

Chapter 2

Collateral damage, censorship, and hubris: The practical reality of the lockdown

... from the moral point of view, pain cannot be outweighed by pleasure, and especially not one man's pain by another man's pleasure. Instead of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, one should demand, more modestly, the least amount of avoidable suffering for all; and further, that unavoidable suffering—such as hunger in times of an unavoidable shortage of food—should be distributed as equally as possible.

Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*

Many Westerners, including authorities, panicked during the Covid epidemic. But this authentic distress was accompanied by a remarkable level of disregard for the ordeal experienced in the developing world as a result of Western and local lockdowns. Medical anthropologist Carlo Caduff speaks of a “neoliberal pandemic,”¹ which has resulted in neoliberal policies that have defunded healthcare but also ingrained the belief that citizens are responsible for their own protection and for the protection of others. This has served to promote a “political economy of free carelessness” while obscuring democratic accountability.²

1 Yarimar Bonilla, “Covid, Twitter, and Critique: An Interview with Carlo Caduff,” *American Anthropologist*, May 25, 2020, <https://www.americananthropologist.org/online-content/covid-twitter-and-critique-an-interview-with-carlo-caduff>.

2 Bonilla, “Covid, Twitter, and Critique.”

The poor in developing countries were free to die as long as we in the West survived

In March 2020, we ignored the human disaster that our lockdowns unleashed outside of the Western world as humanitarian aid faced “the first world crisis ... of the precautionary principle.”³ Angered by what he saw as the abandonment of vulnerable populations in the developing world, Pierre Brunet spoke of “a form of dictatorship of political thought, of globalized governance ... (we no longer tolerate the very idea of death, as if we had acquired a kind of enforceable right before the state not to die.)” This right “not to die” was only enforced in Western states, however; the author predicted on the contrary that the number of people suffering from hunger in the world would rise from 135 million in 2019 to 265 million in 2020.⁴

People did die in Africa because food and medicines were not delivered,⁵ while the only planes in the air were delivering face masks to Westerners. People died of hunger on the Indian subcontinent⁶ because they lost their jobs due to the collapse of Western industrial consumption and due to their own stringent lockdowns.⁷ Mothers in labor died in Uganda due to

3 Pierre Brunet, “L’humanitaire à l’épreuve de la peur, ou comment faire face à la première crise mondiale ... du principe de précaution,” *Défis humanitaires*, May 12, 2020, <https://defishumanitaires.com/2020/05/12/lhumanitaire-a-lepreuve-de-la-peur-ou-comment-faire-face-a-la-premiere-crise-mondiale-du-principe-de-precaution/>. On the collateral damage of the lockdown both in the West and in the developing world, see the volume Daniel Briggs, Luke Telford, Anthony Lloyd, Anthony Ellis, and Justin Kotzé, *Lockdown: Social Harm in the Covid-19 Era* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

4 Brunet, “L’humanitaire à l’épreuve de la peur.”

5 See, for instance, “Coronavirus-Linked Malnutrition Is Killing 10,000 More Children a Month, UN Warns,” *France 24*, July 28, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200728-coronavirus-linked-hunger-kills-10-000-children-per-month-says-un>.

6 “Covid-19 Disruptions Killed 228,000 Children in South Asia, Says UN Report,” *BBC*, March 17, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56425115>.

7 Jeevant Rampal, “The Hunger Challenge of the Lockdown,” *BusinessLine*, May 1, 2020, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-hunger-challenge-of-the-lockdown/article31480844.ece>.

coronavirus lockdowns.⁸ How many people will have perished in total? The figures are not yet known but are expected to be in the tens of millions.⁹ Yet, Western mainstream media have not been interested in investigating the lockdown and other Covid restrictions as purveyors of death; instead, they almost unfailingly blame “the pandemic.”

A research paper of the World Bank from May 2021 showed that up to “1.76 children’s lives could potentially be lost due to the economic contraction per Covid-19 fatality averted,”¹⁰ a trade-off which was evidently not in favor of lockdowns. In lower income countries, to remain in lockdown meant to starve, while to feed one’s family amounted to breaking the quarantine and risking repression.¹¹ The lockdown gravely impacted not only food security but the economy, education, hospitality, tourism, leisure, gender relations, domestic violence, domestic abuse, and mental health.¹² A documentary film, *The Children of Nowhere*, shows that hundreds of millions of children in India saw their education devastated—indeed, schools closed for almost two years, but only 8% of rural children were able to attend online classes, and 37% did not

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- 8 Elias Byriabarema, “In Uganda, Mothers in Labor Die amidst Coronavirus Lockdown,” *Reuters*, April 9, 2020, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/uganda-mothers-labour-die-amidst-153850240.html>.
 - 9 Michaela C. Schippers, “For the Greater Good? The Devastating Ripple Effects of the Covid-19 Crisis,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, September 29, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7550468/>.
 - 10 Lin Ma et.al, “The Intergenerational Mortality Trade-Off of Covid-19 Lockdown Policies,” *World Bank Development Research Group*, May 2021, abstract, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/990621622121589737/pdf/The-Intergenerational-Mortality-Tradeoff-of-COVID-19-Lockdown-Policies.pdf>.
 - 11 Kelsey Piper, “The Devastating Consequences of Coronavirus Lockdowns in Poor Countries,” *Vox*, April 18, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/4/18/21212688/coronavirus-lockdowns-developing-world>.
 - 12 See Helen Onyeaka, Christian Anumudu, and Paul Mbaegbu, “Covid-19 Pandemic: A Review of the Global Lockdown and Its Far-Reaching Effects,” *Science Progress*, June 1, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00368504211019854>.

attend any class at all.¹³ Also, cases of teenage pregnancies and child marriages soared. A devastation also occurred in Honduras and, again, in Uganda, where millions of children simply never returned to school when it resumed after the lockdown (20% of them in the latter case). In Latin America, young women's sexual and reproductive health went back to what it was decades ago. In Angola, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and many other countries, the impact of school closures, especially on girls, was no less than disastrous.¹⁴

New Zealand boasted about its success in the pandemic, but this success was predicated on "Covid nationalism," i.e., on tightly closing its borders in a modern form of "apartheid," and on "not appearing to care" about the impact this policy would have on poorer countries dependent on trade.¹⁵ The overall result of this policy and similar ones was dire:

Middle-income countries saw a dramatic rise of soup kitchens in poor areas as their ability to earn money vanished overnight. Children in poor countries were suddenly unable to access education, and the impact was so severe that on some estimates the follow-through in terms of lost skills will be felt for a century. Death rates in countries like Angola for malaria and dengue fever went through the roof as the state, plunged into an economic crisis more severe than anything since independence, withdrew services. Domestic abuse soared all over the world, while child marriage and trafficking increased.¹⁶

Policymakers knew exactly what to expect: UNESCO had released a report on March 19, 2020, to lay out that school closures

13 Abeer Khan and Kunal Purohit, "The Children of Nowhere," *Collateral Global*, March 23, 2023, <https://collateralglobal.org/article/the-children-of-nowhere/>.

14 Khan and Purohit, "The Children of Nowhere." See also Caduff, "What Went Wrong."

15 Toby Green and Thomas Fazi, *The Covid Consensus: The Global Assault on Democracy and the Poor—A Critique from the Left* (London: Hurst, 2023), 436–37.

16 Green and Fazi, *The Covid Consensus*, 437.

would mostly affect those who were already underprivileged. They could “only immensely exacerbate inequalities owing to gaps in care caused by the stress and competing responsibilities provoked by this policy.”¹⁷ Authorities proceeded with them anyway and got the expected results:

...lockdowns were catastrophic. The disruption to economies and education entrenched and deepened inequality and massively expanded national debt, worsening the debt crisis facing the [African] continent.... In 2020 and 2021, Western countries raised interest rates to manage the economic effect of the pandemic. This curtailed the ability of African countries to finance and repay their debt arrangements and has resulted in ballooning interest rates and weakening local currencies.¹⁸

Already by October 2020, the World Bank estimated that 100 million people had been thrown into extreme poverty; “decades of progress” had “gone into reverse” in the “worst setback” in a generation.¹⁹

The Western left has become indifferent to inequality

“Lockdowns,” wrote Martin Kulldorff on Twitter on January 28, 2021, “have protected the laptop class of young low-risk journalists, scientists, teachers, politicians, and lawyers, while throwing children, the working class, and high-risk older people

17 Khan and Purohit, “The Children of Nowhere.”

18 Anjuli Webster, “Pandemic Preparations Are Unhealthy,” *Mail & Guardian*, March 22, 2024, <https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2024-03-22-pandemic-preparations-are-unhealthy/>.

19 Josh Zumbrun, “Coronavirus Has Thrown around 100 Million People into Extreme Poverty, World Bank Estimates,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-has-thrown-around-100-million-people-into-extreme-poverty-world-bank-estimates-11602086400>.

under the bus.”²⁰ The collective reaction of indifference on the part of the academic liberal left has been all the more puzzling that the latter belong to a social class which is typically critical of authoritarianism and which likes to portray itself as attuned to the plight of the poor and disadvantaged. Yet, it attacked those who defended the poor as Covid unfolded:

Four years ago, a professor of epidemiology, Oxford’s Sunetra Gupta, released a study suggesting that Covid may have started to spread earlier than anyone thought, and that as a result of this, the doomsday scenario which some scientists were predicting might not come to pass. The abuse she faced as a result of not yielding to the general hysteria was instructive. It revealed an intellectual establishment where to challenge authority was seen as heresy. Academics who did question the government’s strategy ended up having their reputations attacked and their livelihoods threatened. Universities offered no support to dissenters, but stayed silent.²¹

Toby Green and Thomas Fazi asked why the Western “public performance of empathy” and “performative compliance with lockdown measures”²² was also (and perhaps mainly) practiced by politicians and writers from the left while they “produced ... radical harms for poor people.”²³ Indeed, the reactions to the pandemic seem to have gone against all left-wing values. Toby Green even describes the Covid pandemic response on the continent as “neocolonial”: “It suppressed indigenous medical systems, disregarded the perspectives of public health officials

20 See Martin Kulldorff (@MartinKulldorff), “Lockdowns have protected the laptop class of young low-risk journalists, scientists, teachers, politicians and lawyers,” Twitter, January 28, 2021, 2:20 pm, <https://twitter.com/Martin-Kulldorff/status/1354781489150504962>.

21 “Covid and the Politics of Panic,” *The Spectator*, March 30, 2024, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/covid-and-the-politics-of-panic-2/>.

22 Green and Fazi, *The Covid Consensus*, 4.

23 Green and Fazi, *The Covid Consensus*, 3.

in Africa, and frontlined Covid vaccinations at the expense of treating other serious medical conditions such as malaria and tuberculosis. On the other hand, the pandemic produced a new billionaire almost every day, inflating inequality across the globe.”²⁴ This policy was not only neocolonial but frankly racist.²⁵ Carlo Caduff showed that the notion of “global threat” posed by the virus conjured a response framed as requiring “everyone’s sacrifice,” but that this image “relied on a false assumption of equality.” The notion of solidarity proved meaningless in view of the fact that the lockdowns affected people in different ways. It is in fact the most vulnerable who were the most affected by the lockdown.²⁶

Oxfam International indeed warned in 2022 that the pandemic was creating one new billionaire every 30 hours, while one million people could be falling into poverty at the same rate.²⁷ By 2022, the ten richest men had already doubled their fortunes thanks to the pandemic, while the income of 99% of the world population had fallen.²⁸ The American left, obsessed with and entirely mobilized around the construction of its anti-Trump image, failed to express any indignation or concern or to even collectively engage, as mentioned above, in any critical approach to the Covid response. It displayed the same indifference concerning the lack of access to vaccines among the poorer countries. Millions of Westerners,

24 Webster, “Pandemic Preparations.”

25 See Bhattacharya, Green, and Oduor, “Is the New WHO Treaty Neo-Colonialism.”

26 See Caduff, “What Went Wrong.”

27 Annie Thériault and Belinda Torres-Leclercq, “Pandemic Creates New Billionaire Every 30 Hours—Now a Million People Could Fall into Extreme Poverty at Same Rate in 2022,” *Oxfam International*, May 23, 2022, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/pandemic-creates-new-billionaire-every-30-hours-now-million-people-could-fall>.

28 Annie Thériault and Belinda Torres-Leclercq, “Ten Richest Men Double Their Fortunes in Pandemic While Incomes of 99 Percent of Humanity Fall,” *Oxfam International*, January 17, 2022, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/ten-richest-men-double-their-fortunes-pandemic-while-incomes-99-percent-humanity>.

including many in academia, posed for the camera while getting their vaccine, keen on providing a “good example” to the world but failing to consider how offensive such a display was for those who had no chance of getting it.

Shortsightedness drastically limited rational discourse. On the one hand, the trio Donald Trump-Jair Bolsonaro-Boris Johnson downplayed the dangers of Covid. Worse, they politicized the issue, as populist politicians typically do: insofar as everything is about them, anyone criticizing their Covid denial was pitched as their enemy, the “leftist.” Alas, the liberal left around the globe fell right into this trap; as if in a mirror, anyone criticizing stringent Covid policies was automatically associated with the “populist” enemy and had to be silenced. This attitude greatly contributed to hiding the disaster caused by the lockdowns also in the West.

The collateral damage of the lockdowns has also been devastating in the West

Lockdowns have proved useless against Covid: “Whatever we did, the virus just kept on spreading: this is a fair summary of what happened in 2020.”²⁹ On the other hand, the lockdowns are now known to have caused considerable damage in the West as well,³⁰ costing, for instance, as of February 2024, 111,000 years of lives in Europe to skin cancer patients alone due to delayed diagnoses.³¹ In a study published in March 2024 on the server of the *Wall Street Journal* rather

29 See Green and Fazi, *The Covid Consensus*, 436.

30 See Ross Clark, “Did Lockdowns Cause More Harm Than Good?” *The Spectator*, February 18, 2024, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/did-lockdowns-cause-more-harm-than-good/>.

31 Lara V. Maul, Dagmar Jamiolkowski, Rebecca A. Lapidés et al., “Health Economic Consequences Associated with Covid-19-Related Delay in Melanoma Diagnosis in Europe,” *JAMA Network Open*, February 16, 2024, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2815226>.

than in an academic journal (although it appears adequately sourced), perhaps because one of its lead authors, Scott Atlas, was pushed to resign from his position at Stanford due to its critical stance on Covid lockdowns,³² it was estimated that the deaths caused by the lockdowns and societal disruptions in the US since 2020 were “likely around 400,000, as much as 100 times the number of Covid deaths the lockdowns prevented.” As mentioned earlier, the report quotes a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, which found that the US “would have had 1.60 million fewer deaths if it had had the performance of Sweden.”³³

On a side note, the lead author of this study, John Ioannidis from Stanford, was censored on YouTube for claiming in a 2021 documentary film that the national reaction to Covid was the result of sensationalism and of a state of panic. The *Washington Post* claimed that he was “losing the argument,” while his critics said he violated his “own principles of intellectual rigor,” “refusing to admit his mistaken judgements and recklessly lending a scientific imprimatur to forces that defy public-health directives for irrational reasons.”³⁴ These accusations, proffered in December 2020, have not aged well. Ioannidis’ analyses, on the other hand, are more salient than ever.

Amidst the staggering costs of lockdowns, Scott Atlas’s study from March 2024 quotes the fact that in spring 2020, nearly half of the US’s 650,000 chemotherapy patients did not

32 For an example of the coverage he received from mainstream media, see Philip Bump, “Scott Atlas Will Forever Be the Face of Surrender to the Coronavirus,” *The Washington Post*, December 1, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/12/01/scott-atlas-will-forever-be-face-surrender-coronavirus/>.

33 John P. A. Ioannidis, Francesco Zonta, and Michael Levitt, “Variability in Excess Deaths across Countries with Different Vulnerability during 2020-2023,” *PNAS*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2309557120>.

34 Peter Jamison, “A Top Scientist Questioned Virus Lockdowns on Fox News. The Backlash Was Fierce,” *The Washington Post*, December 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2020/12/16/john-ioannidis-coronavirus-lockdowns-fox-news/>.

get treatment, and 85% of living organ transplants weren't completed. Moreover:

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as many as 49 million Americans were out of work in May 2020. This shock had health consequences. A National Bureau of Economic Research study found that the lockdown unemployment shock is projected to result in 840,000 to 1.22 million excess deaths over the next 15 to 20 years, disproportionately killing women and minorities. By one estimate today's children will lose \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings owing to school closings. They may also suffer shorter life expectancy, which is linked to income and educational attainment.³⁵

Indeed, the lockdowns caused considerable damage to Western children. School closures are now known not to have significantly slowed down the spread of the Covid virus, but on the other hand they caused what will possibly be irreparable harm to the impacted generations; they caused long-term academic decline, especially in poor communities, as well as a considerable rise in anxiety and mental health issues among the youth.³⁶ Babies and young children also suffered developmental setbacks.³⁷ Perhaps lockdowns did save lives, the *Spectator*

35 Scott Atlas, Steve H. Hanke, Philip G. Kerpen, and Casey B. Mulligan, *COVID Lessons Learned: A Retrospective after Four Years*, Committee to Unleash Prosperity, March 2024, https://committeetounleashprosperity.com/wpcontent/uploads/2024/03/240313_CTUP_COVIDCommitteeReport_Doc.pdf, 10.

36 Sarah Mervosh, Claire Cain Miller, and Francesca Paris, "What the Data Says about Pandemic School Closures, Four Years Later," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/18/upshot/pandemic-school-closures-data.html>. See also my tweet on this article: Muriel Blaive (@MurielBlaivePhD), "After slandering for four years the people who tried to warn about the disastrous effect school closures would have on education," Twitter, March 18, 2024, 3:00 pm, <https://twitter.com/MurielBlaivePhD/status/1769725569040547987>; as well as Hannah Fearn, "How Covid Lockdowns Hit Mental Health of Teenage Boys Hardest," *The Guardian*, March 23, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/23/how-covid-lockdowns-hit-mental-health-of-teenage-boys-hardest>.

37 Hannah Devlin, "Young and Old: How the Covid Pandemic Has Affected Every UK Generation," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com>.

mused, “but for how long, given that most of those who did succumb to Covid were in their eighties or nineties? Against all this should be weighed the excess deaths, many of far younger people.”³⁸

The economic crisis which resulted from the lockdowns has been worse than the worst expectations, even in the West: already by March 2021, Covid measures had cost \$5.2 trillion in the US, whereas World War II had cost \$4.7 trillion in today’s money.³⁹ According to Toby Green and Thomas Fazi, even in “cushioned Western countries,” the “savings of the rich grew as the poor found themselves falling into rent arrears and struggling to feed their families, and a generation of poor children found their life chances scarred so deeply that many educators wonder if they will ever recover.”⁴⁰ As a result of the pandemic response’s “authoritarian war on the poor” and enabling of the neoliberal state, the world’s billionaires had made US\$4 trillion by the end of the first year of the pandemic. Toby Green calls this an “abject political surrender to the ghosts of Thatcherism” on the part of the left.⁴¹

Why did this tale of misery and destruction not enter Western public consciousness as the logical and predictable consequence of the lockdown? I venture that it is because the entire lockdown debate was captured by the narrative on the Covid vaccine as the upcoming savior of humanity. Indeed, it is on the vaccine issue that censorship was really rolled out.

com/world/2024/mar/21/young-and-ol.d-how-the-covid-pandemic-has-affected-every-uk-generation.

38 The Spectator, “Covid and the Politics of Panic.”

39 Ron Surz, “Money Printing and Inflation: Covid, Cryptocurrencies, and More,” *Nasdaq*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/money-printing-and-inflation%3A-covid-cryptocurrencies-and-more>.

40 Green and Fazi, *The Covid Consensus*, 437.

41 Toby Green, “Covid-19 and the Left: A Post-Mortem,” *Sublation*, May 25, 2024, <https://sublationmedia.com/covid-19-and-the-left-a-postmortem/>.

For instance, in 2021, the French national research agency (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, CNRS) issued a public warning to its 30,000 researchers, stating:

The CNRS deplores the public statements made by certain scientists, often more concerned with fleeting media glory than scientific truth, on subjects far removed from their professional fields of expertise, such as vaccination against Covid. These communications do not respect any of the rules in force for scientific publications, notably peer review, which is the only way to check the rigor of the process.⁴²

The CNRS was reacting here to the public statements of sociologist and biopolitical scholar Laurent Mucchielli in which he evoked the side effects of the Covid vaccine; he claimed on the basis of data from the official Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) that the Covid vaccination had already by August 2021 caused the death in the US of more than five times as many people as the flu vaccine in thirty years.⁴³ Mucchielli was issued a call to order by CNRS despite his protests that “science is based on contradictory debate, the free discussion of data, and reasoning.”⁴⁴ Science and free speech had become two contradictory notions, and Mucchielli’s contentions were never discussed.

42 “Le CNRS exige le respect des règles de déontologie des métiers de la recherche,” *CNRS.fr*, August 24, 2021, <https://www.cnrs.fr/fr/presse/le-cnrs-exige-le-respect-des-regles-de-deontologie-des-metiers-de-la-recherche>.

43 See Soazig Le Névé, “Le sociologue Laurent Mucchielli rappelé à l’ordre par le CNRS,” *Le Monde*, August 24, 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/08/24/le-sociologue-laurent-mucchielli-rappelle-a-l-ordre-par-le-cnrs_6092249_3224.html. The original post was taken down by Médiapart but is reproduced here: “La vaccination Covid à l’épreuve des faits—‘Une mortalité inédite,’” *altermidi*, August 6, 2021, <https://altermidi.org/2021/08/06/le-texte-de-laurent-mucchielli-depublier-par-mediapart/>.

44 Le Névé, “Le sociologue Laurent Mucchielli.” See also his volume: Laurent Mucchielli, *La doxa du Covid: Peur, santé, corruption et démocratie*, 2 vols. (Bastia: Éolien, 2023).

A personal story of censorship, or how fact-checking goes wrong

On November 3, 2021, I reposted on Facebook without comment an article published by the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ). This article was entitled “Covid-19: Researcher Blows the Whistle on Data Integrity Issues in Pfizer’s Vaccine Trial.”⁴⁵ Here is the screenshot of my post:

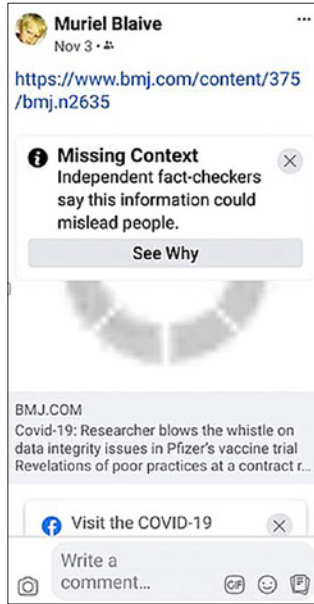


Figure 1. Screenshot of my original reposting of the *British Medical Journal* article “Covid-19: Researcher Blows the Whistle on Data Integrity Issues in Pfizer’s Vaccine Trial” on Facebook, November 3, 2021

The post was instantly covered by the banner “Missing Context. Independent fact-checkers say this information could mislead people,” which dwarfed it.

45 Paul D. Thacker, “Covid-19: Researcher Blows the Whistle on Data Integrity Issues in Pfizer’s Vaccine Trial,” *BMJ Investigation*, November 2, 2021, <https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n2635>.

On November 11, 2021, eight days later, I received a further notice from Facebook according to which my post had now been fully assessed by “independent fact-checkers.” It was accompanied by a link toward a “related article” entitled “Fact check: The *British Medical Journal* Did NOT Reveal Disqualifying and Ignored Reports of Flaws in Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine Trials.”⁴⁶

This article was authored by Dean Miller, the managing editor of a website called Lead Stories.⁴⁷ Lead Stories defines itself as a “fact-checking website that is always looking for the latest false, misleading, deceptive, or inaccurate stories, videos, or images going viral on the internet.”⁴⁸ It is one of the companies subcontracted by Facebook to screen users’ posts for misinformation, responsible at the time for up to half of Facebook’s fact checks. Here is what my post now looked like—the original reference and topic were even less recognizable:

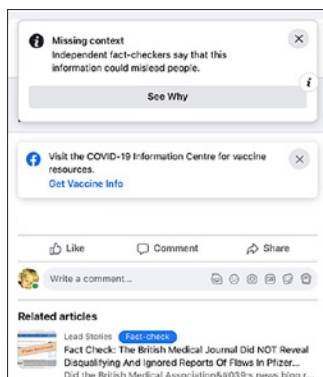


Figure 2. Screenshot of my reposting on Facebook of the *British Medical Journal* article after it was modified by Lead Stories’ “fact-check” on November 11, 2021

46 Dean Miller, “Fact Check: The *British Medical Journal* Did NOT Reveal Disqualifying and Ignored Reports of Flaws in Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine Trials,” *Lead Stories*, November 10, 2021, <https://leadstories.com/hoax-alert/2021/11/fact-check-british-medical-journal-did-not-reveal-disqualifying-and-ignored-reports-of-flaws-in-pfizer-vaccine-trial.html>.

47 See his profile here: <https://leadstories.com/author/dean-miller.html>.

48 <https://leadstories.com/>.

The cancelling of this post was the result of a policy dictated by the “Trusted News Initiative,” a consortium of mainstream media that focused, according to BBC Director-General Tim Davie, on “combatting the spread of harmful vaccine disinformation.”⁴⁹ Launched in 2019 and reactivated on December 10, 2020, in view of the impending rollout of the Covid vaccine, it stated: “The Trusted News Initiative partners will ... work together to expand our framework and ensure legitimate concerns about future vaccinations are heard, whilst harmful disinformation myths are stopped in their tracks.”⁵⁰ Founding members of the consortium were AP, AFP, BBC, CBC/Radio-Canada, European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Facebook, *Financial Times*, First Draft, Google/YouTube, *The Hindu*, Microsoft, Reuters, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Twitter, and the *Washington Post*.

A crucial question is, who is checking the fact-checkers and their definition of what is “legitimate” and “harmful”? The *BMJ* was not amused. It published on January 5, 2022, a protest letter against this Lead Stories piece which debunked the debunking.⁵¹ This letter pointed out that the *BMJ* article was the courageous work of a whistleblower at Pfizer’s as reported by journalist Paul D. Thacker and that the FB “fact-check” would have a deterring effect on future potential whistleblowers. The letter also opened up the wider issue of the way in which critics are surveilled in our societies, which is not without reminding, again, the way dissidents used to be delegitimized under communism, with arguments also pertaining at the time to public sanity and national security.

49 See BBC Media Center, “Trusted News Initiative (TNI) to Combat Spread of Harmful Vaccine Disinformation and Announces Major Research Project,” *BBC*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/2020/trusted-news-initiative-vaccine-disinformation>.

50 BBC, “Trusted News Initiative.”

51 Peter C. Göttsche, “Rapid Response to: Covid-19: Researcher Blows the Whistle on Data Integrity Issues in Pfizer’s Vaccine Trial,” *BMJ*, January 5, 2022, <https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n2635/rr-86>.

Journalist and lawyer Glenn Greenwald shreds to pieces this so-called “disinformation expertise”:

This is a completely fraudulent credential. It was invented out of whole cloth following the dual 2016 disasters of Brexit in the UK and Trump’s victory over Hillary in the US. Seemingly out of nowhere, overnight, there descended upon the United States this creepy new group of self-anointed experts who proclaimed to the world that they were able to identify falsity and deceit where nobody else could. As a result of this unique insight they insist that they and they alone possess, they have demanded the power to dictate the limits of our political debate, and have purported to impose on the largest tech companies in the West the obligation to enforce their pronouncements.... these people are often financed by the most powerful and politically interventionist billionaires in the West. The country’s largest media outlets routinely treat them as the prophets they claim to be.⁵²

These fact-checkers certainly are no prophets. On the other hand, as censors, they yield enormous influence.

Unchecked fact-checking is perverse because censorship defines social capital

Dean Miller is a journalist; according to his own logic, why should he be more credentialed to assess medical data than a laboratory assistant and a science journalist, or than the *British Medical Journal* itself? Two weeks later, on January 19, 2022, the *BMJ* published a long academic response to Miller’s “fact-checking” piece entitled “Facebook versus the *BMJ*:

52 Glenn Greenwald, “Lee Fang Exposes 60 Minutes’s ‘Disinfo Expert’ as Partisan Hack,” *System Update*, March 27, 2024, <https://rumble.com/v4lwy9o-sys-update-show-249.html>.

When Fact-Checking Goes Wrong.”⁵³ It pointed out that Dean Miller had substantiated his article with a defense that appeared to be coming straight from the horse’s mouth:

The Lead Stories article said that none of the flaws identified by *the BMJ*’s whistleblower, Brook Jackson, would “disqualify” the data collected from the main Pfizer vaccine trial. Quoting a Pfizer spokesperson, it said that the drug company had reviewed Jackson’s concerns and taken “actions to correct and remediate” where necessary. A Pfizer spokesperson said that the company’s investigation “did not identify any issues or concerns that would invalidate the data or jeopardize the integrity of the study.”⁵⁴

To take Pfizer at face value on such an important matter is a grave ethical and professional failure on the part of a “fact-checker.” But the *BMJ* response raised yet another serious issue: Facebook refused to intervene in the matter, claiming that only fact-checkers were responsible for reviewing content and applying ratings. Conversely, Lead Stories replied that it was not responsible for Facebook’s actions.⁵⁵ In this Catch-22, no one is responsible, and there was and still is no independent appeal process in place. In effect, “fact-checkers” have been granted a monopoly on information.

I posted a little communist joke to their attention: “That FB’s ‘independent fact-checkers’ know more than the *BMJ*, in fact so much more that they can quite simply silence them, is of course the new ‘science.’ Facebook is the new Lysenko! (just checking if you are as good in history as you are in biology, dear FB ‘independent fact-checkers.’)”

53 Rebecca Coombes and Madlen Davies, “Facebook versus the *BMJ*: When Fact-Checking Goes Wrong,” *BMJ*, January 19, 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9893920/>.

54 Coombes and Davies, “Facebook versus the *BMJ*.”

55 Coombes and Davies, “Facebook versus the *BMJ*.”



Figure 3. Little communist joke addressed to the “Facebook independent fact-checkers” on November 11, 2021

Lysenko was a Stalinist pseudo-scientist who rejected Gregor Mendel’s revolutionary discoveries on genetics and who “used his political influence and power to suppress dissenting opinions and discredit, marginalize, and imprison his critics, elevating his anti-Mendelian theories to state-sanctioned doctrine.”⁵⁶ Sadly, Lead Stories missed the reference and failed to censor my little joke.

On the other hand, Facebook kindly offered me to take down my post with the *BMJ* link, which was an implicit threat with consequences I did not understand fully at the time: I and all the others who refused to do so have been shadow-banned ever since. We could not be completely banned because an article in the *BMJ* is hardly “fake news,” but shadow-banning was the alternative measure devised to punish those who challenged the official narrative. It means that to this day, my “Facebook friends” hardly see my posts, which then get zero or very few likes, even though I stopped posting on Covid after this incident. Since I have nowhere to appeal

⁵⁶ See the Wikipedia entry on Lysenko, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trofim_Lysenko.

and the situation hasn't improved one bit in three years, I progressively migrated to Twitter, where two of my tweets reached one million impressions in my first year of active use and many others routinely hover around 20,000; this is all the difference between banning and not banning. This forced isolation made a standard user like me appear ideologically suspicious on Facebook, as opposed to appearing legitimate on Twitter. Censorship socially defines normality. Worse, it largely defines social capital.

Facebook consequently also censored my "Facebook memories" on Covid topics so even I could not see my own past posts. Those that dealt with the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 became visible to me only in the winter of 2024. In a practice which cannot but remind of Stalinism, social media had endeavored to rewrite not only the future but also the past. Czech-French writer Milan Kundera narrates in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* how communist leaders who fell into disgrace were retroactively airbrushed from official pictures.⁵⁷ In one memorable scene, one such leader, Vladimír Clementis, vanished from a group picture but his hat, which he had lent to the Stalinist leader who later ordered his execution, Klement Gottwald, remained in the picture—on the leader's own head. "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting," concluded Kundera.

I was silently censored on another occasion, which I hadn't even noticed until I could finally access my "Facebook memories" four years later. This time it was about masks: in May 2020, I had apparently reposted a cartoon (I still can't fully see my post) claiming that N95s and surgical masks had 95% efficiency, but cloth masks and sponge masks had 0% efficiency. Like with my other case, the banning of this post

57 See "Czechoslovakia: Falsified Photographs," *Index on Censorship* 14, no. 6 (1985): 34–39, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03064228508533993>.

was accompanied by an article from a fact-checking website, this time PolitiFact. I deconstructed in a short piece on my Substack channel the spurious claims of these fact-checkers as to the efficiency of cloth masks: they used “experts” to assert that cloth masks could be “up to 95% protective.”⁵⁸ Since my post is still made invisible by being barred with the sign “False information. The same information was checked in another post by independent fact-checkers,” I have to assume that PolitiFact still makes the claim that cloth masks can offer up to 95% protection against Covid, which is not only plain disinformation but outright dangerous to the public.

As history could have told our contemporary “fact-checkers,” Stalinism is inevitably followed by destalinization. On May 13, 2024, the *Times* published a lead article, “The Times View on Press Rating Agencies: Arbiters of Truth.” The self-explanatory subtitle ran: “Self-Appointed Monitors of News Accuracy Such As the Global Disinformation Index Can Undermine Objective Reporting by Penalizing Sites They Disagree with”:

The willful dissemination of inaccurate news stories by hostile foreign states and grassroots conspiracy theorists poses an obvious threat to the healthy functioning of political life. But so too does the attempt to clamp down on so-called disinformation, especially when such efforts clumsily intrude on the legitimate operations of a free press. The work of the Global Disinformation Index (GDI), a not-for-profit ratings agency founded in the UK in 2018, illustrates this chilling tendency. Though the GDI presents itself as an institution devoted to the promotion of “neutrality, independence, and transparency,” in practice it has helped to stymie valuable and independent-minded journalism on the basis of little more than ideological prejudice.⁵⁹

58 Muriel Blaive, “More Covid ‘Expertise’ on Facebook, More Disinformation on Masks—Still in 2024,” *Muriel’s Substack* (blog), May 20, 2024, <https://open.substack.com/pub/murielblaive/p/more-covid-expertise-on-facebook>.

59 “The Times View on Press Rating Agencies: Arbiters of Truth,” *The Times*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-times-view-on-press-ratings-agencies-arbiters-of-truth-3qg93hdnt>.

The GDI was funded by the UK government until 2023, i.e., it was fully functional during Covid. In fact, the UK invested £2.6 million in it in 2020-23. Rating agencies are powerful because they act as intermediaries between online advertisers and news websites seeking advertising revenue; they “have the power to effectively starve an outlet of income if they judge it to have propagated disinformation.”⁶⁰ For a small outlet, this is a question of life and death.

The US Congress has documented the attacks on free speech led by the Biden White House

On May 1, 2024, the Committee on the Judiciary and the Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government of the House of Representatives published a joint interim report entitled “The Censorship-Industrial Complex: How Top Biden White House Officials Coerced Big Tech to Censor Americans, True Information, and Critics of the Biden Administration.”⁶¹ This report details the way in which Facebook, YouTube, and Amazon surrendered to demands from the White House concerning the moderation of the content published on their platforms. The respective parts of the report are called “Facebook Files,” “YouTube Files,” and “Amazon Files.” The report did not consider Twitter but referred to the “Twitter Files” that were made public following Elon Musk’s acquisition of the company, files which were already used in at least three judicial trials (see Chapter 4, section “The Covid measures are also challenged in court”).

60 “The Times View.”

61 Committee on the Judiciary, Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government, “The Censorship-Industrial Complex: How Top Biden White House Officials Coerced Big Tech to Censor Americans, True Information, and Critics of the Biden Administration—Interim Report,” Washington, DC, May 1, 2024, <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/Biden-WH-Censorship-Report-final.pdf>.

The very title and tone of the report on the censorship-industrial complex suggest a dominating Republican influence, although the two committees are bipartisan. This in turn virtually guarantees that the report will be ignored by mainstream media. Yet, the evidence presented (subpoenaed letters, emails, messages, and other documents) is compelling. It demonstrates without a doubt that the Biden White House actively intervened to have content “moderated,” i.e., censored, on these major platforms of public interest. The vaccine was always a political matter: the Democrats were suspicious of “Trump’s vaccine” before winning the November 2020 election⁶² but then fully endorsed the vaccine as soon as Joe Biden came into office.

The censorship of vaccine criticism is not a partisan issue. The pressure of the pharmaceutical industry to push the vaccine would have been doubtless equally strong, and the result almost certainly identical, if the president in place had been Republican rather than Democrat. But as it happens, the Covid vaccine rollout coincided with Joe Biden being in office and suited the Democrats’ interventionism in Covid matters, so it is the Biden administration which became associated with what some saw as a vaccine success and others as the censorship of the vaccine failure.

While this congressional report throws an appalling light on the way any discussion of the vaccine side effects has been censored in order to push for ever more vaccinations, the present volume is too limited in size and scope to deal with the topic of the Covid vaccine itself, especially its mRNA version. I am not antivax by principle, have received all the usual shots we get in the West, and have had three shots of the Pfizer/

62 Evan Semones, “Harris Says She Wouldn’t Trust Trump on Any Vaccine Released before Election,” *Politico*, September 5, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/05/kamala-harris-trump-coronavirus-vaccine-409320>.

BioNTech vaccine. My parents and my adult children are also vaccinated against Covid. However, the picture that is slowly emerging raises deep ethical concerns and would deserve a volume of its own. Since mainstream media appear paralyzed by this issue, I can only express the hope that independent journalists will continue investigating it and/or that various inquiry commissions will throw more light both on the manipulative way in which the vaccine has been presented to the public and on its potential dangers, if there are any.

What this congressional report did was to chronicle almost day by day from February to September 2021 the efforts of the Biden administration to impose its views on the three companies mentioned, until they relented and fully complied with its censorship requests. I will limit myself here to Facebook since it offers an interesting accompaniment to my experience described above.

According to the report, “Facebook began censoring in February 2021 not just anti-vaccine content but also claims that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was manmade,” i.e., relating to the lab leak theory.⁶³ However, the Biden administration, often under the guise of Senior Pandemic Advisor Andy Slavitt or White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, sometimes Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, continued pressuring Facebook for ever more censorship, endorsing a claim of the Center for the Countering of Digital Hate (CCDH) according to which only a dozen Facebook users, the so-called “Disinformation Dozen,” were producing 65% of all anti-vaccine misinformation.⁶⁴ Internal communication at Facebook shows that the company employees were baffled by this claim, scrambled to figure out if it was true, and identified 39 suspicious accounts, while still “noting that the Biden Administration’s

63 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 10.

64 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 35.

definition of ‘misinformation’ was ‘completely unclear.’”⁶⁵ As Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of the company, put it, “the White House was ‘scapegoating’ Facebook to ‘cover their own missed vaccination rates and a virus they can’t get control of through public policy.’”⁶⁶ To be even more precise, communication with Surgeon-General Murthy made clear that the White House was concerned that “disinformation” on Facebook was hampering the vaccination effort.⁶⁷

On May 26, 2021, Facebook stopped censoring the lab leak theory (although it continued demoting it until at least January 2022), but the situation escalated when President Biden told a reporter in July that “social media companies like Facebook were ‘killing people’ by allowing Covid misinformation to spread on their platforms.”⁶⁸ On July 21, 2021, an internal memo at Facebook noted that

the Biden White House would like Facebook to “remove content that provides any negative information on or opinions about the vaccine without concluding that the benefits of the vaccine outweigh that information or opinion” as well as “humorous or satirical content that suggests the vaccine isn’t safe.” The memo also indicated that it was likely that the Biden White House wanted Facebook to remove “true content and criticism of the government, both of which,” the company felt the need to add, “are appropriate to allow on platform.” The internal Facebook memo further explained that the Biden White House had “previously indicated that it thinks humor should be removed if it is premised on the vaccine having side effects,” so Facebook “expect[ed] it would similarly want to see humor about vaccine hesitancy removed.”⁶⁹

65 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 35.

66 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 38.

67 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 37–38.

68 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 37.

69 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 43–44.

On August 18, 2021, Facebook expressed once again its frustration at the administration, noting that the oft-mentioned “Disinformation Dozen” “are responsible for about just 0.05% of all views of vaccine-related content on Facebook.”⁷⁰ Yet, on August 23, 2021, it capitulated and agreed to censor what the White House demanded: “And with that, the Biden Administration’s censorship campaign had completed its mission: one of the world’s largest social media platforms again succumbed to pressure and violated its own principles to appease a powerful government office.”⁷¹ In a bombshell letter to Jim Jordan, Chair of the House Committee for the Judiciary, on August 26, 2024, Zuckerberg confirmed these conclusions, expressed regret, and vowed to resist such White House pressure in the future (see Chapter 4).⁷²

So, this is how my reposting on Facebook of an article of the *British Medical Journal* came to be censored and my profile to be shadow-banned ever since—not because Facebook itself suspected it was disinformation, but at the request of the White House, in order to promote vaccine intake. It is all the more absurd that I (and many of those who were censored) am not antivax. Antivax people should be entitled to their opinion anyway; at the very least, should they be deprived of the right to express themselves, it should be only after a wide public debate, not at the secret whim of the executive branch in the US. To quote the report, “While the Biden White House’s pressure campaign largely succeeded, its effects were devastating. By suppressing free speech and intentionally distorting public debate in the modern town

70 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 50.

71 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 50.

72 See the Twitter post of the House Judiciary GOP group, which reproduced the letter in full: House Judiciary GOP (@JudiciaryGOP), “Mark Zuckerberg just admitted three things,” Twitter, August 27, 2024, 12:44 am, <https://x.com/JudiciaryGOP/status/1828201780544504064>.

square, ideas and policies were no longer fairly tested and debated on their merits.”⁷³

“Science” served to disguise hubris: the Fauci personality cult

Indeed, it is easy to claim that a “scientific consensus” reigns when anyone thinking otherwise is silenced. The primary opposition to the official Covid narrative on lockdowns, the Great Barrington Declaration,⁷⁴ which promoted focused protection and boasts almost one million signatories, was derided and defiled in the mainstream media, when it was mentioned at all. Anthony Fauci, the much-publicized director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, called it “nonsense” and “dangerous.”⁷⁵ As already mentioned, its three authors, Martin Kulldorff from Harvard, Sunetra Gupta from Oxford, and Jay Bhattacharya from Stanford, were called “fringe epidemiologists” by the director of the National Institutes of Health, Francis Collins.⁷⁶ Hubris followed in the footsteps of censorship: a year later and as the efficacy of lockdowns became seriously contested, Anthony Fauci claimed, “Attacks on me, quite frankly, are attacks on science.”⁷⁷

73 “The Censorship-Industrial Complex,” 1.

74 See its website: <https://gbdeclaration.org/>.

75 Noah Higgins-Dunn, “Dr. Fauci Says Letting the Coronavirus Spread to Achieve Herd Immunity Is ‘Nonsense’ and ‘Dangerous,’” *CNBC*, October 15, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/15/dr-fauci-says-letting-the-coronavirus-spread-to-achieve-herd-immunity-is-nonsense-and-dangerous.html>.

76 Stephen M. Lepore, “‘There Needs to Be a Quick and Devastating Take down’: Emails Show How Fauci and Head of NIH Worked to Discredit Three Experts Who Penned the Great Barrington Declaration Which Called for an End to Lockdowns,” *The Daily Mail*, December 19, 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10324873/Emails-reveal-Fauci-head-NIH-colluded-try-smear-experts-called-end-lockdowns.html>.

77 Carlie Potterfield, “Dr. Fauci on GOP Criticism: ‘Attacks on Me, Quite Frankly, Are Attacks on Science,’” *Forbes*, December 10, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carliepotterfield/2021/06/09/fauci-on-gop-criticism-attacks-on-me-quite-frankly-are-attacks-on-science/>.

At the height of what reminds one of a personality cult on the communist model, the *Guardian* claimed not only that Fauci was a “superstar” and a “cult hero,” but also that “the US diseases expert has been spoofed by Brad Pitt and lauded as the ‘sexiest man alive.’”⁷⁸ Fauci figured on donuts from the company Donut Delite that supposedly were a “nationwide hit.”⁷⁹ He posed on the cover of *InStyle* magazine wearing dark sunglasses with the caption “The Good Doctor” and the title “Dr. Fauci Says, ‘With All Due Modesty, I Think I’m Pretty Effective.’”⁸⁰ His memoirs, published in 2024, advertised him as “the most famous—and most revered—doctor in the world today,” making him “truly an American hero,” the “embodiment of ‘speaking truth to power,’ with dignity and results.”⁸¹ Fauci was indeed awarded a \$901,400 prize from the Israeli-based Dan David Foundation in 2021 for “speaking truth to power” and “defending science.”⁸²

What is science, short of being “Anthony Fauci” and his cult of the personality? How do we recognize a scientific endeavor as opposed to a political one? How do we avoid

78 David Smith, “‘Maybe the Guy’s a Masochist’: How Anthony Fauci Became a Superstar,” *The Guardian*, September 10, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/sep/10/how-anthony-fauci-became-a-superstar>.

79 Lauren M. Johnson, “Doughnuts Featuring Dr. Fauci’s Face Are Quickly Becoming a Nationwide Hit,” *CNN*, March 26, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/26/us/dr-fauci-doughnuts-trnd/index.html>.

See also Chris Cillizza, “Explaining the Cult of Anthony Fauci,” *CNN*, April 20, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/20/politics/anthony-fauci-poll-favorability-trump/index.html>.

80 The original article authored by Norah O’Donnell is no longer accessible. However, a review of the article can be found here: Quentin Fottrell, “Defiant Fauci Tells *InStyle* Magazine: ‘With All Due Modesty, I Think I’m Pretty Effective,’” *MarketWatch*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/defiant-fauci-tells-instyle-i-dont-regret-anything-i-said-and-talks-about-being-persona-non-grata-in-trumps-white-house-2020-07-17>.

81 Anthony Fauci, *On Call: A Doctor’s Journey in Public Service* (New York: Viking Press, 2024).

82 Nick Mordowanec, “Fauci Making Millions During COVID Pandemic Sparks Backlash,” *Newsweek*, September 20, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/fauci-making-millions-during-covid-pandemic-sparks-backlash-1828484>.

sacrificing science to emotion? As I mentioned it in the introduction, for historians of communism, these are familiar questions: does historical truth even exist, and how do we recognize the work of a social scientist as opposed to an ideological argument? I mentioned Karl Popper, the philosopher of science, who pioneered a definition of the scientific method. As a young man, Popper had witnessed how the Austrian Communist Party pushed nine comrades in front of police bullets in 1919 in order to fulfill its own predictions on historical materialism and on the “worsening of the class struggle,” an ideology which it claimed was “scientific.” Such cynicism taught Popper that science had to be ethical in order to be protected from abuse and manipulation, and he endeavored to establish the difference between science and ideology. This is how he established the criterion of falsifiability, which places contradiction at the center of the scientific method—a criterion which was never adhered to by Covid authorities.⁸³

The “science” the public was presented with was made on the fly to a large degree

When they introduced restrictions, the Western political leaders not only failed to provide any source material to subject themselves to the possibility of falsification in the Popperian sense, but they now frankly boast about the improvised form of their decision-making.⁸⁴ Mandy Cohen, future head of the CDC, at the time North Carolina Health Director, laughed in 2024 about deciding on the phone in 2020, seem-

83 See Friedel Weinert, *Karl Popper: Professional Philosopher and Public Intellectual* (Cham: Springer, 2022), 13–14.

84 See the Twitter thread provided by user Ian Sollicec (@IanSollicec), “Each time we lift a veil of government, it’s obvious that none of them were ever ‘following the science,’” Twitter, March 22, 2024, 8:10 am, <https://twitter.com/IanSollicec/status/1771071883770753251>.

ingly on a whim, to “close down sports,” as seen on a video posted on Twitter.⁸⁵ Matt Hancock, the UK Health Secretary, was enraged in 2020 by the “f...ing Sweden argument” and demanded “a few bullet points to quash it.”⁸⁶ Francis Collins, the head of the National Institutes of Health in the U.S., ordered as already mentioned a “devastating takedown” of the Great Barrington Declaration.⁸⁷ Nicola Sturgeon, as First Minister of Scotland, decided to mask children in schools on a political rather than medical basis, yet Prime Minister Johnson decided it was “not worth an argument” with her, as later testified by his Chief Scientific Advisor Patrick Vallance during the UK Covid Inquiry.⁸⁸ Gabriel Attal, later French Prime Minister and at the time government spokesperson, admitted that the vaccine passports were not based on science but on “hope.”⁸⁹

In Germany, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) deliberately ignored the data which was contradicting its theory, while its decision-making was political and erratic.⁹⁰ As late as October

85 See Laura Powell (@LauraPowellEsq), “As NC health director, @DrMandyCohen felt comfortable wielding dictatorial power,” Twitter, June 2, 2023, 1:12 am, <https://twitter.com/LauraPowellEsq/status/1664409518468653056>.

86 See Fraser Nelson, “Britain Was Failed by a Pro-Lockdown Clique Incapable of Admitting Its Errors,” *The Telegraph*, March 2, 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/02/britain-failed-pro-lockdown-clique-incapable-admitting-errors/>.

87 See the email here: Phil Magness (@PhilWMagness), “New email dump showing Anthony Fauci and Francis Collins coordinating a propaganda campaign,” Twitter, December 17, 2021, 10:33 pm, <https://twitter.com/PhilWMagness/status/1471956647266377736>.

88 Simon Johnson, “Sturgeon Making Children Wear Masks Was Political, Sir Patrick Vallance Wrote in Covid Diary,” *The Telegraph*, March 12, 2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/03/12/sturgeon-masks-schools-political-scotland-vallance-covid/>.

89 See his appearance on TV channel CNews (@CNEWS) “Gabriel Attal: ‘Je ne crois pas qu’on se soit trompé sur l’efficacité du vaccin,’” Twitter, February 16, 2022, 8:22 pm, <https://twitter.com/CNEWS/status/1494029451662970886>.

90 See Stefan Korinth and Paul Schreyer, “Mehr als tausend Passagen geschwärzt: Multipolar veröffentlicht freigelegte RKI-Protokolle im Original,” *Multipolar*,

30, 2020, it claimed that “FFP2 masks are an occupational safety measure. If people are not trained/qualified personnel, FFP2 masks have no added value if they are not fitted and used correctly,”⁹¹ yet the mask was made compulsory only a few weeks later. On January 8, 2021, it claimed that the AstraZeneca vaccine “needed to be discussed” and there “may need to be restrictions,” yet two months later the vaccine was recommended for all age groups.⁹² On March 5, 2021, the RKI confirmed that vaccination status should never be a pretext for restrictions; yet in mid-September 2021, the “3G rule” (vaccinated, recovered, tested) was added to official restrictions.⁹³ The serious daily *Die Welt* eventually stated that the Robert Koch protocols had proven that “politics ignored science” and that the would-be scientific consensus around Covid was predicated on silencing dissenting scientists.⁹⁴

Concerning masks, journalist Paul D. Thacker remarked that the companies which produce them still carefully advertise on the box that masks “do not stop communicable diseases”—and should therefore be rather understood as a tribal, political statement than as a medical device.⁹⁵ In a video for the

March 20, 2024, <https://multipolar-magazin.de/artikel/rki-protokolle-2>.

91 Britta Spikermann, “Die brisanten Corona-Protokolle des RKI,” *ZDF*, March 23, 2024, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/deutschland/rki-protokolle-corona-klagen-100.html>.

92 Spikermann, “Die brisanten Corona-Protokolle.”

93 Spikermann, “Die brisanten Corona-Protokolle.”

94 Tim Röhn and Anna Kröning, “Die RKI-Protokolle und wie die Politik die Wissenschaft ignorierte,” *Die Welt*, March 26, 2024, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/plus250755780/Corona-Die-RKI-Protokolle-und-wie-die-Politik-die-Wissenschaft-ignorierte.html>. See also David Averre, “Lockdowns Could Cause More Harm Than Covid-19 and There Was No Evidence That Wearing Masks Was Useful, German Health Body Admitted during Coronavirus Pandemic, Released Documents Show,” *The Daily Mail*, March 26, 2024, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13239595/Lockdowns-cause-harm-Covid-19-no-evidence-wearing-masks-useful-German-health-body-admitted-coronavirus-pandemic-released-documents-show.html>.

95 See Jay Bhattacharya, “Episode 35: Paul Thacker on the Illusion of Consensus

Independent, an expert tried out various combinations of masks (cloth, surgical, and FFP2) separately and combined with each other against the sun in a cold environment. The moisture on which the virus circulates was clearly visible in every combination. Against his own evidence, the expert concluded that this was proof that wearing two FFP2 masks on top of each other “worked.”⁹⁶ Even if that had been true (it clearly wasn’t), it was never realistic to expect that the population at large would wear two FFP2 masks on top of one another at all times and would change them regularly. Meanwhile, he convincingly demonstrated that wearing any one mask at a time was useless.

The definitive answer to the potential usefulness or uselessness of masks should have been provided by the Cochrane study on the topic. Cochrane is generally considered the highest quality standard in medical research because it examines all studies put together. A Cochrane study on NPIs to stop Covid, including masks, did appear in 2023 and concluded that “wearing a mask may make little or no difference in how many people caught a flu-like illness/Covid-like illness.”⁹⁷ Crucially, the study noted that too few randomized controlled trials had been carried out so far and many more were needed. But the public outcry was such—the study indeed delegitimized the dominant public health message—that Karla Soares-Weiser, the editor-in-chief of the Cochrane Library, felt compelled to backtrack. She stated that “masks don’t work” would be

of Masking,” *The Illusion of Consensus* (podcast), March 10, 2024, <https://www.illusionconsensus.com/p/episode-35-paul-thacker-on-the-illusion>.

96 “Expert Demonstrates Efficacy of Double Masks in Cold Weather,” *The Independent TV*, YouTube video, 1:41, February 21, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fPfGU1MizY.

97 Tom Jefferson et. al., “Physical Interventions to Interrupt or Reduce the Spread of Respiratory Viruses,” *Cochrane Review*, January 30, 2023, <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD006207.pub6/full>.

an “inaccurate and misleading interpretation” of the study.⁹⁸ This retraction, dubbed a fiasco by many and angering the lead author of the study, who was not consulted, caused a fresh new scandal in the scientific community and further contributed to politicizing the mask issue.⁹⁹

As to the “six feet apart” (or two meters in Europe) social distancing recommendation, it was not based on any scientific evidence but “just sort of appeared,” according to Fauci, as he testified to the House of Representatives Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic on January 10, 2024. He acknowledged by the same token that the lab leak hypothesis was no conspiracy theory but a distinct possibility.¹⁰⁰ New studies in 2024 also showed that the top medical journals had been heavily biased towards the “Zero Covid” strategy by publishing 272 papers from authors supporting it in the UK alone, against 21 from authors with a more critical view and only six from authors of the Great Barrington Declaration.¹⁰¹

Anthony Fauci also dubiously moved the goalpost for achieving “herd immunity,” which was considered to be around 60% of the population if vaccinated, to 80%-85% on a whim (“I thought, ‘I can nudge this up a bit,’ so I went to 80, 85.”).¹⁰²

98 “Statement on ‘Physical Interventions to Interrupt or Reduce the Spread of Respiratory Viruses’ Review,” *Cochrane Review*, March 10, 2023, <https://www.cochrane.org/news/statement-physical-interventions-interrupt-or-reduce-spread-respiratory-viruses-review>.

99 See the blog post of Vinay Prasad, “The Cochrane Mask Fiasco,” *Sensible Medicine* (blog), March 15, 2023, <https://www.sensible-med.com/p/the-cochrane-mask-fiasco>.

100 See the Twitter post of this Select Subcommittee (@COVIDSelect), “Dr. Fauci claimed that the ‘6 feet apart’ social distancing recommendation promoted by federal health officials was likely not based on any data,” Twitter, January 10, 2024, 12:41 pm, <https://twitter.com/COVIDSelect/status/1745048323852005634>.

101 Kevin Bardosh, “Top Medical Journals Were Biased towards Zero Covid, Studies Find,” *UnHerd*, June 20, 2024, <https://unherd.com/newsroom/top-medical-journals-were-biased-towards-zero-covid-studies-find/>.

102 Vinay Prasad, “Why Did Fauci Move the Herd Immunity Goal Posts? Scientists

These are only select examples, and the list is much longer. Such a list naturally raises the question of the validity of science and expertise, which I will further examine in Chapter 3.

Summary of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 delved into the collateral damage, censorship, and hubris experienced during the Covid lockdowns, focusing on the neglect of suffering in the developing world caused by Western responses. It highlighted how the lockdowns disproportionately affected the poor and vulnerable globally, leading to increased hunger, economic devastation, and a myriad of social and health crises. Despite warnings and evidence of the adverse effects of lockdowns, policymakers persisted, causing long-term harm to education, mental health, and economic stability. The chapter also critiqued the response of the Western liberal left, which, despite its purported commitment to social justice, displayed its indifference to the inequalities exacerbated by lockdown measures not only in the developing world but also at home. Furthermore, it discussed the censorship of dissenting voices, particularly regarding vaccine skepticism, and the way in which the focus on vaccines overshadowed discussions on the broader impact of lockdown policies. It raised broader concerns about the suppression of dissenting voices and the influence of powerful actors like the Biden administration in shaping public discourse.

Play a Dangerous Game When They Tailor Factual Statements to Promote Policy Goals," *MedPageToday*, December 29, 2020, <https://www.medpagetoday.com/opinion/vinay-prasad/90445>.

