

Chapter 4

A reckoning about the Covid measures is necessary and urgent

Humanity's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but humanity's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*

To play with democratic values and habituate public opinion to authoritarian measures was to start a ride down a slippery slope. A reckoning of the Covid policy failures is all the more necessary and urgent that the censorship and control tools adopted on the pretext of Covid are still in place and remain at the disposal of all governments; in many cases, they have been further strengthened *after* Covid.

During Covid: How even democracies can be repressive

The Covid responses varied considerably from country to country, which shows yet again that “science,” in this case medicine, is largely cultural and political. The crisis provided both autocracies and democracies with an unexpected biopolitical opportunity to grab ever more power.¹ It also reaffirmed an old European stereotype according to which southern

1 Selam Gebrekidan, “For Autocrats, and Others, Coronavirus Is a Chance to Grab Even More Power,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/world/europe/coronavirus-governments-power.html>.

countries are more authoritarian and less efficient than northern countries. Only five countries in Europe: France, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, and Greece submitted their populations to strict rules about coming out of their houses with a certificate or safe conduct tightly controlled by the police. Meanwhile, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands let their populations go out freely.² The variety of the responses to Covid documents not “science,” but a socio-political difference between countries in their attitude toward their populations, from trusting them to considering them with systematic suspicion.

Even more police powers were conferred to the police by French regional and local authorities than by the national ones; numerous curfews were implemented and duly monitored. Access to recreational or green spaces was restricted with arguments such as “Lockdown is no vacation!” while in other places it was forbidden to buy only one baguette or one newspaper at a time, or to sit on a public bench, or in yet other places, to sit on a bench for more than two minutes.³ According to sociologists Nicolas Mariot and Théo Boulakia:

The difference in reaction is clearly linked to the coercive habits of governments: we show that the more police officers per capita in European states, the more accustomed they are to suspending civic liberties, the more they locked their populations down. During this pandemic, we have therefore witnessed the resurgence of old habits relying on the punitive management of the population.⁴

2 Marina Julienne, “Covid-19: le bilan d’une surveillance massive,” *CNRS Le journal*, April 10, 2024, <https://lejournel.cnrs.fr/articles/covid-19-bilan-du-ne-surveillance-massive>.

3 Julienne, “Covid-19.”

4 Julienne, “Covid-19.” See also their volume: Théo Boulakia, Nicolas Mariot, *L’attestation: Une expérience d’obéissance de masse, printemps 2020* (Paris: Anamosa, 2023).

In fact, the striking point about the lockdown is that it was more about enforcing submission to authority than about health.⁵ The French population (67 million) was submitted to 21 million police controls between March 17, 2020, and May 11, 2020. Spain meted out 2,157 fines per 100,000 inhabitants, France 1,630, and Italy 709, while at the other end of the scale, the Netherlands issued 77 fines per 100,000 inhabitants.⁶ The French case also shows that those social classes of the population that were already the most dominated were the most compliant: women, the poor, and the less politicized.⁷ Only about a third of the population attempted to circumvent the new, authoritarian rules. The data at the basis of Théo Boulakia and Nicolas Mariot's volume *L'attestation* (The Certificate) is publicly accessible, and the volume's website documents the stringency of the French police during the pandemic.⁸ At least the Spanish top court ruled the lockdown unconstitutional and returned the 1.1 million fines the police had meted out between March 14, 2020, and June 21, 2020⁹—a piece of news that conspicuously failed to make big headlines in the *New York Times* or the *Guardian*. Britain also meted out 27,600 court convictions for breach of Covid rules, including 4,000 since all restrictions were lifted in 2022.¹⁰

5 Laurent Mucchielli, "Le confinement de 2020 en France: une expérience de soumission à l'autorité," *Quartier général*, May 24, 2024, <https://qg.media/blog/laurent-mucchielli/le-confinement-de-2020-en-france-une-experience-de-soumission-a-lautorite/>.

6 Mucchielli, "Le confinement de 2020 en France."

7 Mucchielli, "Le confinement de 2020 en France."

8 See <https://l-attestation.github.io/films.html>.

9 AP, "Spanish Government Returns Fines for Breaking Virus Lockdown Rules," October 22, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-europe-health-spain-59be7c26d2a76255119743f23541d310>.

10 Alistair Gray and Clara Murray, "Nearly 4,000 Convicted of Covid Rule Breaches in England since Curbs Ended," *Financial Times*, May 22, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/84dad3e3-cbe2-4dcb-a318-3456d9d64e3e>.

Chile sent its army against protesters, and Bolivia postponed elections. Britain granted new “eye-watering” powers to its government to detain people and close borders. As one account noted at the time, “leaders across the globe are invoking executive powers and seizing virtually dictatorial authority with scant resistance,” since “extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures.”¹¹ Police across the world were “given license to control behavior in a way that would normally be extreme even for an authoritarian state.”¹² “Grueling and humiliating punishments” were often enforced on the “poorest and most vulnerable groups,” including “tens of millions who live hand-to-mouth and risk starving if they do not defy lockdowns and seek work.”¹³

Migrant workers in India were sprayed with bleach at the risk of damaging their health as a supposed means to “disinfect them”; in Punjab, “people accused of breaking quarantine rules were made to do squats while chanting: ‘We are enemies of society. We cannot sit at home.’” “Similarly humiliating tactics” were used in Paraguay, even though to stay in lockdown there was synonymous with dying of hunger; as for the Philippines, “police and local officials trapped curfew violators in dog cages, while others were forced to sit in the midday sun as punishment.”¹⁴ In Hungary, measures including jail terms were passed for “spreading misinformation” and allowed the nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orbán, to “rule by decree under a state of emergency that has no clear time limit.”¹⁵

11 Gray and Murray, “Nearly 4,000 Convicted of Covid Rule Breaches.”

12 Rebecca Ratcliffe, “Teargas, Beatings, and Bleach: The Most Extreme Covid-19 Lockdown Control around the World,” *The Guardian*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/extreme-coronavirus-lockdown-controls-raise-fears-for-worlds-poorest>.

13 Ratcliffe, “Teargas, Beatings, and Bleach.”

14 Ratcliffe, “Teargas, Beatings, and Bleach.”

15 Ratcliffe, “Teargas, Beatings, and Bleach.”

In Israel, authorities used tools normally reserved for counterterrorism, such as tapping into cellphone data to geolocate citizens redefined as “patients,” who might have crossed paths with actual, known Covid patients.¹⁶ This is little different from the breaches of citizens’ privacy that have been in force in China. The issue at stake is the definition of the healthcare “needs” of the population. Does the close surveillance of our bodies amount to care or to control? Where does “saving lives” stop and intruding into our privacy begin?

Prime Minister Netanyahu insisted that Israel was a democracy: “We have to maintain the balance between the rights of the individual and the needs of general society, and we are doing that.”¹⁷ But these measures rather betrayed the presence of an authoritarian mindset: “Mr. Netanyahu’s caretaker government on Sunday authorized prison sentences of up to six months for anyone breaching isolation orders; barring visitors, including lawyers, from prison and detention facilities and allowing the police to break up gatherings—as of now, more than 10 people—by means including ‘the use of reasonable force.’”¹⁸ The Covid pandemic was used to bring about the further militarization of society:

The Shin Bet security service was recruited to operate electronic surveillance devices to track patients and their relatives, the Mossad was sent to bring medical equipment, the National Security Council has set up a war room, the Israel Defense Forces Home Front is publicizing recommendations for proper parenting, and above all of them sits Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, who is trying to wrest control of the crisis from the Health Ministry.¹⁹

16 David M. Halbfinger, Isabel Kershner, and Ronen Bergman, “To Track Coronavirus, Israel Moves to Tap Secret Trove of Cellphone Data,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/16/world/middle-east/israel-coronavirus-cellphone-tracking.html>.

17 Halbfinger, Kershner, and Bergman, “To Track Coronavirus.”

18 Halbfinger, Kershner, and Bergman, “To Track Coronavirus.”

19 Ring, “The Militarization of the Coronavirus.”

The involvement of law-enforcement agencies in maintaining public health is rarely a good sign for civil rights. One particularly worrisome aspect is the pact established between companies specializing in surveillance and the military. If such a relationship is long attested in the US, it is still a relatively novel phenomenon in Europe. The ARTE film *Seven Billion Suspects* mentioned in Chapter 1 interviewed an English researcher, Chris Jones, who dissected European Council reports. Projects in security matters from the 2010s worth 1.4 billion euros attributed 40% of these funds to private companies: “You can see that the security research program was very heavily influenced by corporate interests. They had a big hand in shaping the program, in how it works, and in setting the priorities by having seats on the advisory groups that determine the work programs.”²⁰

“To measure the private companies’ influence” in matters of digital surveillance, continues the film, it is enough to study the CV of the experts in charge of advising the European Council on matters of security. Out of the twenty experts, “a third admit having ties to firms or lobbies in the security industry.”²¹ The group’s president, Alberto Benedictis, “was even head of the ASD (Aerospace and Defense Industries), the main lobby for defense industries.”²²

As Chris Jones states it, these individuals are not necessarily ill-intentioned, “but there’s a saying, ‘The road to hell is paved with good intentions.’”²³ As mentioned in Chapter 3, a similar pattern of corporate interests taking over the European Medicines Agency and the American National Institutes of Health is clearly distinguishable, but mainstream media have

20 Louvet, *Tous surveillés*.

21 Louvet, *Tous surveillés*.

22 Louvet, *Tous surveillés*.

23 Louvet, *Tous surveillés*.

not really investigated this unhealthy relationship either. Again, the reason for this lack of interest is prosaic: it would amount to criticizing the vaccine, which is taboo.

After Covid: A few examples of countries implementing ever tougher speech laws

Western democracies seem engaged in a fierce competition since Covid as to who will implement the most repressive measures targeting free speech.

In Scotland, the new Hate Crime and Public Order Act is so drastic in its provision for criminalizing any speech, even held in the privacy of one's home, that it might be construed as "stirring up hatred,"²⁴ and even the *Guardian* fears it will stifle "honestly expressed, contentious views" and will "stymie public debate."²⁵ The *Telegraph* claimed more brusquely that the new law had turned Scotland into a "nation of snitches,"²⁶ a formulation which has the merit of pointing to the direct line between a behavior purposely nudged during Covid and the new normal—or rather, the new abnormal, as pointed out by Aaron Kheriaty.²⁷

In Germany, the Minister of Interior claimed in an interview to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 2024 that "freedom of expression is not a license for the enemies of the

24 Simon Jenkins, "Scotland's Hate Crime Law May Be Well Intentioned, but the Police Should Not Stymie Public Debate," *The Guardian*, April 1, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/01/scotland-hate-crime-law-public-debate>.

25 Jenkins, "Scotland's Hate Crime Law."

26 Allison Pearson, "Yousaf's Laws Have Turned Scotland into a Nation of Snitches—Stalin Would Be Proud," *The Telegraph*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/columnists/2024/04/02/allison-pearson-farce-is-hot-on-the-heels-of-tragedy/>.

27 Aaron Kheriaty, *The New Abnormal: The Rise of the Biomedical Security State* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2022).

constitution,”²⁸ a headline which would not have been out of place in the Germany of the 1930s.

Ireland, Poland, and Canada are also pushing for speech punishment laws:

The new Irish Taoiseach, Simon Harris, is determined to railroad through the Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill, Donald Tusk’s government in Poland wants to introduce a new law that would make it a criminal offence to “defame” a member of the LGBT community, and Justin Trudeau is pressing ahead with an Online Harms Bill that makes our own Online Safety Act seem like the First Amendment. It’s as if all these “liberal” leaders are saying: “You think Humza Yousaf is the West’s foremost opponent of free speech? Hold my beer.”²⁹

Canada is indeed also planning a drastic law to crack down on social media and make them “safer” from “speech crimes”: the Online Harms Act. Canada was marked by protests in Ottawa in winter 2022, the so-called Freedom Convoy, led by truck drivers who opposed the Canadian Covid vaccine mandate and restrictions and whose bank accounts were frozen, an unprecedented measure taken by the Trudeau government as it invoked emergency powers.³⁰ A Canadian judge later ruled that the use of the Emergencies Act was “unreasonable” and “unconstitutional.”³¹ Yet, the new law, proposed by the Liberal Party (which

28 Thomas Haldenwang, “Die Meinungsfreiheit ist kein Freibrief für Verfassungsfeinde,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 1, 2024, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/verfassungsschutz-thomas-haldenwang-verteidigt-sich-gegen-kritik-19623960.html>.

29 Toby Young, “Even Orwell’s Thought Police Didn’t Go as Far as Trudeau,” *The Spectator*, April 20, 2024, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/even-orwells-thought-police-didnt-go-as-far-as-trudeau/>.

30 AP, “Justin Trudeau Invokes Emergency Powers to Quell Trucker Protests in Canada,” February 14, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/justin-trudeau-invokes-emergency-powers-quell-trucker-protests-canada-rcna16213>.

31 AP, “Judge: Canada’s Use of Emergencies Act to Quell Truckers’ COVID

goes to show that the notion of liberalism is relative), would raise the maximum penalty from the current five years to life in prison for genocide advocacy online. Judges would also be empowered to sentence citizens to house arrest and/or a fine if there were “reasonable grounds to believe a defendant ‘will commit’ an offense.”³² The author of the dystopian novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Margaret Atwood, called the bill “Orwellian” and akin to the “Lettres de cachet all over again.”³³

Moreover, the Canadian law proposal aims to be retroactive, which goes against two principles that govern Western legal tradition, “*nullum crimen sine lege*” and “*nulla poena sine lege*”: no crime without a law and no punishment without a law. Only one well-known exception has been made (and even so, it was controversial): it was the appearance of the “crime against humanity” legal category in the London Charter of August 1945, a provision that paved the legal pathway for the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg to judge Nazi criminals. “Crime against humanity” and “genocide” were mobilized post hoc only because the crimes committed by the Nazis, first and foremost the Holocaust, did not infringe Nazi law, yet it was absolutely necessary to punish them. To apply retroactive punishment to criticism in peacetime, on the other hand, is simply unheard of in Western democracies.

Since 2023, the French Parliament has also been considering a law to crack down on “sectarian drift” and “gravely damaging moral ascendancy,” into which it includes “health gurus who propagate their influence by recommending on

Protests Was Unreasonable,” *Voice of America*, January 23, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/judge-canada-s-use-of-emergencies-act-to-quell-truckers-covid-protests-was-unreasonable-/7452237.html>.

32 Marie Woolf, “Margaret Atwood Calls Online Harms Bill ‘Orwellian,’ Notes Potential for Abuse,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 11, 2024, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-margaret-atwood-online-harms-bill/>.

33 Woolf, “Margaret Atwood.”

social media practices and behaviors that are often gravely damaging to people.”³⁴ This vague offense, if adopted as it stands, could lead to serious infringements of freedom of speech in France. Its real purpose is to target a microbiologist and professor of medicine, Didier Raoult, who before Covid had an international reputation but claimed in March-April 2020 in the hospital he was the head of to have found a cure against Covid combining antibiotics with hydroxychloroquine. Raoult achieved global fame after President Trump touted his cure,³⁵ but he has remained a highly controversial figure and one whom French authorities have relentlessly attempted to silence and ridicule ever since.³⁶

Under the premises of the new French law, someone as moderate as Anders Tegnell, who implemented a policy which the vast majority of the West vituperatively disagreed with, might well be considered a criminal threat to public order. Yet again, I have to repeat that much to the chagrin of lockdown supporters, Sweden ended up with one of the lowest excess death rates of Europe in the Covid period.³⁷

The French government built on the unprecedented Covid measures to reactivate the obligation to show a special QR

34 Conseil d'État, “Avis sur un projet de loi visant à renforcer la lutte contre les dérives sectaires et la répression des emprises mentales gravement dommageables,” *conseil-etat.fr*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.conseil-etat.fr/avis-consultatifs/derniers-avis-rendus/au-gouvernement/avis-sur-un-projet-de-loi-visant-a-renforcer-la-lutte-contre-les-derives-sectaires-et-la-repression-des-emprises-mentales-gravement-dommageables>.

35 Scott Sayare, “He Was a Science Star. Then He Promoted a Questionable Cure for Covid-19,” *The New York Times*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/12/magazine/didier-raoult-hydroxychloroquine.html>.

36 See L.C., “Véran se paie Raoult, ‘le charlatan de la Canebière,’ pour son retour à l’Assemblée nationale,” *Egora*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.egora.fr/actus-pro/politiques/veran-se-paie-raoult-le-charlatan-de-la-canebiere-pour-son-retour-lassemblee>.

37 According to Statistics Sweden, see Bergstedt, “Anders Tegnell” (see the discussion of Swedish figures in Chapter 1). <https://www.svd.se/a/JQvVnj/anders-tegnell-efter-pandemin-overdodlighet-ger-inte-hela-svaret>.

code to move around Paris during the summer 2024 Olympic Games,³⁸ a method of control of movement typical of China. President Macron also threatened to cut off all social media during street riots.³⁹

The fight against so-called Covid “fake news” or “disinformation” has effectively weaponized governments against legitimate criticism. Covid seen as a biopolitical case illustrates how easy it has been for authorities to label any dissent as a “terrorist threat” or a “public health threat,” just like communist regimes did in the past on a routine basis. Communist history indeed exemplifies how precarious the line between preventing crime and exerting dictatorial rule can be. The current trend in Western democracies to legally criminalize legitimate speech is setting a dangerous precedent and raises the possibility of sanctioning mere thoughts or speech expressed only in private. The potential for abuse is overwhelming.

This movement is all the more indefensible that the official Covid narrative is now proving to have been wrong in many crucial aspects.

The reckoning with freedom-depriving and inefficient Covid measures has begun

“We were wrong, but we didn’t know” as a justification for the lockdowns is factually wrong. On March 23, 2020, the Yale School of Public Health unambiguously showed that young

38 “Paris 2024: des QR codes pour circuler aux abords des sites olympiques,” *France Info*, November 29, 2023, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/les-jeux-olympiques/paris-2024/paris-2024-des-qr-codes-pour-circuler-aux-abords-des-sites-olympiques_6213372.html.

39 Kim Willsher, “Macron Accused of Authoritarianism after Threat to Cut off Social Media,” *The Guardian*, July 5, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/05/french-government-should-control-social-media-during-unrest-macron-says>.

children were at less than 0.01% risk (fatality rate) of dying from Covid, while those above 80 had a risk thought to be of at least 15%, possibly as high as 22%.⁴⁰ Citing Imperial College London data published on March 16, 2020, the BBC and many other media confirmed that the chance of dying from Covid lay between 0.5% and 1% (the real rate would prove to be 0.3%), with almost zero risk for children and the highest risk for people over 80.⁴¹

“We were wrong, but we didn’t know” is a fallacious defense also because it was underpinned by censorship, a censorship championed and enforced by the very same authorities now feigning ignorance. As the official narrative gradually unravels, each domino of the dogma falls in succession, prompting the authorities responsible for the Covid measures to scramble and evade accountability—but only rarely to admit they were wrong.

Neil Ferguson, the author of the famous Imperial College model that predicted millions of deaths without a lockdown, has denied ever urging for a lockdown.⁴² Devi Sridhar, one of the most prominent public health voices in the UK who argued for a strict lockdown, has blamed “ministers” for “what went wrong with Covid” while exonerating “scientists” such as herself from any responsibility.⁴³ Boris Johnson has

40 Jeannette Jiang, Emily Peterson, and Robert Heimer, “COVID-19 Updated Data and Developments—March 23, 2020,” Yale School of Public Health, March 23, 2020, <https://ysph.yale.edu/news-article/covid-19-updated-data-and-developments---march-23-2020/>.

41 Robert Cuffe, “Coronavirus Death Rate: What Are the Chances of Dying?” BBC, March 24, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-51674743>.

42 Paul Gallagher, “Covid Inquiry: ‘Professor Lockdown’ Neil Ferguson Denies Urging UK-Wide Restrictions after ‘500k Deaths’ Model,” *iNews*, October 17, 2023, <https://inews.co.uk/news/health/professor-lockdown-denies-uk-res-trictions-model-predicted-500k-deaths-2693514>.

43 Devi Sridhar, “Don’t Blame Scientists for What Went Wrong with Covid—Ministers Were the Ones Calling the Shots,” *The Guardian*, June 13, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jun/13/covid-inquiry-ministers-scientific-advisers>.

blamed the lockdown on his advisors.⁴⁴ Liz Truss admitted it would have been “better” if “we’d gone for the Swedish model.”⁴⁵ The UK Covid-19 inquiry conceded that the tough lockdown failed children,⁴⁶ then, in Module 1 of its full report, openly criticized the absence of any cost-benefit analysis before implementing a lockdown that would result in a 25% drop in GDP between February and April 2020.⁴⁷ The report is even quite blunt: “Almost every area of public life across all four nations was badly affected.... Levels of mental illness, loneliness, deprivation, and exposure to violence at home surged. Children missed out on academic learning and on precious social development.”⁴⁸ Moreover and crucially, the report disavowed censorship by acknowledging that “the scientific advice received by the UK government ... was not subject to sufficient external challenge ... There was no institutional guard against the risk of conventional wisdom becoming embedded in the institutions responsible for emergency preparedness and resilience.”⁴⁹

Nudging, moreover, proved in hindsight to have been “emotionally disturbing”; it used “harrowing messages and

44 Luke McGee, “Boris Johnson Has Split from His Top Scientists on Coronavirus,” *CNN*, October 13, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/13/uk/bo-ris-johnson-versus-scientific-advice-intl-gbr/index.html>.

45 Rob Lownie, “Liz Truss: We Should Have Followed Swedish Model on Covid,” *UnHerd*, September 11, 2024, <https://unherd.com/newsroom/liz-truss-we-should-have-followed-swedish-model-on-covid/>.

46 Amelia Hill, “Children Were Failed by Pandemic Policies, Covid Inquiry Told,” *The Guardian*, October 4, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/04/children-were-failed-by-pandemic-policies-covid-inquiry-told>.

47 See Toby Green, “Did the Covid Inquiry Report Just Admit Lockdown Was a Mistake?” *UnHerd*, July 18, 2024, <https://unherd.com/newsroom/did-the-covid-inquiry-report-just-admit-lockdown-was-a-mistake/>. The original report, Baroness Hallett, ed., *UK Covid-19 Inquiry, Module 1: The Resilience and Preparedness of the United Kingdom*, July 2024, can be found here: <https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/18095012/UK-Covid-19-Inquiry-Module-1-Full-Report.pdf>.

48 Hallett, *UK Covid-19 Inquiry*, viii.

49 Hallett, *UK Covid-19 Inquiry*, 147.

videos ... without any ethical oversight.”⁵⁰ Members of the SPI-B group mentioned in Chapter 1 who were interviewed by Laura Dodsworth expressed “regret” over their action. For instance, Gavin Morgan, a psychologist, admitted that “using fear as a means of control is not ethical. Using fear smacks of totalitarianism.”⁵¹ Another one told Laura Dodsworth that the way in which fear was “ramped up” to “encourage compliance” was “dystopian.”⁵² A third warned about the “authoritarianism” that was “creeping in.”⁵³ And finally, one told her, members of SPI-B were “stunned by the weaponization of behavioral psychology” during the pandemic, and “psychologists didn’t seem to notice when it stopped being altruistic and became manipulative. They have too much power, and it intoxicates them.”⁵⁴ This lucid analysis speaks for itself.

In the US, former president Trump blamed the lockdown on Anthony Fauci.⁵⁵ He famously declared, “I don’t take responsibility at all.”⁵⁶ Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York and beacon of the liberal left opposition to President Trump, declared having done what was possible in an atmosphere of disinformation.⁵⁷ Former NIH director Francis

50 Sidley, “UK Government Use of Behavioral Science.”

51 Gordon Rayner, “Use of Fear to Control Behavior in Covid Crisis was ‘Totalitarian,’ Admit Scientists,” *The Telegraph*, May 14, 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/05/14/scientists-admit-totalitarian-use-fear-control-behaviour-covid/>. See also Dodsworth, *A State of Fear*.

52 Rayner, “Use of Fear to Control Behavior.”

53 Rayner, “Use of Fear to Control Behavior.”

54 Rayner, “Use of Fear to Control Behavior.”

55 Kaitlan Collins and Kevin Liptak, “Trump Trashes Fauci and Makes Baseless Coronavirus Claims in Campaign Call,” *CNN*, October 20, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/19/politics/donald-trump-anthony-fauci-coronavirus/index.html>.

56 Amber Phillips, “Everyone and Everything Trump Has Blamed for His Coronavirus Response,” *The Washington Post*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/03/31/everyone-everything-trump-has-blamed-his-coronavirus-response/>.

57 Real Time with Bill Maher, “Overtime: Andrew Cuomo, Scott Galloway, Melissa

Collins admitted on the lockdown policy that “public health people had a very narrow view of what the right decision is”⁵⁸ and that “we were not really thinking about the consequences (of the lockdown) in communities that were not New York City or some other big city.”⁵⁹ Anthony Fauci held on ABC News that he had “nothing to do with closing down schools.”⁶⁰ The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic was irritated by Dr. Fauci’s “feigned ignorance,” picking up on his “not recalling” events and issues around the pandemic “more than 100 times” in his congressional testimonies.⁶¹ But he did admit in front of the same subcommittee on June 4, 2024, that he couldn’t recall any scientific research supporting evidence for masking children. He also conceded that the six-foot social distancing guideline, which made it nearly impossible for schools to reopen, was “arbitrary” and “not based on science.”⁶² In Australia, former New South Wales Premier, Dominic Perrotet, declared upon retiring that the Covid vaccine mandate his government had enforced was “wrong.”⁶³

Courts are now regularly vindicating the complaints of citizens and groups who felt robbed of their rights by overly

DeRosa,” YouTube video, 17:05, October 28, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQApZhXLcic>.

58 Jeff Jacoby, “A Pandemic Mea Culpa from Francis Collins,” *Boston Globe*, January 21, 2024, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/01/21/opinion/jeff-jacoby-francis-collins-anthony-fauci-covid/>.

59 Jacoby, “A Pandemic Mea Culpa.”

60 The Hill, “Fauci: I Had ‘Nothing to Do’ with Covid School Shutdowns, Blames the Media,” YouTube video, 9:17, October 17, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9rsSanDrR8>.

61 COVID Select Committee, “Press Release: COVID Select Subcommittee Releases Dr. Fauci’s Transcript, Highlights Key Takeaways in New Memo,” May 31, 2024, <https://oversight.house.gov/release/covid-select-subcommittee-releases-dr-faucis-transcript-highlights-key-takeaways-in-new-memo/>.

62 Select Committee, “Press Release.”

63 Flat White, “Perrotet’s Covid Apology Is Not Good Enough,” *The Spectator Australia*, August 7, 2024, <https://www.spectator.com.au/2024/08/perrottets-covid-apology-is-not-good-enough>.

authoritarian measures, for instance, a Frenchman who was prevented from visiting his dying father because of the stay-at-home orders.⁶⁴ In June 2024, the *New York Times* published a piece by lockdown critic Alec MacGillis which emphasized that the lockdowns had led to mass starvation in poor countries and finally stated the key question which should have been posed from the start: “Were the public health benefits of lockdowns and quarantines worth it, considering their destructive impacts on people’s ability to feed their families?”⁶⁵

In January 2022, Anthony Fauci co-authored an article acknowledging the inefficacy of the Covid vaccine in preventing transmission and re-infection, which was quite a stunning admission.⁶⁶ A Pfizer executive, Janine Small (representing Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla, who refused to come in person), was asked in front of the EU Parliament Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic if Pfizer tested the Covid vaccine for transmission of the virus before it entered the market. She testified: “Regarding the question around did we know about stopping immunization before it entered the market, no. We had to really move at the speed of science to really understand what is taking place in the market.”⁶⁷

64 See “Covid-19: l’État condamné pour avoir empêché un homme de voir son père mourant pendant le confinement,” *Le Figaro*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/covid-19-l-etat-condamne-pour-avoir-empêche-un-homme-de-voir-son-pere-mourant-pendant-le-confinement-20240215>.

65 Alec MacGillis, “There’s Food for Everyone on Earth. So Why Is Hunger Getting Worse?” *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/24/books/review/the-new-breadline-jean-martin-bauer.html>.

66 David M. Morens, Jeffrey K. Tautenberger, and Anthony Fauci, “Universal Coronavirus Vaccine—An Urgent Need,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, January 27, 2022, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2118468>.

67 See the Twitter post of MEP member Rob Roos (@Rob_Roos), “Breaking: vaccine never tested on preventing transmission. This means the COVID passport was based on a big lie,” Twitter, October 11, 2022, 11:04 am, https://twitter.com/Rob_Roos/status/1579759795225198593.

Various health authorities, such as Jean-François Del-fraissy, the head of the French Covid task force, later admitted that they had been aware from the outset that vaccines would not significantly reduce transmission, even though curbing transmission was a primary public health argument used to encourage vaccine uptake.⁶⁸ Paul Offit, a member of the FDA Vaccine Advisory Committee, which approved the Covid vaccine, and a former member of the CDC, one of the officials who was most involved in promoting the Covid vaccine, claimed in March 2024 that the Covid vaccine should have been recommended only for the elderly and high-risk groups, but:

The language ... morphed to essentially a universal recommendation for everyone over six months of age ... I actually talked to Dr Fauci about this particular issue.... He said when you give a nuanced message like that, it's a garbled message. You're much more likely to be able to convince those high-risk groups to get it if you recommend it for everybody.⁶⁹

So this is how a vaccine which was not considered necessary for a majority of the population was recommended, and sometimes made mandatory, for groups of the population that did not need it and for whom it was possibly dangerous.

Major mainstream outlets like the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* ignored Janine Small's testimony, but the *Daily Wire* called the Pfizer executive's response "scandalous."⁷⁰ On

68 L'invité, "Jean-François Delfraissy: 'La vérité sur le Covid, les vaccins et les tartuffes de la télé,'" YouTube video, 32:27, October 12, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=6hdOAE_0BiU.

69 Doctor Mike, "The Uncomfortable Truth of What Actually Happened with COVID—Dr. Paul Offit," YouTube video, 1:53:56, March 24, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OF6vP-SkGA.

70 Greg Wilson, "'Scandalous': Pfizer Exec Tells EU Lawmaker COVID Jab Was Never Tested to Show It Blocked Transmission," *The Daily Wire*, October 12, 2022, <https://www.dailywire.com/news/scandalous-pfizer-exec-tells-eu-lawmaker-covid-jab-was-never-tested-to-show-it-blocked-transmission>.

the other hand, reports suggesting that Pfizer had not tested the vaccine for transmission were dismissed as “fake news” by Associated Press and Reuters, despite a wide sharing of Janine Small’s interview clips on social media.⁷¹ Meanwhile, another viral clip circulating on social media compiled headlines from around the world, ridiculing the diminishing efficacy claims of the vaccine. These headlines showcased a rapid decline in promised efficacy rates, plummeting from an initial 95% promise down to 20% within a few months. This decline in efficacy formed an inversely proportional curve compared to Pfizer’s soaring profits, however, which reached new heights.⁷²

In the Czech Republic, the Constitutional Court judged illegal the banning of a father from the birth of his child and ruled that “the father’s participation in the birth is part of the right to family life.”⁷³ The President of the Constitutional Court Josef Baxa deemed the Covid measures exaggerated to the point of “recalling the time of non-freedom,” a common Czech euphemism for the communist regime.⁷⁴

71 Melissa Goldin and Angelo Fichera, “Posts Mislead on Pfizer COVID Vaccine’s Impact on Transmission,” AP Fact Check, October 14, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/fact-check-pfizer-transmission-european-parliament-950413863226>; Reuters Fact Check, “Fact Check: Preventing Transmission Never Required for COVID Vaccines’ Initial Approval; Pfizer Vax Did Reduce Transmission of Early Variants,” February 12, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/preventing-transmission-never-required-covid-vaccines-initial-approval-pfizer-2024-02-12/>.

72 See the Twitter post of Prashant Bhushan (@pbbhushan1), “Watch: Vaccine efficacy in 2 minutes!” Twitter, October 23, 2021, 9:06 am, <https://twitter.com/pbbhushan1/status/1451807240659161090?lang=en>.

73 (čtk), “ÚS o zákazu při epidemii covidu: Otec má právo být u porodu,” *Česká justice*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.ceska-justice.cz/2023/05/us-o-zakazu-pri-epidemii-covidu-otec-ma-pravo-byt-u-porodu/>.

74 (čtk), “Mimořádná opatření podle Baxy s nadsázkou dávají vzpomenout na dobu nesvobody,” *Česká justice*, July 1, 2021, <https://www.ceska-justice.cz/2021/07/mimoradna-opatreni-podle-baxy-s-nadsazkou-davaji-vzpomenout-na-dobu-nesvobody/>.

The unreflective role of the liberal press: Virtue-signaling in place of investigation

While some members of SPI-B demonstrate reflexivity and self-criticism, this sentiment is not universal, particularly among the mainstream press. The *Atlantic* pleaded for “a pandemic amnesty” because “we just didn’t know,”⁷⁵ which is rather brazen considering the condescending and sometimes venomous headlines the paper had published for years.

Liberal mainstream media weaponized Covid victims for political purposes. The *New York Times* had exhibited so little interest in the first 100,000 deaths from AIDS in 1991 that it had run only a short item on page 18.⁷⁶ The first 1,000 victims of Covid, on the other hand, were spread out one by one across the entire front page of the *New York Times* with the caption “U.S. Deaths Near 100,000, An Incalculable Loss,” calling it a “grim milestone,” which mainly served to underscore the incompetence of the Trump administration.⁷⁷

Scott Galloway, a New York University professor who had been a passionate advocate of lockdowns and masks, claimed on Real Time with Bill Maher (HBO) on October 27, 2023:

We were all operating with imperfect information, and we were doing our best. Let’s learn from it, let’s hold each other accountable, but let’s bring a little bit of grace and forgiveness to the shitshow that was Covid.⁷⁸

75 Emily Oster, “Let’s Declare a Pandemic Amnesty,” *The Atlantic*, October 20, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/10/covid-response-forgiveness/671879/>.

76 AP, “U.S. Reports AIDS Deaths Now Exceed 100,000,” *The New York Times*, January 25, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/25/us-us-reports-aids-deaths-now-exceed-100000.html>.

77 AP, “An Incalculable Loss,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/24/us-us-coronavirus-deaths-100000.html>.

78 “Overtime: Andrew Cuomo, Scott Galloway, Melissa DeRosa. Real Time with Bill Maher (HBO),” October 28, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-QApZhXLcic>.

A claim to imperfection is legitimate, but it is troubling that no cost-benefit analysis of the measure was ever performed by authorities in the countries that advocated the lockdown most stridently.⁷⁹ Scott Galloway operated with “imperfect information” for the good reason that his favorite outlets suppressed any criticism of the Covid official policy and derided them as “fake news,” while calling for ever more censorship.⁸⁰

Uri Berliner, a journalist at National Public Radio for 25 years, described how virtue-signaling came to take the place of investigative journalism at NPR so that the latter now defaults to “ideological story lines.”⁸¹ One of the three examples he takes concerns the lab leak theory of the coronavirus in Wuhan, China, opposing “Team Natural Origin” to “Team Lab Leak.” He describes how the lab leak theory was instantly dismissed as “racist or a right-wing conspiracy theory”: it was enough that Francis Collins and Anthony Fauci, who represented the medical establishment, had spoken against it for NPR to endorse their point of view.⁸² NPR also refrained from mentioning that many of the scientists it interviewed reported doubts about the natural origin story in private or that the Energy Department concluded, even if with low confidence, that the lab leak was the most probable explanation: “Instead, we introduced our coverage of that development on February 28, 2023, by asserting confidently that ‘the scientific evidence overwhelmingly points to a natural origin for the virus.’”⁸³

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

80 See Lisa O’Carroll, “EU Warns Elon Musk after Twitter Found to Have Highest Rate of Disinformation,” *The Guardian*, September 26, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/sep/26/eu-warns-elon-musk-that-twitter-x-must-comply-with-fake-news-laws>.

81 Uri Berliner, “I’ve Been at NPR for 25 Years. Here’s How We Lost America’s Trust,” *The Free Press*, April 17, 2024, <https://www.thefp.com/p/npr-editor-how-npr-lost-americas-trust>.

82 Berliner, “I’ve Been at NPR for 25 Years.”

83 Berliner, “I’ve Been at NPR for 25 Years.” See also, for instance, Geoff Brumfiel,

In short, “advocacy groups are given a seat at the table in determining the terms and vocabulary of our news coverage.”⁸⁴ Uri Berliner was so criticized as a result of his critical piece that he resigned from NPR a few days later.⁸⁵

Marianne Klowak, a veteran reporter from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, testified during the Canadian National Citizens Inquiry that she felt journalists had betrayed the public and broken their trust by branding the doctors and the experts the CBC chose as “competent and trustworthy,” while those who challenged the narrative were presented as dangerous and spreading disinformation. Her conclusion is without appeal: “I felt like I had failed these people, as a journalist, to give voice to their truth, so I witnessed in a very short time the collapse of journalism.... The way I saw it, we were in fact pushing propaganda.”⁸⁶

As noted above, the Israeli liberal newspaper *Haaretz* offers insightful reflections on the role of the media within censorious and authoritarian contexts. Mindful of the challenge of dissenting from national consensus and the latter’s associated privileges, *Haaretz* underscored how critics face scrutiny on social media.⁸⁷ It criticized other Israeli media outlets for functioning as a “kind of national public relations division,” overly focused on propagating the government’s narrative rather than fulfilling their vital democratic role of identifying

“Scientists Debunk Lab Accident Theory of Pandemic Emergence,” *NPR*, April 22, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/22/841925672/scientists-debunk-lab-accident-theory-of-pandemic-emergence>.

84 Berliner, “I’ve Been at NPR for 25 Years.”

85 Benjamin Mullin and Katie Robertson, “NPR in Turmoil after It Is Accused of Liberal Bias,” *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/11/business/media/npr-criticism-liberal-bias.html>.

86 TheOriginalMxGForce, “Former CBC Reporter Marianne Klowak Admits That the Media Manipulated Citizens during COVID,” YouTube video, 2:35, August 29, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifmqdOR1-JU>.

87 Ring, “The Militarization of the Coronavirus Crisis.”

failures, preventing abuses of power during crises, and advocating for the marginalized.⁸⁸ The conclusion of journalist Edan Ring is that the “media’s self-censorship, its turning a blind eye to the blow to basic civil rights and the rule of law” posed a “genuine danger to all citizens.”⁸⁹ While the media focused on reporting case numbers and ventilators, Shin Bet implemented intrusive surveillance measures.⁹⁰

At which point does media silence amount to being complicit?

The *New York Times* contends that resisting censorship enforced by social media platforms under the direction of the American government to suppress criticism of its Covid policies constitutes “disinformation.” It suggests that freedom of speech, protected by the First Amendment, is now an “unsettled question.”⁹¹ If opposing censorship becomes akin to spreading disinformation, we might indeed seriously question the purpose of the First Amendment. Traditional media appear more interested in restoring their de facto monopoly on political commentary in the public sphere by silencing social media than in defending free speech as a principle. In the case at hand, it is the *New York Times* itself which has been spreading disinformation: Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook CEO, was pressed by the House Committee on the Judiciary, which is investigating this censorship on social media at the behest of the US government (see Chapter 2). As briefly mentioned above, in August 2024 he wrote in a letter to Jim Jordan, chair of this committee, in which he confirmed the results of the committee inquiry:

88 Ring, “The Militarization of the Coronavirus Crisis.”

89 Ring, “The Militarization of the Coronavirus Crisis.”

90 Ring, “The Militarization of the Coronavirus Crisis.”

91 Jim Rutenberg and Steven Lee Myers, “How Trump’s Allies Are Winning the War over Disinformation,” *The Washington Post*, March 17, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/17/us/politics/trump-disinformation-2024-social-media.html>.

In 2021, senior officials from the Biden Administration, including the White House, repeatedly pressured our teams for months to censor certain Covid-19 contents, including humor and satire, and expressed a lot of frustration with our teams when we didn't agree.... I believe the government pressure was wrong, and I regret that we were not more outspoken about it. I also think we made some choices that, with the benefit of hindsight and new information, we wouldn't make today.⁹²

In Europe, EU Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton sent a letter to Elon Musk when the latter held an interview with presidential candidate Donald Trump on Twitter on August 13, 2024. In the context of "potential risks in the EU associated with the dissemination of content that may incite violence, hate, and racism," he summoned Musk to "promptly ensure the effectiveness of your systems" concerning "content moderation" or face even stricter "ongoing proceedings" of the EU against Twitter.⁹³ Breton immediately faced accusations of meddling in the US election and was slapped down by European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen for not seeking her approval before sending the letter.⁹⁴ He actually resigned a few days later, but he clearly appears to favor more censorship in the future.

In yet another example of governmental meddling into free speech issues, Telegram founder and CEO Pavel Durov

92 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>.

93 The letter was paradoxically published by Thierry Breton on his Twitter account, Thierry Breton (@ThierryBreton), "With great audience comes greater responsibility #DSA," August 12, 2024, 6:25 pm, <https://x.com/ThierryBreton/status/1823033048109367549>.

94 Alice Hancock, "Brussels Slaps Down Thierry Breton over 'Harmful Content' Letter to Elon Musk," *Financial Times*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/09cf4713-7199-4e47-a373-ed5de61c2afa>.

was arrested in Paris in August 2024 and charged for failing to censor child pornography on Telegram⁹⁵—an ironic contradiction of the fact that Durov had been granted French citizenship in 2021 in recognition of his resistance to the censorship demands of the Putin regime, which had prompted his departure into exile.

Another startling element is the complacency of mainstream liberal media regarding the investigation of the financial interests involved in the pharmaceutical industry's capture of public health, particularly concerning the Covid vaccine. I interpret this passivity at least partly as a detrimental consequence of censorship on Covid policies. Influential outlets like the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Washington Post* have been confined by the official narrative they have endorsed. By acquiescing in the censorship of dissenting voices associated with "Trump supporters," a stance influenced by disdain for these voters (exemplified by Hillary Clinton's characterization of this segment of the public as "the deplorables"), these media outlets have hindered their own ability to provide a critical perspective. Unlike during the Watergate scandal, when it was the *Washington Post's* relentless investigation which exposed Nixon, mainstream media's adherence to political and ideological dogmas now undermines their journalistic integrity. Instead, genuinely investigative journalists like Glenn Greenwald, Paul D. Thacker, Alex Berenson, Matt Taibbi, and others are now thriving on Substack or other channels.

95 France 24 and AFP, "Arrestation de Pavel Durov: Emmanuel Macron nie toute 'décision politique,'" August 26, 2024, *France24.com*, <https://www.france24.com/fr/europe/20240826-arrestation-de-pavel-durov-emmanuel-macron-nie-toute-d%C3%A9cision-politique>.

The lab leak theory deserves to be thoroughly investigated

Despite the best efforts of the liberal press, the lab leak theory is now gaining track. Inquiries as to the origins of the Covid virus repeatedly bring to light that the US National Institutes of Health funded research on viruses in China, possibly even on bioweapons. How did this come about?

After a bird flu outbreak in 2011, Anthony Fauci, director of the NIAID, Francis Collins, director of NIH, and Gary J. Nabel, director of the Vaccine Research Center at NIAID, co-authored an article in the *Washington Post*, praising lab research on the bird flu virus and its potential transmission to humans and supporting the notion that generating a “potentially dangerous virus in the laboratory” would bring “important information and insights.” It was, they wrote, a “risk worth taking.”⁹⁶

But in 2014, the Obama administration instituted a moratorium on research on these dangerous viruses, which “came in the wake of some high-profile lab mishaps at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, plus some extremely controversial flu experiments.”⁹⁷ NPR interviewed a scientist specialist of the coronaviruses SARS and MERS, Ralph Baric. He was shocked, as eighteen grants of the NIH were suddenly banned. But another microbiologist, David Relman, claimed that the government was “right to include SARS and MERS in this moratorium, because they are so close to being

96 Anthony S. Fauci, Gary J. Nabel, and Francis S. Collins, “A Flu Virus Risk Worth Taking,” *The Washington Post*, December 30, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-flu-virus-risk-worth-taking/2011/12/30/gIQAM9sNRP_story.html.

97 Nell Greenfieldboyce, “How a Tilt Toward Safety Stopped a Scientist’s Virus Research,” NPR, November 7, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2014/11/07/361219361/how-a-tilt-toward-safety-stopped-a-scientists-virus-research>.

pandemic viruses.” Only one “trait” was missing: “their means of transmitting easily between humans.”⁹⁸

In 2021, the *Intercept* obtained documents showing that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was engaged in “gain of function” research on viruses thanks to grant money from the NIH, specifically from the NIAID headed by Anthony Fauci, via EcoHealth Alliance, a “research organization which studies the spread of viruses from animals to humans.”⁹⁹

China is not known as the US’s most friendly ally, but, as Anthony Fauci put it with surprising candor, “You don’t want to go to Hoboken, New Jersey or to Fairfax, Virginia to be studying the bat-human interface that might lead to an outbreak, so you go to China.”¹⁰⁰ The Chinese regime didn’t seem to mind. Even the US Department of Health and Human Services, albeit only in 2023, appears to have recognized the imprudence of funding the Wuhan Institute of Health in these conditions and reversed its decision.¹⁰¹ Regardless of whether the virus originated from the Wuhan lab,¹⁰² the act of displacing the risk onto a population without their consultation was ethically dubious in the first place.

98 Greenfieldboyce, “A Tilt Toward Safety.”

99 Sharon Lerner, Mara Hvistendahl, and Maia Hibbett, “NIH Documents Provide New Evidence U.S. Funded Gain-of-Function Research in Wuhan,” *The Intercept*, September 9, 2021, <https://theintercept.com/2021/09/09/covid-origins-gain-of-function-research>.

100 Leland Vittert and Mike Ewing, “Dr. Anthony Fauci Responds to Criticism of Wuhan Lab Funding, Release of Thousands of His Emails,” *The Donlon Report*, June 2, 2021, <https://www.newsnationnow.com/the-donlon-report/dr-anthony-fauci-responds-to-criticism-of-wuhan-lab-funding-release-of-thousands-of-his-emails/> (the full interview with Dr Fauci is accessible on this page.)

101 Sarah Knapton, “China Lab Suspected of Covid Leak Stripped of US Funding for Violating Biosafety Rules,” *The Telegraph*, September 24, 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/09/24/china-lab-wuhan-leaking-covid-loses-us-funding-experiments/>.

102 Jeremy Herb and Natasha Bertrand, “US Energy Department Assesses Covid-19 Likely Resulted from Lab Leak, Furthering US Intel Divide over Virus Origin,” *CNN*, February 27, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/26/politics/covid-lab-leak-wuhan-china-intelligence/index.html>.

The House of Representatives' Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic conducted two interviews with Peter Daszak regarding a potential lab leak at the Wuhan Institute of Virology at the time when the Covid outbreak began. Daszak, head of the biotech firm EcoHealth Alliance mentioned above, was the one who hired and oversaw researchers in Wuhan who were studying bat viruses with this funding from the National Institutes of Health. The reasons behind American agencies funding a Chinese lab, the nature of the research conducted there, which could include bioweapons, the involvement of Anthony Fauci in this funding, and his knowledge of the research are critical questions. Yet, the mainstream press has largely neglected to investigate these issues, bringing us yet again back to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "end of curiosity." The implication that Americans might have played a role in the Covid outbreak, if only by incompetence or negligence, is nevertheless momentous, so Congress's interest is keen.

The Select Subcommittee published an interim report in which it stated: "The below report provides extensive evidence ... that EcoHealth's actions were often enabled by the incompetency of the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. It is this contempt and incompetence that necessitates both congressional and administrative action."¹⁰³

During his second hearing in May 2024, Peter Daszak faced relentless questioning, and several inconsistencies emerged compared to his testimony six months earlier. This time, both Republicans and Democrats scrutinized him

103 Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic Committee on Oversight and Accountability, "An Evaluation of the Evidence Surrounding EcoHealth Alliance, Inc.'s Research Activities," May 1, 2024, https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024.05.01-SSCP-Report_FINAL.pdf.

rigorously. Following this interview, the Select Subcommittee concluded in its report:

Dr. Daszak repeatedly violated the terms of the NIH grant awarded to EcoHealth. The report recommended the formal debarment of and a criminal investigation into EcoHealth and Dr. Daszak. During the hearing, members questioned Dr. Daszak about the findings of this report, pressed him to explain EcoHealth's relationship with the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and scrutinized his abuse of U.S. taxpayer dollars to fund dangerous, potentially pandemic-causing research. Staff from both the majority and the minority grilled Daszak on his less than forthcoming testimony to Congress and described evidence showing EcoHealth "absolutely" facilitated "gain-of-function" research at the WIV on the American taxpayer's dime.¹⁰⁴

It is unclear as of September 2024 if the investigation of the lab leak theory will be fully solved one way or the other, but the mainstream media's enduring apathy toward this possibility is remarkable. It is as though the narrative of the zoonotic origin promoted by Anthony Fauci in March 2020 was beyond reproach,¹⁰⁵ despite Fauci's acknowledgment during his own January 2024 testimony before the same Subcommittee that the lab leak theory is not a conspiracy theory but a plausible scenario.¹⁰⁶ Jay Bhattacharya, one of the Great Barrington Declaration authors, reconstructed the Covid outbreak as if

104 Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, "Heading Wrap Up: EcoHealth Alliance Should be Criminally Investigated, Formally Debarred," May 3, 2024, <https://oversight.house.gov/release/hearing-wrap-up-ecohealth-alliance-should-be-criminally-investigated-formally-debarred/>.

105 See Kristian G. Andersen et. al, "The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2," *Nature Medicine* 26, no. 450-452 (2020), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9>.

106 See the Twitter post of the Select Subcommittee, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVIDSelect), "Dr. Fauci acknowledged that the lab-leak hypothesis is not a conspiracy theory," Twitter, January 10, 2024, 12:41 pm, <https://twitter.com/COVIDSelect/status/1745048325252891068>.

it had come from a lab leak—and while no one has any certainty yet, the scenario is perfectly plausible.¹⁰⁷ Now even the *New York Times*¹⁰⁸ and CNN anchor Chris Cuomo¹⁰⁹ (brother of Andrew Cuomo, the much publicized Democratic governor of New York during the first wave of Covid in spring 2020) seriously entertain the question, as should have been the case from the start.

It is praiseworthy for the *New York Times*, Chris Cuomo, and mainstream media in general to do so now. But it is historically quite unfair, as almost always in such circumstances, that those who did ask these questions at a time when they were critical, be it on the lab leak or, for that matter, on Covid vaccine injuries, or on ivermectin as a drug to treat Covid, were hailed as conspiracists and marginalized. While the sidelined individuals rarely regain their former careers and are often swiftly forgotten, these questions are later appropriated by the same people who marginalized them, and they are the ones who are eventually praised for their critical attitude. Truth-seekers rarely get credit. As French intellectuals know, it is “better to be wrong with Jean-Paul Sartre” (who supported Stalinist show trials but was a moral figure for revolutionary Parisian students in 1968) “than to be right with Raymond Aron” (whose analysis of communist regimes was right from the start but who never experienced quite the same fame as Jean-Paul Sartre). In other words, it pays to be an opportunist.

107 Jan Jekielek and Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, “Scientists Opened Pandora’s Box—Now What?” *Epoch TV*, May 30, 2024, <https://www.theepochtimes.com/epochtv/scientists-opened-pandoras-box-what-now-dr-jay-bhattacharya-5659468>.

108 Alina Chan, “Why the Pandemic Probably Started in a Lab, in 5 Key Points,” *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/06/03/opinion/covid-lab-leak.html>.

109 See The Chris Cuomo Project, “Ex-CDC Chief Dr. Robert Redfield Reveals COVID-19 Truths,” YouTube video, 1:08:46, June 5, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMlhvnMpRU0>.

Legal challenges to Covid measures

Covid has transcended mere virology; it has emerged as a litmus test for the resilience of our democracies, particularly in upholding scientific discourse. Four years after the beginning of the pandemic, initial legal outcomes in the United States suggest that not only social media platforms but also governmental bodies have exceeded their legal authority. Journalist and author Alex Berenson took Twitter to court for violating his First Amendment right to free speech, following his indefinite ban for alleged “disinformation.”¹¹⁰ Upon a federal judge’s decision to allow the lawsuit to proceed, rejecting Twitter’s motion to dismiss,¹¹¹ the social media giant opted to settle, reinstating Berenson’s account.¹¹² As part of the settlement, Berenson gained access to internal Twitter documents, dubbed the “Twitter Files,” which revealed that the platform censored his content at the behest of the Biden administration¹¹³—a revelation scarcely covered, if at all, by the mainstream press.

In the case of *Missouri vs. Biden*, filed in 2022 and later renamed *Murthy vs. Missouri*,¹¹⁴ the argument for defending free

110 See “Alex Berenson v. Twitter, Inc,” *Digital Commons*, December 20, 2021, <https://digitalcommons.law.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3601&context=historical>.

111 Judge Alsup, “Order Re: 27 Motion to Dismiss,” *GovInfo*, April 29, 2022, https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/USCOURTS-cand-3_21-cv-09818/context.

112 Kaitlyn Tiffany, “A Prominent Vaccine Sceptic Returns to Twitter,” *The Atlantic*, August 24, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/08/alex-berenson-twitter-ban-lawsuit-covid-misinformation671219/>.

113 Melissa Koenig, “Twitter Files Dump Shows Company SUPPRESSED Debate and Information from Doctors and Experts Which Clashed with White House—and Suspended Vaccine Skeptic Alex Berenson at Biden’s Request,” *The Daily Mail*, December 26, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11574573/Twitter-suppressed-covid-information-doctors-experts.html>.

114 “State of Missouri et. al versus Joseph R. Biden Jr., et al.,” Case No. 3:22-CV-01213, July 4, 2023, <https://ago.mo.gov/wp-content/uploads/missouri-v-biden-ruling.pdf>. See also Clay Calvert, “Missouri v. Biden and the Crossroads of Politics, Censorship and Free Speech,” *The Hill*, September 13, 2023, <https://>

speech as guaranteed by the First Amendment centered on allegations of censorship against critics of Covid policies by the US government via the conduit of social media platforms. In other words, the plaintiffs charged that the White House collaborated with social media giants to suppress free speech. Judge Terry A. Doughty of the Fifth Circuit issued a preliminary injunction against the Biden administration on July 4, 2023, limiting administration officials from communicating with social media. This decision was justified on the grounds that:

The Plaintiffs are likely to succeed on the merits in establishing that the Government has used its power to silence the opposition. Opposition to Covid-19 vaccines; opposition to Covid-19 masking and lockdowns; opposition to the lab-leak theory of Covid-19.... All were suppressed. It is quite telling that each example or category of suppressed speech was conservative in nature. This targeted suppression of conservative ideas is a perfect example of viewpoint discrimination of political speech. American citizens have the right to engage in free debate about the significant issues affecting the country. If the allegations made by plaintiffs are true, the present case arguably involves the most massive attack against free speech in United States' history.¹¹⁵

The injunction initially blocked the US government from communicating with social media companies, prompting the Department of Justice to file an appeal seeking a stay. In September 2023, the Fifth Circuit upheld the district court ruling against the Biden administration on appeal but narrowed

thehill.com/opinion/judiciary/4198285-missouri-v-biden-and-the-crossroads-of-politics-censorship-and-free-speech/.

115 See Judge Terry A. Doughty, "State of Missouri et. al. vs. Joseph R. Biden et. al.: Judgment," United States District Court, Western Division of Louisiana, Monroe Division, July 4, 2023, <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/injunction-in-missouri-et-al-v/7ba314723d052bc4/full.pdf>.

down the injunction, deeming it overly broad.¹¹⁶ After the Department of Justice appealed again, the Supreme Court agreed in October 2023 to hear the case, while simultaneously lifting the injunction. Oral arguments from both parties were heard in March 2024 in a strained atmosphere.¹¹⁷ On the eve of this hearing, the *New York Times* showcased its virtuous horror, suggesting that only “friends of Mr. Trump” would criticize Biden’s Covid policy. It further asserted, as mentioned above, that the First Amendment guaranteeing the right to free speech was an “unsettled question.”¹¹⁸

Given the intensity of the debate, the Supreme Court was divided on the issue. The judgment regarding this injunction (only the injunction) was handed on June 26, 2024, with six justices against three. It ruled that the plaintiffs had no standing in their request to prevent the Biden administration from contacting social media, as they could not prove a “direct injury.”¹¹⁹ In other words, the Supreme Court defined a new threshold for standing (i.e., for having a justified motivation to sue), one in which the government is allowed to demand censorship of particular ideas from social media as long as it doesn’t target a particular person by name.¹²⁰

116 Tiemey Sneed, “Appeals Court Says Biden Admin Likely Violated First Amendment but Narrows Order Blocking Officials from Communicating with Social Media Companies,” *CNN*, September 9, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/08/politics/biden-administration-social-media-lawsuit/index.html>.

117 See the analysis of the case by two of the plaintiffs, Aaron Kheriaty and Jay Bhattacharya, on *The Illusion of Consensus* podcast, “Aaron Kheriaty on the Murthy vs. Missouri Supreme Court Hearing,” April 2, 2024, <https://www.illusionconsensus.com/p/episode-43-aaron-kheriaty-on-the>.

118 Rutenberg and Myers, “How Trump’s Allies Are Winning.” See also the Wikipedia page “Murthy v. Missouri,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murthy_v._Missouri#:~:text=On%20July%204%2C%202023%2C%20Judge,for%20material%20involving%20illegal%20activity.

119 Supreme Court of the United States, “Murthy, Surgeon General, et al. v. Missouri et al. Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit,” June 26, 2024, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-411_3dq3.pdf.

120 See Aaron Kheriaty’s second podcast with Jay Bhattacharya, “The Worst

The injunction was therefore lifted, and the Biden administration was allowed anew to contact social media in order to “combat misinformation,” which the *New York Times* hailed as a “major practical victory” for President Biden,¹²¹ while the original trial of *Murthy vs. Missouri* resumed. A new element, however, was that Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who was also suing the federal government for restriction of his own free speech as a presidential candidate, asked to have his lawsuit *Kennedy vs. Biden* consolidated with the *Murthy vs. Missouri* case (actually against Jay Bhattacharya and Aaron Kheriaty’s will, who feared politicization of their case), so he effectively became their co-plaintiff.

A positive element for the Missouri side is that Kennedy immediately convinced the court that he had standing to sue the federal government, and it is enough if one of the plaintiffs has standing to grant standing to the whole case, so Missouri now also has standing. As a result, Kennedy was granted a new preliminary injunction by Judge Doughty in August 2024 to restrain contacts between the federal government and social media: “The Court finds that Kennedy is likely to succeed on his claim that suppression of content posted was caused by actions of Government Defendants, and there is a substantial risk that he will suffer similar injury in the near future.”¹²²

Violation of Free Speech Rights in US History,” *The Illusion of Consensus* (podcast), August 6, 2024, <https://www.illusionconsensus.com/p/new-the-worst-violation-of-free-speech>.

121 Adam Liptak, “Supreme Court Rejects Challenge to Biden Administration’s Contacts with Social Media Companies,” *The New York Times*, June 26, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/26/us/politics/supreme-court-biden-free-speech.html>.

122 Joseph Mackinnon, “Court gives RFK Jr. Green Light to Sue Biden-Harris Admin over Censorship,” *The Blaze*, August 23, 2024, <https://www.theblaze.com/news/court-gives-rfk-jr-green-light-to-sue-biden-harris-admin-over-censorship>.

If the federal government appeals and if the Supreme Court agrees to hear the case a second time, it might finally rule on the merits of the case and really answer the question: can the federal government exert censorship on individuals via social media?¹²³

We can note that the three dissenting SCOTUS justices in the *Murthy vs. Missouri* case are also the three most conservative (Samuel Alito Jr., Clarence Thomas, and Neil Gorsuch). Does this mean that the defense of free speech is now less of a liberal concern than a conservative one? This could be part of a tectonic shift in Western politics which sees the liberal left turning toward a more authoritarian form of governmentality while the conservative right is increasingly representing not only freedom of speech but also the vote of the poor and lower middle class—as seen with Trump’s electorate. I will come back to this discussion in the conclusion.

Meanwhile, Alex Berenson, once derided by the *Atlantic* as “the pandemic’s wrongest man,”¹²⁴ is also suing President Biden as a continuation of his trial against Twitter.¹²⁵ The New Civil Liberties Alliance, representing media outlets like the *Daily Wire* and the *Federalist*, along with the state of Texas, has also taken legal action against the State Department for violating free speech and press rights. Despite facing opposition, including a motion to dismiss and a request to transfer the trial venue, the Alliance prevailed on May 7, 2024, securing expedited discovery and ensuring the lawsuit will proceed.¹²⁶

123 See Hannes Sarv, “Dr. Aaron Kheriaty. Censorship, Covid Crisis and the Decline of Liberal Democracies,” *Freedom Research* (podcast), September 3, 2024, <https://www.freedom-research.org/p/freedom-research-podcast-14-dr-aaron>.

124 Derek Thompson, “The Pandemic’s Wrongest Man,” *The Atlantic*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/pandemics-wrongest-man/618475/>.

125 “Berenson v. Biden, Jr. et al.,” *Justia*, April 12, 2023, <https://dockets.justia.com/docket/new-york/nysdce/1:2023cv03048/597054>.

126 “NCLA Defeats Motion to Dismiss, Wins Expedited Discovery in Suit Alleging

Finally, on June 18, 2024, it was announced that five states, led by Kansas, were suing Pfizer for “misleading and deceptive statements” on the properties of its Covid vaccine, Comirnaty, leading people to get vaccinated without proper information and “under duress.” The evidence for this accusation comes from material obtained via the Freedom of Information Act. Five main points are mentioned in the accusation:

- “Pfizer did not provide the truth”:
- the vaccine was mentioned as safe for pregnant women while “in the abandoned trial of pregnant women, more than half reported a serious adverse event and more than 10% a miscarriage”;
- Pfizer denied the cardio-inflammations provoked by the vaccine;
- the would-be protective effect against variants was in fact lower than 50%;
- and Pfizer claimed the vaccine “stopped transmission.”¹²⁷

Carl Heneghan, a professor of evidence-based medicine at Oxford, summarized the charges in a post on his Substack channel. Among the many points of contention concerning the clinical trials, point 14 (“Pfizer tested the booster shot on

State Dept. Censorship,” *New Civil Liberties Alliance*, May 7, 2024, <https://nclalegal.org/2024/05/ncla-defeats-motion-to-dismiss-wins-expedited-discovery-in-suit-alleging-state-dept-censorship/>.

127 See Carl Heneghan and Tom Jefferson, “Five U.S. States Sue Pfizer over False Claims of Vaccine Safety and Efficacy,” *The Daily Sceptic*, June 23, 2024, <https://dailysceptic.org/2024/06/23/five-u-s-states-sue-pfizer-over-false-claims-of-vaccine-safety-and-efficacy/>. Reuters also reported the news, albeit in a skeptical tone: Brendan Pierson, “Kansas Accuses Pfizer of Misleading Public about Covid Vaccine in Lawsuit,” *Reuters*, June 17, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/kansas-accuses-pfizer-misleading-public-about-covid-vaccine-lawsuit-2024-06-17/>.

only 12 trial participants (out of 40,000) who were in the 65 to 85 year-old age range”) and point 15 (“Pfizer did not test the booster on any participant older than 85 years old”) stand out sharply.¹²⁸

These legal challenges to the Biden administration’s official narrative underscore the importance of allowing a scientific debate. They indicate at minimum that censorship was misplaced and that a debate was worth having, regardless of the scientific validity of the narratives involved. But communist history also teaches us that the rule of law is not intangible, and it can be bent in almost any direction. When the communists took over in Czechoslovakia in 1948, they had to contend with a democratic legal system. To make it conform to the new dictatorship from one day to the next, they claimed that judges had to remedy the old, now “faulty” law by applying a “teleological interpretation of the law,” i.e., by taking into account the new communist values and “directing the purpose of the law towards the upcoming victory of the working class,” at least until the new communist laws were passed.¹²⁹ This is an ominous example; the Supreme Court ruling on the injunction in the case *Murthy vs. Missouri* can similarly be interpreted as injecting “new values” (noble censorship for the good of society) into an old law (the First Amendment).

128 Carl Heneghan, “Kansas Attorney General Report,” *Trust the Evidence* (blog), June 27, 2024, <https://trusttheevidence.substack.com/p/kansas-attorney-general-report>.

129 See Michal Bobek, “Conclusions: Of Form and Substance in Central European Judicial Transitions,” in *Central European Judges under the European Influence: The Transformative Power of the EU Revisited*, ed. Michal Bobek (Oxford: Hart, 2015), 403.

Summary of Chapter 4

The imperative for a thorough examination of Covid measures became apparent in Chapter 4, in light of the authoritarian inclinations and erosion of democratic norms witnessed throughout the pandemic. Governments worldwide seized upon the crisis to expand their control and stifle dissent, prompting a troubling surge in repressive speech laws in Western democracies under the pretext of combating misinformation. Legal battles in the US against the White House, revealing collusion with social media platforms to suppress free speech, serve as stark reminders of the pivotal juncture at which Western societies currently stand. Now is the time to decide whether we want to safeguard democratic ideals against political encroachment.

