workers, gypsies and travellers, rough sleepers and anyone “not giving a good account of himself or herself” could be arrested and summarily sentenced to three months' hard labour. Astonish-

ingly, large sections of this barbaric law remain in force, and it is still sometimes used by the police against homeless people.

Police powers to move people on are necessary during this pandemic. But well into the first half of the 20th-century, they were used as a form of social control, securing public space for “the right sort”, while excluding “undesirables”. They were a source of great resentment in Victorian England, and commemorated in several satirical ballads, various of which had the title *Move on There*. One song complains that “swells” (rich and extravagant young men) could

get away with anything, while those without the means to bribe the police were “collared”.

Today, much of what looks like public space in our cities is in fact privately owned. Many of these pseudo-public spaces are patrolled by security guards, enforcing opaque rules. As a homeless man interviewed by the *Guardian* observed, most people wouldn’t notice the difference between a publicly and privately owned open space. But “to me, the difference is everything, because I’m not the sort of person they want over there.” Typically, in these places, homeless people are moved on, no music or photography is allowed, and political gatherings are banned. In some of them, the only acceptable activity appears to be spending money.

There’s an interesting parallel with urban parks in the 19th-century, many of which were



No Photo sign: Spitalfield Market, London

also then privately owned. As the historian Katrina Navickas documents, the owners typically banned music and political meetings. The Salvation Army, then an extreme temperance movement, waged its wars against people enjoying themselves in any public places, sparking confrontations that sometimes turned violent.

Last year, the *Guardian* revealed that some London estates were excluding children in social housing from playgrounds used by richer residents. The developers of one estate had been granted planning permission on the grounds that its playground would be available to all, after which they replaced a gate with an impenetrable hedge, to shut out the poorest residents.

We might look for freedom in the countryside, but for centuries it has been the scene of extreme ex-

clusion and injustice. Here, enclosure (the seizure of land from commoners) violently deprived many people of their liberties. The labouring poor were forbidden to live in “close parishes”, where their homes were ripped down by the lords of the manor, to avoid liability for poverty relief. As a result, until, in some places, the late 19th-century, people were crowded into filthy, dilapidated cottages sometimes an hour’s walk from the fields in which they worked, for which they were charged astounding rents.

Today, we have no right of access to 92percent of England. The great majority of the access land is in the north-west of the country, a long way from where most people live. While in London, four times as many BAME people are stopped and searched today as white people, in Suffolk, they are 17 times more likely to be stopped, and in Dorset, 25 times. Is it any wonder that, despite government efforts at persuasion, so few people of colour visit the countryside?

For the moment, our freedoms have to be restricted. But when the lockdown ends, let’s celebrate by demanding a right to roam on open land in both cities and the countryside. Let’s have a legal definition of public space, in which peaceful use and assembly is established as a universal right. The freedom to roam is as fundamental a right as freedom of speech. When the pandemic is over, let’s make the UK the free nation Boris Johnson boasts about. **CT**

*George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)*

# What did US intel really know about ‘Chinese’ virus?

*The CDC had an advance warning of no less than four months – from November to March – to be properly prepared for Covid-19 hitting the US*

**H**YBRID War 2.0 on China, a bipartisan US operation, is already reaching fever pitch. Its 24/7 full spectrum infowar arm blames China for everything coronavirus-related – doubling as a diversionist tactic against any informed criticism of woeful American unpreparedness.

Hysteria predictably reigns. And this is just the beginning.

A deluge of lawsuits is imminent – such as the one in the Southern District of Florida entered by Berman Law Group (linked to the Democrats) and Lucas-Compton (linked to the Republicans). In a nutshell: China has to shell out tons of cash. To the tune of at least \$1.2-trillion, which happens to be – by surrealist irony – the amount of US Treasury bills held by Beijing, all the way to \$20-trillion, claimed by a lawsuit in Texas.

The prosecution’s case, as Scott Ritter memorably reminded us, is straight out of Monty Python. It works exactly like this:

*“If she weighs the same as a duck...*

*...she’s made of wood!”*

*“And therefore...”*

*“A witch!!!!”*

In Hybrid War 2.0 terms, the current CIA-style narrative translates as evil China never telling us, the civilised West, there was a terrible new virus around. If they did, we would have had time to prepare.

And yet they lied and cheated – by the way, trademark CIA traits, according to Mike “We Lie, We Cheat, We Steal” Pompeo himself. And they hid everything. And they censored the truth. So they wanted to infect us all. Now they have to pay for all the economic and financial damage we are suffering, and for all our dead people. It’s China’s fault!

**A**ll this sound and fury forces us to refocus back to late 2019 to check out what US intel really knew then about what would later be identified as Sars-Cov-2.

The gold standard remains an ABC News report, according to which intel collected in November 2019 by the National Center for Medical Intelligence (NCMI), a subsidiary of the Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA),

was already warning about a new virulent contagion getting out of hand in Wuhan, based on “detailed analysis of intercepted communications and satellite imagery.”

An unnamed source told ABC, “analysts concluded it could be a cataclysmic event”, adding the intel was “briefed multiple times” to the DIA, the Pentagon’s Joint Chiefs of Staff, and even the White House.

No wonder the Pentagon was forced to issue the proverbial denial – in Pentagonese, via one Col R. Shane Day, the director of the DIA’s NCMI: “In the interest of transparency during this current public health crisis, we can confirm that media reporting about the existence/release of a National Center for Medical Intelligence Coronavirus-related product/assessment in November of 2019 is not correct. No such NCMI product exists.”

Well, if such “product” existed, Pentagon head and former Raytheon lobbyist Mark Esper would be very much in the loop. He was duly questioned about it by ABC’s George Stephanopoulos.

**Question:** “Did the Pentagon



receive an intelligence assessment on Covid in China last November from the National Center for Medical Intelligence of DIA?”

**Esper:** “Oh, I can’t recall, George,” (...) “But, we have many people who watch this closely.”

**Question:** “This assessment was done in November, and it was briefed to the NSC in early December to assess the impact on military readiness, which, of course, would make it important to you, and the possible spread in the United States. So, you would have known if there was a brief to the National Security Council in December, wouldn’t you?”

**Esper:** “Yes (...) I’m not aware of that.”

So “no such product exists” then? Is it a fake? Is it a Deep State/CIA concoction to trap Trump? Or are the usual suspects lying, trademark CIA style?

Let’s review some essential background. On November 12, a mar-

ried couple from Inner Mongolia was admitted to a Beijing hospital, seeking treatment for pneumonic plague.

The Chinese CDC, on Weibo – the Chinese Twitter – told public opinion that the chances of this being a new plague were “extremely low”. The couple was quarantined.

Four days later, a third case of pneumonic plague was identified: a man also from Inner Mongolia, not related to the couple. Twenty-eight people who were in close contact with the man were quarantined. None had plague symptoms. Pneumonic plague has symptoms of respiratory failure similar to pneumonia.

Even though the CDC repeated, “there is no need to worry about the risk of infection”, of course there was plenty of skepticism. The CDC may have publicly confirmed on November 12 these cases of pneumonic plague. But then Li Jifeng, a doctor at Chaoyang Hospital, where the trio from Inner Mongolia was receiving treatment, pub-

lished, privately, on WeChat, that they were first transported to Beijing on November 3.

The key point of Li Jifeng’s post – later removed by censors – was when she wrote, “I am very familiar with diagnosing and treating the majority of respiratory diseases (...) But this time, I kept on looking but could not figure out what pathogen caused the pneumonia. I only thought it was a rare condition and did not get much information other than the patients’ history.”

Even if that was the case, it seems that the three Inner Mongolian cases were caused by a detectable bacteria. Covid-19 is caused by the Sars-Cov-2 virus, not a bacteria. The first Sars-Covid-2 case was only detected in Wuhan in mid to late December. And it was only in March that Chinese scientists were able to positively trace back the first real case of Sars-Cov-2 to November 17 – a few days after the

Inner Mongolian trio.

It's out of the question that US intel, in this case the NCMI, was unaware of these developments in China, considering CIA spying and the fact these discussions were in the open on Weibo and WeChat. So if the NCMI "product" is not a fake and really exists, it only found evidence, still in November, of some vague instances of pneumonic plague.

Thus the warning – to the DIA, the Pentagon, the National Security Council, and even the White House – was about that. It could not possibly have been about coronavirus.

The burning question is inevitable: how could the NCMI possibly know all about a viral pandemic, still in November, when Chinese doctors positively identified the first cases of a new type of pneumonia only on December 26?

Add to it the intriguing question of why the NCMI was so interested in this particular flu season in China in the first place – from plague cases treated in Beijing to the first signs of a "mysterious pneumonia outbreak" in Wuhan.

There may have been subtle hints of slightly increased activity at clinics in Wuhan in late November and early December. But at the time nobody – Chinese doctors, the government, not to mention US intel – could have possibly known what was really happening.

China could not be "covering up" what was only identified as a new disease on December 30, duly communicated to the WHO. Then, on January 3, the head of the American CDC, Robert Redfield, called the top Chinese CDC official. Chinese doctors sequenced the virus. And only on

## *How could US intel have known about a contagion a month before Chinese doctors detected an unknown virus?*

January 8 it was determined this was Sars-Cov-2 – which provokes Covid-19.

This chain of events reopens, once again, a mighty Pandora's box. We have the quite timely Event 201; the cozy relationship between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the WHO, as well as the World Economic Forum and the Johns Hopkins galaxy in Baltimore, including the Bloomberg School of Public Health; the ID2020 digital ID/vaccine combo; Dark Winter – which simulated a smallpox bio-attack on the US, before the 2001 anthrax attack being blamed on Iraq; US Senators dumping stocks after a CDC briefing; more than 1,300 CEOs abandoning their cushy perches in 2019, "forecasting" total market collapse; the Fed pouring helicopter money already in September 2019 – as part of QE4.

And then, validating the ABC News report, Israel steps in. Israeli intel confirms US intel did warn them in November about a potentially catastrophic pandemic in Wuhan (once again: how could they possibly know that on the second week of November, so early in the game?) And NATO allies were warned – in November – as well.

The bottom line is explosive: the Trump administration as well as the CDC had an advance warning of no less than four months – from November to March – to be properly prepared for Covid-19 hitting the US. And they did nothing. The whole "China is a witch!" case is debunked.

Moreover, the Israeli disclosure supports what's nothing less than extraordinary: US intel already knew about Sars-Cov-2 roughly a month before the first confirmed cases detected by doctors in a Wuhan hospital. Talk about divine intervention.

That could only have happened if US intel knew, for sure, about a previous chain of events that would necessarily lead to the "mysterious outbreak" in Wuhan. And not only that: they knew exactly where to look. Not in Inner Mongolia, not in Beijing, not in Guangdong province.

It's never enough to repeat the question in full: how could US intel have known about a contagion one month before Chinese doctors detected an unknown virus?

Mike Pompeo may have given away the game when he said, on the record, that Covid-19 was a "live exercise". Adding to the ABC News and Israeli reports, the only possible, logical conclusion is that the Pentagon – and the CIA – knew ahead of time a pandemic would be inevitable.

That's the smokin' gun. And now the full weight of the United States government is covering all bases by proactively, and retroactively, blaming China. **CT**

*Pepe Escobar is an Independent geopolitical analyst, writer and journalist*

■ TREVOR HOYLE

# The trials and temptations of a wayward publisher

*Maurice Girodias and the founding of Olympia Press*

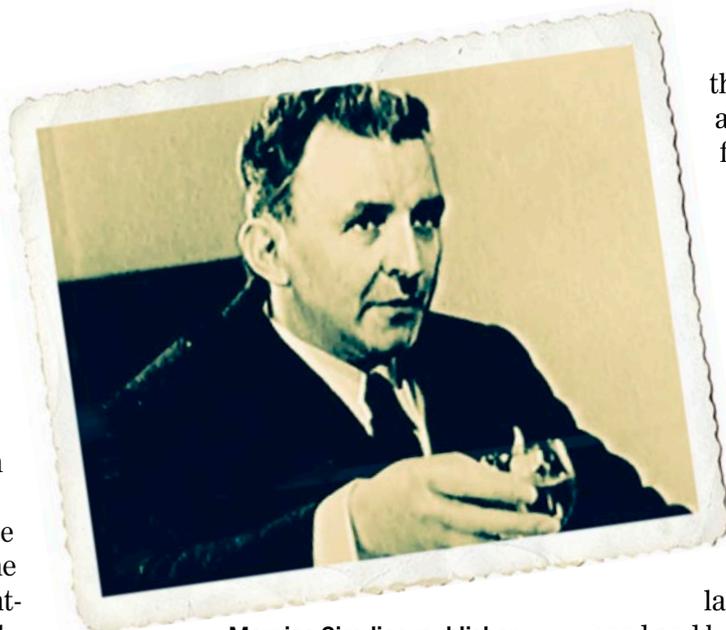
*White Thighs*  
*Until She Screams*  
*Sin for Breakfast*  
*Cruel Lips*  
*Inch by Inch*  
*Tender Was My Flesh*  
*There's a Whip in my*  
*Valise*

**N**O, that's not the Eng. Lit. reading list for next year's Open University.

Actually, it's a choice selection of titles from the infamous and much-sought-after DB\* catalogue issued by Paris-based imprint Olympia Press during the two decades following World War II.

Sole proprietor of Olympia – editor-in-chief, head of sales, book-keeper, office boy – was our hero Maurice Girodias; every perfect inch the darkly good-looking Frenchman, Maurice was charming, mysterious and dangerously attractive to women. Surprisingly he was in fact half-English and carried a British passport. His father, Jack Kahane, hav-

\* Dirty Books



Maurice Girodias, publisher

ing started out in the ragtrade in Manchester, moved to Paris in the '30s and set up the Obelisk Press, which as well as pornography also published the banned novels *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* by American ex-pat Henry Miller.

Though a bit of a lad and a rascal, relishing the good life, the money he made from porn was always a means to an end for Maurice. Like his dad he had a genuine, heartfelt passion for daring and imaginative works of literary merit at

the cutting edge – plus a discriminating eye for new talent.

Maurice was 20 when war broke out. He was detained by the Gestapo and taken in for questioning and, because his name – it was then Kahane – was Jewish, he was about to be deported to the camps until an influential re-

lative, an uncle, intervened and he was released.

To avoid further danger, Maurice changed his identity papers to his mother's (non-Jewish) name of Girodias, which he retained thereafter.

In August 1944 Maurice was on the barricades, throwing Molotov cocktails at retreating German tanks, and shortly after witnessed the entry of General Leclerc's Free French Army into the capital. As captured later in *The Mandarins*, the novel by Simone de Beauvoir, there was a "heady mixture of hope and despair that swept through Paris following its liberation."

Though impoverished and dingy, Paris in the following decade was a vibrant mix and melting-pot of literary and artistic fervour. Easy sex and free love were everywhere, along with gourmet dining, vintage wines and an elegant life-style – if you could afford and knew where to find them.

Jean-Paul Sartre, his muse and companion Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus were the dominant figures during the '50s (Camus was killed in a car crash in 1960). Other residents in the city striving to make reputations for themselves, soon to become a roll-call of literary superstars, included Sam Beckett, Henry Miller, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Raymond Queneau, Jean Genet, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Paul Bowles (he and his wife Jane were frequent visitors from Tangiers), Allen Ginsberg and Terry Southern.

Publishing wasn't Maurice's first business venture. Shortly after the war he opened an art gallery, with canvasses by Bonnard, Picasso and Dubuffet, which was a great success and the entire art world of Paris came along. It bankrolled Maurice and kept him afloat for several years, during which he married his first wife Laurette and they had two children.

This didn't stop Maurice, a serial philanderer, from having numerous affairs, one of the most significant with a woman several years older, Germaine, who taught him the art of lovemaking. She also educated the young man about literature, introducing him to such "modern" writers as Kafka.

Theirs was a tempestuous relationship: they often made love on the carpet in his office above the art gallery. On one occasion, for no

*Desperate for lodgings,  
they agreed to take a  
squalid room just as  
the previous tenant was  
being brought down the  
stairs in a coffin*

apparent reason (perhaps jealousy got the better of her) Germaine produced a .22 revolver from her bag and sprayed shots at all the mirrors.

Making up after a stormy row by driving into the countryside and having passionate sex, Germaine then pushed a naked Maurice out of the car and drove off, leaving him stranded in the fog, miles from anywhere.

Some while later, when their relationship had ended, Germaine took her own life

Maurice was hopeless at business matters. He never bothered keeping accounts and spent money without thought or regard for tomorrow. This on top of his frenetic sexual activities took their toll and by his early thirties he was estranged from his family, living in cheap hotels with his brother Eric. Down and out, the pair were desperate for lodgings and agreed to take a squalid room just as the previous tenant, a Yugoslav painter who committed suicide, was being brought down the stairs in a coffin. The brothers negotiated a cheaper rate.

Things were going steadily and remorselessly downhill when Maurice had a brainwave. He still

retained, somewhere, a list of confidential subscribers – more than 500 names – his father had provided with certain "erotic" material in the pre-war Obelisk Press era. Scraping together a few hundred francs, Maurice circulated leaflets to the list, also including bookshops in Paris, Amsterdam, Nice, Geneva and Milan. Most of the advertised DB (Dirty Books) titles didn't exist except as products of Maurice's fertile and lustful imagination.

When orders started to trickle and then flood in, Maurice set up a cottage industry of predominantly British and American writers living in Paris to feed the demand. Then he had another bright idea. Before the war his father had published Frank Harris's scandalous memoir, the subsequently banned *My Life and Loves*, and Maurice now brought out a new 3-volume edition which sold in its tens of thousands. Another of his best-sellers was the ancient classic *Fanny Hill* by John Cleland.

Olympia Press was up and running.

Along with the DB catalogue, Maurice didn't neglect his literary aspirations for promoting fiction by writers of real talent. He published Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal* in English, new editions of Henry Miller's novels, and later on the Samuel Beckett novels *Watt* and *Molloy*. Not many "reputable" imprints could boast titles and authors of such distinction, joined in years to come by *The Black Book* by Lawrence Durrell, *The Naked Lunch* by William Burroughs, *Candy* by Terry Southern, and *Young Adam* by Alexander Trocchi, amongst many others.

Trocchi is an interesting case in

point of how Girodias operated in finding the right talent for his porn operation. Having made a pile with Frank Harris's memoir, Maurice brought out a four-volume edition which outsold the first. So when he heard a rumour of another missing volume, *as yet unpublished*, he was desperate to obtain it. Harris's widow lived in the south of France. Her lawyers informed Maurice that Mme Harris demanded a million francs for the rights. It was a huge risk, particularly as he wasn't allowed to see the MS until the total amount was paid up front. Maurice called in favours, gathered all his resources, and returned triumphantly, cash in hand, to claim his prize – only to be met with the lawyer's demand that he wanted an extra 50,000 francs himself for arranging the deal.

Maurice dug even deeper and managed this, too. Finally handed the precious missing volume, it turned out to be a thin packet of scraps and assorted pages, random illegible jottings, and even grocery lists: the whole useless mess padded out with old miscellaneous articles and blank sheets. If he didn't recoup his investment, Maurice was sunk. His solution was to hire Alexander Trocchi to ghost-write the fifth volume using these fragments and scraps as a pretence at authenticity. Trocchi, a talented though as yet unpublished writer from Glasgow (and notorious piss-artist in Parisian circles) accomplished this task brilliantly and the book sold well.

Olympia Press was now a thriving and profitable concern, selling 5,000 copies of each new title and continually reprinting old ones.

## *Maurice agreed to an injection of monkey glands to improve his health and sexual prowess. The treatment worked a miracle ...*

(There was a brisk market across the Channel: crate-loads of DBs transported in lorries to Soho, hidden under fruit and veg.)

Even so, Maurice couldn't rid himself of ingrained bad habits. He never kept proper accounts, couldn't be bothered with legal publishing agreements – a few scribbled lines on a sheet of paper was his idea of a contract – or accurate royalty statements. The upshot was that authors lay in ambush round corners and queued for hours on the stairs to his office to get what was owed. This lackadaisical approach sometimes backfired when Maurice, having forgotten, paid them twice for the same work. Others received little more than a pittance. William Burroughs arrived from Tangiers in need of money, knowing he was due a handsome advance for rights in the Grove Press (US edition) of *Naked Lunch*. It's doubtful he ever received it.

Always prone to mood swings, Maurice agreed to an injection of monkey glands to improve his health and sexual prowess. The treatment worked a miracle ... He was endowed with a new lease of life and a resurgent libido: no one woman could satisfy him. Soon he was leading an almost sleepless existence, working hard in the of-

fice ten to twelve hours a day, making love most of the night.

Out of the blue a letter arrived from an American living in London offering a 125,000-word MS the author claimed had been rejected by a New York publisher because it was considered obscene. Naturally Maurice was interested and went ahead, drawing up his usual "contract" of a few paragraphs scribbled in longhand. This was to prove a big mistake, because the author was JP Donleavy and the novel was *The Ginger Man*.

The book duly appeared, sold about average for Olympia – but the real pot of gold were the English language rights, which Maurice thought he had secured with his ramshackle contract. High-powered London lawyers became involved, expenses mounted by the day, and in the end, mainly through naivety and his trusting nature, Maurice came off worst. It was a hard-earned lesson and one he wouldn't forget.

**AFTERWORD:** *These biographical and historical events are taken from accounts by Maurice Girodias, and also John Calder's memoir *The Garden of Eros*. They were close friends as well as business rivals for over forty years, until Maurice died of a heart attack in 1990 at the age of 71. John Calder died in Edinburgh on 13 August 2018, aged 91. He was my publisher and a very dear friend. (TH)* **CT**

*Trevor Hoyle is a writer and novelist based in Lancashire, England. His most recent novel is the environmental thriller *The Last Gasp*, published by Jo Fletcher Books (Quercus). His website is [www.trevorhoyle.com](http://www.trevorhoyle.com).*



FIELD OF DREAMS: The home stretch tower at Belmont Park Racecourse, New York

■ PHILIP A. FARRUGGIO

# Come in, Number Three ...

*It was a story that could have been written by Damon Runyan  
– the day a miracle happened at a New York racecourse*

**I**T'S been more than 25 years since that glorious warm, blue sky summer day at Belmont Park Racetrack. I remember it so well that I can almost inhale that special racetrack smell, a combination of disinfectant merged with horse manure.

The moment you walked into the place, open air as it was, you might have been on some livestock farm, but this was Elmont, Long Island, and I lived within a mile of the track.

I had just finished my sales rep phone calls by noon, and my wife allowed me to do what I always did on beautiful racedays like this one: Go to the track. Well, not so fast. First I drove to Guido's

deli and got my usual salami and American cheese hero.

Then, at the track, wearing my usual racetrack wardrobe of baggy shorts, loose cotton shirt with giant pocket to hold my pens and Te Amo cigars, I ventured up to the third floor grandstand. This was my spot right on the finish line.

The sandwich was devoured along with a cold draft beer (couldn't beat the racetrack beer) and I puffed on my cigar as I attacked the *Daily Racing Form*.

By a quarter to one I was joined by my two compatriots, jockey room masseur Stevie Lee and retiree Ira from Great Neck. We were all doping out the first race when a great moment began to unfurl in

front of our eyes.

"You see horse Number Three, Great All Over?" Stevie said. "Well, I worked on him about an hour ago at the barn".

Ira and I both were startled to learn that our buddy did more than just massage humans. Still, looking over the horse's past performances, I cracked, "Yeah, I think God would have to work on this horse to move him up!"

Stevie countered, "I know, I'm just saying that the trainer had me work on the horse for about 45-minutes before he brought him over. The horse was tight."

I rechecked the horse's past form: he wasn't just bad, he was terrible! This was a cheap maiden

claiming race, the bottom of the barrel in New York, and this horse sure was consistent: he had trailed last track from gate to finish in every start.

“This horse doesn’t need a massage, it needs a miracle!”

Ira laughed, but very subtly so as not to insult Stevie. “I like horse Number Four, the second choice in the betting. I wouldn’t place a dime on Number Three. Sorry, Stevie.”

We all laughed. As the horses approached the gate, we scurried up to get our bets in. I went with Number Eleven horse, ignoring the favourite, who looked so good on paper that he was a candidate for a stiff job. Ira bet on Number Four, while Stevie passed on the race. Great All Over now had odds of 60-1 and rising. “Should be 160-1”, Ira offered. “That horse has absolutely no form.”

The next two minutes proved fateful for me, and for Stevie Lee, massage therapist extraordinaire.

No, Great All Over did not win the race at 75-1 ... that’s the stuff of a Walter Matthau film. I’ll tell you what he did do, though: He ran the race of his life! After being trapped

*Stevie just sat there, shocked at what his work had accomplished. Ira and I looked at each other, shaking our heads*

on the rail in this 13-horse field, he weaved through horses down the stretch and lost the race by no more than a head! He finished third, beating 10 horses and causing gasps from track announcer Tom Durkin.

Stevie just sat there, shocked at what his work had accomplished. Ira and I looked at each other, shaking our heads. “What did you actually do to that horse, Stevie?” Ira asked. “Could you do the same thing for me; my wife would be grateful?”

Stevie was never asked back to massage Great All Over again. Why?

“You see”, he explained, “If the owner finds out that I improved his

horse that much by massage, then it takes away from the trainer, and trainers usually have big egos in this business.”

A few months later, when a writer for a popular magazine found out about Stevie’s prowess, he arranged a story on massaging horses. Stevie asked a trainer friend if he had a horse he could work on. “Sure”, said the trainer, “come to my barn with the writer and work on my colt. The horse is scheduled to race in a few days and could use some loosening up”.

Stevie set it up and did his thing, not once but in two early-morning sessions. The horse ran a few days later and won at 40-1 odds.

The trainer never invited him back again, however. He didn’t want to share the glory with anyone, no matter how successful.

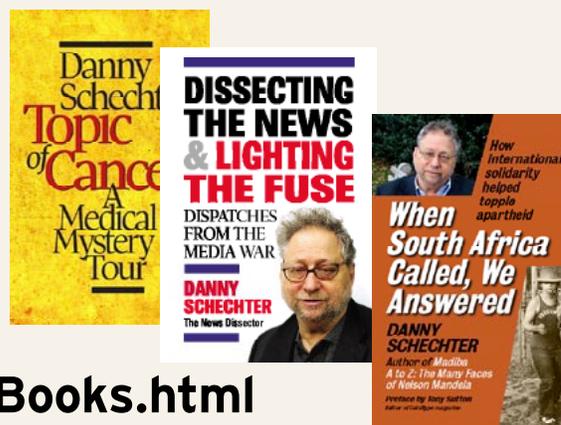
Such is the reason why famed author Runyon loved the race-track experience. You never know what to expect! **CT**

*Philip A. Farruggio is the son and grandson of Brooklyn NYC long-shoremen and a graduate of Brooklyn College, class of 1974. He can be reached at [paf1222@bellsouth.net](mailto:paf1222@bellsouth.net).*

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# Red State Revolt

Photographs  
by **Tim Purdue**

**FREEDOM CALLS:** Waving flags and banners, protesters gather around the statue of former President William McKinley outside the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus.



*Few people expected the US Covid-19 lockdown to pass without challenge when the Spring sunshine came along. Ohio was one of the first states to see demonstrations when a crowd protested the shutdown at the Statehouse in Columbus, on April 18. Photographer Tim Perdue says, “I went downtown planning to walk around and take a few photos on the mostly empty streets. I knew there were protests, but I didn’t realise all this was happening until I got down there. I stayed across the street and far away from them, but I just felt I had to document the craziness.”*





Above: Family affair – Father and son wave the flags while Mom keeps the little ones warm.

Left: Columbus cycle cops rest on the sidelines, ready for action ...

Right: Hmm, perhaps he should spellcheck his banner!

● See more of Tim Purdue's photographs of the Columbus demonstration at <https://flickr.com/photos/timthetrumpetguy/albums/72157713954107253>



■ ROBERT C. KOHLER

# War, irony and the New Normal

*The world devotes \$2-trillion annually to war and armaments, all in the name of keeping itself safe. This is insanity beyond comprehension*

**T**HE uber-irony about the deadly coronavirus is that, as it claims lives, endangers millions and interrupts the social normal, threatening unprecedented global chaos, it is also quietly informing us what we must do to create a better world – and, indeed, creating it, in certain ways, as we look on in stunned wonder.

The “what we must do” part is obvious to many: “After all”, writes Lawrence Wittner, author of *Confronting the Bomb* (Stanford University Press), “why not work cooperatively to save humanity from massive global death and economic collapse rather than continue to devote \$1.8-trillion a year to waging wars and engaging in vast military buildups with the goal of slaughtering one another?”

And Khury Petersen-Smith, of the Institute for Policy Studies, pointing out how xenophobic racism at the level of national government – eg, Donald Trump’s initial impulse to blame China for the virus – fans the flames of public stupidity, “The impact will be disastrous. Already, racists have taken license to attack Asians and Asian-Americans in public. And stoking division on a

world scale will undermine one of the most important keys to our collective survival of this crisis: cooperation across borders.”

Has the division of the planet into nation states, each with a desperately maintained sense of identity – an identity that seems so real to so many when there’s an enemy beyond the border to hate and fear – completely deprived national leaders of the ability to think beyond the imaginary borders of the worlds they rule?

As the world struggles to create or flee from the new normal that’s emerging (or maybe not), here’s a phenomenon almost too strange to comprehend: March 2020, with schools across the country closed down, “was apparently the first March in nearly two decades without a school shooting in the US”, CBS News reports. The last March our school system has been free of a shooting spree was 2002.

What?

But let’s go back to the nearly \$2-trillion the world devotes annually to war and armaments, all in the name of keeping itself safe. This is insanity beyond comprehension. But because, up until the

last couple of months, it has been, for several millennia, the essence of Normal. It’s the way things are. Protecting borders and “interests” is the primary function of most national leaders across the globe. Almost every nation maintains a hammer – a military – and every problem out there then becomes a nail to whack at. Is the coronavirus waking us up?

“Imagine”, writes David Swanson at [rootsaction.org](http://rootsaction.org), “if the nuclear doomsday clock being closer to midnight than ever before were addressed appropriately, with some hint of interest from human governments in human survival.”

That’s precisely what millions of people across Planet Earth have desperately wanted from their governments – some hint of interest in human survival! – since, I would say, the dawn of the nuclear age. “Considering these questions”, writes Murtaza Hussain at the *Intercept*, “it’s hard not to conclude that the American government’s national security priorities have been so askew of reality that they left the country dramatically unprepared for an acute threat to millions of its people.”



**UNREAL:** "It's hard not to conclude that the American government's national security priorities have been so askew of reality that they left the country dramatically unprepared for an acute threat to millions of its people."

While world leaders prepare for war, real threats continually percolate. One of them, of course, now has the name Covid-19. But most of them remain nameless and barely imaginable. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be looking at and addressing them with all the clarity we can muster.

Doing this is the work of what Swanson called a Department of Actual Defense, which is a far different entity from the current US Department of Defense, which for most of American history was more accurately called the Department of War. A Department of Actual Defense "would need to be global, not national", and, actually having an interest in human survival, would address our collapsing ecosystem, as well as poverty, physical and mental health, and issues of safety, he writes. I could see it also addressing the ongoing global pandemic of violence, the inadequacy of our prison system, the nature of crime and the nature of healing.

"A Department of Actual Defense", he writes, "would train

pro-environment workers, disaster-relief workers, and suicide-prevention workers in the tasks of protecting the environment, relieving disasters, and preventing suicide, as opposed to training and arming them all to kill large numbers of people with weapons but then assigning them to other tasks. We don't need a military redirected but disbanded."

Unfortunately, while the Department of Actual Defense has not yet attained actual existence, the Department of War . . . I mean, the Department of Pseudo-Defense . . . continues to strategise about winning victories that have nothing to do with the real world. For instance, the *New York Times* recently informed us: "The Pentagon has ordered military commanders to plan for an escalation of American combat in Iraq, issuing a directive last week to prepare a campaign to destroy an Iranian-backed militia group that has threatened more attacks against American troops. . . .

"Some top officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

and Robert C. O'Brien, the national security adviser, have been pushing for aggressive new action against Iran and its proxy forces – and see an opportunity to try to destroy Iranian-backed militia groups in Iraq as leaders in Iran are distracted by the pandemic crisis in their country."

Actual military commanders see a few problems with this: "The debate is happening as top Pentagon officials and senior commanders worldwide are also expressing growing concerns about coronavirus cases expanding rapidly in the ranks, potentially threatening the military's ability to field combat-ready troops."

There you have it: The virus is interrupting humanity's ability to kill itself. **CT**

**Robert Koehler** is an award-winning, Chicago-based journalist and syndicated writer. His new book, *Courage Grows Strong at the Wound* is now available. His website is [www.commonwonders.com](http://www.commonwonders.com).

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■ CHRISTINE E. BLACK

# Six feet apart in the sunshine

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*Keeping clarity and a sense of humour is a challenge, while trying to make sense of a morass of fear and language around this virus*

**W**E are in lockdown in Virginia after Governor Ralph Northam closed beaches, book stores, libraries, restaurants, coffee shops, cancelled live music concerts, and ordered churches closed. He said to not have gatherings of more than 10 people and to practice “social distancing”, which I think in this strange world of invisible enemies, threatening us at all times, means staying away from people mostly and staying about six feet apart when you are with people. I am not totally sure, though. The governor’s edict – or maybe it was the CDC’s – qualified the six-foot distance, or “socially distancing” recommendation to say that spouses and children and their parents did not have to stay six-feet apart.

I am a public-school teacher, not in school now, because they are closed, of course. I love my church, my libraries, bookstores, musicians I go to hear, and getting together with my friends. Two friends in the last few days have declined walking outside together, even though I said, “We can walk apart from each other if you want to”. I am not sure

why. Quarantine? Just stay home? Will walking outside endanger me or others? I thought we could gather as long as it’s less than 10 people. Isn’t two OK?

I have worked to keep clarity and a sense of humour, while trying to make sense of a morass of fear and language around this virus, which I know may be serious, but which I also think has been surrounded by a lot of panic and misinformation. I found a few anchoring facts that seem reliable – people with the virus have a recovery rate of 98-99 percent, and infection, or testing positive for it, does not mean you will get the disease.

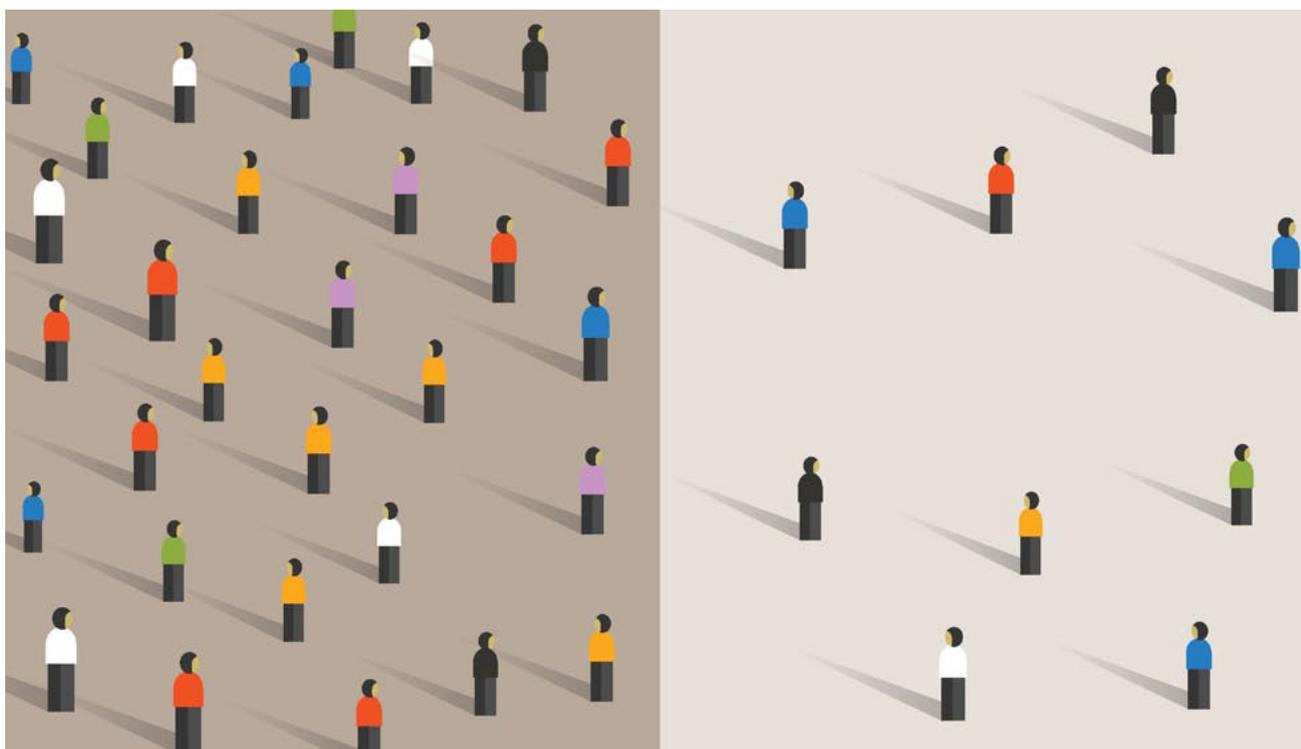
Also, most people who die, who have tested positive, die of other serious causes, though the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has misled the public by forcing doctors to say the deaths were caused by the virus rather than saying the truth, which often is that the person died of heart disease, diabetes, old age, pneumonia, obesity, while they also had tested positive for coronavirus. They died with the virus but not from it.

Some doctors have reminded us that outside in the sunshine is

one of the safest places we can be when an illness like this is a worry. Fear and misinformation, however, have convinced people that inside their homes, in closed rooms, they are safer from this invisible enemy that we are “at war with”, according to President Trump. The War on Terror, the War on Drugs, the US is always at war with someone or something. I am not buying this war any more than I have bought the others.

“Somewhere behind all wars are a few founding lies”, wrote Mark Kurlansky in *Non-Violence: Twenty-Five Lessons in the History of a Dangerous Idea*. I do not think this “war” is much different than others with its early lying and distortions that take hold, take on lives of their own and manipulate us into group-think and rash actions, such as forcing all businesses to close, probably causing many small business owners to lose what they have spent their lives building.

Isolation and loneliness, especially loneliness of the elderly, who can’t see their friends, go to the symphony, to book groups, to church – all activities that give life sustenance and meaning; econom-



ic despair, unemployment, exacerbated addictions without the social supports that keep people alive and healthy – all these may kill many more people than any virus.

Language viruses infect our culture this spring. This is not “lockdown”, as it really is, not government control, as it really is, or the government’s taking our civil liberties, such as practicing our religion at our churches or exercising our right to peaceably assemble. I do not think the writers of the Constitution wrote that we have the right to peaceably assemble, unless there is a sickness around. No, this is not lockdown. As people comply with hardly a word of protest, they are not calling it lockdown; instead they are not only doing as they are told, they are speaking as they are told – “sheltering in place” or “staying home” or “social distancing”.

These are creepy terms, meant to make government-enforced lockdown sound cozy and good for us.

We are also told that this is the “new normal”. Words and phrases like this distort realities, and not for the better, I believe. This is not normal at all. Human beings are meant to live in communities. Research supports that human touch, emotional and physical connection, strengthens immunities and prevents disease. There are viruses that cause people to get sick, and some to die, but so much of this so-called pandemic is not adding up. We are not seeing the deaths from this virus in the context of deaths from other causes, such as cancer, heart disease, obesity, car accidents, domestic violence.

I remain skeptical that the government knows what is good for us after studying other wars and calamities and their precipitating and enabling language and lies.

Lies around the Gulf of Tonkin incident ignited the US war against Viet Nam. The Kuwaiti ambassador’s daughter was told to tell a false story of babies yanked from incubators to whip the US government into the war frenzy of the first Iraq War. The Weapons of Mass Destruction and “mushroom cloud” nonsense, touted by politicians and bureaucrats, sent thousands of Americans to their deaths, destroyed a whole country, and scattered millions as war refugees.

I have mistrusted the media, while continuing to seek alternative, independent-thinking information sources, after almost every major US media outlet championed war against Iraq. US media outlets never issued formal retractions after that devastation and after the lies were made plain.

I remain skeptical of the government and health bureaucrats when

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they approved harmful drugs, such as high dosages of estrogen from mare's urine, which scientists knew caused cancer in women, and they approved it anyway. Women died. Examples of government deceptions that cause death are numerous. We must read and talk and listen, and keep thinking.

**N**ow, because the government and its highly paid health and disease bureaucrats told them to, people put their pictures inside "Stay at Home" or "I am Saving Lives by Staying at Home" signs or even the stronger "Stay the F Home" admonition to others and shared them on the Internet. Language changes have been fascinating and frightening when friends are now scared to walk outside, even in pairs. My teenage son, whom his dad and I wheeled in a stroller in demonstrations against the US war in Iraq when he was a toddler while a gauntlet of counter protesters screamed in our faces, today tells me that I shouldn't drive to do chores on my friend's farm to help with food production because the government said, "We have to stay home."

Death has done it this time. Death and fear and language. Insidious death. Phantom death on the TV or computer screens – or even rumoured to be there. We don't even have cable TV in our home, but this fear has infected our home. The red numbers are out there flashing, digits rising, blinking. Attractive people with super white teeth and expensive haircuts talk non-stop. Bureaucrats and politicians wield language of fear and death – death, like the greenish smoke, snaking by each door

*Language changes  
have been fascinating  
and frightening  
when friends now are  
scared to walk outside,  
even in pairs*

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in the Charlton Heston movie, *The Ten Commandments*, my brothers and I watched on TV when we were children. Maybe our "Stay at Home" hashtags will save us like the blood painted in the shape of the cross on the doors in the Charlton Heston movie.

Today a "news" station showed a cartoon-coloured virus spray cascading over a barricaded grocery aisle to the cartoon people on the other side. Over weeks, we have had to look at lines of bright stick people in diagrams multiplying and stacking up, dead presumably, if we did not "social distance" because the deaths will rise exponentially. But even the exponential part is being called into question by health professionals. On social media today a New York writer, I somehow ended up "friends" with, posted an obscure study saying that six-feet apart is not enough to stay safe while running outside. It was complete with cartoon figures and bright-coloured virus sprays, clouding the air and making their way to a cartoon runner many feet away. Oh, brother.

Tell people, like the politicians and bureaucrats are doing, that they may have it, not know it, may not even know how long they have had or will have it. You could not even be sick and still have it, give

it to others. Reading and listening to so-called news, I could not get a handle on how long you could have it and not know it – some said five days, someone else said two weeks or more. It may be me. It may be you. Paranoia abounds. But, guess what? We all have it. We are all going to die. This virus, however, has a recovery rate around 98-99 percent. Most people recover – not in the hospital but at home, I read today. Contracting it and recovering may build immunity and make us stronger. Our bodies – and our lives – are amazing, are miracles. How can we miss this in this season of resurrection?

**B**ecause I miss my friends, and I love getting outside in the sunshine, especially before the government closed the Shenandoah National Park and Skyline Drive, even to motorists, I still wanted to better understand Governor's Northam's rules after he closed the beaches and businesses too. My teenage son is worried I am not following the rules or taking them seriously enough. I am. Nothing is open. I only go to the grocery store. I have been making the best of it. We have planted flowers, moved mulch, cleared brush, had a fire on the deck and made S'mores. I taught him how to thread a needle, how to sew on a button, how to mend a tear, with two different kinds of stitches, as my mother taught me. I taught him to make French toast. We played Jenga and listened to my '60s and '70s Pandora station.

I do not like lockdown, however. I do not like the sorrow and grief I feel as I hear of friends and acquaintances losing their beloved

businesses they have spent their lives building. And many others do not have the economic privilege to “work at home” or not work at all and have lost their jobs. I like being free to come and go as I chose while being responsible for my health and caring for the health of others.

**W**hen I learned we will likely have to endure this government-mandated lockdown for longer, I wanted to understand it better. Maybe others were having similar questions, and I could help. I called the CDC press line, planning to tell them I was a freelance journalist doing a story on safe practices for outdoors.

I thought I would be able to talk to someone and ask my questions right then, take notes. Write my story. I was trying to get a handle on how the six-foot rule (or guidance, surely not a law?) worked with gatherings of 10 people or less – and how did that work with being outdoors? Maybe I should call Northam’s office with my questions. I decided to start with the CDC. I also wanted to tell my son, whom I told he could walk to a nearby friend’s house, and they could walk or play in the neighbourhood (stay apart if they wanted to) and that the CDC and the governor said that was OK. I was worried about this health, staying inside so much, and I know

*Surely, outside is healthier than Walmart with all the hands that have touched the bread bags and housewares from China?*

he misses his friends and is out of the school routine. But my son said no, he didn’t want to go outside to meet his friend. I said, “Why not?” He said, “You know, quarantine.”

So, I planned to ask the CDC and the governor if it was OK to walk outside with my friend – if one friend was OK, and should we walk six feet apart? I see people walking in my neighbourhood, in pairs and small groups. I knew people in Walmart were not always six feet apart though they have little tape marks on the floor now because maybe because the governor told them to do that. Surely, outside is healthier than Walmart with all the hands that have touched the bread bags and housewares from China.

I planned to ask how the six-foot rule worked with gatherings of less than 10, which I thought were OK. And how did it work with family members, which the governor and the CDC said were not required to stay six feet apart? What if you had a cook-out in this glorious spring weather with, say, eight

people, five family members and three close friends, middle-aged, healthy, not sick? Would we have to stay six feet apart? And what about beaches? They are closed, but the governor said not for fishing, and that they could still be used for exercise. So, can you fish with your spouse or child or friend and not get in trouble? Can you walk on the beach with your boyfriend, for exercise, or would you have to be six feet apart?

I had my notes ready and planned to start by asking the CDC press office these questions. But things are different now than they were when I was a reporter 20 years ago and got people on the phone quickly, then wrote my story. The woman who answered the CDC phone said that I would have to complete an online form, listing my name and my questions, and then a press officer would get back to me. I haven’t done that yet. Maybe I’ll take a walk outside instead. **CT**

*Christine E. Black’s work has been published in The American Journal of Poetry, New Millennium Writings, Nimrod International, The Virginia Journal of Education, Friends Journal, Sojourners Magazine, English Journal, Amethyst Review, and other publications. Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and the Pablo Neruda Prize.*

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# Pandemic not just a crisis, it's also a gift to the rich

*Like cancer, capitalism grows until it murders the host body. During this pandemic shutdown, it's not getting the growth it needs and is becoming benign*

**W**ITH most of the country still on lockdown, all is quiet. For those of us lucky enough to be healthy and simply stuck at home – not in mourning; not sick or dying; not performing high-risk “essential” work; not waiting on long food bank lines – life is on pause.

We're held in limbo. Our existence floats nonchalantly in a bizarre stasis like the banana slices inside a Jell-O mould. Or the fish on the top of a child's fish tank, long dead. The things we thought mattered, now don't. The things we thought didn't matter, now really don't. Remember when you thought if you didn't get your eyebrows threaded every other week your life was over? Now people walk around with eyebrows looking like the backend of a peacock. No one cares.

Remember what used to matter before this pandemic? Remember what you used to focus on? How many “likes” a picture of your dinner got on Instagram. What happened in the new episode of *The Voice*, or *The Real Housewives* or *The Walking Dead*. Which superhero movie to go see then complain that it sucked afterwards. Wheth-

er that guy at work doesn't like you even though he smiles his stupid face at you all the time.

None of it really mattered.

For years (decades?), we've been lost in the frenetic pace of lives based on non-events, never pausing to reassess or recess. The spastic motion of avoidance filled the ether – afraid, if we stop to truly think about it, we may find our scant few years of consciousness are pissed away as slaves at often meaningless jobs. They, the pustulant corporate owners, suck away our lives. That's what your job is – it's a piece of your existence. And now, with life on holiday, we see almost none of it was essential.

This pandemic is not just a crisis, it's also a gift. It allows us the oxygen to notice the things we've been ignoring were the truly essential:

- Learning and creating
- Enjoying clean water, clean air, clean food, and making sure every human has that right
- Forming a world that will last longer than an NFL season
- Spending a lot of time with your beautiful family (or a little time with an unsightly one)

Point is – the stuff that truly matters is the stuff we were completely ignoring, blithely pushing it to the back of our minds as our planet is eaten for corporate profit. But now, during “life on hold” the natural world reclaims spaces. Beaches around the globe teem with millions of birds and wildlife, no longer flooded by undulating masses of fleshy apes with our frisbees, and snorkels, and beer coolers and entitlement.

Voluminous highways usually bursting with noise, pollution and jack-offs now sit empty, quiet and clean. Contaminated cities like Los Angeles and Delhi breathe effortlessly, enjoying clean air and water for the first time in years.

As reported by *Mercury News*, “In Los Angeles, the air quality, which is usually some of the worst in the nation, has turned into one of the cleanest compared to other major cities. Even more impressive is the fact that the city has enjoyed its longest stretch of ‘good’ air quality since 1995”. Do you understand how long ago 1995 was? In 1995 there was a movie called *Top Dog*, starring Chuck Norris and – wait for it – a dog. Yet such a thing was

not viewed as unusual. And the dog won a Golden Globe. Needless to say, it was a different era.

Nitrogen dioxide has plummeted over China and Italy during this pandemic. Coyotes walk free again in California, eating people's pets the way God intended. A zoo in Hong Kong has been trying to get two pandas to Netflix and chill for 10 years. And now that the zoo is shut down, they finally mated. What more proof do you need that we're witnessing utopia? The pandas are shtupping again!

But let's cut to the chase – and I'm sorry if the next statement upsets you – but in order to stop climate change and create a sustainable world, it requires the end of capitalism. I know I'm not "allowed" to say that. Saying such a thing would be heresy on one of the corporate media dog-and-pony bullshit infotainment hours. If I spoke that unholy fact on CNN or Fox News or CBS or NPR, a tranquiliser dart would immediately hit me in the neck, and they'd cut to a commercial while my body was dragged off.

But let's take our intellectual honesty out for a spin, shall we? As *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot said, "Capitalism has three innate characteristics that drive us towards destruction... firstly, that it generates and relies upon perpetual growth."

Endless growth on a planet with finite resources. Such a thing is physically impossible, no more scientifically feasible than Secretary of State Mike Pompeo touching his toes. The reason we're now in the largest economic crisis since the Great Depression is because capitalism requires non-stop growth, much like cancer. Also, like cancer,

it grows until it murders the host body. And during this pandemic shutdown, it's not getting the growth it screams out for. During this brief respite, many parts of capitalism are benign.

The second problem is "...the idea that our right to own natural wealth equates to the amount of money that we've got in the bank or we can borrow. So, you can take as much natural wealth away from other people as you like."

You can buy all the land, water, and air you want – even as others die from starvation or thirst. It means that no matter what environmentalists do to try to mitigate climate change, the richest corporations in the world can easily undo it by buying and polluting ever more. It also means the biggest sociopaths in the room (the world?) have the most impact.

"The third characteristic is the one that really ensures that people go along with capitalism, the idea that everyone can pursue – and can expect to find – private luxury."

**B**ut of course, that's impossible. If everyone lived the way the top one percent live, then the planet would collapse quickly, and in fact it's crumbling anyway, right now, because of the resources used and the refuse discarded by a small percentage of humanity. ...Sure, I admit I like to keep my private jet air-conditioned to a nice 58 degrees F on the hottest days of summer and stocked full of rare endangered fish filets. Not for me – for my five dogs who are bathed in only the freshest spring water shipped in from Alaska. BUT, I recycle the filet packaging. So, I think I do my part.

The cold truth is 90 percent of humanity will never enjoy anywhere near the soft luscious luxury that envelopes the richest among us. In fact, the World Bank says that nearly half of the world lives on less than \$5.50 a day. (Not enough for even one fresh Alaskan salmon filet for your dog.)

As our planet disintegrates under the weight of consumption and greed, most people are trapped in extreme poverty. And that's how the system of capitalism is designed. No mistake. No whoopsy. No boo-boo. It's by design. Slightly altering capitalism will not change this reality, just as tilting a gun in a different direction does not make it a pony.

If we take away the false promises of capitalism and just say to people, "Private luxury is only for a few humans. You will never have it and won't even have the chance at getting it" – if we admit that – then the entire justification for capitalism evaporates.

I'm not saying I have all the answers, but the pandemic shutdown has shown us the problem. It has revealed what the world looks like without as much pollution, without the chaos and roar of mostly meaningless "work" performed by the exploited, using materials stolen from the abused, for the benefit of the pampered and oblivious.

Another world is possible, and we've just got a glimpse of it. **CT**

*Lee Camp is the host of the hit comedy news show Redacted Tonight. His new book "Bullet Points and Punch Lines" is available at [www.LeeCampBook.com](http://www.LeeCampBook.com) and his standup comedy special can be streamed for free at [LeeCampAmerican.com](http://LeeCampAmerican.com).*

# Just like living under the bubonic plague

*The Diary of Samuel Pepys shows how the impact of the 17th-century plague mirrored that of today's coronavirus pandemic*

**N**early April, writer Jen Miller urged *New York Times* readers to start a coronavirus diary. “Who knows,” she wrote, “maybe one day your diary will provide a valuable window into this period.”

During a different pandemic, one 17th-century British naval administrator named Samuel Pepys did just that. He fastidiously kept a diary from 1660 to 1669 – a period of time that included a severe outbreak of the bubonic plague in London. Epidemics have always haunted humans, but rarely do we get such a detailed glimpse into one person's life during a crisis from so long ago.

There were no Zoom meetings, drive-through testing or ventilators in 17th-century London. But Pepys' diary reveals that there were some striking resemblances in how people responded to the pandemic.

For Pepys and the inhabitants of London in 1665, there was no way of knowing whether an outbreak of the plague that occurred in the parish of St. Giles, a poor area outside the city walls, in late 1664 and early 1665 would become an epidemic.



Portrait of Samuel Pepys by John Hayls (1666).

Art: National Portrait Gallery

The plague first entered Pepys' consciousness enough to warrant a diary entry on April 30, 1665: “Great fears of the Sickenesse here in the City”, he wrote, “it being said that two or three houses are already shut up. God preserve us all.”

**P**epys continued to live his life normally until the beginning of June, when, for the first time, he saw houses “shut up” – the term his contemporaries used for quarantine – “marked with a red cross upon the doors, and ‘Lord have

mercy upon us’ writ there.” After this, Pepys became increasingly troubled by the outbreak.

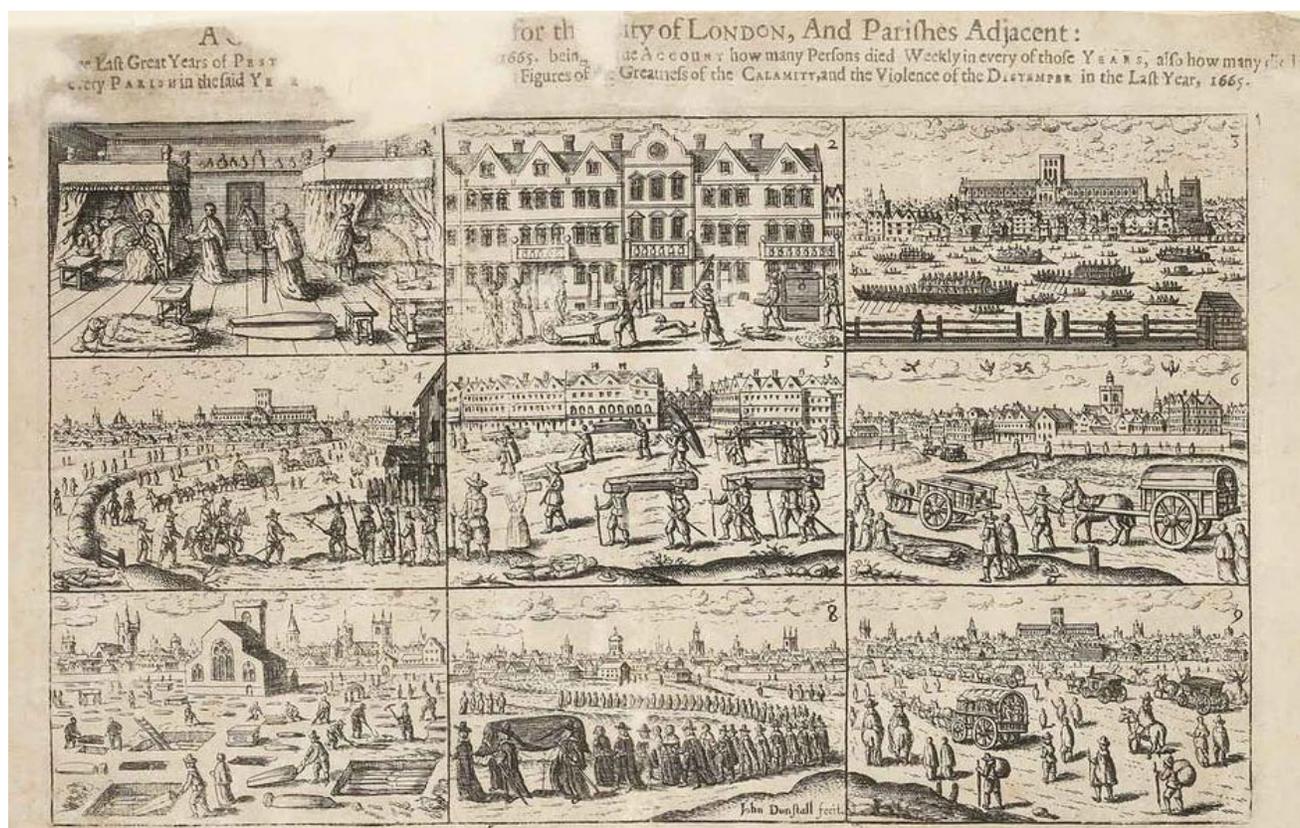
He soon observed corpses being taken to their burial in the streets, and a number of his acquaintances died, including his own physician.

By mid-August, he had drawn up his will, writing, “that I shall be in much better state of soul, I hope, if it should please the Lord to call me away this sickly time”. Later that month, he wrote of deserted streets; the pedestrians he encountered were “walking like people that had taken leave of the world.”

In London, the Company of Parish Clerks printed “bills of mortality”, the weekly tallies of burials.

Because these lists noted London's burials – not deaths – they undoubtedly undercounted the dead. Just as we follow these numbers closely today, Pepys documented the growing number of plague victims in his diary.

At the end of August, he cited the bill of mortality as having recorded 6,102 victims of the plague, but feared “that the true number of the dead this week is near 10,000”, mostly because the victims among



A 1666 engraving by John Dunstall depicts deaths and burials in London during the bubonic plague.

the urban poor weren't counted. A week later, he noted the official number of 6,978 in one week, "a most dreadful Number."

By mid-September, all attempts to control the plague were failing. Quarantines were not being enforced, and people gathered in places like the Royal Exchange. Social distancing, in short, was not happening.

He was equally alarmed by people attending funerals in spite of official orders. Although plague victims were supposed to be interred at night, this system broke down as well, and Pepys griped that burials were taking place "in broad daylight."

There are few known effective treatment options for Covid-19.

Medical and scientific research need time, but people hit hard by the virus are willing to try anything. Fraudulent treatments, from teas and colloidal silver, to cognac and cow urine, have been floated.

Although Pepys lived during the Scientific Revolution, nobody in the 17th-century knew that the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium carried by fleas caused the plague. Instead, the era's scientists theorised that the plague was spreading through miasma, or "bad air" created by rotting organic matter and identifiable by its foul smell. Some of the most popular measures to combat the plague involved purifying the air by smoking tobacco or by holding herbs and spices in front of one's nose.

Tobacco was the first remedy that Pepys sought during the

plague outbreak. In early June, seeing shut-up houses "put me into an ill conception of myself and my smell, so that I was forced to buy some roll-tobacco to smell ... and chaw". Later, in July, a noble patroness gave him "a bottle of plague-water" – a medicine made from various herbs. But he wasn't sure whether any of this was effective. Having participated in a coffeehouse discussion about "the plague growing upon us in this town and remedies against it", he could only conclude that "some saying one thing, some another."

During the outbreak, Pepys was also very concerned with his frame of mind; he constantly mentioned that he was trying to be in good spirits. This was not only an attempt to "not let it get to him" – as we might say today

– but also informed by the medical theory of the era, which claimed that an imbalance of the so-called humours in the body – blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm – led to disease.

Melancholy – which, according to doctors, resulted from an excess of black bile – could be dangerous to one’s health, so Pepys sought to suppress negative emotions; on Sept 14, for example, he wrote that hearing about dead friends and acquaintances “doth put me into great apprehensions of melancholy. ... But I put off the thoughts of sadness as much as I can.”

Humans are social animals and thrive on interaction, so it’s no surprise that so many have found social distancing during the coronavirus pandemic challenging. It can require constant risk assessment: How close is too close? How can we avoid infection and keep our loved ones safe, while also staying sane? What should we do when someone in our house develops a cough?

During the plague, this sort of paranoia also abounded. Pepys found that when he left London and

*Pepys was willing to risk his health to meet certain needs; by early October, he visited his mistress without any regard for the danger*

entered other towns, the townspeople became visibly nervous about visitors. “They are afear’d of us that come to them”, he wrote in mid-July, “insomuch that I am troubled at it.”

Pepys succumbed to paranoia himself: In late July, his servant Will suddenly developed a headache. Fearing that his entire house would be shut up if a servant came down with the plague, Pepys mobilised all his other servants to get Will out of the house as quickly as possible. It turned out that Will didn’t have the plague, and he returned the next day.

In early September, Pepys refrained from wearing a wig he bought in an area of London that was a hotspot of the disease,

and he wondered whether other people would also fear wearing wigs because they could potentially be made of the hair of plague victims.

Yet he was willing to risk his health to meet certain needs; by early October, he visited his mistress without any regard for the danger: “round about and next door on every side is the plague, but I did not value it but there did what I could ...”

Just as people around the world eagerly wait for a falling death toll as a sign of the pandemic letting up, so did Pepys derive hope – and perhaps the impetus to see his mistress – from the first decline in deaths in mid-September. A week later, he noted a substantial decline of more than 1,800.

Let’s hope that, like Pepys, we’ll soon see some light at the end of the tunnel. **CT**

*Ute Lotz-Heumann is Heiko A. Oberman Professor of Late Medieval and Reformation History, at the University of Arizona. This article was first published at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

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■ JONATHAN COOK

# Welcome to the era of the Great Disillusionment

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*We need a new model of independent, pluralistic, responsive, questioning media that is accountable to the public, not to billionaires and corporations*

**T**HIS is an essay I have been mulling over for a while but, for reasons that will be instantly obvious, I have been hesitant to write. It is about 5G, vaccines, 9/11, aliens and lizard overlords. Or more accurately, it isn't.

Let me preface my argument by making clear I do not intend to express any view about the truth or falsity of any of these debates – not even the one about reptile overlords. My refusal to publicly take a view should not be interpreted as my implicitly endorsing any of these viewpoints because, after all, only a crazy tinfoil hat-wearing conspiracy theorist sympathiser would refuse to make their views known on such matters.

Equally, my lumping together of all these disparate issues does not necessarily mean I see them as alike. Rather, they are presented in mainstream thinking as similarly proof of an unhinged, delusional, conspiracy-oriented mindset. I am working within a category that has been selected for me.



Truth and falsehood are not what this column is about. To consider these debates solely in the context of whether they are true or false would distract from the critical thinking I wish to engage in here – especially since critical thinking is so widely discouraged in our current societies. I want this column to deny a safe space to anyone emotionally invested in

either side of these debates. (Doubtless, that will not dissuade those who prefer to make mischief and misrepresent my argument. That is a hazard that comes with the territory.)

I am focusing on this set of issues now because some of them have been playing out increasingly loudly on social media as we cope with the isolation of lockdowns. People trapped at home have more time to explore the internet, and that means more opportunities to find often obscure information that may or may not be true. These kinds of debates are shaping our discursive landscape, and have profound politi-

Art: 123RF.com

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*... it is not unreasonable or irrational for a debate about the safety of 5G to have gone viral on social media while being ignored by corporate media ...*

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cal implications. It is these matters, not questions of truth, I want to examine in this column.

### **Social media and 5G**

Let's take 5G as an example. I'm not a scientist, and I have done no research on 5G. Which is a very good reason why no one should be interested in what I have to say about the science or the safety of 5G. But like many people active on social media, I have been made aware – often with little choice on my part – of online debates about 5G and science.

Holmes, I have inevitably gained an impression of that debate. To a casual viewer, the debate looks (and we are discussing here appearances only) something like this:

a) State scientific advisers and scientists whose jobs or research are financed by the mobile phone industry are very certain that there are no dangers associated with 5G.

b) A few scientists (real ones, not evangelical pastors pretending to be former Vodafone executives) have warned that there has not been independent research on the health effects of 5G, that the technology has been rushed through for commercial reasons, and that the possible dangers posed long term to our health from constant exposure have not been properly assessed.

c) Other scientists in this specialist field, possibly the majority, are keeping their peace.

### **Business our new god**

That impression might not be true. It may be that that is just the way social media has made the debate look. It is possible that on the contrary:

- the research has been vigorously carried out, even if it does not appear to have been widely reported in the mainstream media,

- mobile phone and other communication industries have not financed what research there is in an attempt to obtain results helpful to their commercial interests,

- the aggressively competitive mobile phone industry has been prepared to sit back and wait several years for all safety issues to be resolved, unconcerned

about the effects on their profits of such delays,

- the industry has avoided using its money and lobbyists to buy influence in the corridors of power and advance a political agenda based on its commercial interests rather than on the science,

- and individual governments, keen not to be left behind on a global battlefield in which they compete for economic, military and intelligence advantage, have collectively waited to see whether 5G is safe rather than try to undercut each other and gain an edge over allies and enemies alike.

All of that is possible. But anyone who has been observing our societies for the past few decades – where business has become our new god, and where corporate money seems to dominate our political systems more than the politicians we elect – would have at least reasonable grounds to worry that corners may have been cut, that political pressure may have been exerted, and that some scientists (who are presumably human like the rest of us) may have been prepared to prioritise their careers and incomes over the most rigorous science.

### **Looney-tunes conspiracism**

Again, I am not a scientist. Even if the research has not been carried out properly and the phone industry has lobbied sympathetic politicians to advance its commercial interests, it is still possible that, despite all that, 5G is entirely safe. But as I said at the start, I am not here to express a view about the science of 5G.

I am discussing instead why it is not unreasonable or entirely irrational for a debate about the safety of 5G to have gone viral on social media while being ignored by corporate media; why a very mainstream TV presenter like Eamonn Holmes might suggest – to huge criticism – a need to address growing public concerns about 5G; why such concerns might quickly morph into fears of a connection between 5G and the current global pandemic; and why frightened people might decide to take things into their own hands by burning down 5G masts.

Explaining this chain of events is not the same as justifying any of the links in that chain. But equally, dismissing all of it as simply looney-tunes conspira-

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## *It is not just governments to blame. The failings of experts, administrators and the professional class have been all too visible to the public as well*

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cism is not entirely reasonable or rational either.

The issue here is not really about 5G, it's about whether our major institutions still hold public trust. Those who dismiss all concerns about 5G have a very high level of trust in the state and its institutions. Those who worry about 5G – a growing section of western populations, it seems – have very little trust in our institutions and increasingly in our scientists too. And the people responsible for that erosion of trust are our governments – and, if we are brutally honest, the scientists as well.

### **Information overload**

Debates like the 5G one have not emerged in a vacuum. They come at a moment of unprecedented information dissemination that derives from a decade of rapid growth in social media. We are the first societies to have access to data and information that was once the preserve of monarchs, state officials and advisers, and latterly a few select journalists.

Now rogue academics, rogue journalists, rogue former officials – anyone, in fact – can go online and discover a myriad of things that until recently no one outside a small establishment circle was ever supposed to understand. If you know where to look, you can even find some of this stuff on Wikipedia (see, for example, Operation Timber Sycamore).

The effect of this information overload has been to disorientate the great majority of us who lack the time, the knowledge and the analytical skills to sift through it all and make sense of the world around us. It is hard to discriminate when there is so much information – good and bad alike – to digest.

Nonetheless, we have got a sense from these online debates, reinforced by events in the non-virtual world, that our politicians do not always tell the truth, that money – rather than the public interest – sometimes wins out in decision-making processes, and that our elites may be little better equipped than us – aside from their expensive educations – to run our societies.

### **Two decades of lies**

There has been a handful of staging posts over the past

two decades to our current era of the Great Disillusionment. They include:

- the lack of transparency in the US government's investigation into the events surrounding 9/11 (obscured by a parallel online controversy about what took place that day);

- the documented lies told about the reasons for launching a disastrous and illegal war of aggression against Iraq in 2003 that unleashed regional chaos, waves of destabilising migration into Europe and new, exceptionally brutal forms of political Islam;

- the astronomical bailouts after 2008 of bankers whose criminal activities nearly bankrupted the global economy (but who were never held to account) and instituted more than a decade of austerity measures that had to be paid for by the public;

- the refusal by western governments and global institutions to take any leadership on tackling climate change, as not only the science but the weather itself has made the urgency of that emergency clear, because it would mean taking on their corporate sponsors;

- and now the criminal failures of our governments to prepare and respond properly to the Covid-19 pandemic, despite many years of warnings.

Anyone who still takes what our governments say at face value ... well, I have several bridges to sell you.

### **Experts failed us**

But it is not just governments to blame. The failings of experts, administrators and the professional class have been all too visible to the public as well. Those officials who have enjoyed easy access to prominent platforms in the state-corporate media have obediently repeated what state and corporate interests wanted us to hear, often only for that information to be exposed later as incomplete, misleading or downright fabricated.

In the run-up to the 2003 attack on Iraq, too many political scientists, journalists and weapons experts kept their heads down, keen to preserve their careers and status, rather than speak up in support those rare experts like Scott Ritter and the late David Kelly who dared to sound the alarm that we were not being told

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## *The question is why did no scientific advisers or health officials blow the whistle before now, when it is too late to save the lives of many thousands ...*

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the whole truth.

In 2008, only a tiny handful of economists were prepared to break with the corporate orthodoxy and question whether throwing money at bankers exposed as financial criminals was wise, or demand that these bankers be prosecuted. They did not argue that there must be a price for the banks to pay, such as a public stake in the banks that were bailed out, in return for forcing taxpayers to massively invest in these discredited businesses. And they did not propose overhauling our economic systems to make sure there was no repetition of the economic crash. Instead, they kept their heads down as well, in the hope that their large salaries continued and that they did not lose their esteemed positions in think-tanks and universities.

We know that climate scientists were quietly warning back in the 1950s of the dangers of runaway global warming, and that in the 1980s scientists working for the fossil-fuel companies predicted very precisely how and when the catastrophe would unfold – right about now. It is wonderful that today the vast majority of these scientists are publicly agreed on the dangers, even if they are still trapped in a dangerous caution by the conservatism of scientific procedure. But they forfeited public trust by leaving it so very, very late to speak up.

And recently we have learnt, for example, that a series of Conservative governments in the UK recklessly ran down the supplies of hospital protective gear, even though they had more than a decade of warnings of a coming pandemic. The question is why did no scientific advisers or health officials blow the whistle before now, when it is too late to save the lives of many thousands, including dozens of medical staff, who have so far fallen victim to the virus in the UK alone.

### **Lesser of two evils**

Worse still, in the Anglosphere of the US and the UK, we have ended up with two-party political systems that offer a choice between supporters of a brutal, unrestrained version of neoliberalism and supporters of a

marginally less brutal, slightly mitigated version of neoliberalism. (And we have recently discovered in the UK that, after the ordinary members of one of those twin parties managed to choose a leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who challenged this orthodoxy, his own party machine conspired to throw the election rather than let him near power.) As we are warned each election time, in case we decide that elections are in fact futile, we enjoy a choice – between the lesser of two evils.

Those who ignore or instinctively defend these glaring failings of the modern corporate system are really in no position to sit smugly in judgment of those who wish to question the safety of 5G, or vaccines, or the truth of 9/11, or the reality of a climate catastrophe, or even of the presence of lizard overlords.

Because through their reflexive dismissal of doubt, of all critical thinking on anything that has not been pre-approved by our governments and by the state-corporate media, they have helped to corrupt the only yardsticks we have for measuring truth or falsehood. They have forced on us a terrible choice: to blindly follow those who have repeatedly demonstrated they are not worthy of being followed, or to trust nothing at all, to doubt everything. Neither position is one a healthy, balanced individual would want to adopt. But that is where we are today.

### **Big Brother regimes**

It is therefore hardly surprising that those who have been so discredited by the current explosion of information – the politicians, the corporations and the professional class – are wondering how to fix things in the way most likely to maintain their power and authority.

They face two, possibly complementary options.

One is to allow the information overload to continue, or even escalate. There is an argument to be made that the more possible truths we are presented with, the more powerless we feel and the more willing we are to defer to those most vocal in claiming authority. Confused and hopeless, we will look to father figures, to the strongmen of old, but with a new twist: we will be drawn to those who present themselves

## *The technocrats, the professionals will try to re-establish their authority as though the last two decades never occurred*

as what we aspire to be – those who have cultivated an aura of decisiveness, of fearlessness, of being free spirits, those who look like down-to-earth mavericks and rebels.

This approach will throw up more Donald Trumps, Boris Johnsons and Jair Bolsonaros. And these men, while charming us with their supposed lack of orthodoxy, will of course still be exceptionally accommodating to the powerful corporate interests – the military-industrial complexes – that really run the show.

The other option, which has already been road-tested under the rubric of “fake news”, will argue that we the public, like irresponsible children, need a firm hand. The technocrats, the professionals will try to re-establish their authority as though the last two decades never occurred, as though we never saw through their hypocrisy and lies.

They will cite “conspiracy theories” – even the true ones – as proof that it is time to impose new curbs on internet freedoms, on the right to speak and to think. They will argue that the social media experiment has run its course and proved itself a menace – because we, the public, are a menace. They are already flying trial balloons for this new Big Brother world, under cover of tackling the health threats posed by the Covid-19 epidemic.

We should not be surprised that the “thought-leaders” for shutting down the cacophony of the internet are those whose failures have been most exposed by our new freedoms to explore the dark recesses of the recent historical record. They have included Tony Blair, the British prime minister who lied western publics into the disastrous war on Iraq in 2003, and Jack Goldsmith, rewarded as a Harvard law professor for his role – since whitewashed – in helping the Bush administration legalise torture and step up warrant-less surveillance programmes.

### **Need for a new media**

The only alternative to a future in which we are ruled by Big Brother technocrats like Tony Blair, or by chummy authoritarians who brook no dissent, or a mix of the two, will require a complete overhaul of

our societies’ approach to information. We will need fewer curbs on free speech, not more.

The test of our societies – and the only hope of surviving the coming emergencies, economic and environmental – will depend on our leaders being truly held to account. Not based on whether they are secretly lizards, but on what they are doing to save our planet from an all-too-human, self-destructive instinct for acquisition and the need for guarantees of security in an uncertain world.

That, in turn, will require a transformation of our relationship to information and debate. We will need a new model of independent, pluralistic, responsive, questioning media that is accountable to the public, not to billionaires and corporations. Precisely the kind of media we do not have now. We need media we can trust to represent the full range of credible, intelligent, informed debate, not the narrow Overton window through which get a highly partisan, distorted view of the world that serves the 1 per cent – an elite so richly rewarded by the current system that they are prepared to ignore the fact that they and we are hurtling towards the abyss.

With that kind of media in place – truly holding politicians to account and feting scientists for their contributions to collective knowledge, not their usefulness to corporate enrichment – we would not need to worry about the safety of our communications systems or medicines, we would not need to doubt the truth of events in the news or wonder whether we have lizards for rulers, because in that kind of world no one would rule over us. They would truly serve the public for the common good.

Sounds like a fantastical, improbable system of government? It has a name: democracy. Maybe it is time for us to truly give it a go. **CT**

**Jonathan Cook** won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). This essay first appeared at [www.jonathan-cook.net/blog](http://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog).

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