

SPECIAL ISSUE

# NATIONAL REVIEW



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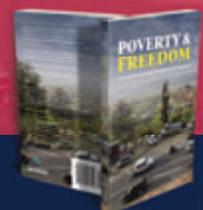
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# NATIONAL REVIEW

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# Letters

Text



## Home Cheap Home

In his article “The Unbuildable American Home” (March 9), Kevin Erdmann makes the strong case that high prices of houses in major cities are due to policy-makers’ using zoning laws and other regulations to prevent developers from building new housing units. This is demonstrably happening, yet there are various densely populated cities, such as Seattle, where workers are stuck between making enough money to not be eligible for the public-housing system and not making enough money to be able to afford living in the community. Many of these families are living inside their cars in church parking lots. Maybe the best solution is freer and more open markets to help close this gap. Or maybe the most direct option is for local, state, or federal government to provide subsidies to low-income households.

John Pai  
Smiths Station, Ala.

KEVIN ERDMANN RESPONDS: It is certainly true that there are immediate needs that might be best served through public intervention and subsidy. But let’s consider those interventions.

One solution would be to build more public housing. In cities where obstructions to market-rate housing have become extreme, public housing is affected by many of those same obstructions. So it is frequently reported that public units in the San Francisco area might cost hundreds of thousands of dollars each. Even effective direct public intervention is prevented by the underlying problems that prevent market-rate building.

Another solution, called “inclusionary zoning,” would be to allow builders to create more market-rate units if they agree to build below-market units, too. While this may lead to short-term gains of affordable units, it is still using the tools of exclusion, so those short-term gains come at the expense of long-term gains. Builders should be allowed to build all sorts of homes in greater density.

Another solution would be to give under-housed families cash so that they can afford the housing that is available. What if a city has 4 million homes and 20,000 families who are homeless or under-housed? If it gives those families \$15,000 to help them pay rent but still has only 4 million homes, at best it has changed the distribution of those homes. The only way for everyone to have a home would be to implement a policy that creates a city with more than 4 million homes.

It is easy to excuse certain cities by blaming geographical constraints for their lack of growth, but geographical constraints are just part of the political problem. Political obstruction has more power against infill development where there are many who assert that they are stakeholders. Reducing the overreach of those powers is the key to creating abundant housing where undeveloped land is not widely available.

Furthermore, it is especially important to make sure that public interventions aren’t used as stalking horses that make the underlying problem worse.

## Correction

Because of an editing error, “The Miracle That Never Ceases” (Richard Lowry, March 23) referred to “the classic Texas high-school match-up, John Tyler versus East Plano.” The name of the latter school is in fact “Plano East.”

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# The Week

Text

■ Trump has every right to boast about his TV ratings, but he really ought to give the virus some of the credit.

■ The headline in the *New York Times* gets this one right: “U.S. Deaths Set to Surpass China’s, but China’s Figures Remain in Doubt.” If you believe official numbers, we passed the virus’s homeland long ago, but why in the world would anyone believe the official numbers of the Chinese Communist Party? They denied the existence of the virus for months, silencing brave doctors who dared to mention it; then they staged a grandiose health campaign, quarantining cities and welding the doors of the sick. Now, presto, all is well. Meanwhile, video taken by Chinese people shows large shipments of funeral urns to the hard-hit city of Wuhan; there was a riot at the border of Hubei Province, where Wuhan is located, the neighbors in Jiangxi not wanting to share what they believe is still a medical emergency. The regime publishes lies to calm its own people, whose exchange of freedom for security has been betrayed. It publishes lies to defend its status. Americans who casually repeat China’s figures need a dose of the *Times*’ skepticism. Make that a double.

■ Perhaps the middle of a crisis isn’t the best time to haul out the guillotine, but the officials responsible for the testing debacle in the U.S. deserve to be sent to one forthwith. The CDC fouled up its initial testing kit, and then the FDA put obstacles in the path of others trying to deploy tests via the asinine imposition of its usual regulations. Presiding over the entire mess was HHS Secretary Alex Azar, reportedly frustrated but clearly ineffectual. The testing delay prevented us from learning of the spread of the virus earlier and meant the criteria for testing were too restrictive for too long. Now, finally, tests are becoming widely available. Sensitive to any criticism, President Trump has been defensive about the testing failure, which he should have been focused on much earlier. He should take ownership of the mistakes and resolve, when the appropriate time comes, to fire those most responsible.

■ The coronavirus has pushed Joe Biden to the sidelines. President Trump’s daily briefings are drawing viewers, as he grotesquely bragged, while few people are watching the challenger critique the administration’s response in low-tech productions. Biden’s short-term problem is that some people are asking “Where’s Joe Biden?” while others are forgetting to ask. His longer-term problem is that eventually people are going to start listening to him again.

■ “You’ve got to start off with the presumption that at least the essence of what she’s talking about is real, whether or not she forgets facts, whether or not it’s been made worse or better over time.” That was Joe Biden’s view, in September 2018, of sexual-assault allegations against Brett Kavanaugh. Now the glove is on the other hand. Former Biden staffer Tara Reade claims that Biden sexually assaulted her in 1993. Reade first complained



publicly of the incident in April 2019, then describing only inappropriate touching. She is not the first woman to speak about the presumptive Democratic nominee’s wayward hands. She seems to have confided her account to others when the incident occurred. Biden’s campaign now says “reporters have an obligation to rigorously vet those claims.” There are cases for skepticism. Reade supported Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders and has had warm words for Vladimir Putin. Her story has grown somewhat in the telling. But these are questions of credibility and motive. Biden and others who once said such questions were out of bounds should be made to answer why the standard should be different this time. Goose, gander.

■ During Lincoln’s hapless quest for good Union generals in the early days of the Civil War, he lighted twice on George McClellan. McClellan was an efficient organizer beloved by his troops, and he would win the bloody battle of Antietam. He was also arrogant, and contemptuous of Lincoln personally, calling him an ape in private and ostentatiously keeping him waiting for meetings. Lincoln’s reaction? “I will hold his horse if he gives us victories.” Flash-forward to 2020 and President Trump’s schoolyard spat with Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer (D.). Whitmer is a piece of work, but Trump responds in kind, dubbing her “half-Whitmer” and saying he tells Vice President Pence not to call her. Pence rightly ignores the advice, and Michigan has been federally approved as a disaster area. But why the antics? Trump’s supporters often argue, *Watch what he does, not what he says!* But in this crisis, the president’s words matter more than ever.



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Gratefully

Ron Robinson  
President

## THE WEEK

■ When a reporter listed senators who were in isolation because of the coronavirus, Trump interrupted, saying, “Romney is in isolation?” The reporter said yes, prompting Trump to say, sarcastically, “Gee, that’s too bad.” Three days later, Trump tweeted out an article headed “Mitt Romney Tests Negative for Coronavirus.” The president commented, “This is really great news! I am so happy I can barely speak. He may have been a terrible presidential candidate and an even worse U.S. Senator, but he is a RINO, and I like him a lot!” If on nothing else, Trump fans and Romney fans can agree on this: Those two men are nothing alike. And in this time, especially, the president could use a little charity and grace.

■ In Illinois, pro-life Democratic congressman Dan Lipinski lost his primary race to progressive challenger Marie Newman, who took issue in particular with Lipinski’s refusal to support legal abortion. Several abortion-rights groups backed Newman, eager to unseat a Democrat who bucks the party’s extremist line. In his concession speech, Lipinski was bold: “I’ve watched many other politicians succumb to pressure and change their position on this issue. . . . I could never give up protecting the most vulnerable human beings in the world simply to win an election.” We’re grateful to Representative Lipinski for his consistent, costly witness to the dignity of unborn human life.

■ While Washington was downplaying the threat of the coronavirus and happy-talking the markets out of a correction, powerful players in government got on the red phone—to their brokers. Senator Kelly Loeffler (R., Ga.) and her husband unloaded millions of dollars in stock beginning on the day she received a coronavirus briefing. Her husband is the chairman of the New York Stock Exchange. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D., Calif.) sold between \$1.5 million and \$6 million in stock in a California biotech company right before the recent market crash. Senator Richard Burr (R., N.C.) sold as much as \$1.7 million in shares in 33 transactions on February 13. It is unlikely that any of this rises to the level of “insider trading” in a legal sense, but the senators’ explanations for their actions range from the plausible to the preposterous. Burr, who is the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, says that his decisions were based on watching CNBC, whose Asia bureaus he claims to admire. Senator Feinstein says that the sales were taken on her husband’s initiative without her knowledge. Senator Loeffler says her sales were undertaken by “third-party advisors without my or my husband’s knowledge or involvement.” While Senator Loeffler’s third-party advisers were selling, the senator was on Twitter downplaying the economic risks of the epidemic. No incumbent wants to run for reelection in a bear market, and they are happy to take a bad bet with your money. Their money? Different story.

■ Andrew Cuomo’s nickname, for the many years he has been in New York politics, has been “Ratface”—meant, what is worse, as a comment on his character rather than his looks. As a young man he was his father Mario’s dark self; as a politician in his own right, he has been abrasive, arrogant, incapable of working with others. His tenure as governor has been a strange combination of left-wing crusades (for abortion, against fracking) with enough deviations to alienate his party’s progressives (he supports charter schools), plus a dash of old-fashioned corruption (his big-ticket



development projects for upstate collapsed in a welter of embarrassing accusations). Came the coronavirus, and a new Andrew Cuomo appeared. His briefings on the catastrophe have been clear and direct; he has taken pains not to tangle with President Trump, on whose help he depends; he has avoided preening and admitted error. As the *New York Post*’s Bob McManus, no friend to Cuomo, observed, “he

has gotten the poetry of government-in-a-maelstrom right.” His stricken state is grateful for the transformation.

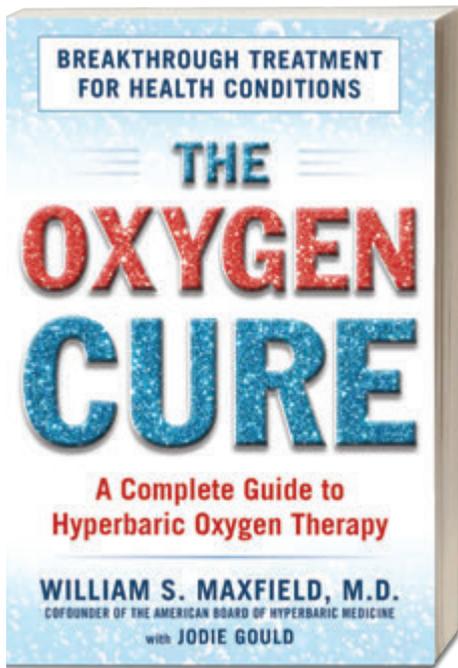
■ Former Chicago mayor and Obama chief of staff Rahm Emanuel famously remarked that “you never want a serious crisis to go to waste.” Nancy Pelosi and her caucus in the House apparently took that advice when they stuffed their 1,432-page coronavirus-relief proposal full of progressive policies. The bill would have required aid recipients to upend their corporate boards, file annual diversity reports on the demographics of their staff and suppliers, and, in the case of airlines, “fully offset” their annual carbon emissions. Pelosi’s bill would even have required the 29 states that do not offer same-day voter registration to do so, which—whatever one thinks of the idea—has nothing to do with the pandemic that necessitated the relief package in the first place. While a slightly pared-down version ultimately cleared the House and the Senate with many of the initial partisan provisions removed, Pelosi’s Democrats threw a wrench into negotiations during a moment of national crisis, a moral mistake that they should be made to pay for at the ballot box.

■ After the Senate unanimously passed the relief bill, it was expected to pass the House on a voice vote. Representative Thomas Massie (R., Ky.), a libertarian, objected, demanding a roll-call vote. To defeat his motion, 216 congressmen had to come back to the House chamber. Under normal circumstances, Massie would surely have been right to want a roll-call vote on a \$2 trillion bill—just as, under normal circumstances, he would have been right to oppose a big-spending bill. The House should have made provision for remote voting in exceptional cases. But the outcome of the vote was foreordained; voters had access to every congressman’s position on the question; and requiring members to travel was a risk to public health. The ideologue, unlike the statesman, will insist on his principle at just the wrong time.

■ Congressional debates over the relief bill were held up by several sticking points, one of which was whether Planned Parenthood would be eligible for federal money under the legislation. Democrats fought to extend aid to the abortion provider, but Republicans and pro-life groups won out: The new law’s language about nonprofit affiliates seems to exclude Planned Parenthood from receiving forgivable small-business loans. Good: The organization gets too much federal money as it is.

■ As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise in the U.S., several states are taking action to keep residents home and limit the spread of the disease. In Texas, Ohio, Alabama,

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### HBOT a Fountain of Youth?

In addition to helping reverse some symptoms of dementia, HBOT may actually slow down some of the physical effects of aging. Valerie, receiving HBOT treatment for stroke, reports: "It can make your hair grow thicker and your sex drive will be off the charts. If people understood what oxygen does, you would have to make reservations months in advance to get into a chamber."

### HBOT Could Save Thousands Dumped in Nursing Homes

The U. S. Government estimates that 250,000 patients have been unnecessarily confined to nursing homes when, with appropriate treatment, they could be living productive lives. With wider acceptance of HBOT, far fewer people

could be mistakenly left to wither away in nursing homes and critical care facilities.

### Could HBOT Have Saved Robin Williams?

After beloved actor Robin Williams committed suicide, an autopsy revealed he suffered from undiagnosed Lewy body dementia (LBD). The brain disease often causes depression and suicidal thoughts. Dr. Maxwell theorizes that, with a correct diagnosis, a course of HBOT could have helped repair Williams' damaged brain cells and perhaps saved him from a tragic death.

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## THE WEEK

and elsewhere, lawmakers have deemed elective abortions “non-essential” procedures in an effort to enforce social distancing and conserve necessary medical supplies for treating patients with the coronavirus. Abortion providers and their legal allies have sued. There is no Supreme Court precedent directly on point, doubtless because it had never occurred to even the most creative jurist that the Constitution exempts abortion from emergency measures in an epidemic.

■ Triage strategies formulated by public-health officials in Alabama and Washington State have provoked sharp criticism. Under the Alabama plan, people with intellectual disabilities, including dementia, were classified as “unlikely candidates” for ventilators. In Washington, patients with “loss of reserves in energy, physical ability, cognition and general health” were targeted for possible transfer from the hospital to outpatient or palliative care. Advocates for people with disabilities in both states filed complaints with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the Department of Health and Human Services. The office has issued a bulletin reminding the public of laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability or age. “Our civil rights laws protect the equal dignity of every human life from ruthless utilitarianism,” said the OCR director, Roger Severino. “Persons with disabilities, with limited English skills, and older persons should not be put at the end of the line for health care during emergencies.” He explained that the office was not dictating to states how to allocate care but only reaffirming that any rationing standards must comply with civil-rights law. They should comply as well with the moral principles that make our civilization worth preserving in the first place.

■ Shortages of surgical masks and respirators have many Americans wondering whether we should have protected more of our manufacturing base from trade. It is certainly true that the U.S. has a national interest in ensuring ready access to supplies that are vital to public health and to defense, whether from within the country or from diverse friendly countries. While trade can promote that goal, especially by driving down costs, allowing Chinese dominance in masks was a mistake (probably one made out of inattention more than ideology). New production of protective equipment in the U.S. also has to pass stringent regulatory review. But it’s also true that even the most intelligent policies are not going to produce the optimal amount of supplies for a historically unprecedented epidemic. We would in any case have to resort to such measures as repurposing existing factories. We should begin preparing to stockpile vital supplies and, yes, rethink some trade policies. Like our doctors, we will need a scalpel and not a sledgehammer.

■ There is such a thing as coronavirus machismo—a skeptical or devil-may-care attitude toward the pandemic. Jerry Falwell Jr., the president of Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Va., exhibits this machismo. Defying national norms, he brought his students back from spring break. Almost 2,000 of them returned, and more than 800 soon left. How many had the virus, it’s hard to tell. Marybeth Davis Baggett, a professor of English, wrote an open letter to the university’s board of trustees, asking them to close the campus. On Twitter, Falwell referred to her as “the ‘Baggett’ lady.” Addressing Falwell, Jeff Brittain tweeted, “I’m as right wing as they get, bud. But as a parent of three of your students, I

think this is crazy, irresponsible and seems like a money grab.” In his reply, Falwell called him a “dummy.” Machismo in this time is not only silly but potentially fatal.

■ The Supreme Court reaffirmed in 1998 (*Saenz v. Roe*) that Americans have a constitutional right to travel between states. Though not spelled out as such in the Constitution, the right is so deeply ingrained in the formation of the Union that it is deemed “virtually unconditional.” Ah, but there’s that word: *virtually*. No right is absolute. Even fundamental rights must yield to the degree necessary to vindicate legitimate government interests, such as preventing the spread of infectious disease. The coronavirus outbreak illustrates this tension. As the Court explained, the right to travel includes “the right to be treated as a welcome visitor rather than an unfriendly alien when temporarily present” in the host state. Yet states such as Rhode Island have threatened to detain and force quarantines on out-of-state visitors from such “hot spot” states as New York. It is for the federal government, not the states, to regulate interstate travel. While states may restrict *intrastate* travel, they may not subject citizens of other states to restrictions more onerous than their own face. That said, if state authorities have reasonable grounds to believe a person is infected, they must be able to test and, if necessary, quarantine.

■ Gallup recently asked Americans whether they approved or disapproved of how U.S. leaders and institutions have been handling the coronavirus pandemic. Only one group, the news media, ended up with more people disapproving of it (55 percent) than approving (44 percent). Donald Trump—who the press corps seems to be convinced is failing the task—has a 60 percent approval rating on coronavirus. Vice President Mike Pence, the CDC, and even Congress are rated far higher than journalists. While conservatives might celebrate the public’s rejection of the media, the fact that Americans are unable to trust the fourth estate as a reliable source of information during a time of crisis is a problem. In a vacuum of trust, people are more vulnerable to quacks or erroneous information. Some of this perilous situation was created by the president’s scattershot denunciation of media, but plenty of blame falls on the laps of journalists, who even now are preoccupied with gotchas, political correctness, and partisan squabbles. Let’s hope everyone learns a lesson.

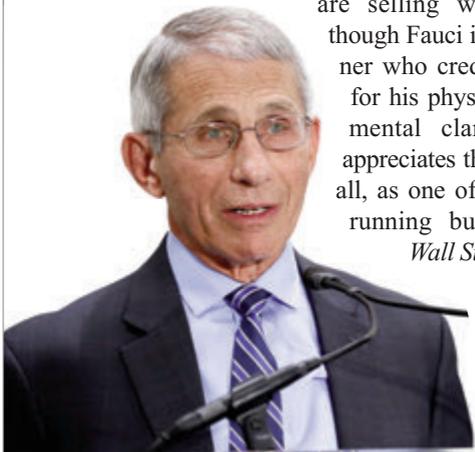
■ The people of Venezuela are unlucky in manifold ways, and lucky only in one: The Trump administration is actively opposed to the dictatorship that rules them. The Justice Department indicted Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela’s dictator, for narco-terrorism and drug trafficking. The State Department offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to his arrest. In addition to indicting Maduro, the Justice Department indicted an array of Venezuelan officials, plus members of the FARC, the Colombian narco-terrorist group. Some critics say that these moves prevent a negotiated exit for Maduro and his gang, denying them a “soft landing” and thereby forcing them to hang on till the bitter end. But they appear to have been doing this anyway. The administration acted boldly, and may this boldness pay off.

■ Israeli politics much resemble professional wrestling, in which losers seem ready to be taken away in an ambulance only to end the contest in the same good shape as the winner. Three general elections in the last twelve months have failed to produce a

winner and a loser, so that deadlock appears to be a permanent condition. Veteran prime minister Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu and his Likud Party are supposedly on the right and his foremost opponent Benny Gantz, former chief of staff and founder of the Blue and White Party, is supposedly on the left, but it takes specialists in split hairs to differentiate most of their policies—with one vital exception. For the first time in the country's history, Arab members of the Knesset have come together in a so-called joint list in numbers that give them the role of king-makers. If they could, they would abolish the State of Israel, for which reason Bibi and Likud refuse to have them in coalition. When Blue and White split on the issue, Gantz had no choice except to agree to a government of national unity. In a similar fix in the past, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres set a precedent for such an outcome. For the moment, the usual haggling over posts obscures who gets what and on which terms. The Left is screaming that Bibi is mounting a palace coup and Gantz is making a shameful surrender. In plain fact, reality wins again.

■ Anthony Fauci, the 79-year-old physician and immunologist, is having a moment. George H. W. Bush called him a hero in 1988, but until the COVID-19 outbreak, most Americans had been fortunate enough to remain unaware of his quiet diligence. He has again risen to the occasion, a reliable font of clarity in a confusing time. Donuts Delite, a pastry shop in Rochester, N.Y., has landed on a way to thank him: by making a doughnut with Fauci's face on it. "We noticed Dr. Fauci on [TV], and we loved his message and how thorough he was, and how he kept everyone informed during the crisis, . . . so we wanted to give back and say thanks," owner Nick Semeraro told CNN. The doughnuts are selling well. And even though Fauci is a lifelong runner who credits the pastime for his physical vitality and mental clarity, he likely appreciates the gesture. After all, as one of Fauci's former running buddies told the

*Wall Street Journal*, "if you run every day for five miles, you can basically eat a cow."



■ Capitalism is endlessly adaptable. With virtually no sports left in action, America's strapped bookmakers are finding all sorts of unconventional events to satisfy the nation's hard-core gamblers—even presidential press conferences. Bookies, like everyone else, have noticed that when President Trump speaks in public, he uses a rather limited vocabulary and tends to repeat himself. So now a Las Vegas firm has compiled a set of proposition wagers on how often Trump will speak certain words and phrases in a single coronavirus briefing. "We're doing a great job" has an over/under of 2.5; "best" is 5.5; "more tests than any other country" is 9.5; and the omnibus "fantastic, incredible, amazing or tremendous" gets a whopping 24.5. It's all meant (at

least partially) to make fun of Trump, but if this catches on, it could make thousands of voters tune in to his press conferences and focus intently on every word.

■ In New York, "three healthy twentysomethings," as they describe themselves, have started a volunteer service dedicated to running errands for "those in high-risk demographics," primarily the elderly. Liam Elkind, one of the founders, saw his father working tirelessly as a doctor in the crush of the pandemic. "I figured, okay, I can buy some groceries," Elkind said. "That I can do." He and his team sent the word out on social media. They built a website. They posted flyers in several languages. They call themselves "Invisible Hands." Within 72 hours, they had signed up 1,300 volunteers. They're duly cautious, insisting on social distancing and ample hand-washing, but providing human contact to the extent possible, if only by phone. Elkin told reporters that he hoped they would become obsolete. He added that he does not think, however, that "the need for social connection or for helping out your neighbor or for making new friends ever goes away."

■ Kenny Rogers knew when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em. In the mid 1960s he was a member of the New Christy Minstrels, a folk ensemble. As the folk scene began to fade, he folded his hand and left to form a band called The First Edition, with a psychedelic and anti-war slant. As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, Rogers, now in his 30s, dropped the hippie angle and shifted increasingly to mainstream pop (while also appearing in a memorably cheesy 1970s commercial for the Quick Pickin', Fun Strummin' Home Guitar Course). Then, in 1978, he recorded "The Gambler"—and remained a country(ish) artist for the rest of his days, while parlaying his Gambler character into a series of movies and opening a restaurant chain bearing his name. He did some holding and folding in his personal life too; after four unsuccessful marriages, he got hitched to Wanda Miller in 1997 and stayed with her until his recent death at 81. R.I.P.

■ Who was the last great composer? Shostakovich (d. 1975)? Britten (d. 1976)? It is possible that Krzysztof Penderecki will be ranked among the greats, or near greats. He will certainly be rated highly, as he long has been. He was a Pole, born in 1933. That means he grew up in the war. This ever marked him, obviously. Penderecki wrote a variety of music, including symphonies, operas, and concertos. In his younger years, he was attracted to a severe modernism. But gradually he loosened, and broadened. "I was saved from the avant-garde snare of formalism by a return to tradition," he once remarked. Penderecki influenced many younger composers, and he was unusually admired by performers. In 2009, our Jay Nordlinger interviewed Lorin Maazel, the great conductor, and asked him, "Who's good today, among composers?" Immediately, Maazel said, "Penderecki." Then he paused a long while—thinking—before naming anyone else. Many other top musicians said "Penderecki" first too. Krzysztof Penderecki—not an easy name for non-Poles—has died at 86. R.I.P.

■ Curly Neal, virtuoso ballhandler and point guard for the storied Harlem Globetrotters, joined the team in 1963, fresh from a stellar college basketball career in North Carolina, where he was still known as Fred, before his shaved head had earned him his nickname. Over the next 22 years he played in thousands of games in nearly 100 countries. For a generation he served, or rather shone,

## THE WEEK

as the face of the act, to which he lent his spirit, and vice versa. Sliding to his knees and then rising as he dribbled in circles around other players, up and down the court, he did things the hard way, for fun, and made it look easy. With an athleticism that concealed his athleticism, he would dazzle the crowd and then mix his stunts with occasional slapstick humor. In 2008 the Globetrotters retired his number, 22. “We weren’t just entertainers,” he wrote in 2015. “I truly believe that we helped ease many of the tensions that pulled at the country. It didn’t matter if you were black, white or whatever—laughing and enjoying our games made those barriers disappear.” Dead at 77. R.I.P.

■ How easy it is to vote for “something that sounds good,” Tom Coburn told the *New York Times*. “It is hard to stand against it and say there is a bigger principle.” A fiscal hawk, Coburn made his mark in the Senate by opposing spending bills. “Dr. No,” they called him. He called out government waste. “You cannot negotiate with Coburn,” his colleague Harry Reid (D., Nev.) remarked—high praise, in Coburn’s book. Before running for Congress in 1994, he was an obstetrician. He delivered 4,000 babies. He served in the House through 2000, keeping his promise to leave after three terms. Elected to the Senate from Oklahoma in 2004, he became fast friends with the freshman senator from Illinois, Barack Obama. Coburn, a full-spectrum conservative, on social as well as economic issues, observed that “the interesting friendships are the ones that are divergent.” In 2007, he voted twice against funding the Iraq War. His health flagging, he retired from the Senate in 2015, before the end of his second term, and served as a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. His largely unheeded message of fiscal conservatism has never been timelier. Dead at 72. R.I.P.

■ Presidential campaigns are dedicated to selling their candidates as colossi bestriding history. But such efforts are the product of the men and women behind the scenes, without whom any campaign would collapse. Such a man was John Patrick Sears. Born on July 3, 1940, in Syracuse, N.Y., Sears managed his first presidential campaign in college, helping a friend become class president at Notre Dame. Law school and a court clerkship eventually brought him to Richard Nixon’s law firm. He worked for the former vice president in various capacities, helping to manage his 1968 presidential campaign and ultimately securing a White House post. But Sears got along poorly in the Nixon White House, something that redounded to his advantage when he was forced out well before the Watergate scandal destroyed it. Uncorrupted, he remained a force behind the scenes in Republican politics, helping to engineer Ronald Reagan’s near-win in the 1976 primary and the early stages of his eventual victory four years later. But the behind-the-scenes operator fell out behind the scenes again, and Reagan bounced him from the campaign. Thirty-nine then, the man Lou Cannon called “the resident mastermind of Republican politics” had worked for his last candidate. Dead at 79. R.I.P.

■ Richard Reeves was trained as an engineer but gave it up after a year to go into journalism. The 1960s were a fertile time for someone interested in politics and social trends, and by the end of the decade he had worked his way up to a plum job at the *New York Times*. He was best known for writing about presidents, in his syndicated column, newspaper and magazine articles, and

well-researched biographies of presidents from Kennedy to George W. Bush. Over the years, Reeves came to embody the Washington liberal consensus, but toward the end of his career he softened some of his opinions, admitting in a 1996 *American Heritage* article that he had been wrong to criticize Gerald Ford for his pardon of Richard Nixon. Reeves’s biography of Ronald Reagan was critical but even-handed and understanding, which earned it some hostile reviews, but he had nothing good to say about Nixon or George W. Bush. Dead at 83. R.I.P.

■ NR joins our longtime friend and contributor Terry Teachout in mourning the death of his wife, Hilary. He is familiar to our readers, as he is to readers pretty much everywhere. She had a sharp mind, a ready wit, when necessary a tart tongue, and a bright countenance. One deed illuminates the whole: She gave him, on one birthday, a necktie formerly owned by the composer and critic Virgil Thomson: the perfect gift, signifying her love of the recipient and her knowledge of just what would please. She was also, as Terry said, tough as an old boot, which she needed, having endured for years the lung ailment that finally took her. Her memory, in the hearts of all who knew her, will be even more tenacious. R.I.P.

## PUBLIC POLICY

## First and Foremost, Defeat the Virus

IF President Trump is right that the fight against the coronavirus is the equivalent of a war, we need to focus first and foremost on defeating the enemy.

That means, as an urgent priority, getting hospitals the protective gear and ventilators that they need to keep from getting overwhelmed by the surge of patients in places like New York City and New Orleans, with staff pushed to the brink and refrigerated trucks parked outside awaiting bodies. It means continuing with the lockdowns as long as necessary, despite the terrible cost. And it means coming up with a post-lockdown regime that will allow us to open for business as soon as possible, even as the virus is still with us.

It’s a sign of seriousness in meeting the need for hospital equipment that President Trump invoked the Defense Production Act—the Korean War—era law allowing the government to direct the manufacture and distribution of goods necessary for the national defense—to compel General Motors to make ventilators on an emergency basis.

The action came after a typically confusing back-and-forth over GM. If a report in the *New York Times* was to be believed, the \$1 billion price tag of a potential deal with GM for the ventilators caused the administration to have second thoughts. The *Times* also reported that the administration worried about getting saddled with too many unused ventilators, a concern that accorded with President Trump’s statement on Fox News that he doubted that New York City would really need 30,000 ventilators.

At the end of this, though, if we have kept hospitals from getting swamped at the cost of paying top dollar for gear and buying too much of it, our response will have been a success well worth the price.

As bad as the escalating numbers of cases and fatalities have been in recent weeks, the situation is surely going to deteriorate

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further. Besides fortifying the medical system, the massive scale-up in testing has to continue and every exertion must be made to develop and deploy therapies as soon as possible. The roll-out of a test by Abbott Laboratories that can reveal a positive in five minutes is a sign of the role technological innovation can play.

The hope that Trump briefly expressed about opening up the economy again by Easter weekend was understandable, but nothing is truly going to open up—nor should it—unless we have clearly gotten a handle on the virus and its spread has begun to wane. Trump backed off the Easter date, in part in reaction to sobering estimates from the government’s experts that even in a best case, 100,000 people or more may die in the epidemic.

The shutdowns have their critics on the right. It’s important to remember, though, that the disease itself is imposing an economic cost. It would have caused a recession regardless of government policy. Would New York City restaurants really be full if it weren’t for the Governor Cuomo–ordered lockdown? Would people be eager to get on airplanes? To book a cruise? To see a Broadway show? To go to Disneyland? If the disease had been left unchecked, it would have exacted an enormous price, in lives of the infected, in the breakdown of the hospital system, in the follow-on effects on people ill with conditions that would have gone untreated.

More important than coming up with an aspirational date for a return to normalcy is thinking through what our post-lockdown strategy will look like—how testing, masks, contact tracing, and other methods will be deployed to allow a return to economic and social activity without risking a major second wave of infections. Life in a place such as New York City may not look the same for a long time.

President Trump has gotten a bump in the polls recently, perhaps a rally-around-the-flag effect or a reaction to his briefings, where new measures are announced every day. We suspect that his mini-bounce would be even higher if he could at least stop warring with governors and shooting at his critics during this interlude. Trump should know that how he responds in this moment will define his presidency and determine his odds of reelection.

We hope and expect that our country will, in its characteristic fashion, find its way through this crisis by marshaling huge resources, discovering innovations, and relying on the incredible courage and initiative of medical personnel, grocery-store clerks, and countless millions of others who make our civil society so robust. But the worst is yet to come.

## PUBLIC POLICY

## Relief from Congress

**W**HAT Congress passed was not a stimulus. We have often opposed stimulus bills in the past, considering it a mistake for the federal government to borrow money to expand a depressed economy. At the moment, though, the government is not trying to expand the economy or even arrest its contraction. It is principally trying to enable the temporary shutdown of much of the economy with the least human damage.

The legislation should be judged on whether it aids efforts to slow the spread of coronavirus, aids the treatment of the infected, relieves those adversely affected by it and the fight against it, and supports the overall economy. These purposes, as we noted in our last issue, sometimes overlap and sometimes con-



flict. They also call for placing speed ahead of efficiency, and both ahead of mere partisan objectives.

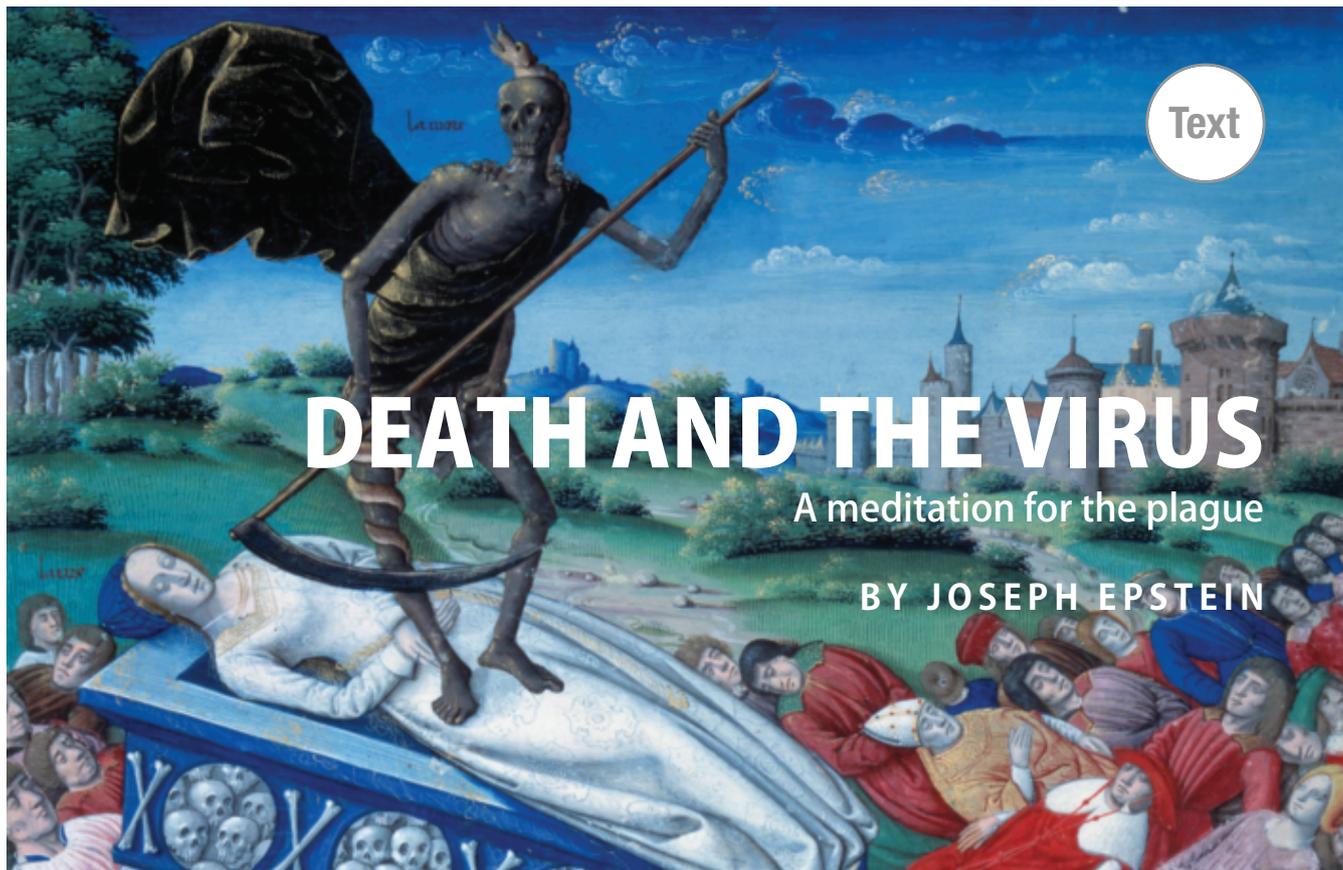
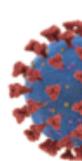
Congressional Democrats did not rise to this occasion. They saw an opportunity to advance goals on the environment, racial diversity, and Planned Parenthood funding that, whatever their other merits, do not belong in this bill. And they were willing to slow down the process for the sake of these goals.

Some Republicans also lost perspective, albeit less crassly. They feared that the expansion of unemployment insurance in the bill is too generous and will incentivize quitting or refusing to take work. Under normal circumstances, we would share this concern. But at the moment we should be more focused on helping the unemployed—especially since the rules of unemployment insurance discourage the gaming of the system, however imperfectly, and this expansion is temporary. (Congress has let temporary expansions expire before.)

The bill’s rebates—\$1,200 for singles and \$2,400 for married couples, up to an income limit beyond which the value declines eventually to zero—are not especially well designed. The income limits are based on previous years’ income, which means that some people who need help won’t get it. It would have been better to give the rebates to everyone and count them as income for the taxes collected next year. But they will mitigate some near-term hardship.

The provisions to support businesses, small and large, are especially valuable. Businesses cannot be expected to have saved enough money to weather a once-in-a-lifetime pathogen. The public has an interest in their being able to pay ongoing expenses during this crisis and to resume as viable enterprises once it ends. The legislation stipulates that businesses receiving loans may not pay dividends or conduct stock buybacks for several years. This is faddish thinking, and there are better ways to protect taxpayer interests and keep existing shareholders from making windfall gains.

The law that passed is far from perfect. The enormous spending involved would be easier to stomach if legislators and presidents had shown greater restraint before this crisis hit or showed at any time any interest in getting the national debt on a sustainable trajectory. But we will heed our own stricture. The support for business, the relief for individuals, and the expansion of medical capacity are all urgent matters. They justify a bill that, in a happier time, nobody would consider, and we ourselves would vehemently reject.



Text

# DEATH AND THE VIRUS

A meditation for the plague

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

The Triumph of Death, from a 1503 edition of Petrarch

**D**EPEND upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully,” wrote Samuel Johnson, whose mind, without fear of hanging, was concentrated on death throughout his life. Johnson concentrated on death with, in a word, “terror.” He thought, mistakenly, that he was not a good enough Christian, and that nothing pleasing awaited after his demise. None of us is to be hanged in in a fortnight, either, but, these days, with the plague of the coronavirus upon the land, all our minds are concentrated on death. Turn on the television or radio, national or local, and one discovers that the dread virus is topics 1 through 896. News of the increased number of people who have the virus, the numbers of those who, locally, nationally, and internationally, have died from it, is inescapable.

Two of Pascal’s best-known passages come into play in connection with the coronavirus. The first has it that “all of humanity’s problems stem from man’s

inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” The second speaks to the human condition: “Imagine a number of men in chains, all under sentence of death, some of whom each day are butchered in the sight of others; those remaining see their own condition in that of their fellows, and looking at each other with grief and despair await their turn. This is an image of the human condition.” The coronavirus has forced almost all of us, either in enforced or self-imposed quarantine, to sit quietly in our room, and the news of the continuing deaths it is causing—of the obscure and the celebrated—concentrates our minds on Pascal’s dark human condition.

Montaigne, whom one does not think of as a dark writer, felt one couldn’t think too often or too much about death, especially one’s own. He wrote about death in three separate essays—“On Fear,” “Why We Should Not Be Deemed Happy Until after Our Death,” and “To Philosophize Is to Learn How to Die”—and his general point was that we should accustom ourselves to the idea of death, of our own death specifically, in order “to educate and train [our souls] for their encounter with that adversary, death.” Doing so, we

would thereby fight free of the fear of death, so that when it does arrive “it will bear no new warning for [us]. As far as we possibly can we must have our boots on, ready to go.” Montaigne wished to die tending his cabbages, but, alas, he was instead the victim, at 59, in 1592, of quinsy, a disease of the throat that can be painful and that, in his case, rendered him speechless at the close of his life.

“So it has come at last, the distinguished thing,” uttered Henry James of death on his own deathbed. Far from clear is what is distinguished about it, death, that most democratic of events, “an old joke,” as Turgenev once referred to it, “that comes to each of us afresh.” Yet if not death generally, then some deaths do seem more distinguished than others. Surely there are good and bad deaths, and sad because unnecessary deaths. A good death for men, most would agree, is one on the battlefield in a war fought for an important cause. The classic good death is thought to be that of Socrates, his principles intact, calmly drinking hemlock in the company of friends. For a woman a good death might be one in which she dies for her children or to stave off the death of

others, a death marked by selflessness. A good death is often thought an easeful death, one unaccompanied by pain or mess. A death in one's sleep at home at an advanced age is for most of us the very model of a good death.

Perhaps the most famous easeful death was that of the philosopher David Hume—famous because James Boswell recorded it in his *Life of Johnson*. Hume “was quite different from the plump figure which he used to present,” Boswell wrote. “He seemed to be placid and even cheerful. He said he was just approaching to his end.” When Boswell asked him “if the thought of annihilation never gave him any uneasiness,” Hume answered: Not in the least, “no more than the thought that he had never been, as Lucretius observes.” Boswell reported Hume's calm in the face of death to Samuel Johnson, who retorted: “He lied. He had a vanity in being thought easy. It is more probable that he lied than that so very improbable a thing should be as a man not afraid of death; of going into an unknown state and not being uneasy at leaving all that he knew.”

Sad deaths sometimes seem to constitute the preponderance of deaths. Sad is a death that comes about through malfeasance, foolish misbehavior, accident. Sad it seems to die too soon because of heavy smoking, obesity, drugs, careless driving. (I write “too soon,” but then Balzac, in *Cousin Pons*, notes that “death always comes too soon.”) A too-early death, in which one is deprived by a large measure of the full share of one's days, is inherently sad. Too early is any death that falls well below the life expectancy of the day. One thinks of Anton Chekhov, George Orwell, F. Scott Fitzgerald, all of whom died in their forties.

In literature, Tolstoy did death best, whether it was the suicide of Anna Karenina, the prolonged dying of Prince Andrei Bolkonsky after the Battle of Austerlitz in *War and Peace*, or the insignificant (to all but him) death of Ivan Ilych Golovin in “The Death of Ivan Ilych.” Tolstoy writes: “Besides considerations as to the possible transfers and promotions likely to result from Ivan Ilych's death, the mere fact of the death of a near acquaintance aroused, as usual, in

all who heard of it the complacent feeling that ‘it is he who is dead and not I.’ . . . Each one thought or felt, ‘Well, he's dead, but I'm alive.’” Ivan Ilych himself cannot confront his fate directly, and for a long stretch he refers to death as “*It*”: “He would go into his study, lie down, and again be alone with *It*: face to face with *It*. And nothing could be done with *It*, except to look at it and shudder.” As for perhaps the most famous death in English literature, in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Oscar Wilde remarked that “one must have a heart of stone not to read the death of Little Nell without laughing.”

Which brings us back to death by coronavirus—surely one that, by the nature of its accidental, its almost haphazard quality, would be sad indeed. There is no avoiding this blasted virus—“Kung Flu,” an acquaintance of mine calls it—either on the news, on the streets, or in one's consciousness. Because of it we are advised to avoid social gatherings, eating

## How would Epicurus, that most reasonable of philosophers, have confronted the coronavirus?

and drinking in public places, discretionary travel. We are instructed to make up for the time ordinarily spent in these pleasant pursuits by washing our hands throughout the day for no less than 20 seconds each time and the rest of the time trying to remember not to touch our faces. In grocery shops, on the otherwise empty streets, most people one encounters are wearing face masks and blue rubber gloves. If the coronavirus continues for an appreciable time, the man or woman who invents a full-body condom will make a fortune.

The news is utterly dominated by talk of the coronavirus, with only the weather report offering relief. Owing to the virus, sports, that opiate of us male masses, have been eliminated. On every news show, physicians are called in to tell us what to do to elude the virus, what we need to worry and not worry about. Two different friends sent me advice, via YouTube, given by a youngish, overweight M.D. with a ponytail, on how to unpack my

groceries safely, which, as he demonstrated, can easily be done if you have, say, 40 or so minutes to give to the project and perhaps an extra quart of disinfectant on hand to do it properly.

In the British *Spectator*, Theodore Dalrymple, apropos of the coronavirus, makes the distinction between genuine danger and the *frisson* of danger, the latter being available to us through horror movies, roller coasters, thrillers, the former being true terror, and concludes that the coronavirus entails genuine fear. “A mixture of definite statistics—the absolute or cumulative number of deaths day by day, for example—and projections of present trends indefinitely into the future, together with unknown quantities such as the true rate of mortality and an absence of any sense of proportion,” he writes, “promotes obedience and a trust in authority as the only shield we have.” What we are afraid of, of course, is an all but arbitrary death by germ.

“Seven thousand old people have died in Italy, 13,800,000 have not,” Dalrymple writes, “but the 7,000 are infinitely more real to us than the 13,800,000, and further deaths, even at a slowing rate, can only reinforce our fears.” None of us wants to die for no better reason than that we came too close to a stranger carrying the virus or put our hand on an infected counter or package, or an index finger on an elevator button. To do so, not to put too fine a point on it, would be unreasonable.

How would Epicurus (341–270 C.E.), that most reasonable of philosophers, have confronted the coronavirus? Epicurus, contra Montaigne, instructs us to get our minds off death. Not to worry, he advises. After death comes oblivion, in which you will be returned to the state you existed in before you were a child. As for rewards or punishment in the afterlife, perish the thought, for if there is no God or gods, then worrying about His or their judgment is a waste of time. The same goes for pain. Two possibilities here, either it will go away or it will worsen and you will die, upon which benign oblivion will follow. Hey, no problem! Yet why do I see Epicurus, were he alive today, washing his hands yet one more time and checking for his face mask before leaving the house? The man was a philosopher, true, but he was no damn fool. **NR**

# New York City in Crisis

Perilous moments from the Revolution to today

BY RICHARD BROOKHISER

**I**t's official. Vice President Pence said the New York City metropolitan area is a "high-risk area." Large problems happen to large numbers of people; inevitably they appear in New York, which has been one of the largest cities in North America for centuries.

George Washington had the Declaration of Independence read to his army in New York on July 9, 1776. He and they were about to lose the city to the enemy. Washington was outnumbered, 19,000 versus a British expeditionary force of 32,000. Worse, he was attempting to defend an island city, and only the enemy had brought a fleet. The last American post on Manhattan fell on November 16.

Early in the enemy occupation a fire destroyed about a third of New York. Patriot saboteurs may have set it; enraged inhabitants certainly thought so—during the blaze suspicious characters were summarily thrown into the flames. After that disaster the occupation settled into a long trying slog. The outflow of patriot refugees was matched by an influx of loyalists. In time the island was denuded as trees were cut for firewood. American prisoners of war fared worst; the British put them in disease-ridden ships in the East River; thousands died, their bones still turning up on the Brooklyn waterfront decades later.

The city became a hive of espionage. Our former NR colleague Alexander Rose detailed American operations in his book *Washington's Spies*, and in *Turn*, the TV series made from it. On the British side, John André, based in New York, worked the recruitment of Benedict Arnold. After Arnold's treachery was exposed, he fled to New York. Washington approved an elaborate plan to extract him. John Champe, a bold young cavalryman, staged a bogus

defection and offered his services to Arnold. Champe planned to snatch the traitor from his garden one night and, with the help of agents in place, spirit him across the Hudson to patriot hands. But at the last minute, Arnold shipped out to lead an invasion of Virginia. Champe re-defected to his proper side later in the war.

Two years after the Battle of Yorktown, months after the Treaty of Paris, the British finally left New York, on November 25, 1783. The south-facing equestrian statue of Washington in Union Square Park represents his return. In a departing act of spite the British nailed the Union Jack to the flagpole at Manhattan's southern tip and cut the halyard. A young American managed to clamber up and replace it with the Stars and Stripes.

New York's next great disaster was natural. Cholera is a bacterial infection of the small intestine, typically spread by bad sanitation. The first cholera pandemic began in India in 1817. Then as now the world was interconnected, but things moved more slowly. The disease appeared in Russia and central Europe in 1830–31—a century-plus later, my late father-in-law, of Russian-Jewish stock, used "cholyera" as an epithet—then England and France. In early June 1832 it arrived in Quebec, whence it moved up the St. Lawrence River to Montreal and Ogdensburg, N.Y. Patient zero in New York City was an Irishman named Fitzgerald.

One New Yorker who came down with a mild case was former mayor Philip Hone. Son of immigrants, Hone had become wealthy in the auction business. His politics were anti-Jacksonian, his manners upper-class, and he kept one of the great diaries of the 19th century. In it he complained of the dietary restrictions his doctors imposed during "these 'cholera times.'" "Beef and mutton are allowed, but vegetables and fruit are strictly interdicted. The peaches and melons in vain throw their fragrance around. We look at them, we sigh for their enjoyment—but we don't touch them. . . . It is too much [for the] frailty of human nature."

Cholera bore more heavily on the frailty of other New Yorkers. The symptoms of a bad case were diarrhea, vomiting, and dehydration. Skin turned

blue; death could come in a few days, sometimes hours. Virtually all New Yorkers who had the means to do so—an estimated 100,000 of them, half the city's population—fled. Cornelius Vanderbilt's steamboats did a brisk business ferrying the lucky away. The poor remained, and suffered. Hospitals shut their doors against them; only Bellevue admitted them. Many of New York's poor were immigrants. Hone, one generation removed, did not view them charitably. "Irish and Germans [are] filthy, intemperate, unused to the comforts of life, and regardless of its proprieties. They flock to the populous towns . . . with disease contracted on shipboard, and increased by bad habits on shore." However bad their habits, they were felled now not by intemperance but by living in a booming city without a sewage system or clean drinking water. Three thousand died. Cholera visited again in 1849 and 1854, when it slew 5,000 and 2,000 New Yorkers, respectively.

As New York improved its infrastructure, the threat of cholera withered. The next disaster involved shooting in the streets—not by enemy invaders, but by Americans fighting each other. In 1863 the Union found it necessary to institute conscription. The well-heeled, however, could avoid service by paying for substitutes—a recipe for social discord. Another toxic ingredient was the feeling, strong among New York's Irish poor, that they were being made to fight to free black slaves, even as they competed with free blacks for low-end jobs. A riot began on July 13 with the burning of a draft wheel—the contraption that picked the names of draftees at random. It quickly morphed into a citywide saturnalia of arson, looting, and mayhem, paralyzing New York for four days. The classic account comes from another copious diarist, George Templeton Strong, a lawyer, a trustee of Columbia College, and a vestryman of Trinity Church (Episcopalian, of course). Strong was also an active member of the Republican Party and a supporter of the war effort, who looked no more kindly on the lower orders than Philip Hone had. His nightly notations are flashes of detail in a fog of unease—like Twitter or cable news. "Eleven PM. Firebells clanking, as they have clanked at intervals throughout the

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# The View From Paris

A doctor, stuck in his flat, considers our situation

BY ANTHONY DANIELS

evening. . . . Mob fired upon. It generally runs, but on one occasion it appears to have rallied, charged the police and militia, and forced them back in disorder. . . . Shops were cleaned out, and a black man hanged in Carmine Street for no offence but that of Nigritude.” As the hours became days, Strong’s rage against the rioters built. The “Irish anti-conscription Nigger-murdering mob” is “a jacquerie that must be put down by heroic doses of lead and steel.” It was. U.S. Army units, many of them with Irish-American troops, took over from local law enforcement, firing howitzers up the city’s avenues. In a gloomy poem on the riots, another observer, Herman Melville, described the end-game thus: “Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll / Of black artillery.” So much, Melville added, for “the Republic’s faith / . . . that man is naturally good, / And—more—is Nature’s Roman, never to be scourged.” The official death toll was 119, but Walt Whitman in Washington was told, by his brother Thomas writing from Brooklyn, that the real figure was much higher. “The papers are not allowed to publish this. I suppose it is much better not to let it be known.”

In my lifetime the city saw two catastrophes. I moved here in the summer of 1977, which was enlivened by a blackout and the murders of the Son of Sam (the *nom de crime* of David Berkowitz, a crazed postal worker who preyed on women and corresponded with Jimmy Breslin). There was only one killing during the actual blackout, but 1,600 stores were looted and 4,500 people arrested. One of my friends at the gym, a youth at the time, remembered yearning to join the fun until his mother told him, “You sit your *black ass* down!” He took her advice.

And then there was 9/11. It happened in a magazine week, as the editorial section was being put to bed—rewritten, in a daze. NRO was relatively new then; the impressions of that week, and month, were recorded there by Rich, me, Professor Hanson. They were horrible—uniquely so, in many respects. But we had also been there before. One rallying spot for bewildered, mournful, ultimately determined New Yorkers was Union Square. We hung George Washington’s statue with posters, flags.

NR

**L**IKE an inveterate gambler who obsessively notes the successive numbers that come up on a roulette wheel, hoping to discover a pattern of which he might take advantage, or an investor who follows the fluctuations of the stock market minute by minute, I study the latest statistics of the coronavirus pandemic throughout the day in an attempt to understand what is going on.

I have the time to do so because I am under virtual house arrest in my small flat in Paris, and if I venture out for a short walk round the block or to the nearest shops (no longer peregrinations are permitted) I must have a self-certified *laissez-passer* with me stating on my honor that my little excursion is really necessary.

It is a bit like the Occupation. A policeman can ask for your papers, albeit in French rather than German. My wife has been asked twice for hers. If you don’t have your *laissez-passer* in good order, you are fined the equivalent of \$150. We had a conversation with a young man (at a distance of more than a meter, of course) who had received such a fine because he had put the wrong date on his *laissez-passer*.

There is both fear and insouciance in public reactions to the epidemic, the fear not usually being proportional to the statistical threat, or at any rate the statistical threat so far. The enemy is invisible and therefore both everywhere and nowhere. It is Camus’s great allegorical novel, *The Plague*, come literally true.

Pascal said that our problems arise from our inability to sit quietly in a room alone: but what about sitting quietly with others? When this is all over, will there be a baby boom, or more divorces? And will the murder rate have risen? My next-door neighbor in England, a mortgage broker, tells me that he is always busiest just after Christ-

*Mr. Daniels, a retired doctor who worked in several parts of the world, is the author of Mass Listeria, a book about health scares.*

mas, when couples break up and have to sell their house to buy two others. This lockdown is far more testing than Christmas, and may last three months or more.

At eight o’clock each evening here, people open their windows or go out on their balconies and start applauding. What is this all about? They are applauding the staff of medical facilities who are devotedly battling the effects of the epidemic. I find this mildly irritating; I can’t quite say why. Is it a manifestation of the irrationalism that can so quickly become epidemic in an epidemic, and is as dangerous as the epidemic?

My sifting of the statistics leaves me not much the wiser, for information is not wisdom, or at least it is not a sufficient condition for wisdom. I still can’t work out whether this pandemic is unprecedentedly deadly or rather ordinary as these things go. What is the death rate from the infection? We still don’t know. The numerator (the number of deaths) is known, more or less, but the denominator (how many people have had the virus) is not, and will not be known for some time, if ever. I say the numerator is known *more or less* because there is a difference between dying *with* an infection and dying *of* it (many more old men die *with* cancer of the prostate than *of* it), and because we know the number who have died but not the number who *will* die. Since emergency departments have never experienced such an influx of patients with acute respiratory distress before, it is fair to assume that most deaths attributed to the virus were actually caused by it.

As for the denominator, it is important because we need to know the true rate of mortality from the infection, without which both irresponsibility and panic will flourish. As I write this, the death rate from ascertained cases in France is 4.2 percent (according to my calculations based on the available data), but if there were ten cases of infection for each ascertained case, the death rate would be 0.42 percent, which (depending on the proportion of the population infected) would mean a lot of deaths, but not in numbers that are orders of magnitude greater than in a “normal” flu epidemic.

Of course, exponential growth is a fearsome thing: If Italian deaths were to double every six days, the entire population of Italy would be wiped out in just over three months. This is not going to happen, of course, and what can rise exponentially can also fall exponentially. As I look at the

## CORONAVIRUS ISSUE

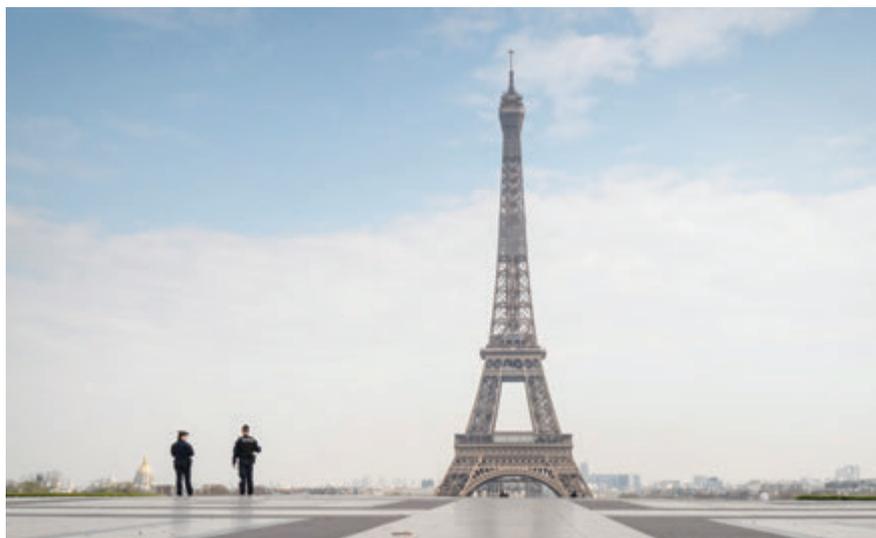
figures this very morning (I think I woke early specifically to examine them), it seems possible—no more than possible—that a decline is beginning, at least in several countries. In any case I have difficulty in putting the statistics in perspective, because I don't know what perspective to put them in. There are so many perspectives.

From the point of view of world mortality, deaths from COVID-19 so far represent scarcely more than a blip or faint statistical noise. Deaths from COVID-19 in the United States would have to double six times (from when I write this) to represent more than 1 percent of all annual deaths in the United States. This is not the Black Death or even the Spanish flu.

And from yet another point of view, that of years of human life lost, the epidemic is likely to be of limited importance, because deaths are overwhelmingly among the aged. This is horrible to think about because when we think of death we think of our own or that of the individuals close to us; to say that the death of one 20-year-old (who might have lived to his early 80s) represents as many years of human life lost as the deaths of, say, 15 80-year-olds (who might each have lived a few more years) could easily be taken to mean that one 20-year-old is in some sense “worth” 15 80-year-olds. That is not how we think, or ought to think, of the value of human life, and the murder of an 80-year-old is as much murder as that of a 20-year-old. But I cannot disguise from myself the fact that death at my age would not be as tragic as death at my nieces' and nephews' ages, albeit I do not want to die. Alas, both epidemiologists and health economists are obliged to think like this.

There are, of course, anomalies in the figures that cry out for explanation. The death rate in ascertained cases in Israel, for example, is 0.08 percent (again, by my own calculations at the time of writing), that is to say one-fiftieth of that in France. The death rate in Ireland is 0.44, as it is in Austria, that is to say one-tenth of that in France. What explains these differences?

It cannot be treatment, because treatment of the predominantly old victims of serious disease is not very successful. No one would suppose in any case that the Irish medical system is ten times better or more efficient than the French. Could the nature of the virus be different in different countries? Certainly the proportion of serious cases differs very greatly among countries.



Paris, March 17

Is it that the criteria for testing people varies among countries, so that what appear to be low-fatality countries are merely laggards as far as the exponential increase in serious cases is concerned and that Austria, say, will soon catch up with Italy? (The age structure of Austria is not so different from Italy's that it could possibly explain the vast gulf between the countries' infection rates.) Is it that the certifications of cause of death differ? Or the technique of testing? Unlikely.

I cannot answer the questions, only ask them, but at least they are both important and susceptible of a reasonably definite answer. Soon, however, questions that are perfectly sensible and important in themselves but capable of an infinitude of answers will begin to torment us and cause discussion that, given the present state of our souls, so ready for acrimonious ideological dispute, will indeed turn acrimonious.

The economic effects of the epidemic are likely to be severe (though economic forecasting makes epidemiology look as certain as a tautology), but will they have been inherent in the epidemic or caused by our response to it? Did or does the epidemic justify more intervention by the state and more state control of the population? Did or does the epidemic spell the end of international supply chains, and if so will we be the richer or poorer, or rather have a higher or lower standard of living, as a result?

Will our conduct as people have changed because of the epidemic? Will we be more selfish or more altruistic than we were? During the epidemic, people have been helping their elderly neighbors as never before (at least in my lifetime), but on the other hand they have fought over toilet

paper in supermarkets—and the latter merely in anticipation of shortages.

Amnesia is a powerful force (thank goodness), and crises once over are often crises soon forgotten. Amnesia leads to unpreparedness, however. Moreover, recrimination—always good fun—is likely to occupy the minds of the intelligentsia for some time. Who was or is to blame? Why was something not done before? Why was the wrong thing done?

For the moment, South Korea is held up as the exemplar. It is said to have done almost everything right, an indication that the Mandate of Heaven has moved back from West to East. But South Korea's results are worse than Austria's (at least as they stand at the moment). Could it be that we are applying to South Korea the fallacious reasoning of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*?

Whatever the answer, everyone agrees that the South Koreans were much more efficient than the Europeans or the Americans. Is it a coincidence that in 2019 public expenditure as a share of GDP was about a third in South Korea of what it was in France, which lagged in testing and lacked even masks? One recalls with amazement that in the early 1950s, South Korea was poorer than the Gold Coast (soon to be Ghana).

My wife, a retired doctor, made a very important medical discovery while cooped up in our flat in Paris. Homemade masks being better than none, and material to make them being in short supply owing to the closure of shops, she discovered that a padded bra cut in two and adapted slightly makes two splendid masks. There is no excuse for going out unprotected. NR

# The Immoral Equivalent of War

Text

Innovation is needed,  
not economic coercion

BY DEIRDRE NANSEN  
McCLOSKEY

**W**e are in a war, says the president, against a hidden enemy. That's scary, and scarier still for what it may yield afterwards.

The great economist and historian Robert Higgs argued long ago that wars in the 20th century led regularly to permanent expansions of governments. There has to be a reason that all levels of government in a typical country spend now about 40 percent of GDP, whereas in 1910 worldwide they spent about 10 percent. In earlier centuries, war was seen as a hobby of kings. Consult the early scenes of *Henry V*. In 1815, after Britain had spent a century crushing France in war, from King-Queen William-and-Mary to King George III, sometimes appropriating startlingly large portions of private British GDP to do so, it stopped. The weight in the economy of governmental expenditure and supervision and press gangs declined instantly. In a few decades the British government was able to pay off its funded debt, which, as with the U.S. in 1945, had risen by 1815 to twice GDP. In the U.S. the ratio later did fall some, bumping up in Korea and each of our other undeclared wars. It was never within hailing distance of zero.

Something, that is, was strange about the 20th century. And war is always with us. I think the strangeness was in the realm of ideas, in particular the flourishing idea of socialism. J. M. Keynes, who contributed mightily to its flourishing even in free countries among sensible people of good will, and whose ideas of free lunches have recently been revived,

*Deirdre Nansen McCloskey's latest book is Why Liberalism Works: How True Liberal Values Produce a Freer, More Equal, Prosperous World for All.*

said truly in 1936 that “madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.”

The wars, as in today's war against the novel coronavirus, that is, were used as excuses to implement the bizarre ideas of European professors and their revolutionaries. Even in countries without many wars, such as those in Latin America, socialist ideas hitched to nationalism made their way and pumped up the size of government. Majority voting surely also contributed. The curmudgeon of Baltimore, H. L. Mencken, wrote a century ago that “democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.” If you voted for socialism and nationalism in their up-to-date 20th-century forms, it was easy to vote for populism, Peronism, national socialism, and the regulatory state. Thus President Wilson's sharp extension of governmental control of the economy in 1917–18, all the while using his propaganda machine, run by the brilliant George Creel, to suppress news of the “Spanish” influenza. (It started, you know, on a pig farm in Kansas. My grand-aunt Tillie from Illinois died of it.)

If we're going to wander from the realm of ideas and focus on war, though, socialist countries of course *are* better at war than capitalist countries. Naturally. A war, especially under modern conditions of totality, unlike the hobby wars of earlier times, has a single, clear purpose for the nation, like a football team. A system of coercion directing given resources, which is what socialism is, will obviously be better at achieving the single purpose than a system of mutual agreements expanding the very meaning of resources, which is what capitalism is.

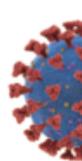
But I do so dislike the two words we use, the S-word and the C-word. They are misleading, coinages both of them by the enemies of liberty. Like “society” or “the nation” or “the general will” or “the balance of international trade,” they make us stupid. Capitalism should be called, rather, “innovism,” which is what it is. The original liberalism of people such as Adam Smith and Mary Wollstonecraft inspired millions of ordinary people to have a go at innovating, such as Malcom McLean in

1956 inventing containerization, with the result that real income per head exploded, raising the roof. To a very, very tall roof. A roof 30 times as tall as the roofs of the earlier, pathetic hovels. It's called the “Great Enrichment,” well beyond the more routine Industrial Revolution.

“Socialism,” to consider the other bad word, sounds sweet and collaborative. It charmed me as a folk-singing leftie in high school. Bernie Sanders and I are the same age. In 1960 we had the same opinion about capitalism. Since then I've listened and learned. Of course socialism is literally the use of the government's monopoly of physical coercion to force people to do what they would not otherwise choose to do. If your sweetly socialist neighbor doesn't think so, and balks at the word “coercion,” buy her a copy of the Soviet Jew Vasily Grossman's last novel, *Everything Flows* (unpublished and indeed suppressed after his death in 1964), about how life under socialism actually is. Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power over the economy corrupts absolutely.

Socialism should therefore be called “coercionism.” Sometimes, rarely, what the government coerces us to do is a swell idea, such as coercing parents to inoculate their children against measles. One measles case infects 20 others and the disease is regularly fatal for adults who haven't had it as children. Ask the Aztecs and the Incas and the Mohicans on that score. The corresponding number for the novel coronavirus is two or three, which is quite bad enough. For influenza it is lower, between one and two, which is why in the normal seasonal influenzas, for some of which we have inoculations, it doesn't make a lot of sense to coerce people. People, especially old people like me, have plenty of incentive to self-protect by getting their shots. And when the protection from the flu doesn't work, as for many thousands annually it doesn't, there isn't actually anything more that either self-protection or an activist government can do about it.

But if the government has muffed the correctly coercive response to a plague with a high infection number—the correct response being to jump on it early and then test, test, test—then all that can be done sensibly is to quarantine. It's the medieval technique. It has to be imposed on everyone if you are in the Middle Ages, or if the testing has been muffed for



Text

two months running. Everyone is suspect in the absence of testing. I don't need to tell you that the president and his servants in the CDC and the FDA did not jump on the problem.

It's like a shortstop fielding a hot grounder. The coaching advice is, "Play the ball. Don't let it play you." That is, step towards the ball, to master its bounce. The U.S. did not. Fellow democracies, such as South Korea, and Taiwan, did, and have not had to adopt the medieval coercion of mass quarantine. Tyrannies such as China and the Russian Federation tried early on to get away with suppressing the truth, natch, which is like pretending that the ground ball never came close to you. Or that the ground ball is fake news, or a conspiracy by CNN or other enemies of the people. Eventually China, as Russia will do soon, reverted to comprehensive coercion, as tyrannies do.

The president let the ball play him, and as a result our team is way behind. Come to think of it, if he can succeed in pushing the responsibility for going to get the ball, now resting in short left field, onto the governors and mayors, many of them Democrats, and if on the daily show with the VP and the compliant doctors he can go on getting free publicity to say how beautifully he in fact played the ball, maybe he'll actually win the Fall Classic.

In other words, coercion is not all bad, no more than preventing your two-year-old from running in front of a bus is bad. Sometimes we need, in a war of survival (measles, Pearl Harbor), to reach over and coerce people. Compulsory elementary education is a case in point, properly financed by coerced taxes on you and me, though there's no reason that the institution of coercion itself needs to run the schools. And there are a few other items. But in the age of electronic transponders, not roads, which could be privatized tomorrow, the way Chicago privatized street parking, and not "free" college, a massive subsidy to rich people whose kids are already better prepared for college.

In a society of free adults, it turns out, treating people like free adults works. Few readers of this magazine will disagree, although some of them, the real conservatives in the mold of Thomas Carlyle, will have doubts that most other people are suitably accorded the status of "adults." Carlyle, a personal friend and political enemy of John Stuart Mill, originated the

description of classical-liberal economics as "the dismal science." Dismal how? Not because its conclusions were pessimistic, though they were, but because Mill and his liberal allies approved of the liberation in 1833 of all slaves in the British Empire. Carlyle reckoned that the slaves, like medieval serfs, needed sweet supervision by their masters. Oh, joy. Therefore, denying the sweet supervision was "dismal." It was like bureaucrats in a regime of coercionism supervising the childlike citizens. Oh, joy. After all, it is so *dismal* to imagine that federal bureaucrats and their master might have their own motives unrelated to the public good, such as getting reelected and reappointed by means of underestimating the novel coronavirus. Surely they are our lovely and loving parents.

So another good name for the system that the non-conservatives and the non-socialists among us favor would be "adulthood." The Dutch defended very late their Indonesian empire by claiming that the childlike Indonesians needed a long apprenticeship to their masters before they were ready for independence. How long? Oh, another century or two.

Innovism and adulthood, even aside from their intrinsic merit of raising up a people with dignity, have the extrinsic merit, I have noted, of making the people rich. The Great Enrichment, 1800 to the present, that factor of 30 in goods and services, was not caused by coercion but by liberty. Its magnitude was further multiplied by the free trade and free migration and free press that the president and his advisers Peter Navarro and Stephen Miller so disdain. Such riches make the distinctly second-best solution of social distancing less than disastrous. We will recover, of course, and do not have to sacrifice our liberties forever to do so. In 1984 George Orwell has the Party man O'Brien explain what a future of coercionism means: "But always—do not forget this, Winston—always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. . . . If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever."

Let's not. Let's keep a true liberalism supporting innovism and adulthood. Let's not fall back into the arms of an ignoramus Daddy with authoritarian tastes. Let's not suppose that an occasionally necessary coercion justifies a future of coercionism. **NR**

# The Social Costs of COVID-19

They're apt to be long-lasting, hard to measure, and heavy

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

**E**PIDEMICS are not an esoteric subfield for the interested specialist but instead are a major part of the 'big picture' of historical change and development," writes historian Frank M. Snowden, of Yale, in *Epidemics and Society*. "Infectious diseases, in other words, are as important to understanding societal development as economic crises, wars, revolutions, and demographic change." So it is reasonable to assume that the coronavirus pandemic will exact a toll not only on our physical health and economic vitality. It will also change our society. And, if history is a guide, not for the better.

Already, populations around the world face varying levels of quarantine, self-isolation, lockdown, social distancing, and other techniques intended to mitigate the spread of the virus. This unprecedented stoppage of social interaction has led to a variety of odd and discordant images. In a scene of eerie beauty, Pope Francis delivers a blessing to a deserted and rainy St. Peter's Square. No pedestrians or automobiles clog New York's Fifth Avenue. Cars line up for drive-through medical testing in shopping-center parking lots. European apartment dwellers sing choruses from their balconies.

This disruption of established behaviors and routines is a reminder that human beings are social creatures. "Just as a strong economy bolsters all of us against losses, social connection is a renewable resource that helps address the challenges we face as individuals and as a society," write former surgeon general Vivek H. Murthy and his wife, physician Alice Chen, in a recent article for *The Atlantic*. Unable or unwilling to commute to the workplace, attend school,

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travel to conferences or vacations, patronize restaurants and bars, convene meetings and playdates, participate in religious services, visit the elderly, or get within six feet of their neighbors, Americans may discover a newfound appreciation of community. “We had to be set apart in order to feel together,” writes David Brooks in the *New York Times*.

That is the optimistic view. And plenty of anecdotal evidence supports it. The press is filled with heartwarming stories of people looking out for one another, formulating innovative ways to communicate and connect, sharing the surreal experiences of plague life. Social distance doesn’t make you a hermit. “With schools and restaurants closed, and a huge swath of the workforce stuck at home either working remotely or not working at all, usually quiet and empty neighborhoods are suddenly bustling,” writes John Daniel Davidson of *The Federalist*.

My own neighborhood in northern Virginia is an example. Before the lockdowns, you rarely saw anyone on the street other than dog-walkers. Now there are singles and couples and families walking and scooting and cycling from dawn to dusk. “No one would wish for neighborhood revival at the cost of a deadly plague and a ruined economy,” Davidson goes on. “Yet the resurgence of neighborhood life, especially neighborly solidarity and compassion, is proving to be an unforeseen silver lining to the coronavirus.”

The search for silver linings continues in a column in the *Wall Street Journal* raising the possibility that the coronavirus might inspire a return to faith. “Will Americans, shaken by the reality of a risky universe, rediscover the God who proclaimed himself sovereign over every catastrophe?” asks Robert Nicholson of the Philos Project. Nicholson, it is safe to say, hopes that the answer is yes. He isn’t alone. But the barriers to a resurgent Church are high. And the limitations on worship imposed by governments as a result of the pandemic make them higher still.

The pessimistic view of the situation asserts that, at the time of writing, the United States has not experienced the full impact of the coronavirus. We are just

beginning to recognize its severity. A *Washington Post*/ABC News poll released during the last week of March found that 70 percent said the outbreak was a source of stress and 36 percent said it was a source of “serious stress.” Ninety-three percent of respondents said they were “maintaining distance from other people.” Eighty-eight percent said they had stopped patronizing restaurants and bars.

Medical systems have not yet exceeded capacity. Record unemployment numbers have just started to accumulate. Social distancing is a fresh and unexpected break in procedure. How is it possible to spot the glimmers of silver lining? Because the virus hasn’t been here long.

As the shutdowns continue, the novelty will wear off. The absence of extended family, friends, colleagues, congregants, and associates will be harder felt.

Eventually, scientists will discover therapies for the coronavirus. One day, there will be a vaccine. Over time, economies recover. But social structures are not as easily reparable.

The stresses and pathologies associated with extended periods of separation will rise. Recently, after it surveyed the technical literature, the British medical journal *The Lancet* found that “the psychological impact of quarantine is wide-ranging, substantial, and can be long-lasting.” Zoom is an amazing and wonderful (if occasionally glitchy) technology. But it is not a substitute for face-to-face interaction.

Past epidemics and natural disasters have carried a high price not just in lives and money. They have also weakened social institutions and eroded “social capital”—the web of networks that bring value to our lives and encourage social reciprocity and solidarity. Professors Arnstein Aassve, Guido Alfani, Francesco Gandolfi, and Marco Le Moglie studied the General Social Survey of the United States in the years before and after the Spanish-influenza pandemic of 1918–19. “Similar to the Black Death, the Spanish flu had long-lasting social consequences leading to a decline in social trust,” they write at the Center for Economic Policy Research. “We argue that this potentially

resulted from the experience of social disruption and generalized mistrust which characterized the period.” More disturbingly, they write, in a recent paper for the Innocenzo Gasparini Institute for Economic Research, at Bocconi University, “Our findings suggest that lower social trust was passed on to the descendants and survivors of the Spanish flu who migrated to the U.S.”

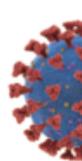
Like a hurricane or tornado, infectious disease uproots the mediating structures that stand between the individual and the state. Families, churches, and communities sustain the worst damage. Nor is the pain equally distributed among the entire population. In a March 2014 paper, Francis O. Adeola, of the University of New Orleans, and J. Steven Picou, of the University of South Alabama, found that Gulf Coast populations with lower levels of social capital experienced disproportionate adverse mental-health consequences from Hurricane Katrina.

What will make the social effects of the pandemic worse is the global recession that is sure to follow. Alcohol and drug abuse as well as suicide are correlated with unemployment. But those who suffer from addiction or despair in this instance will find themselves unable physically to attend meetings of support groups.

Churches are more than places of worship. They are sites of communal activity that provide shelter for voluntary associations that address chemical dependency, obesity, and loneliness. Furthermore, rapid declines in the stock market and in the economic-growth rate all but guarantee that nonprofits will see some lean years. It will be difficult to cover deficits when social distancing proscribes the conferences, banquets, galas, events, walks, marches, and runs from which charities derive revenue.

Eventually, scientists will discover therapies for the coronavirus. One day, there will be a vaccine. Over time, economies recover. But social structures are not as easily reparable. The family and the Church have gone through decades of decline. Now they must endure this pandemic.

America can survive an economic depression. We’ve done it before. How we overcome a social-capital depression remains to be seen. **NR**



Text

# What Drugs Can Do

The role of pharmaceuticals in combating the pandemic

BY AVIK ROY

**W**HEN can we end social distancing and get back to normal life? It's the question on everyone's mind, and one without a clear answer at this time. Here's what we do know: An effective treatment against the novel coronavirus would make a big difference in getting us there.

Remember the old adage, "There's no cure for the common cold"? Well, the common cold is caused by a mild strain of coronavirus. The version of coronavirus we're dealing with here is far more dangerous—but possibly just as difficult to treat.

In order to talk about therapies, it's important to distinguish between the virus itself—the infectious agent—and the disease caused by the virus. (Think of HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus that causes the illness known as acquired immune-deficiency syndrome, or AIDS.) In our present case, the World Health Organization has named the novel coronavirus "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2," or SARS-CoV-2. The WHO calls the illness caused by SARS-CoV-2 "COVID-19."

*Mr. Roy, the president of the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity, is a former policy adviser to Mitt Romney, Rick Perry, and Marco Rubio.*

("COVID" stands for "coronavirus disease"; "19" comes from the fact that the disease was first identified in Wuhan in late 2019.) To repeat: Virus, SARS-CoV-2; disease, COVID-19.

There are two broad categories of ongoing clinical development related to the pandemic. Vaccines, which help people achieve immunity to the virus, are the farthest off. A vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 won't be ready until late 2021 at the earliest. That's because vaccines need to be painstakingly tested in clinical trials to ensure that they make patients better, not worse. Flawed vaccines can lead to dangerous overstimulation of the immune system, or can make someone even more sensitive to coronavirus exposure. And since you can't ethically expose someone to coronavirus, you have to give the vaccine to hundreds or even thousands of people and wait to see evidence of whether the vaccine achieves a statistically significant reduction in the number of people who get infected. Furthermore, coronaviruses mutate frequently, meaning that a vaccine developed in one year would likely be less robust, or even completely ineffective, in future years.

The second category of drug development involves testing treatments for people who already have COVID-19. Some

of these drugs treat the symptoms of the COVID-19 disease; others directly attack and kill the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This latter category includes the combination of hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin, which President Trump has held out as a promising approach. A small French trial of 42 patients with hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin showed potential in reducing virus levels in COVID-19 patients. But another trial conducted in China compared the outcome of 15 patients receiving hydroxychloroquine with that of 15 patients who did not; the results showed that the hydroxychloroquine had no apparent effect. A third study, also conducted in China, suggests that a related drug, chloroquine, may clear a patient's concentration of viral infection, known as the viral load.

The mixed evidence led to much tut-tutting from those who already dislike the president, but also genuine concern from those who worry that people will rush out to treat themselves with chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine without conclusive evidence from clinical trials. Anthony Fauci, the eminent virologist who has served in six presidential administrations, made the obvious point that while the president was understandably expressing hope that the drug combination might work, we don't yet have conclusive proof that it does. "I was taking a purely medical, scientific standpoint, and the president was trying to bring hope to the people," Fauci said on *Face the Nation*. "There isn't fundamentally a difference there. He's coming at it from a [hopeful] layperson standpoint."

On March 28, the FDA authorized the emergency use of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine for "treatment of COVID-19 when clinical trials are not available, or participation is not feasible." We will get the results of two more clinical trials of hydroxychloroquine in May or possibly late April. Success is not assured.

Fortunately, not all of our eggs are in the hydroxychloroquine basket. According to the Milken Institute, there are 104 different COVID-19 treatments currently in preclinical or clinical studies. (Clinical studies are those taking place in humans; preclinical studies are those taking place in animal or laboratory settings.) One of these other drugs getting some hype is Gilead Sciences' remdesivir, which has

shown some potential in treating the Ebola virus.

In the 2010s, Gilead became an infamous case study in our broader debate about runaway prescription drug prices. In 2011, Gilead bought Pharmasset, a startup that had developed a cure for hepatitis C, for \$11 billion—nearly double Pharmasset's stock price at the time. Gilead then launched the hepatitis drug, branded Sovaldi, at an aggressively high price, generating \$60 billion in revenues for the company since 2013. Gilead benefited from the fact that hepatitis C patients are disproportionately poor; since government-funded Medicaid programs are obligated to pay for enrollees' drugs with minimal cost-sharing, Gilead was able for a time to treat taxpayers like an ATM and charge whatever it wanted for Sovaldi. This feat of financial engineering made Gilead executives—and its largest investors—rich.

The hepatitis C experience has led to fears that something similar will happen with COVID-19. Bernie Sanders, in a March presidential-primary debate, said, "We have a bunch of crooks who are running the pharmaceutical industry, ripping us off every single day, and I'll tell you something right now, in the midst of this epidemic, you've got people in the pharmaceutical industry who are saying, 'Oh wow, what an opportunity to make a fortune.'"

For better or worse, the real pharmaceutical fortunes aren't made on treating episodic infectious diseases such as the flu or coronavirus. The most lucrative drugs treat chronic diseases. Patients depend on such drugs for years, or even decades. And the government often interferes in those drugs' markets to protect an incumbent monopoly.

A classic example is GlaxoSmith-Kline's Advair, an asthma treatment. Its pharmaceutical constituents were first approved by the FDA in 1988, but GlaxoSmithKline retained a \$100 billion monopoly on Advair's sale until 2019, simply because the FDA refused to approve a generic alternative. Another example is AbbVie's Humira, the world's most profitable drug, which is used to treat disorders of the immune system such as rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis. AbbVie has extended its market exclusivity for years by overwhelming the United States Patent and Trademark

Office with marginal and even frivolous patent applications that don't represent actual innovation. (It's a useful reminder that the patent office is hardly infallible, but rather a federal government agency staffed by bureaucrats who regularly make economically consequential mistakes.)

Unlike asthma or rheumatoid arthritis, viral pandemics come and go. Each year, the exact strain of influenza that spreads throughout the world is slightly different from that of previous years, requiring new R&D expenditures for new vaccines. And vaccines are especially expensive to manufacture. The result is that, today, only a handful of established industry players even bother to try to make influenza vaccines.

Antiviral treatments have a bit more staying power, because, like chloroquine—a malaria treatment discovered in 1934—they can sometimes be recycled to address new pandemic threats. That's good, because it means that our current crisis will provide plenty of opportunities to test a broad range of therapeutic approaches to see what works and what doesn't.

Indeed, the race to develop effective COVID-19 treatments promises to be one of the most competitive of all time. That's important, because the novel coronavirus could put paid to the biggest cliché in drug development: that high prices are necessary to support pharmaceutical innovation.

In every other sector of the economy, innovative technologies *lower* the price of formerly expensive goods and services, such as taking a cab or phoning someone on the other side of the world. Lower-income Americans have benefited the most from innovations that make everyday life less expensive.

In contrast, drug companies charge high prices because they can, especially where the government has awarded them monopolies, and especially monopolies subsidized by taxpayer-funded health programs.

There is reason to hope we'll do better with treatments for COVID-19. If multiple successful therapies emerge from the dozens of clinical trials underway, vigorous price competition may lead to reasonably priced drugs. If that happens, pharmaceutical innovation could truly help solve the greatest public-health crisis of our lifetime. **NR**

# How Much Is A Life Worth?

Hard answers to a cold question

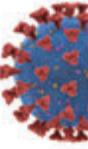
BY ROBERT VERBRUGGEN

**A**S I write these words, a debate is raging over whether the country is "overreacting" to the COVID-19 pandemic by shutting down too much economic activity. I hope that by the time you read this, everyone has agreed that we were, because the virus has proved to be far milder than many experts predicted. But however things turn out—and especially if the pandemic is still in full swing for you—it is worth thinking carefully about how governments should make such trade-offs *without* the benefit of hindsight.

It is sometimes said that life is priceless. But of course this is not true: Every day, we behave in ways that could shorten or end our stays on this earth, whether that means stuffing our faces with Doritos or simply traveling across train tracks, through the air, or at high speed down a highway. We do these things because we value their benefits more than we fear the risk of death they entail. And every year, this country's legislators and regulators decide to enact some life-saving rules but not others, because some of these rules are deemed worth the costs and some are not. Making trade-offs between lives and other things we value is simply a fact of, well, life.

And as it happens, there are well-developed—if far from settled—guidelines regarding *how* to value human life, and these guidelines can at minimum sharpen our thinking when we have to decide between severe economic damage and a large number of lives lost. The two key concepts are the "value of a statistical life" (VSL) and the "quality-adjusted life year" (QALY).

The VSL is typically estimated by looking at data on workers who change jobs, specifically those who move between jobs that involve different mortality risks. These moves give us a clue as to how much people need to be paid to endure a higher risk of dying. Estimates vary a bit, but government agencies in the U.S. typically assume a VSL of about \$9 million.



There are any number of criticisms one might make of this approach, but perhaps the most troubling is that it doesn't value a child's or young adult's life more than it values anyone else's. Saving a three-year-old is the equivalent of keeping a sick and elderly person alive a couple of years longer.

This is where the QALY comes in. This is the value of a year lived in good health, and it is scaled downward if the patient will instead be in poor health. As a 2014 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* summarized:

Some economists as well as the World Health Organization have argued, on the basis of plausible assumptions about people's values and attitudes toward risk, for a threshold of two to three times the per capita annual income, which would imply a U.S. threshold of \$110,000 to \$160,000 per QALY today (given that the per capita income is roughly \$54,000). Others have inferred a threshold of \$200,000 to \$300,000 per QALY on the basis of increases in health care spending over time and the health gains that have been associated with those increases, surveys that ask people how much they would be willing to pay for health gains, or the trade-offs that people make in the workplace between pay and safety risks.

So what does all this look like in practice? In normal times, these concepts can be relatively easy to apply, at least once the relevant numbers have been studied extensively and estimated. A regulation might be estimated to cost \$X and save Y lives, or a drug might cost \$X and extend life by Y years, in which case X/Y gives you the cost per unit of human life you're looking for.

However, the coronavirus pandemic, as it stands at press time, poses a number of special challenges. Estimates vary widely as to how many people an uncontrolled pandemic would kill, in large part because we have no idea how many people get the virus without showing symptoms (and thus are probably immune but not captured in current statistics). The virus causes many more hospitalizations and intensive-care visits than it does deaths, and overwhelming hospital capacity can harm patients suffering from other illnesses, meaning even more deaths, health-care costs, and misery. Meanwhile, another wave of shutdowns could be required if the virus comes back later in the year, increasing the cost of

containment. And the raw economic price of our immediate response, in dollar terms, doesn't account for the mental-health issues caused by cooping people up and driving up unemployment—though the effect on mortality is hard to predict; the Great Recession might have even *reduced* mortality—or for the long-term human-capital damage caused by idling workers and closing schools.

On top of all that, we don't have time to wait around and get all the numbers just right; we have to act now, and in fact some entire states are already shut down. Further, even if governments *don't* act, individuals and businesses still will, so some economic damage and some of the accompanying health benefits are inevitable, no matter what policymakers do. This is a problem that would require a lengthy study by a whole team of experts to solve satisfactorily, but we needed the answers yesterday.

Nonetheless, as I laid out on NRO's Corner blog in late March, it's possible to work up some very rough math illustrating the trade-offs. U.S. GDP is a bit above \$20 trillion, suggesting that \$5 trillion is likely a generous estimate of what shutting things down for a plausible amount of time will cost. (That would be the cost of losing *all* economic activity for nearly a quarter. Currently, both Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs see the economy severely contracting in the second quarter of the year but improving afterward—for a yearlong contraction of perhaps 3 to 9 percent depending on the scenario—and the government has enacted a \$2 trillion stimulus package to prop everything up.) Meanwhile, assorted fatality estimates, such as those from the Centers for Disease Control and London's Imperial College, suggest that keeping the virus under control could save a million lives—maybe a lot fewer, but maybe a lot more, too. Finally, judging from current age statistics on COVID-19 fatalities, which skew heavily toward the elderly, the typical victim probably has maybe a decade or so to live.

A million lives valued at \$9 million apiece comes to \$9 trillion in benefits—far above the expected economic damage even without accounting for the health-care spending and suffering that stem from nonfatal cases and overwhelmed hospitals. It would be hard to tally the costs of our response in a way that exceeded such a figure, unless one assumes a lasting impact on par with that of the Great Recession rather

than a temporary pause in economic activity followed by a bounce-back. But by contrast, if each year of life is worth as little as, say, \$125,000, and we can preserve only a decade of life for each of a million people, that amounts to just \$1.25 trillion. This begins to justify the costs, but it sets up a closer call that will depend on the murkier math of hospitalizations, intubations, permanent lung damage in some cases, harm to hospital patients with other maladies, and the uncertain psychological and longer-term economic harms of a shutdown.

Several experts have attempted similar calculations. A paper from Michael Greenstone and Vishan Nigam assumes that 1.7 million lives could be saved by social distancing and, using a version of the VSL that varies by age, arrives at benefits of over \$8 trillion. By contrast, Eline van den Broek-Altenburg and Adam Atherly start with a QALY of \$100,000, assume the typical COVID-19 victim has only eight years left after the quality adjustment (as many already have other illnesses), and estimate that shutting down the economy will be worth it only if the correct death estimate is toward the high end of the plausible range while the economic damage is toward the low end. Meanwhile, Anna Scherbina predicts \$13.2 trillion in damage from an uncontrolled pandemic (starting with a death toll of 1.9 million and a VSL that varies by age, and factoring in medical costs); she finds that a shutdown will create more benefits than costs for at least nine weeks.

My own view is that it is a good idea to practice social distancing for a bit and to entirely shut down the hardest-hit areas, to buy us time to learn more about the virus and ramp up production of masks, tests, and ventilators. More knowledge and supplies will be necessary to transition to a state where the economy is functional again but we're still controlling the virus's spread, and a temporary economic setback is likely to be worth it to get to that point.

Ultimately, such beliefs must rest on an analysis of the costs and benefits involved, not a blind insistence that any cost is worth it if it saves even one life. But, the situation being what it is, I must admit that the assumptions behind my analysis—both economic and epidemiological—may look very wrong by the time this magazine makes its way to your fingertips. And how to act amid such uncertainty might be the hardest question of all.

NR

# 'A Disease Spread by The Rich'

Progressivism, passports, and a pandemic

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

**F**OR the classical Marxist, class conflict is *everywhere*: in economics, history, the critical reception of *Portnoy's Complaint*, the McDonald's all-day breakfast menu . . . The last of these recently has become a victim of the coronavirus epidemic: The iconic burger chain has temporarily streamlined its menu and relegated the Egg McMuffin to conventional breakfast hours, ending its round-the-clock status. There's your class war in the decadent consumerist West: The virus may have flown here first-class on a transcontinental airliner, but it's the salt-of-the-earth blue-collar McDonald's customer hankering for midday hash browns who pays the price.

He and the thousands, if not millions, who are going to die.

Where the classical Marxist saw class war, the contemporary progressive speaks of "privilege," which is a way of both enlarging and hardening the old Marxist analysis. The social-media conversation among the English-speaking Left is all-in on pandemic privilege: If you are lamenting your social isolation and enforced lockdowns, you are flaunting your privilege: that you have a home to be quarantined in. Don't dare complain about the challenges of working remotely or the state of your 401(k). A bit of analysis said to be from an Indian physician (I cannot find the original; it may be a fabrication) that has been rocketing around lefty Twitter catalogues the sundry coronavirus privileges (hand-washing means you have running water, etc.) and concludes: "A disease spread by the rich as they flew around the globe will now kill millions of the poor."

Let us take the implicit moral argument about international travel seriously, if only for a moment.

This is not the first time the moral-political dimensions of travel have cropped

up at the edges of lefty discourse. And there is good reason for that: If you believe that carbon emissions are an existential threat to the human species as a whole, then you really should be very down on international travel, which is one of the most carbon-intensive things a person in the affluent parts of the world is likely to do. A European who takes a long-haul flight produces more carbon emissions in that single act than a typical Ugandan does over the course of a year's living. A *Guardian* article citing a study from Atmosfair, a German nonprofit, reports that a round-trip flight from New York City to London individually produces more carbon dioxide emissions (strictly from the jet fuel and excluding other greenhouse gases or the "embedded" carbon from manufacturing the airliner, the associated facilities, etc.) than the average resident of at least 56 different countries does in a year. If your top-tier issues are climate change and "inequality," then this should concern you.

The problem, of course, is that progressivism in the United States is a luxury good, an item of conspicuous consumption for relatively affluent and educated urban elites. In response to my criticism of Emma Thompson and other celebrities who burn up tremendous amounts of fossil fuel to fly around the world denouncing fossil fuel, Jonathan Chait of *New York* magazine insisted that the "charge of hypocrisy is manifestly insipid": "In general, individual choices have an infinitesimal impact on collective-action problems like greenhouse-gas emissions. In this particular case, Thompson's choice has either zero, or close to zero, impact." This is, of course, obvious poppycock. Individual choices are what aggregate choices are made of, and, as we are seeing right this moment, changes in demand for air travel produce—SURPRISE!—changes in the supply of air travel, in this case reductions in the number of flights offered, and, hence, in the emission of greenhouse gases produced by petroleum products.

But progressive political magazines are not read by people who do not have passports; they are read by, and written by, people who condescend to the majority of Americans who do not have a passport: See Jack Fischl ("writer specializing in progressive masculinity") in *Mic*, Richard Florida in *The Atlantic*, et al. *New York* magazine itself is full of travel features.

"What's the Best Cross-Body Travel Bag?" If you want to know, flip past the latest from Chait, which is good advice in any case.

It has been said that accessible international travel is the cheap cologne of our time: It was only a few decades ago that the phrase "jet set" indicated wealth and glamour of a particularly modern and rarefied kind—completely at odds with reality as seen from seat 33B on American Airlines on any given Monday morning. What once was the preserve of the upper classes became democratized and vulgarized, and now every third Caitlyn at Lehigh University can run off to Vietnam or Cambodia or some other exotic place her grandfather desperately wanted never to see. All poor Lucy Jordan ever dreamt of doing was to "ride through Paris in a sports car with the warm wind in her hair." I've rented a convertible in France, and it was a hell of a lot cheaper than going to Disney World or watching the Dolphins play at Hard Rock Stadium. (The wind was warm, the hair was sparse, I wore a hat.) But, still, this has been a limited kind of democratization: from wealthy businessmen and celebrities to a very wide and diverse selection of relatively high-income, college-educated white people in occasional want of expert advice about cross-body travel bags.

The coronavirus epidemic already has produced calls for radically reforming the U.S. health-care system—but then, the American Left issues demands to radically reform the U.S. health-care system every time a rat passes gas in Brooklyn. The European systems our progressives profess to admire do not seem to be all that robust in the face of the epidemic, and the Swedes are taking a much more libertarian approach to things than you might have expected. On the right, the epidemic and our own shortcomings in dealing with it have been taken by some as an indictment of globalization, free trade, immigration—the whole Buchananite enchilada. I have not yet seen the great progressive "Coronavirus Is Really about Global Warming" essay, but I am sure it is already in first draft. These rhetorical projects are all weak in pretty obvious ways—they all have a very strong whiff of "LITERALLY EVERYTHING CONFIRMS MY PRIORS!" about them.

But the guy complaining about how this is a disease spread by the footloose rich at the expense of the rooted poor has a point. The spread of the coronavirus is more

intimately, directly, and unavoidably linked with international travel (and with travel more generally) than it is with trade, health-care benefits, the regulation of bulk paper goods, or any other issue of any real consequence. But, other than a little grumbling in the cheap seats, you will not hear very much about that. You might make a very good case for, e.g., laying a substantial per-departure/per-landing tax on overseas travel and using that money to fund epidemic-preparedness programs. You might believe that traveling overseas for fun ought to be considered socially akin to leaving the toilet without washing your hands. I myself do not want to see the U.S. government enacting any restrictions on Americans' freedom to move about (including burdening that freedom financially), but, in principle, such ideas are both supportable and much more closely linked to the actual problem before us than are calls for sweeping health-care reform or vague agitation about "inequality."

But don't expect to hear very much about that.

One need not agree with the orthodox Marxists on every jot and tittle to concede and appreciate that the public-policy discourse inevitably reflects the interests, biases, and aspirations of those who dominate that conversation: relatively affluent and overwhelmingly college-educated people of precisely the sort for whom international travel is one of the most prized of all possible items of consumption. (As NATIONAL REVIEW's resident Helvetiphile, I obviously do not exclude myself from this characterization. I'll see you at Funky Claude's when the plague subsides.) This is why the pages of the *New York Times* contain impassioned debates about Ivy League admission policies but relatively little about the dropout rate in New York City's public schools, why you hear more about veganism on Twitter than about hunger.

It is very difficult for us to find a place to stand outside ourselves, a perch from which we might look from the outside in on how we got into this situation and what we might learn from it. And there exists the real and woeful possibility that we will learn nothing at all from this, that we will spend the next several months trading "HURRAY, TRUMP!" and "BOO, TRUMP!" and insisting that all these dead Americans only go to show you that we were right about tariffs or bank regulators or veganism all along. **NR**



**I**n the days when the coronavirus was just beginning to dominate the news, analyses of its economic impact emphasized that its spread counted as a "supply shock." The economic effect of disruptions to supply chains would be similar to that of the 1970s oil embargo. A sudden drop in productivity would reduce our economy's output of goods.

It followed that the Federal Reserve would be nearly powerless to undo the damage. The Fed typically combats recessions by acting on the "demand" side of the economy. By reducing interest rates, it can, for example, lead more people to buy houses, and their increased willingness to spend money boosts levels of economic activity. But central banks can do nothing directly to increase productivity. The Fed cannot repair supply chains, or stop a virus from spreading.

There was another reason not to look to the Fed for help. Interest rates were already low, so the Fed had little room to reduce them further. The ubiquitous phrasing had it that the Fed was "out of ammunition," or nearly so. Fed officials themselves said that Congress would have to do much of the work of softening the blow to the economy. Pessimistic

though this view was about the Fed's capacity to respond to this crisis, it had a positive implication: If the danger from the virus was brought under control, a recovery could occur quickly as supply chains were repaired.

But there are reasons to doubt this widespread view, and to believe that there is more the central bank can and should do for the economy. Let's start with what ought to be a puzzle. If the economy were primarily beset by a supply shock, inflation ought to rise. Think of the oil embargo's effect on prices. But just the opposite has been happening.

The difference in yield between bonds that are indexed for inflation and those that are not gives us a rough measure of market expectations of inflation. By that measure, expected inflation over the next five years began a vertiginous fall in mid February. So did expected inflation over the next ten years. The prices of key commodities told the same story.

At around the same time, expected federal-funds rates for the future fell. Futures markets revised the projected rate for January 2021 downward. And the projected rate for January 2022. And for as far out as January 2023.

Markets cannot see the future, but they are pretty good at processing current information that bears on it. Their implicit projections do not easily fit the hope that a short, sharp recession will be followed by an equally rapid “V-shaped” recovery. They suggest instead that we are at best in for a prolonged period of low growth after the contraction. They further suggest that this low growth will be associated less with continuous supply disruptions than with a persistently depressed willingness to consume and invest: with “demand,” in other words. (Hence the long-lasting decline in expected inflation.)

A reduced propensity to spend money on consumption and investment is equivalent to an increased demand for money balances. In a panic, we want to hold on to more of our money. Individual households and businesses can accomplish that goal by spending less. In the aggregate we can’t do it that way: If we all try to spend less we all have less coming in, too. We can, however, attain our goal through a falling price level (or a price level that rises less than it otherwise would); the real value of our money balances thereby increases. Or rather, we could attain it that way if prices were sufficiently flexible. But there are a number of rigidities that prevent this kind of smooth economic adjustment. Mortgage payments, for example, do not drop in response to reductions in spending and prices.

There is also abundant evidence that wages, especially in modern economies, are not flexible downward. Consider two scenarios. In one, the price of everything drops 2 percent and so do everyone’s wages. In the other, the price of everything rises 2 percent and so do wages. In theory, employers and employees ought to be indifferent between these situations: The real wage, the value of a paycheck after adjusting for the price level, stays flat either way. In practice, though, the first scenario of widespread pay cuts doesn’t happen. If the level of spending throughout the economy falls enough that payments to workers must drop too, a lot of those reductions in payments will come from layoffs. That’s what happened during the great recession: The average real wage actually rose.

The other, less painful way for money balances to rise is for monetary authorities to create more money: to increase supply to meet demand. Each unit of currency is

then worth less than it would have been without that money creation, but households and businesses are able to keep a higher proportion of their income and assets in cash or near-equivalents without the need for a general reduction in prices and wages. Even better, the increased supply of money should reduce demand for it. There is less need to hold money if it does not appear to be growing scarcer and more valuable.

Markets appear to be anticipating an extended period of an elevated demand for money balances that is not met. That would explain why inflation expectations have fallen. It would explain low federal-funds rates in the future: If the expected future path of spending is pulled downward, so will be the interest rate the economy can sustain. Lower prospects for economic growth plus lower prospects for inflation (which add up, mathematically, to lower prospects for spending) means lower interest rates too. An unaccommodated rise in money demand also partly explains the recent strength of the dollar, and even part of the decline of stocks. Falling future spending means falling future income, which means falling asset values now.

There is recent precedent for such a series of events. Spending, which had been growing at roughly 5 percent a year for decades, fell during the Great Recession of 2008–09. Afterward it did not rise more quickly so as to return to its previous trendline. It instead settled in at a lower growth rate from a lower level. As a consequence, inflation also generally stayed below the Federal Reserve’s official target of 2 percent per year.

At the time, the Fed was commonly said to have done all it could, and various theories were advanced to explain why central banks no longer had the power to increase inflation. But the Fed hadn’t done all it could. It could have done more quantitative easing, or stopped paying banks interest on excess reserves, or said that it would tolerate inflation above 2 percent for a time to make up for being under it for so long. Or it could have committed to not raising interest rates until the 2 percent target had been hit. Instead it raised rates nine times from 2015 to 2018 while remaining below the target.

The Fed may have chosen the course it did, as opposed to a more expansionary one, because of an excessive fear of infla-

tion. Or it may have had a faulty model of the economy, continually overestimating how high inflation was about to run. Or it may have balked at using more of the unconventional methods of loosening monetary policy that had already drawn it criticism. A lot of conservatives ten years ago were warning that quantitative easing and low interest rates threatened us with runaway inflation. Whatever the combination of reasons, markets may believe that such concerns will keep the Fed too tight in the aftermath of this crisis too.

It would be grossly unfair to accuse the Fed of inaction. It has cut interest rates to nearly zero, albeit a bit more tardily than President Trump wanted. (Trump has been more dovish than the Fed for most of his presidency, and his instincts on this question have generally been better than its.) It has resumed its quantitative easing and expanded the class of assets it is purchasing as part of it. It has created new lending facilities. Yet monetary conditions have tightened considerably anyway: Expected spending and inflation have fallen.

What the Fed has not done is suggest it has in any way altered how it thinks about its inflation target. If it said that its quantitative-easing and interest-rate policies were geared toward ensuring that the level of spending and prices in early 2022 would be the same as if this crisis had never happened—that it would do whatever it took to attain such results—it might powerfully reshape expectations for the better. It would be committing to offset any swings in money demand. To the extent that this commitment was credible, the Fed would be raising expected inflation, spending, and interest rates, which in turn ought to put a floor under asset values and spending now.

Economic activity, employment, and asset prices would still be negatively affected by the virus and the efforts made to lower its toll. And other parts of the government would still have important roles to play. The Fed can’t procure ventilators. Expanding unemployment insurance was, and continuing to monitor the need for changes to it is, a job for Congress and the president.

What the Fed can do is prevent the crisis from, as it were, infecting our monetary system. And what it can do, it should do.

NR

# Restoring America's Commercial Sea Power

Now is the time to secure naval dominance over China

BY CHRISTOPHER R. O'DEA

**W**HILE many in the U.S. and the West shelter in place hoping that warmer spring weather will slow the spread

of the Wuhan coronavirus, China is planning its own Spring Offensive.

China sees an opportunity to exploit the fear and carnage of the outbreak to strengthen its hold over global supply chains—and the medical-equipment and pharmaceuticals sector is the next industry in China's sights.

It's a bold move, but a deeper look reveals the fundamental weakness in China's dominant position in global logistics and points to two strategic opportunities for the U.S. The first is to bring supply chains for vital medical, pharmaceutical, and technology products and rare-earth minerals back home to the United States. The second is to cripple the Chinese commercial maritime network that has allowed the Chinese Communist Party to sit atop a global supply system like a puppet master pulling the strings of commerce from Wuhan to Westchester.

China's game plan is to pit large companies and financial investors against Western populations. Leading Chinese business schools and the creator of China's top state-owned cement company believe that large U.S. companies and investors can be persuaded to increase foreign investment for the production of pharmaceutical and medical supplies in China. The calculus is that China will be more successful at keep-



ing companies in China by appealing to the financial motives of those that are already invested there than it would be by opposing anti-globalization political constituencies that want companies to move manufacturing out of China.

It's the latest application of the predatory economic and financial strategy that China has long used to gain dominance over almost every industry it has targeted, to coerce developing nations into accepting Chinese loans in exchange for giving mineral rights to China, and to pressure developed countries such as Italy and Greece to turn their historic harbors into ports for China's global maritime empire. But China's pharma gambit may be too little, too late. The political tide China is hoping to sidestep by appealing to the financial motives of U.S.-based multinationals is turning against the country now that American consumers, their homes brimming with Chinese-produced electronics, realize the full cost of moving so many critical domestic manufacturing jobs to Communist territory. Americans now understand the urgency of moving production of vital goods back to the United States.

Some Chinese business schools believe that large international companies might delay such supply-chain adjustments. In a recent paper, the Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance at Shanghai Jiao Tong University argued that the driving force of globalization is the profitability of capital, and risk-

averse large companies could decide to leave substantial portions of their production capacity in China. The paper recognizes that calls to bring manufacturing back to the U.S. reflect a wider anti-globalization political movement in the West, and asserts that it's easier, in the face of the pandemic, to promote the potential profitability of capital investments in China to large companies than it is to promote the benefits of globalization to populations suffering under lockdown orders.

One of China's leading architects of state-owned companies recently said that epidemic-control products can become a major Chinese export. Song Zhiping, who previously led the consolidation of the Chinese cement industry into the state-owned colossus China National Building Material Co., Ltd., said that demand for technologies such as surveillance drones, disinfection robots, AI-powered epidemic-forecasting systems, no-contact technology for online education, and fabric for protective masks is a boon for Chinese business. In the *People's Daily* on March 12, Song wrote that "these areas are bound to become the focus of attention of the entire society and have great potential for development."

An early-March paper from Nanjing University Business School describes how the virus outbreak is an opportunity for Jiangsu Province to stabilize the global supply chain and increase foreign investment in the province, where

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LUBA MYTS

## CORONAVIRUS ISSUE

biomedical companies from many countries have operations. The author even provides a target list: “Multi-national pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer, Merck, Johnson & Johnson, GlaxoSmithKline, Siemens, and Roche have already settled in Jiangsu,” he writes. After the pandemic, opportunities will arise to “vigorously develop Jiangsu’s biomedical R&D outsourcing service industry, innovate the use of foreign investment models, and improve the quality of foreign investment.”

China’s confidence is striking but understandable. To cut costs over the past two or three decades, manufacturers around the world adopted techniques such as lean manufacturing, offshoring, and outsourcing. These methods allow companies to reduce the number of parts held in inventory to the minimum needed to keep “just in time” assembly lines running, often at factories in China employing low-cost workers. By not paying for parts until the last minute, companies freed up cash for other purposes. But companies also gave up control of supply lines. A recent *Harvard Business Review* analysis of how the coronavirus might affect supply chains noted that the “vast majority of global companies have no idea of what their risk exposure to what is going on in Asia actually is; that’s because few, if any, have complete knowledge of the locations of all the companies that provide parts to their direct suppliers.”

Supply chains consist of two parts: the supplies that go into finished goods; and the chain, the physical network of trucks, ships, and cargo-handling gear that moves manufactured goods, food, and autos from the point of production to the point of consumption. Over the past ten to 15 years, China weaponized the supply chain itself. Its state-owned port and shipping companies bought up contracts to operate ports and container terminals in developed and emerging markets, and these companies now control a base network that previous global hegemony obtained only through military victory.

The sun never set on the British Empire because the British had a port under their control in every time zone that mattered. With its state-owned

enterprises now in control of a global commercial maritime network penetrating deep into Western territory, Beijing is in a position to issue threats, such as the warning that it might cut off life-saving pharmaceuticals to the United States in the middle of a pandemic. And if countries depend on Chinese companies to run their import and export infrastructure, China could also coerce them to adopt its policy positions or to endorse its handling of the pandemic. With medicine and medical equipment on the line, what country is going to risk running afoul of China by siding with the U.S.?

But when it comes to logistics, China has been fighting the last war. As China tries to accelerate its efforts to strengthen its hold on medical and pharmaceutical supply chains, the coronavirus crisis will also accelerate changes in logistics. Supply-chain innovations include “logistics control towers” that consolidate supply shipments into integrated dashboards; AI software that for the purpose of quality control creates avatars of every step in a production process; and 3D printing that eliminates the need for long supply lines for some parts, thereby cutting inventory costs by moving production close to consumers.

The pandemic has already sparked 3D printing of masks and ventilator parts. Such new techniques and tools can digitally disrupt the source of China’s manufacturing dominance: centralized control of complex supply chains. Emerging supply-chain technologies result from innovation, and while China has built manufacturing platforms for autos, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and other goods, it lacks indigenous innovation capacity. China prefers instead to force foreign companies to divulge their proprietary technology developed at great cost, or to simply steal the technology through cyber espionage and human spies. In its Made in China 2025 plan, the CCP sets forth its goal of upgrading China’s manufacturing base by rapidly achieving dominance in ten industrial sectors, but the ambitious program also reveals China’s Achilles’ heel: The creativity and experimentation that drive such innovation are kryptonite to the CCP system of control.

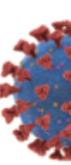
The American response to COVID-19 suggests that this country can reboot domestic production of pharmaceutical ingredients while also creating numerous vaccine candidates and innovating and producing virus tests that did not exist even weeks ago. Institutional investors have financed a boom in construction of life-science research labs across the country in the past few years, and those capabilities are now coming into play. Meanwhile, China has proven—with its propaganda to evade culpability for the pandemic, and with the failure of Chinese masks sent to the Netherlands and of Chinese tests rushed to Spain—that it cannot deliver innovation, the one ingredient it needs for its Spring Offensive to succeed. It’s time for American industry to stop subjecting consumers in the U.S. to China’s predatory authoritarianism and to start building new supply chains at home.

Pending legislation that requires American companies to move production of certain goods back home is a good start. But in recent research for my book *Ships of State*, sources with deep experience and current operating responsibility in ports, shipping, and military sealift support have made it clear that America needs a comprehensive two-track strategy to rebalance manufacturing supply chains in a way that ends China’s weaponization of global logistics while ensuring that the U.S. Navy can sustain high-tempo operations in multiple theaters if Chinese aggression escalates.

First, the U.S. should initiate a dialogue about strategic supply chains with South Korea and Japan in the Pacific, and with the U.K. and Ireland and perhaps certain Nordic countries in the Atlantic, with the aim of ensuring that all member nations have fully secure access to critical medical and technological goods and to the means to transport those goods by air, sea, or land. This framework could be expanded to encompass Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia as well.

The goal would be to form a new type of commercial alliance that encompasses not only trade *rules*, as in post-World War II trade agreements, but also the trade *tools* that make modern supply chains work.

Second, we need a strategy to expand the size of the U.S. merchant fleet and



the number of operational vessels in the U.S. sealift fleet, including the Military Sealift Command and the Maritime Administration's Ready Reserve Force. This process has bogged down while China has been adding as many ships to its commercial fleet annually as exist in the entire American inventory. It's also important to build or buy the right mix of vessels to sustain naval operations for long periods. We can do this by developing U.S. and allied shipbuilding industries, shipping finance, and mariner training. A mobilization exercise last year found that only about 40 percent of the U.S. military support fleet would be ready to surge in a crisis, and naval sources warn that the U.S. lacks secure capacity in fuel tankers. Also last year, Chinese commercial vessels began conducting exercises to replenish Chinese combatants and supply ships while underway. That technology is not new, but the exercises suggest that China's commercial ports around the world must be treated as potential logistics bases that can extend the range and scope of Chinese naval activity without requiring those ships to dock at commercial ports.

My recent helicopter reconnaissance of the Port of Long Beach found mostly empty berths. With demand from the West at a standstill, the power of China's maritime network is temporarily depressed. This presents an opening for the U.S. The administration, wisely, is providing financial aid to Italy; the U.S. could also work with Italy and other countries hosting Chinese ports to cancel or renegotiate their port contracts. The concept is simple: Retake the ports, and the rest of the Belt and Road will follow.

Despite the enormous stress America is under from the pandemic, we now have an opening to mitigate or remove the economic leverage of China's commercial maritime network and start to correct America's dangerous neglect of the commercial maritime capabilities that underpin naval power. To fail to take advantage of these opportunities would be to accept a risk of historical magnitude: that a country can maintain global supremacy without having command of the commercial maritime domain under its own commercial fleet.

NR

# The Crisis Congress

## What is the legislature's job in a national emergency?

BY YUVAL LEVIN  
& ADAM J. WHITE

**R**ECENT weeks have seen the U.S. Congress rise to the challenge of a public-health crisis in some impressive ways. In an era when the institution barely moves, and major bipartisan legislation has been vanishingly rare, Congress responded swiftly by passing three significant measures to combat the coronavirus. All had broad support and seem likely to be useful and effective.

The first bill, passed on March 4, bulked up the capacity for detection, containment, and treatment of the virus with about \$8 billion in grants to existing agencies at the federal and state levels. Just a week later, a second bill provided more than \$100 billion in further public-health resources, worker protections, and a payroll-tax credit for employers. And then on March 27, Congress sent to the president a massive package of \$2 trillion in emergency assistance to help people stay employed, to support those who do lose their jobs, to sustain businesses of all sizes through the economic hardship of the economic shutdown required to contain the coronavirus, and to support state, federal, and private efforts to fight the disease. It is hard to remember a time when Congress moved so quickly and decisively. And the public noticed: On March 25, even before the third measure passed, Gallup found that 59 percent of Americans approved of Congress's handling of the crisis—a level of confidence in Congress rarely seen in modern times.

And yet, even in the midst of this focused activity, the weaknesses and vices of the modern Congress have been on display. Like most major legislation in recent decades, these bills were produced without much involvement by most members

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of Congress. Drafted in leadership offices, they were presented to members with very little time to dig into the details. And when some members raised concerns (about the design of unemployment benefits in the third bill, for instance), they were able to draw public attention to problems but had no real opportunity to do anything about them.

Much more important, though, the burst of crisis legislation has tended to reveal the narrowness of Congress's own understanding of its purpose. As soon as the third bill was enacted, Congress dashed out of town and left itself few options for remaining engaged in the near-term government response. The institution stepped up to provide resources for executive action, but it did not work to empower itself to play its own crucial, ongoing role in the weeks and months ahead.

Most notably, both houses declined to take actions to enable remote work for members. That lawmakers wanted to get home in the midst of still-tightening restrictions on travel and activity around the country is understandable. But given those restrictions, and given that several members have already tested positive for the coronavirus and many others are in high-risk groups for complications from exposure to it, members should have created a process for remote work and even remote voting.

Senate rules allow some proxy voting in committees (though not on the floor), but only if a quorum of members is physically present to vote on behalf of those who are absent. House rules prohibit even that much, allowing no proxy voting in committee or on the floor. Neither house permits genuine *remote* voting.

There are good reasons for caution on this front. Congress is a deliberative body; its work requires negotiation and depends on relationships that cannot be built or maintained by video links. Generally speaking, Congress should be assembled in order to work. But there are also good reasons to make provision for emergencies like the one we are now living through. Congress has essential work to do, and yet its members are rightly under pressure to stay out of Washington and to avoid gathering in close proximity to one another.

The rules could acknowledge such crisis necessities by allowing, for instance, the House speaker and Senate majority



*The United States Capitol*

leader to declare an emergency that permits, on a temporary basis, some remote legislative work for a set period of time. The technology exists to enable both deliberation and voting remotely. The executive branch has developed secure systems for video-conferencing and remote decision-making over many years, and Congress could be provided access to these systems when necessary. It is already apparent that some of the key work required to develop even major legislative measures can be done remotely: The third and largest of the coronavirus bills enacted in March was mostly formulated while members (and even leaders) were out of town, by both staff and members who were mostly working remotely. It would be reasonable to formalize such work and make it more fully legitimate.

At this point, such a change in the rules could only be made in person. But the language required to do it should be prepared for the next time Congress assembles (which, given that the public-health crisis is still only intensifying and may require further legislative action, is likely to happen sometime in April). Both houses should even consider empowering a quorum of members to return briefly to Washington to enact such emergency provisions and thereby enable Congress as a whole to work remotely.

That work, moreover, will need to involve more than just massive relief measures that provide funding for the work of others. The demands of this crisis should help Congress get a clearer view of the full scope of its own power and role.

First, legislators should be prepared to take smaller steps by both authorizing and appropriating emergency government actions as required. Rather than assume that the president has the power he needs to take any necessary action in a crisis, Congress should reinforce the centrality of legislation in our system by working closely with the president and other officials at the federal and state levels to get a clear sense of what ongoing federal action is needed and to step in and legislate as circumstances warrant. Asserting its role in this way would allow for greater clarity and legitimacy in the federal response, and would help prevent turning this crisis into another excuse for burgeoning executive powers.

Second, Congress has an essential oversight role in this period. Having just enacted more than \$2 trillion in federal action, benefits, and assistance, Congress must now ensure that federal action takes the form the legislature required and is responsive to changing circumstances and public demands. This job cannot be outsourced; while inspectors general can support Congress's oversight role, their

practical powers are limited—as exemplified by President Trump's statement, on signing the emergency relief bill, that the new special inspector general will not be allowed to report to Congress without "presidential supervision."

Oversight is ultimately Congress's responsibility, and it does not occur purely in the past tense. It cannot wait until the crisis fully passes. Ongoing oversight will help to keep the president accountable and to ensure that Congress's will is done in real time. Moreover, the best kind of oversight plays not just a negative role but a positive one: It can aid the administration's work during the crisis by raising questions that might go unasked within agencies or inside the White House, or by offering answers that might otherwise go unheard. Oversight hearings are essential in this crisis. If they do not require formal committee votes, they can already occur remotely—and with the rules changes suggested above, they could involve every facet of committee work.

Third, and relatedly, Congress's oversight activities can play a crucial role in keeping the public informed. In the opening weeks of the crisis, the most significant sources of expert opinion have been provided through the administration itself, as exemplified by Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health. Though understandable in the short term, the centrality of the administration in providing information is unsustainable in the longer term. The public needs information from experts who are not already part of the president's "team." Congressional hearings are a natural way to elevate and amplify credible views by experts from outside the administration on the state of the scientific research surrounding the virus.

Such hearings would benefit the public generally, but they would be of particular help to state officials fighting COVID-19 on the front lines. And, in turn, when states find success with particular strategies and tactics to thwart the virus, congressional hearings can serve to highlight those successes on a national stage. In all of this, hearings could help Americans understand what their governments are doing and what they can expect.

Finally, even as it conducts real-time oversight, Congress needs to lay the groundwork for more exhaustive ex post facto oversight by defining at least some

# Church From Home

A new experience for many Americans

BY DAN McLAUGHLIN

of the metrics against which the government's actions will someday be measured. In time, when the worst of the crisis has passed, there will certainly be a review commission established to assess the federal response and draw lessons for the future. The assistance package enacted at the end of March already called for such a review of the particular spending it authorized. By taking action now to establish the parameters for such work, Congress can make it more effective and useful when the time comes.

In urging Congress to carry out these roles, it is worth pausing to appreciate how much better equipped our constitutional system is for grappling with crises today than it was in earlier generations. When the Constitution was written, Congress was expected to be absent for months at a time, and so the Constitution's authors needed to preserve the executive branch's capacity for responding unilaterally to crises. By vesting the president with an "executive power" broad and flexible enough to repel attacks and handle emergencies, and by providing a recess-appointment power enabling a president to staff his government even when the Senate was unavailable to confirm appointments, the Constitution was crafted to enable a president and his administration to hold down the fort until Congress could reassemble. This power was exemplified by President Lincoln's management of the outbreak of the Civil War for the four months preceding the return of the 37th Congress for a special session in July 1861. Today, when our technologies for travel and communication have erased the limits that distance once imposed on governance, there is no question whether senators and representatives *can* do their part of governance. The only question is whether they *will* do it—or cede it to the executive branch.

To do its part in the crisis, Congress must remain engaged and working. And of course, during this period it must also perform some other essential legislative work not directly related to the crisis. An intense emergency naturally draws our attention to the president. But even in a crisis, and particularly an extended one, the legislature has crucial work to do. Congress must resist the temptation to treat itself as a spectator. It must recover a clear idea of its purpose and necessity, and step up to serve the country in a time of need. **NR**

Is it time to turn on church yet?" In normal times, this would be a bizarre question for most families to ask. Yet here we are. Public, communal church services have been among the victims of the coronavirus pandemic. So, church on television it is.

For Catholics, Sunday Mass attendance is ordinarily an obligation from which we are not lightly released. We Catholics are not alone. Most major faith traditions in the United States have some sort of weekly communal liturgy. Church on Sunday is a venerable institution among Christians of all stripes, regardless of whether it is strictly required. Weekly services are common to Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh congregations and communities alike.

Nearly all of those in-person gatherings are suspended right now across all faiths, throughout the country and around much of the world. One of the earliest signs of the gravity and global reach of the pandemic came when the Saudi government announced in early March that it would close Mecca to foreign pilgrims during the annual hajj. In Rome, not far from one of the epicenters of the pandemic, Pope Francis will celebrate Easter from a largely empty St. Peter's Basilica for a television audience. He will do so without the customary 5 million visitors a year who crowd the Basilica square. Catholic dioceses, ours among them, have issued dispensations from the obligation of Sunday Mass. Less centralized Protestant denominations have made decisions on a church-by-church basis.

Most everything about a Catholic Mass is built around the physical gathering of a community. This is not surprising, coming from a tradition that stretches back almost 2,000 years. The churches themselves are laid out for close-quarters seating and processions, not for television broadcasting. The Mass is full of call-and-response prayers and songs. The sign of

peace, once conveyed with a kiss, is today typically a handshake. The handshake has been a frequent victim even of regular flu season and may be headed for permanent extinction after the current pandemic. The centerpiece of the Mass is Communion: the believers' encounter with the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The liturgy surrounding the Eucharist is a commemoration of the Last Supper, itself a communal breaking of bread.

Now, we gather around a screen. The liturgy is still there, but the community and the physical presence are not. Many faith traditions are going online, often forcing un-tech-savvy clerics into uncharted waters. Conservative Jews who need a minyan of ten to conduct a prayer service have been improvising over Zoom. This does not work for everyone, however. The Mormon Church has closed all temples, postponing services, such as some weddings and baptisms, that can take place only in a temple ceremony. Orthodox Jews' strict no-technology rules for Sabbath observance (drawn from the rule against working on the Sabbath) make it impossible to hold services.

For the faithful at home, picking a Mass on television or the Internet raises a number of unfamiliar questions: Should we watch the local parish Mass, the bishop, or the pope? Should we tune in live, or record it? If so, when should we watch? My wife is a morning person; my oldest daughter, abruptly and involuntarily home from college, is not. Trading in a fixed Mass schedule for contents of the DVR opens up a much more fluid negotiation over when to tune in. We gather on sofas in the den.

The first Sunday at home, we record the bishop's Mass. The bishop, being a modern bishop, seems at home on television, but the absence around him is palpable. Catholic priests are required to say Mass daily even if there is no public Mass to celebrate, so it is second nature to go through the ritual without a congregation. But not at the altar of a large, empty cathedral. The cantor gamely leads the congregation in song, but there is no one to sing along.

The quiet and emptiness are felt across faith traditions. Al Jazeera quoted a weeping muezzin who ordinarily sings the call to prayer at Riyadh's Al Rajhi Grand Mosque: "This feeling is indescribable. . . . The minarets are crying. The mosques were once full of worshippers."

# Time to Pass Without Our Pastime

Life without baseball and other sports

BY MICHAEL BRENDAN DOUGHERTY

In church, we know the cues and responses by heart, and if the mind wanders, we follow the crowd. Sitting on a couch at home, not dressed for church, what do you do? Stand, sit, and kneel at the appropriate times? Sing along? Even in a family accustomed to saying prayers together in the home, it feels uncomfortable to act as if we were in a crowded church. Man's desire for the divine is natural; liturgy is not. It is practiced. The role of the congregation in making it feel normal to participate in Mass is underrated until you try to do it without one.

Mass in the best of times is a tug of war between a prayerful mindset and a drifting attention span. That, too, is easier when you have gone to the effort of separating yourself from the home. With the distractions of home nearby, and without the familiar setting of the pews, it is harder to concentrate.

The second Sunday at home, we attempt to record the bishop's Mass again, but the DVR starts recording it midway through. This is a hazard of ordinary television programming that we are not normally accustomed to facing with Sunday Mass. Rather than watch half a Mass, we opt for the local parish Mass, which is on YouTube. Can we play it on the TV screen? Our youngest suggests that we can run a YouTube video through the Wii, but we are not going to church on a Wii. We plug in a laptop. The recording has a few technical hiccups, but thankfully nothing as mortifying as the viral video of a priest in Italy who accidentally broadcast Mass with ridiculous animated hats and glasses imposed on him by automated filters. Christians are called to be "fools for Christ"; broadcasting or attending Mass remotely requires a willingness to risk a good deal of feeling foolish.

It is announced that the pope will offer a global blessing on a Friday afternoon. We tune in, expecting a short prayer, and the service runs for an hour of the workday. There's that itch of distraction again. But popes since medieval times have been calling for universal prayer; how often have most of us actually tuned in to experience it live, at the same time, as Catholics all over the globe facing a common challenge? Pope Francis speaks into the dark, rain-slicked expanse of a square where people would ordinarily press in upon him from all sides. We may not be in communion, but we are not alone. **NR**

ONE day in November or December of last year, one Chinese person got excited about a very special meal. And that's why my family is subject to sudden-onset homeschooling. That is why my wife is now my barber. That's why I pass a bleach wipe over the edge of a pizza box delivered to my door. That's why a thousand people are reported dead in Italy every few days, why seemingly half of the Iranian government is ill. That's why the prime minister of the United Kingdom—also ill—is confining his nation, the one that invented freedom, to house arrest.

One Chinese person got a craving and Americans don't have baseball. I bet that Chinese person was a middle-aged guy, like me. And I bet on that frigid night his old lady was going out with her girlfriends in Wuhan, and he thought it was the exact right time to order the food she hates to see him eating. I would get chicken wings. But he went all the way to pangolin scales or snakes. And he just happened to get something that a sick bat had soiled. Unlike me, he didn't use bleach wipes on his takeaway orders. And now we are locked inside our homes and baseball has been canceled until further notice.

We don't have sports at all. March Madness, gone. Formula 1, suspended. So far there is no relief coming from overseas, where my connection to sports is a little more tenuous. Premier League football is down in the United Kingdom. Australian Rules football is suspended. What is left?

One Saturday recently, I turned on ESPN2, and there, where sports usually are, I saw a pre-taped broadcast of a stone-skipping competition. It was fol-

lowed by cup-stacking. It was all part of a one-day annual gimmick to highlight odd competitions. But still, in these times it emphasized the absence of real sports.

The NBA is gone. And we should be less sore about that. It's been only a few months since figures across the NBA scolded the Houston Rockets' general manager Daryl Morey for defending the liberty protesters in Hong Kong. This was followed by embarrassing scenes in which the NBA censored fans for holding up signs drawing attention to China's persecution of Uighurs. To make the insult worse, recently the entire Utah Jazz organization somehow found a way to needlessly monopolize more than half of Oklahoma's small number of available daily tests for COVID-19. To my mind the NBA is consigned to share opprobrium with other craven institutions that act as useful idiots for Chairman Xi, such as the World Health Organization. I'm sorry, hoops fans, but there is a karmic justice in that season's being interrupted because the snake soup got extra spicy.

The NHL is another matter. Canadians did nothing to deserve this desolation. More important, Quebecers don't deserve this. Being located that far north on the globe and lacking your national sport has got to be depressing. How many suicides from seasonal affective disorder does the NHL stop each year? It must be significant. Also, playoff hockey is the only sport my five-year-old daughter tolerates; it is the only thing as frenetic and exhausting as she is.

But it is baseball that is the most unjust robbery of all. We have time to pass, but not our national pastime. The experience of going to a baseball park has been praised endlessly. The sounds of the concessions, the din of the crowd. And I will miss that experience during this lockdown. But not nearly enough has been said about the joys of spectating from home, where we are temporarily confined.

The game on television and radio can become the background murmur of a life well lived. Put the game on in the browser, and handle that batch of work emails. Tune in on the radio, and get the chores and home projects done. Flip on the television during a summer party, and stay inside, in the air-conditioned



# Staggering Cornucopias

On books to read and music to listen to—or not

Text

BY JAY NORDLINGER

**V**LADIMIR HOROWITZ, the great pianist, was a complicated person. He pretty much did not leave his home for twelve years. Later, a guest had the chutzpah to ask, “You mean, you didn’t leave this house for *twelve years*?” Horowitz, glancing around and gesturing, said, “You don’t like my house?”

When Bill Buckley heard about this, he loved it. He told the story using an excellent Horowitz impression—dead-on.

There is a lot of home confinement these days, and we may not be in a place like Horowitz’s: a beautiful townhouse on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. He had the piano to play, and practice, and he made several recordings during his dozen years of self-isolation.

You may be playing the piano too. You may be playing some other instrument, or singing, or even composing. You can certainly *listen* to music—on YouTube, for example, that staggering cornucopia. Virtually the whole of music, at the flick of our fingers.

I asked someone the other day, “Can you imagine home confinement without the Internet?” “Hardly,” he said—“and we would not even be able to listen to baseball on the radio,” suspended as it is.

Some people are taking on major listening projects, though that makes it sound too much like work. I know a family, for example, that is watching the *Ring* cycle on video. Ideally, this should be done over four days, as Wagner designates the parts of his tetralogy “Vorabend” (or “Fore-evening”), “Day One,” “Day Two,” and “Day Three.”

Every evening, Igor Levit is performing a little recital via Twitter. They take place at 7 P.M., Central European Time. Levit is a Russian-German pianist, and one of the best in the world. He is doing these daily recitals as a gift to one and all. The situations are not the same, but I



An unused practice field at the New York Yankees’ spring-training facility in Tampa, Fla., March 13

air, when your friend says the pitcher is working on a no-hitter. So what if it’s only the third inning?

There is a hypnotic quality to television broadcasts of baseball. A pitcher sets the pace of play, and by doing so he sets the pace of a broadcast. Cut to the wide-angle shot of the field, cut back to the shot from the batter’s eye over the pitcher’s shoulder, cut to the close-up of the batter as he adjusts gloves, stance, and helmet. And cut back again. This is a hypnotism worth undergoing to catch up on a little sleep during languorous afternoons.

Sports are also a reminder that you live in a free and prosperous society. It provides a subtle, nonetheless real, reminder that your nation’s strong young men are not desperately needed in battle and can pursue something just for the sheer joy of it. This also means that the absence of organized sports is a sign that we are somehow less free, that we are being shut in against our will, whether by the virus itself, by the government assuming its emergency powers, or by our own fear. Baseball went away for a few days

after 9/11, and its return, especially to New York, was a sign not just of normality but of hope, even courage, and the deep magnanimity of our society.

Some people I see on social media are trying to make some good use of their time in lockdown, reevaluating their habits, drawing closer to the loved ones with whom they are sheltered. They want to improve themselves. That’s admirable. But the human heart craves more than productivity; it needs play.

I want to pay over \$20 for a parking space outside a stadium named after a bank we bailed out during the last economic crisis. I want to wake up from a Sunday nap watching the game to discover a no-hitter in progress. I want to bellow at horrible umpires. I want to live-stream hurling matches from Semple Stadium in Thurles, Ireland, to my flatscreen in New York. I want to see the Sydney Swans in Aussie Rules, and the Olympics in Tokyo. What I long for most of all in this period of social distancing, self-quarantine, and shelter in place, is the roar of a crowd. **NR**

can't help thinking of Dame Myra Hess during the Blitz. She gave noontime recitals at the National Gallery—which boosted national morale.

Even in normal times, Igor Levit is one of the most intense of pianists. He plays as though the activity were the most important thing in the world—even the only thing. He is even more intense in this time of pandemic. I thought of what Leonard Bernstein said after the Kennedy assassination: “This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.”

Music organizations trot out this statement in terrible times, such as after 9/11. I never liked the statement, finding it treacly, platitudinous, and even a little pompous. I'm not sure I feel that way anymore.

There are a number of things we might do at home (besides worrying about financial or physical survival, of course). Physical fitness? In the form of weightlifting, or jump-roping? Learning a language, probably with the help of the Internet? Repairing or building something? Cleaning?

Reading?

In 1994, Harold Bloom came out with his book *The Western Canon*. At the back, it had appendices, providing for what amounted to a life's reading. I xeroxed those pages, expecting to keep them with me always, and to march through the lists.

I'll get started any day now. (No, I won't.)

One of Bloom's chapters is “The Canonical Novel.” It focuses on *Bleak House* and *Middlemarch*. Forthwith, I went out and bought those two books—good used copies, in hardcover. I seldom bought books in those days, having not very much money. I borrowed them from libraries—as I had *The Western Canon* (which is why I xeroxed the appendices). But I knew, because Bloom said so, that I had to have *Bleak House* and *Middlemarch*.

For the next many years, I carried them with me wherever I went—as I changed addresses and traveled. I started each one, several times. I could never keep going.

Last year, I said to myself, “You're going to read *Bleak House*. I don't care if

you like it. You're going to read it, if it kills you. Every page. Even if it takes a year, or more.” Over about five weeks, I read about 300 pages. I finally gave myself permission to give up. I have no doubt—none—that *Bleak House* is an immortal masterpiece. I just can't get with it, somehow.

And I'll tell you something funny about *Middlemarch*: A couple of weeks into our national lockdown, or semi-lockdown, my friend Kevin Williamson published a piece titled, bluntly, “Read *Middlemarch*.” Its subheading: “You know you've always meant to; now it's put up or shut up.” I think I will shut up . . .

Several times, I tried to read *The Magic Mountain*. The novel is set in Davos, Switzerland, at a sanitarium. Reader, I was in that very sanitarium,

Have you ever read the *Decline and Fall*? By acclamation, one of the greatest works of history ever written? For decades, I have owned an abridged, one-volume edition. I have read *in it*, but not through it. Someday?

that very place—which is now a hotel. I had the book in my hand, on the *Zauberberg*, on the magic mountain. Out my window, the snow twinkled in the moonlight. I was lying in a room that was possibly in the novel itself! And I could not persevere . . .

Bret Stephens told me, “*The Magic Mountain* is the second-best novel of the 20th century.” Naturally, I asked what he regarded as No. 1. Bret answered as if it was the most obvious thing in the world—as though I'd asked, “What day comes after Tuesday?” “*Lord Jim*!” he said. (That book was published in 1900, hovering between the centuries.) I have never tried *Lord Jim*, but I intend to.

The greatest compliment ever paid to an author, I think, was paid by Gilbert Ryle, the British philosopher, who was born in the *Lord Jim* year, 1900, and lived

to 1976. Someone said, “You don't read novels, do you?” He said, “Yes, I do. I read all six of them every year.” That's how many novels, or major novels, Jane Austen wrote.

I confessed to Bill Kristol one night, many years ago, that I could not stick with Austen. (Are you sensing a pattern?) He said, “Do yourself a favor: Buy a good hardback copy—not a mass-market paperback—of *Mansfield Park*, and give it a serious try.” I bought it that very night, on the way home. I stayed with it for about 150 pages. I enjoyed it, sort of. But it was just so chatty, so leisurely. Who had the time?

The same night I bought *Mansfield Park*, I bought a good copy—not inexpensive—of *The Red and the Black*. No dice.

*Anna Karenina* is certainly on my list.

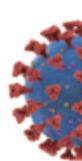
I'm the type to know Rodion Shchedrin's ballet score—and the ballet—rather than the novel itself. Norman Podhoretz told me that, in his judgment, it was the greatest novel ever written. *Middlemarch*, he said, “might be No. 2, I'm not sure.”

Roger Scruton, in a separate conversation, agreed on *Anna Karenina*—or mainly agreed. “There are competitors,” he said, including *Middlemarch*. “But there are weaknesses in the Eliot, and there are *no* weaknesses in the Tolstoy.” He also

named *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Emma*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Ulysses*. “Those are all books that I read again and again,” he said.

Have you ever read the *Decline and Fall*? By acclamation, one of the greatest works of history ever written? For decades, I have owned an abridged, one-volume edition. I have read *in it*, but not through it. Someday?

A conversation with Andrew Roberts convinced me to read—or at least buy—all four volumes of *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. For one thing, he said, Churchill was the greatest writer in English since Shakespeare. I expected to march through these volumes, right from the Druids, worshipping in the woods, to Cecil Rhodes in South Africa. I marched for a while—but since then have hop-scotched around, in odd moments.



Text

# The Great Non-Freakout

Americans were ready,  
by gadget and by character

BY ROB LONG

Yet this long, sweeping, and wondrous work would make for a fine corona-time reading project, wouldn't it? Especially for an Anglophile. (Churchill certainly deserved his Nobel Prize in Literature.)

Another fine project can be found online: "Great Thinkers" and "Contemporary Thinkers." These stem from a program founded long ago by Harvey Mansfield and Bill Kristol. If you fancy an immersion in political philosophy, you could hardly do better. There are 28 "great thinkers," from Herodotus to Heidegger. (That list is chronological.) There are 34 "contemporary thinkers," from Hannah Arendt to Tom Wolfe. (Alphabetical.)

Reading philosophy is not for everyone. Years ago, I was relieved to see an exceptionally brainy person, John Derbyshire, say something in print: He could not read more than a few pages of philosophy at a time—it fatigued him. Same here. Other people (I have confirmed it with them) can read philosophy like comic books. They turn the pages, eagerly, lustily, as though they were engrossed in a spy novel.

A young philosopher friend of mine—recent Ph.D. from Princeton—urged me to read a little book by E. H. Gombrich, the art historian. (His *Story of Art* has long been a bible of the field.) *In Search of Cultural History* is simply a lecture, published at a measly 50 pages. I wanted to whip through it—or at least read it—to discuss it with my friend. But the very phrase "Herr Professor Hegel" (page 7) makes my lids heavy.

I think of an expression from junior high: "Let's not and say we did."

The sorry truth is, I would rather play or listen to Mozart's worst minuet than read my favorite philosopher. Or is that truth "sorry"? We are all built differently, or inclined differently, and there is a world of choice, thank heaven.

There is such a thing as "found money"—a 20-dollar bill, sitting in the pocket of an old jacket—and such a thing as "found time." A lot of people now have such time, whether they like it or not (and we don't). May we all fill it profitably and reasonably, somehow. When you finish *Bleak House* or ramble through "Great Thinkers"—let me know how wonderful it was, and I will be very pleased, amid my newspapers and magazines, and my Mozart minuets. **NR**

**P**RETTY much every space-alien movie or television show—from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* to *Mork & Mindy*—had the same basic setup: There are aliens and spaceships and ray guns and flying saucers—these things exist—but if people discover this, the country will freak out.

Bill Bixby, the swinging bachelor in the old sitcom *My Favorite Martian*, hides the identity of the Martian visitor, played by veteran character actor Ray Walston, from everyone for the same reason that the little boy in *E.T.* doesn't tell anyone that he's found a real live space alien and is hiding him in the closet. Because he knows that grownups will hear this and go insane and then the government will come in and take his *E.T.* away.

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, like *E.T.*, is a terrific and uplifting movie, but at least a third of it is government-secrecy porn—18-wheel trucks, disguised as just your average long hauler, bringing equipment and support to Devils Tower. Barbed wire being unspooled, black helicopters circling around, government agents tight-lipped and no-smiles, and all because they know that if we learn aliens are coming to visit, we'll all have a conniption.

So it was weird, a few months ago, when some videos surfaced showing active-duty Navy pilots, flying F-18s, encountering some crazy nutty flying things they couldn't identify. And what usually happens is that these videos are dismissed by the government as drones or planes or something perfectly reasonable. *Nothing to see here*, essentially.

But this time—and this happened a few months ago, do you remember?—this time the Navy said, *Yeah, we don't*

*know what those were.* And the audio on the tape from the pilots, where they express almost speechless astonishment—how can that thing fly that way?—well, according to the Navy, *Yeah, we're, like, freaking too.*

So for the first time, video showing unidentified aerial phenomena was confirmed as just that, weird objects flying around the sky at a speed and in a trajectory that no known technology allows, and it was on television and cable news for a day, and then everyone just went back to talking about what Trump tweeted to the guy on CNN.

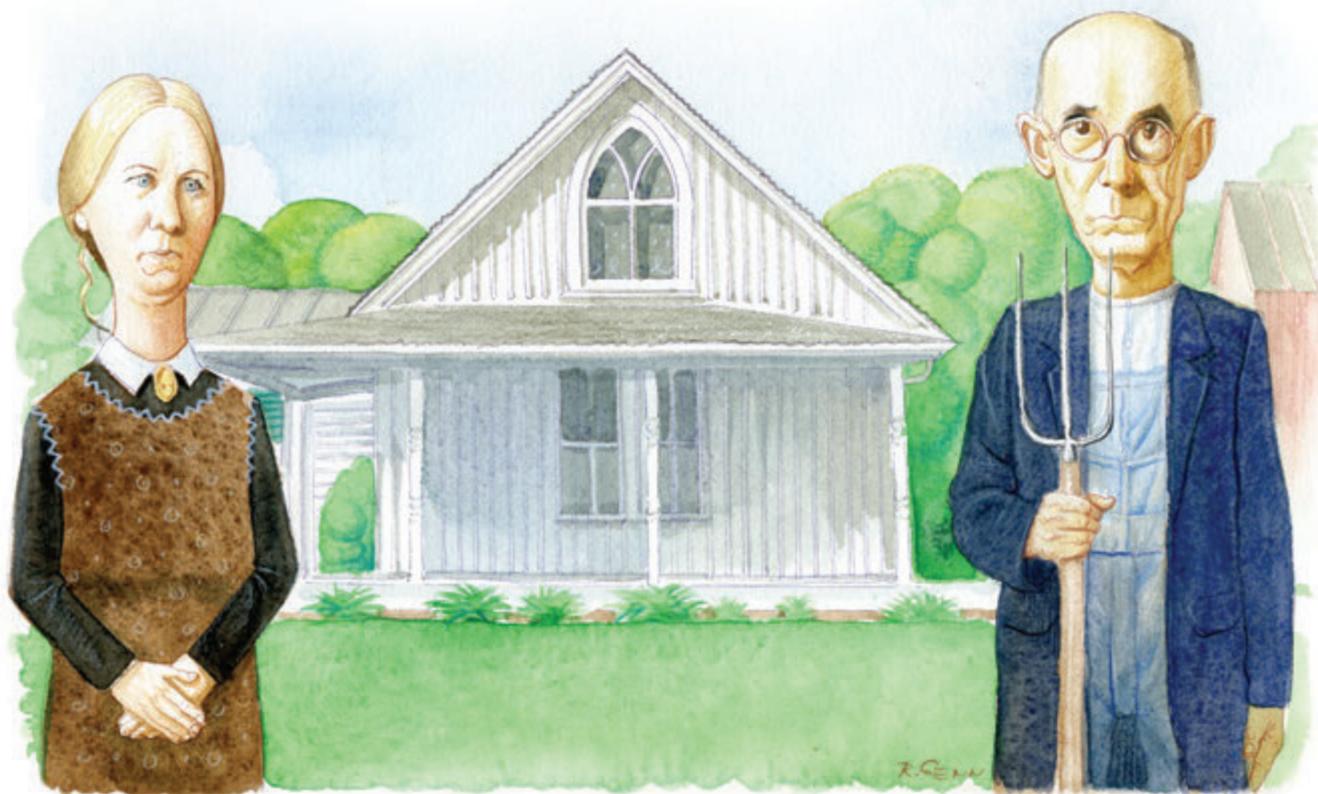
We didn't freak or overreact. The country wasn't plunged into chaos and warlordism. A weird phenomenon occurred, it was duly noted, and then we all went back to talking about celebrities.

That snapshot tells us a lot about the American character. It also tells us something we probably already knew: Hollywood movies and television shows have a dim view of the American people. In the face of aliens—or, more relevantly, global contagion—they expect us to forget everything we know about civility and community. They expect us, at the first sniffle, to turn to black-market profiteering and to barricade the driveway, to shut the door against our neighbors, to engage in pagan rituals, to wear necklaces made of strung-together human skulls . . .

You get the picture. And while that's overstating it, this is undeniable: Hollywood fully expects that when the bad stuff comes, the real danger will come not from killer viruses or alien warships but from the gun nut next door and the weirdo down the street who keeps a copy of the Constitution in his back pocket.

Today we find ourselves housebound, cut off from friends, family, and colleagues, engaged in a collective action against a highly contagious virus, and so far the only mass hysteria has been that some people got nervous about their toilet-paper supply.

But who am I to call that "hysteria"? I'm fairly certain that I have enough of those essential supplies to carry me through the crisis, but I can't speak for you or your needs. Don't criticize people, goes the saying, until you've walked a mile in their shoes. How do I know how much toilet paper you need until I've, you know, sat . . .



You get the picture. Hollywood was convinced that we wouldn't be able to handle this, whatever "this" is. And yes, a fuzzy and impossible-to-identify image of a certified UFO isn't exactly *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. But the collective yawn from the general population suggests that we're well prepared for when (if) the real thing comes along. Just as COVID-19—as awful and deadly as it is—isn't quite the killer gripe of the movie *Contagion*, much less the explosively bloody Ebola of *Outbreak*, the almost total lack of public freakouts suggests that we're all going to be fine. We may even be more stable and calm than the folks in Hollywood, many of whom have chucked their belief in nontraditional shamanic medicine and magic jade eggs and are now screaming at their internist for an antibody test—*I don't care if there isn't one yet! I want one!*—and sending their assistant out for hydroxychloroquine, vegan, if they have it.

The American people, whether they knew it or not, had been preparing for a COVID-19-style event for a decade, at least. Americans in general (and me in specific) may be terrible at math, but everyone is familiar with the concept of a "viral video." We've spent the better part of this century sharing and retweeting

and forwarding videos, passing funny memes and GIFs along to our entire address book, sharing and posting "you won't believe what happened next" content to our Facebook wall. Our timelines and social-media feeds are infested with viral content—we're not even sure where it all came from, who sent it first, why it's in front of us—so the idea of being touched by a virus that came from someone with whom we have the thinnest connections? We've been living that way since aol.com.

And we know how to protect ourselves from it, too: log off, run antivirus software, turn the computer off for a minute, and when it's cooled off, turn it back on. Sound familiar?

Working from home? Big deal. Our devices and software have enabled many of us to take work everywhere. The American worker has long since adjusted to late-evening emails and urgent texts from the boss over the weekend. The COVID-19 edict to work from home is, for these Americans, redundant—most of us carry our offices in our pockets, able to edit and forward and collaborate on any document, on any task, anywhere. Connectivity has already extended the working hours into the home

hours—which is only fair when you consider how much time employees spend mindlessly surfing the Web at work.

The surge in videoconferencing comes just at the time when ordinary Americans have mastered the tricks to looking good onscreen. All over the country people are propping their laptops on a stack of books—when you look slightly up, you appear thinner and more youthful—and blurring the background of the home office that was, before COVID, a closet with a squeaky door and a bunch of old Swiffers. Americans have been starring in their own shows on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok for years—they are, I assure you, ready for their close-up.

Americans are ready, in general. Maybe not cheerful about it—the virus is serious business, and there are lots of tears left to be shed—but to the average American, none of this seems like something to get hysterical about. Some Navy pilots saw a UFO? Whatevs. We've all gotta stay in because of a deadly virus? No prob. We're Americans, we adapt. Even if we do, somehow, run out of toilet paper, we'll shrug and figure out a workaround.

You get the picture. Hollywood doesn't.

NR

## Navigating the Covidian Miasma

**O**N a sunny Friday noon, five hours before our state was about to go into lockdown, I was in the kitchen with my daughter, laying out ration rules for the coming duration. One can of fizzy water a day, or one can of pop. Go light on the milk. And so on. I shut the fridge door and was about to discuss the Five-Square Rule of toilet-paper consumption—at least until we're down to one-ply, then it's seven—when she asked whether we had any hummus.

“We got hummus galore,” I said, thinking that would be a great name for a Bond girl in the Lebanese version, and opened the door.

The light in the fridge was off. Looked around the kitchen: All the clocks were blank. Turned on a switch: nothing. The power was out.

In the Before Times, your thoughts would go to the ice cream in the freezer. Dang it, it's going to get soft. And then it'll refreeze, and it'll have crystals. I can't *believe* I'm going to have to eat ice cream with some crystals tonight.

Now, in Covidian Miasma times: We have a fortnight of sustenance in the freezer. If it spoils, we *die*.

No—that's ridiculous. If we cook and eat everything in the freezer, we can accumulate so much excess stored protein that we can live on ramen noodles for a week. There are 24 packets of ramen. One per person, one per day. Possible problem: They are all chicken-flavored. If I'd known this was coming, I would have varied the flavor. Shrimp would be nice.

Of course, if I'd known this was coming, I would have liquidated all my assets and buried them in the backyard. The neighbor might have wondered: What are you doing there, friend?

“I cashed out of the market because a deadly virus is coming from China in six months and blood will run down Wall Street like a crimson tsunami of panic, so, you know, just planning ahead.”

“Does China know about this?”

“Good point. I should tell them. Also, if I were you, I'd get the variety pack of ramen.”

Not that it would have done any good to tell China before this got out of hand. It's interesting how the view of China has changed over the last few weeks.

Previous assumption: China learns of a bad new disease affecting people, sends a team of government officials wearing impeccable suits who ride a sleek train from a gorgeous new station designed by a world-class architect; they arrive at the hospital, gather evidence in a stressful situation, reminding each other that “Paul Krugman is counting on us”

when things get tough; then they present the data to the world like good global citizens.

Current assumption: China learns of a bad new disease, sends a team of government officials wearing impeccable suits who ride a sleek train from a gorgeous new station designed by a world-class architect; they arrive at the hospital and shoot everyone.

A lot of people believed the first scenario, and even if they had doubts, would you *look* at the price of 4K TVs these days!

Anyway. Power's out. Nothing to do but walk the dog. It was a bright day, warm for late March. Many families were out in the front yard playing with the toddlers, tossing a ball to the dog. Ping! My phone buzzed. A text from the power company: The juice would be restored by 12:45. It was possible I would be spared both chicken-ramen fatigue and crystallized ice cream. Might get COVID-19 on my walk, but everything in life is a trade-off.

The dog took me where he wanted to go. I listened to my favorite talk-show host, who was angry about the lard in the relief bill passed by Congress. Me too, but it also feels like being annoyed by the cologne of the Civil War field-hospital doctor who's sawing off your leg without anesthesia.

Ah, the dog found something in a pile of leaves. While he sticks his snout into the redolent pile a plane passes high overhead, and I wonder who's on board. How many? Ten? Forty? I was supposed to take a plane to New York in a few months to take a cruise to go to England. Last month I thought: It'll all be over by then. Then I thought: We'll do it at summer's end. Now I think: Wonder if I'll ever see England again.

A truck from the power company turns the corner. I give the driver a thumbs-up: thanks for working tirelessly to prevent a disappointing ice-cream experience but also to maintain the comforting pretense of civilization! But mostly the ice-cream part.

When I got home it was 12:48, and the power was still out. In the Before Times, I might have feigned anger—why, these slack-bodied layabouts had best get cracking lest I come over and apply a switch to their fly-blown shanks—but now I'm grateful for believing that it'll probably be on soon.

Belief, not hope.

At 12:55 something went ding! And a fan turned on, and the computer sang a merry, satisfied chord, and the boiler clicked and started to warm up the house. Civilization, and what we expect of it, had come through again. We'll get through this; we'll pull together and make it.

I wrote a note, dated two weeks into the future. “Candles are gone, we ate the dog.” Put it in an envelope to be opened in a fortnight. If we're doing better than that, it's all good. **NR**

If I'd known  
this was  
coming, I  
would have  
liquidated all  
my assets  
and buried  
them in the  
backyard.



# The Long View

BY ROB LONG

## Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us04web.zoom.us/j/80431](https://us04web.zoom.us/j/8043111983)

11983

Meeting ID: 804 311 1983

*You have been invited to a ZOOM video conference by DAD*

*Please click on the link to join the conference*

“Dad?”

“Hey! Can you hear me?”

“Yes, and I can see you too. Where’s Mom?”

“Right here, sweetie, your father made me get my own log-in thing.”

“Dad, why are we doing this?”

“Wait a minute. Let your sister get on.”

“Katie! Get on the Zoom whatever! Dad’s making it into a whole big thing!”

“Sweetie, please do not yell through the walls.”

“I don’t understand why we’re doing this. We, like, live in the same house.”

“Hello? Can you hear me?”

“Hey! Katie Bear! Okay now, the family is all together.”

“Daddy, why are we doing this? We can just talk together, I can come downstairs.”

“That’s what I told your father.”

“Okay, now. We’re all here. Let’s get started. First off, thank you all for joining the webinar.”

“Oh gimme a break!”

“Tyler! Listen to your father. Doug, we’re all feeling a bit weird here.”

“I understand that, Jen. But here’s what I’m thinking. You know, all day I was on a Zoom call with the gang at work, and what I discovered was this. Bruce in product management wasn’t such a pain in the butt. Karen and LouEllen from HR were actually toler-

able. I didn’t yell at my assistant and I interacted with the design and marketing groups without resorting to salty language of any kind—”

“Dad, can you get to the point? I’ve been on Zoom all day with school and—”

“I have a lecture to watch and—”

“Can you not interrupt me?”

“GOD!”

“Katie, Tyler, stop it! Listen to your father!”

“No, see, this is my point—Katie, you’re home from college and Tyler’s school is closed and Jen’s office and my office are both closed, so we’re all kind of back to the old days when we, you know, lived together all under one roof.”

“I miss those days, love.”

“When we were kids. Right. Dad, where is this going?”

“Well, for the past three weeks we’ve been rattling around this house together, getting in each other’s way and stuff, and today I realized that Zoom calls are really making it easier to get along with the people at my office, so maybe they’ll help us all get along at home.”

“Honey?”

“So what I’m thinking is, we just, you know, keep our distance from now on.”

“Dad?”

“You guys just sort of stick to certain areas and we’ll sort out kitchen and bathroom times and—”

“Doug? What are you saying? You want the children to, what? Stay in their rooms?”

“Not just the children, Jen.”

“DOUG?”

“Look, let’s face it, fam. We worked best when you, Katie, were off at college, and Jen, when you were super busy at work, and Tyler, honestly, I think we were all happier when we had no idea where you were or what you were doing and now we’re all packed back into this house all day every day with nowhere to go and are you really

telling me that I’m the only one here who is ready to just EXPLODE?”

“Daddy, you’re scaring me.”

“I’m not trying to scare you. But, you know, keep your distance.”

“Doug, this is not funny.”

“Not trying to be, Jen. I’m deadly serious. I’m going to screen-share with you guys one possible schedule we can adopt and of course really looking for your feedback on this, it’s just a spitball first shot at it, maybe there’s better times for the bathroom and—”

“I’m relegated to our bedroom for ten hours?”

“Yeah, Jen, see, you’ll be there and I’ll be working out of the car in the garage and—”

“Daddy, you’re getting unglued.”

“No, no, see, I’m not. I just don’t want to be stuck in this house with you people anymore. I just—I just—Katie, I love you, but I loved you a lot more when I didn’t have to overhear your stupid conversations with stupid friends about stupid Bernie Sanders and—”

“GOD! You are a dictator! This is fascism! This is Nazi Germany.”

“See? I just . . . It’s just better on Zoom, okay, Katie Bear?”

“You don’t want to see your children? Or your wife? Doug?”

“I do want to see you! I want to see all of you! I love you guys! I want to have meals with you and talk and do everything we used to do, just on Zoom. From different parts of the house. Remotely.”

“Doug? Doug? Tyler, your father’s mouth is moving but we can’t hear him.”

“I know.”

“Why is that, sweetie?”

“Because I took over the admin for this Zoom and I put him on mute.”

“Tyler, take your father off mute this instant.”

“Okay.”

“Well, not this instant. First, show me how to get the Eiffel Tower in my background.”

# Books, Arts & Manners

## Conservatives And Geopolitical Change

A. WESS MITCHELL

the very social schisms that it is conservatism's role to prevent.

Kissinger saw two possible answers to this problem, embodied respectively by the 18th-century British statesman Edmund Burke and the 19th-century Austrian statesman Klemens von Metternich. Burke's answer to the conservative dilemma was to avoid irremediable schisms by mediating and moderating the forces of change; to fight revolution not with counterrevolution but with a slow rear-guard action that softens its edges, rendering change less destructive to the polity. This, Kissinger said, was historical conservatism—"to fight for conservatism in the name of history, to reject the validity of the revolutionary challenge because of its denial of the temporal aspect of society and the social contract." Metternich's answer was different—he did not want to tame revolution but to make it impossible; to govern, as he put it, "so as to avoid a situation in which concessions become necessary." This was rational conservatism—"to fight for conservatism in the name of reason, to deny the validity of the revolutionary question on epistemological grounds, as contrary to the structure of the universe."

There was no question whose brand of conservatism Kissinger identified with. It is well known that Kissinger admired Metternich for his urbanity and virtuosity as a statesman. But from a philosophical standpoint, what probably attracted a young Kissinger to Metternich most was the essentially preventive nature of his conservatism. In Metternich's use of congress diplomacy to prevent great-power war and stave off the threat of revolutionary nationalism, Kissinger saw a model for a post-war America newly encumbered with the dual task of preventing nuclear war and containing the spread of global Communism.

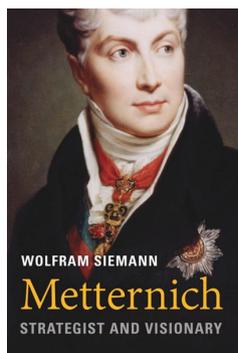
Kissinger's portrait of Metternich, in his 1954 essay and in a book that same year about the Congress of Vienna, *A World Restored*, marked a rehabilitation of sorts for the Austrian statesman. It overturned the earlier appraisals of German historians, such as Heinrich von Treitschke and Heinrich von Srbik, who had, in the decades after Metternich's

death, depicted him as a cosmopolitan climber devoid of principle whose posturing on behalf of the supranational Habsburgs had impeded the march of German *Kultur*. Kissinger's reconsideration of Metternich the diplomat built on the work of interwar English writers such as Algernon Cecil, for whom Metternich's "system" of congresses had regained its luster in the aftermath of a devastating world war. But it was Kissinger who would most contribute to the rehabilitation of Metternich the conservative, and his depiction of Metternich as a universalist, rationalist conservative, rather than a particularist, historical conservative in the Burkean mold, stuck.

Sixty-five years later, a new biography of Metternich challenges Kissinger's portrait. Wolfram Siemann's *Metternich: Strategist and Visionary* is the first biography of Metternich in almost a century to draw primarily on archival materials, many of them previously unearthed, rather than on the research of earlier historians. A professor at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Siemann conducted an exhaustive review of Metternich's voluminous papers in the Acta Clementina at the Czech National Archives in Prague. The result is a serious reappraisal of Metternich that is a joy to read, thanks in part to the work of a talented translator, Daniel Steuer. Siemann manages to sustain a lively storyline through seven decades of European history and bring to light many details of Metternich's life that earlier historians could sketch only in fragmentary form: his formative years and relationship with his father and mother; the influence of his German historicist teachers in the waning days of the old Holy Roman Empire; details of his many love affairs, his family life, and the refinement of his skills as a diplomat.

By far the book's most significant claims are about Metternich's thought life and the tenets of his political philosophy. Though Siemann does not mention Kissinger's characterization of Metternich, reading the two side by side reveals strikingly different conclusions about Metternich's conservatism.

Text



*Metternich: Strategist and Visionary*, by Wolfram Siemann, translated by Daniel Steuer (Belknap Press, 928 pp., \$39.95)

“WHAT is the conservative to do,” Henry Kissinger asked in an essay in 1954, “in a revolutionary situation?” In a stable order, conservatism is in a sense unnecessary, Kissinger wrote, because society’s cohesion makes a revolutionary challenge unthinkable. But once a viable alternative to the prevailing order appears, conservatism’s role becomes at once necessary and difficult—necessary because without it there is nothing to curb the destructive effects of precipitous change; difficult because, in the course of defending what was formerly assumed to be permanent, “the conservative position comes to be dominated by its reactionary—that is, counter-revolutionary—wing” and thus deepens

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## BOOKS, ARTS &amp; MANNERS

Siemann seeks to place the Austrian statesman squarely in the “historical conservative,” or Whiggish, tradition of Burke. This is a bold argument, considering that most other historians to date have classified Metternich as a detached rationalist who (at best) sought a kind of mechanical stability or (at worst, in the eyes of liberal detractors) was a repressive reactionary and administrator of a police state.

To make his case, Siemann relies on archival evidence that either was not available to or was not used by earlier historians. Exhibit A is a first edition of Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that Metternich purchased as a youth on a 1794 trip to London. He apparently even attended sessions of Parliament to watch Burke’s speeches from the visitors’ gallery. (In fairness to Kissinger, these facts were not brought to light until the diary of Metternich’s traveling companion, the Comte de Liedekerke, was published in 1968.)

From Metternich’s notes in the margins of *Reflections*, Siemann identifies two aspects of Burke’s thinking that especially appealed to the young Austrian. One was the contention that human liberty is meaningless, and indeed potentially dangerous, unless combined with order—or as Burke put it: combined with “public force; the discipline and obedience of armies; the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; morality and religion; the solidity of property; with peace and order; with civil and social manners.” The second was Burke’s lamentation that, with the emergence of an unhinged revolutionary France, “the age of chivalry is gone,” and with it the system of “noble equality” that had “mitigated kings into companions” and that “without force, or opposition, . . . subdued the fierceness of pride and power; . . . obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance, and [given] a domination vanquisher of laws, to be subdued by manners.”

The first point is not inconsistent with Kissinger’s reading of Metternich, in that it suggests a preoccupation with order, but its emphasis is on an ordered liberty in the Anglo-American tradition distinct from both the Enlightenment Kantian tradition and the license entailed in the French concept of *liberté*.

The second point deals with checks on the power of the monarch in keeping with the English constitution (and Montesquieu). Siemann convincingly argues that such checks would have appealed to Metternich given his upbringing under the “mixed constitution” of the Holy Roman Empire. And they would have been readily applicable to the “composite state” of the Habsburgs, in which the monarch was far from absolute on the Russian or Prussian model and in fact was constrained by obligations to the various provinces and estates.

While Metternich’s initial reactions to Burke must be read in context, as comments on passages that caught the eye of a still intellectually immature young man, Siemann traces the evolution of these and other elements of Burkean thought in Metternich’s writing, policies, and even the management of his personal estate. Metternich’s respect for private property, commitment to free trade, predilection for balance and compromise, and even (surprisingly) distrust of the powers of unchecked bureaucracy all speak to a conservatism rooted in a firm sense of limits that does not fit with the picture of Metternich as a reactionary statist.

Fittingly enough, however, it is in Metternich’s diplomacy that the strongest case can be made for Metternich as a historical conservative. In the Habsburg Monarchy, Metternich saw a defensive edifice built on divided power that allowed the survival of weak polities that otherwise would have been subsumed into larger neighboring empires. Around Austria, he sought to build independent buffer states and wrap the whole in a system of consensual diplomacy aimed at maintaining a stable balance of power and an independent European center.

An example of Metternich’s conservative statecraft in practice can be seen in his approach to the Polish question. On Kissinger’s logic, Metternich’s stance on this issue should not have been any different from that of his Prussian and Russian counterparts, who sought to carve up Poland among the three empires. But like Burke, and in the tradition of his forerunner Kaunitz, Metternich opposed Polish partition, on the grounds that it would remove an ancient state that was an

irreplaceable component in the European balance of power.

Another example is Italy. On Kissinger’s reasoning, the particular identities, histories, and constitutions of the various provinces of the Habsburg Monarchy should have carried no particular weight, with Metternich as the rationalist manager of the imperial center. Since, as Kissinger writes, Metternich viewed history as being “of no greater moral validity” than most other social forces, the highly local political customs of these different lands should have been at best meaningless to him; indeed, we should expect Metternich, as a praetorian of absolutism, to have treated them as particularist, and therefore potentially wayward, elements to be suppressed and regularized in the fashion of a centralizing continental statesman.

But that was not the case. In numerous memoranda to the Emperor Francis, Metternich made an impassioned appeal for imperial decentralization (what Catholics would call “subsidiarity”). There is an unremarked similarity between these ideas and Burke’s argument that George III should devolve the rights of taxation and legislation to the American colonies as a means of keeping them within the British Empire (a formula later applied, successfully, to Canada) and his advocacy of granting greater religious liberty to Ireland. On a similar logic, Metternich urged Francis to grant a degree of local rule to the Austrian territories in Italy as part of a wider federalization of the empire that would have made the emperor the hub of four semi-autonomous regions corresponding to “the nationality of the province and the interests that result from their local conditions.” Burkean, indeed.

Convincing as these examples are, however, there are some gaps in Siemann’s analysis. Even after 900 pages, it is not entirely clear what made up Metternich’s moral core. What was it, other than the status quo, that he saw as worth defending? Was there a deeper “good” that his elegant structures were designed to protect, or was it simply stability for stability’s sake? In the cases of Poland and Italy, how much did Metternich’s views have to do with preserving the ancient foundations from which political legitimacy

derived, as opposed to merely ensuring the functioning of cogs in a stable balance of power?

Of course, Metternich was operating within a state, Austria, that was the most encircled and geopolitically vulnerable in Europe; he did not have the luxury of attachments to historical constitutionalism afforded by Britain's island geography. Yet it is noteworthy that even when he had the advantage of a favorable margin of power after Napoleon's demise, Metternich did not attempt to resurrect the hoary traditions and estates of the Holy Roman Empire, as one suspects a Burke might have done.

Christianity was probably a more important part of Metternich's worldview than was previously realized, as Siemann shows by relating the emotional reactions that Metternich recorded after encountering a small painting of Christ in Padua and the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. Metternich's essentially

out, even after Siemann's attempt at a convergence, it is in this question of the moral sources of order. Where Burke saw order as springing upward from the foundations of family and friends, for Metternich order seems to have been channeled downward through the state or international system. Perhaps because he was concerned primarily with restoring a system that had collapsed after years of devastating war, and because he presided over a complex empire in which localism, carried too far, could dismantle the whole edifice, Metternich prioritized stability as an intrinsic rather than merely instrumental good, over the preservation of a domestic social order rooted in precedent and custom. By contrast, because Burke was concerned with preserving long-held English liberties against a still-emerging revolutionary threat, he was concerned primarily with a domestic good. There was also an essential difference in their respective senses

Western societies riven by atomization, the inroads of radicalism, and the splintering of the political commons into antagonistic blocs; the second requires a bolstering of the external bulwarks against great-power war. Such conditions inevitably produce a recognition of the limits of gradualism among conservatives fed up with years of rearguard compromise who desire a proactive rather than an essentially defensive and recessionary policy program.

As in Metternich's time, the domestic and the international levels are of course intertwined. When the ultimate test of the Metternich "system" came in 1848, it showed that any stability between states that themselves were of uncertain legitimacy in the eyes of their peoples was doomed to end in crisis, however elegant such a system might seem externally. The nationalist revolutions of 1848 saw an out-of-touch elite caught off guard by the strength of popular dissatisfaction that had accumulated

## Conservatives face a weakening of the domestic order at the same time that the return of **great-power competition** threatens international order.

tragic view of human nature (reflecting the influence of Kant's "crooked timber of humanity") was consistent with the Christian acceptance of mankind's fallenness. Nevertheless, many of the natural attachments that conservatives see as having the greatest claim to our affections seem missing in him. Metternich showed a good deal of hostility to the layers of civil society that Burke and Tocqueville saw as the essential ballast to the social order and as a check on the power of the state. He did not show much interest in protecting his own caste, the old Bohemian nobility, in the way that Burke guarded the privileges of the Anglo-Irish gentry. And try as Siemann might, the picture he paints of Metternich as a doting father never fully sticks. (Anyone who has been a diplomat while raising young children will struggle to understand how Metternich could spend hours negotiating with other diplomats while his daughter lay dying upstairs.)

If there is a tension between Metternich and Burke that still stands

of *Heimat* or homeland: While both had roots outside the imperial center (Metternich coming from the Rhineland and Burke from Ireland), Metternich was, to use David Goodhart's terms, much more a transnational "anywhere" and Burke a particularist "somewhere." One can easily imagine Metternich eagerly making the rounds at Davos; Burke, not so much.

A tension between the Metternichian and Burkean dispositions is present in our own time. Writing in the early Cold War era—that is, prior to the 1960s—Kissinger and his contemporaries could largely take for granted the cohesion of Western societies and, like an early Metternich, devote their energies to questions of systemic stability almost as an abstraction. Today that is not possible; the time of upheaval Kissinger wrote about has arrived. Conservatives face a weakening of the domestic order at the same time that the return of great-power competition threatens international order. The first requires a bolstering of the internal cohesion of

beneath the surface of what had seemed to be a stable edifice.

A similar crisis exists today. To sustain an abstract international order built on the principles of reason, at the expense of historically specific sources of order within individual states, is to invite the consequences of 1848. To ignore the benefits of a well-maintained order above the level of the state, centered on alliances, is to flirt with a return of the old chaos of great-power war and pave the way for the loss of both internal and external order. "Order once shattered," as Kissinger observed, "can be restored only by the experience of chaos."

The task for our time is to preserve international stability while making a sustainable place for the domestic particularisms without which even the most rational of structures will collapse upon itself for want of popular legitimacy. This will require a more convincing convergence of Metternich and Burke than Siemann's beautiful book ultimately achieves. But that must, nevertheless, be our aim.

NR

# Communist Mystic

Text

PETER BAEHR

**B**OLSHEVISM'S appeal to Western intellectuals is a mystery we still struggle to explain. Why did artists who despised patriotism show a larger loyalty to Russian chauvinism? Why did writers defend a regime that repeatedly imprisoned, tortured, and killed writers? In short, why did intelligent people who lived in free countries worship at the altar of despotic states? Few thinkers studied this enigma more carefully than the British critic Rebecca West (1892–1983).

That is not an achievement we associate with her name. Rebecca West is more likely to be recalled for *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), an innovative psychological novel; or for *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941), that grand biotriavelogue of Yugoslavia on the cusp of war. Her reports on the Nuremberg trials, and the post-war trials of British fascists, also continue to find readers, especially among students of journalism. West's writings on Communism, by contrast, lie unread, unsung. Many of them sparked controversy in her own day, and are well worth revisiting in ours.

In articles, book chapters, and book reviews spanning six decades, she returned to the allure of Communism for educated Westerners. (Its attraction for militant members of the industrial working class was no real puzzle, she said, not least because Marxism deified the proletariat.) Reviewing the second volume of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* for the *Sunday Telegraph*, West bitterly recalled that "25 years ago a large part of the Western European and American population of intellectuals were, with disgusting single-mindedness, pinging for Stalin."

Decrypting Communism's appeal, West believed, required paying close attention to the lives of true believers, people such as Julius and Ethel

Rosenberg, Klaus Fuchs, and Alan Nunn May, and also to ex-Communist apostates such as Arthur Koestler and Richard Wright. She drew portraits of them all. But no life to her was more fascinating, and perhaps more revealing, than that of Whittaker Chambers (1901–1961), the Communist, later ex-Communist, informer whose testimony sealed the doom of Alger Hiss. It was in the conduct and words of Chambers that West found a source of longing for Communism that transcended Chambers himself. The context of her discovery was a trial and a book that caused a sensation in early Cold War America.

## THE TRIAL

A Harvard-educated lawyer, Alger Hiss (1904–1996) was a former State Department official who had accompanied Roosevelt to Yalta. Suave and quick-witted, Hiss could boast many accomplishments: These included being the founding secretary general of the United Nations Charter Conference and, at the time of his interrogation by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The vita was formidable both for what it included and for what it left out. Hiss's nemesis Whittaker Chambers would supply the deficiency.

No two men were less visibly and morally alike. Corpulent, somewhat disheveled, and, under klieg lights, soft-spoken, Chambers could never equal Hiss in social polish. But his gifts as an essayist, poet, and controversialist were never in doubt from his student days at Columbia University onward; no less a figure than Lionel Trilling attested to them. When Chambers joined the Communist Party in 1925, he was first assigned to write for its chief organs—the *Daily Worker* and *The New Masses*—before being inducted, complete with Russian handler, into the Communist underground; its operatives had penetrated, inter alia, the departments of State, Labor, and Treasury. Chambers acted as a courier, transmitting purloined information to Soviet military intelligence. His comrades and co-conspirators included Alger Hiss. Their relationship was to be broken by character and by events.

Undergoing a metamorphosis of disillusionment that accelerated during

Stalin's purge trials of 1936 and 1937, Chambers defected from the underground in 1938, went into hiding, and then reemerged to reveal to Adolf Berle, an assistant secretary of state, the extent of Communist penetration of the United States government; the Soviet–Nazi non-aggression pact of August 1939 was just one month old. Berle, though wary of Chambers, disclosed the information he provided to the White House and to the FBI, where it lay dormant. The invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany in June 1941 had turned the vanguard state of Communism into a potential American ally. In the meantime, Chambers resumed public life as a book reviewer and essayist at *Time* magazine, a short career that peaked in his appointment as senior editor.

At war's end, Chambers had no intention of revisiting his Communist past in public or of exposing former comrades. If he was now a pronounced antagonist of Communism, and a fervent Christian convinced that the world must now choose between "God or Man, Soul or Mind, Freedom or Communism," both the enmity and the faith could be amply addressed in journalism.

But in 1948, the previous disclosure to Berle resurfaced and Chambers was subpoenaed by HUAC to testify before it. In August of that year, he divulged the names of several United States Communist Party members. Alger Hiss was one of them. Yet in a bizarre twist of an already convoluted tale, Chambers sought to protect his former friend by withholding the most damning evidence against him. Pressed by HUAC under oath to say whether Hiss had engaged in espionage while holding government office, Chambers denied that he had. It was a plain lie, contrived to shield Hiss from total disgrace. It was as if Shakespeare had risen from the grave to pen a 20th-century tragedy. The stratagem failed. For when Chambers was provoked on *Meet the Press*, a radio program, to repeat his assertion that Hiss was a Communist Party member while in government employ, Hiss launched a defamation suit against his accuser. Only then, on the defensive, did Chambers unearth documents that showed Hiss to be a Communist spy. In January 1950, in the second of two trials, Hiss was convicted of perjury. Because the statute

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of limitations had expired by the time of Hiss's grand-jury trials, he escaped indictment for espionage.

#### WEST'S VERDICT

In 1952, Whittaker (born Jay Vivian) Chambers published an account of the trials embedded in his life story. The book's pregnant title—"Witness"—carries three meanings. Chambers witnessed the nefarious activities of the Communist underground as an *apparat* insider. He was a witness in congressional proceedings. He was bearing witness so that the world would understand the evil it was confronting. Rebecca West reviewed the memoir at length for *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1952) and, more concisely, when it appeared in a condensed British edition, for the *Sunday Times* (July 19, 1953). In both reviews she fastened on the personality of the protagonist and his family background, the most formative of all social milieus. Families shape us, she seems to say, not by creating replicas. Repulsion is as common as emulation; often they are combined. We grow sideways, recognizable offspring who are ineffaceably ourselves, forming around the core of our character and the happenstance of our era. In West's world, the essence of the political is the social. The essence of the social is the household.

The Chambers family story screamed loneliness and incompetence, typified by the dilapidated house in Lynbrook, Long Island, that its members lived in. Whittaker's brilliant journalist father was a drunkard. An overweening and neurotic mother sought to compensate for her husband's dysfunction. "The Chamberses were one of those middle-class families," declared West, "which drift into isolation as if they were criminals." It was from this habitus that Chambers sought escape.

A hackneyed judgment, repeated even by Hannah Arendt, was that Chambers fled from one "church" to another: from Communism to anti-Communism. Both Communism and its antithesis, it was said, afforded him sanctuary for faith and certitude. Rebecca West agreed that Communism was Chambers's refuge from a chaotic home and a humiliating childhood. But she concluded that no church would ever be comfortable with a man like Chambers because he threat-

ened its most basic idea: that truth is mediated through an organization. In marked contrast, Chambers balked at all intercession. He was a mystic, not a priest—a man of personal revelation who believed he had a direct line to God and God to him. The fact that Chambers broke with Communism, a body with its own clerisy, dogma, and taboos, showed just how little any institution could contain him. Equally, Chambers's love for the American countryside—the "third protagonist in the Hiss case"—evoked a kind of Christian pantheism redolent of Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, and Angelus Silesius.

For society at large, West continues, the mystic is both an inspiration and a danger. "Unselfish but egotistical," mystics are people who stop at nothing to tell the truth as they see it; their firmness of purpose is careless of tradition and a menace to themselves. Such persons strike at the heart of any established order not because they reject it, the stance of the negative dissenter, but because they demand that it live up to a cosmic standard of love and justice. Spouse and children are left to endure the quotidian, chaotic consequences of the mystic's timeless vision. Mere human artifacts, such as judicial arrangements, are conventions whose laws and precepts must not be allowed to bind the mystic's God-derived judgment. On West's appraisal,

Mr. Chambers has perhaps the most slender sense of legality that a highly intelligent man could possess. He seems hardly aware of the need to respect the attempts made by the community to reconcile the conflicting rights of its members. He seems, for one thing, to have a blind eye for contract. This can be seen, oddly enough, in his allusions to his religious affiliations. He says explicitly more than once that he does not accept the Quaker doctrine of nonresistance, yet he is an adherent of the Society of Friends because it is a center of mysticism.

It was thus completely in character that Chambers committed perjury to uphold his own determination of justice in the Hiss case. On Chambers's scale of reckoning, the authorities should know just enough to convince them that Hiss had been a Communist while active in the State Department. But they should not know the full record of Hiss's conduct, which would have revealed him also to be a spy. Little wonder that the agents of worldly institutions are perplexed by the mystic and have accused him "on these grounds: 'This man is telling the truth concerning eternity, but he is in error concerning time, and it is in time that we have to do our present duty.' There is much in this complaint. But the mystic has often been able to answer: 'Because I sought the truth in eternity, I alone have had the strength to tell the

## BEHOLD

Let the state highway cleave cold, stubbled fields  
so that both empty lanes extend like grace,  
and let prim churches in the ratio  
of seven Baptist to each Methodist  
appear with rigid regularity  
close to the road, their dead even closer,  
with small, flat rusting markers on most graves,  
then drive another twenty minutes more  
to see the trees defer to furrowed soil  
except for this one rise where pines aspire  
to reach where hawks and turkey vultures rule,  
and let those who have nursed the dirt behold  
the blush and burgundies of morning clouds  
that dare not stifle early rays of dawn  
from blanketing the hillside's eastern slope  
where mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles wait  
as gravestones chalice that unearthly light.

—A. M. JUSTER

Text

## BOOKS, ARTS &amp; MANNERS

truth in time.” *The Atlantic’s* erudite readers may have caught West’s allusion to Augustine, one of her earlier subjects: “Time and Eternity” is the title of Book 11 of his *Confessions*.

Another charge can be laid against the mystic; it is that the force of his pronouncements does not match their veracity. Since Chambers was at one time a Communist, the reader is tempted to take him as an authority on that dispensation. In fact, says West, he is an unreliable source and never more so than when he extenuates the behavior of Communists on the grounds that they were guided by misplaced idealism. Scotching this alibi, West insists that idealism was in short supply among Bolshevik militants. When Chambers cites Eugen Leviné (a member of the Communist Party of Germany who helped create the short-lived Bavarian Socialist Republic) as saying that “we Communists are always under the sentence of death,” West’s retort is scathing. Chambers’s statement is irrelevant to the issue at hand: Communist militancy and

precisely this covenant that socialists refused, believing it would pervert the workers’ movement and the wider society of which it was part; the very moderation of socialists was thus testament to their idealism. Bolsheviks, conversely, were openly contemptuous of idealism. They demanded military discipline, unquestioning loyalty, a subordination of all moral imperatives to the diktat of the party. And so it was that, during the Blitz, as ordinary Britons—socialists and conservatives and liberals alike—demonstrated the faith of people who would rather die for freedom than submit to German domination, British Communists looked to the main chance: With the Stalin–Hitler agreement still intact, they did all in their limited power to weaken Britain in its moment of extremity.

Why, then, did Chambers pay “undeserved tributes” of idealism to the Communist Party, even as he condemned it as pure wickedness? The answer is that Communism provided him with spiritual

Dreyfus’ greatest literary defender, and whose relationship to the Roman Catholic Church showed the same inconsistency as Whittaker Chambers’ relationship to the Society of Friends. The spectators would often have been greatly perplexed.

## FAILURE AND POWER

The opinions I just summarized derive from Rebecca West’s review of *Witness for The Atlantic Monthly*. When, a year later, she offered British readers of the *Sunday Times* an appreciation of the book, truncated to four-fifths of its original version, West’s emphases were somewhat different. Her judgment of Chambers was also harder. To be sure, she calls his memoir a “subject only for respect and wonder, since it draws characters so that more is known about the soul, and carries the human argument a stage further.” But the mystic motif is absent. More heavily accented is West’s contention that the Communism of intellectuals is a response to personal

America received not just the illiterate or destitute. Its immigrants also included those who carried with them the legacy of high European culture or, at least, a culture far more refined than that of their **new neighbors**.

treason in the English-speaking world during the 1930s and ’40s. It is not just that very few Communists were ever sent to jail in America or Britain and that, if they were incarcerated, it was only for short periods. It is also that the Rosenbergs will be the first Communists ever to have been executed in the United States. In contrast, millions have been murdered and imprisoned in the lands where Communism prevails, so that it would be more accurate to say, “We anti-Communists are always under sentence of death.”

West also questions Communist idealism from another angle. It is true that the party’s propaganda about peace and the poor attracts persons of good intention. But Bolshevism is not an idealistic creed; it is implacably instrumental. Lenin’s party offered “a contract with the proletariat, guaranteeing it the monopoly of economic profit in exchange for a monopoly of political power.” It was

release. It was only after his younger brother’s suicide that he resolved to become a Communist. “He then took a vow to purge the world of the baseness which he conceived to have killed his brother. The purity of Party discipline seemed to him a solvent which would wash away the filth which had choked the boy.” And while the indifference to self and to suffering that Chambers attributes to Leviné is not actually a feature of Communist behavior, it is most emphatically “recommended by all the classic religions to those who wish to develop their consciousness of God.” Rehearsing an analogy that appears often in her writings, Rebecca West invites readers to return to the Dreyfus case

and try to imagine what it would have been like had the witness who exposed the Army conspiracy been not the straightforward soldier, Colonel Picquart, but Charles Péguy, the Christian poet and philosopher who was

and social failure. Again, both hinge on problems of family adjustment and status insecurity.

We are all aware, Rebecca West remarks, of the spectacular kinds of success that attend the Rockefellers and the Astors. Less recognized is a peculiar kind of American failure. America received not just the illiterate or destitute. Its immigrants also included those who carried with them the legacy of high European culture or, at least, a culture far more refined than that of their new neighbors. Such European immigrants lacked the “practical gifts used in the expansion of industry and commerce” that their robust compatriots possessed. Nor were they sufficiently brilliant to make an impression even where cultural openings were available. They were objects of ridicule to their neighbors, who were offended by their air of foreign superiority, and derided for their impotence in the mechanical

arts. And this contempt was shared by those at whom it was aimed, transmuted into self-disgust. Unable, by skill and by predilection, to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by their new environment, such people “fled into isolation and fantasy and sat unvisited in their tumbledown houses.” Whittaker Chambers’s family was the epitome of this sorry breed. West quotes a passage from *Witness*: “I am an outcast. My family is outcast. We have no friends, no social ties, no church, no organization that we claim and that claims us, no community. We could scarcely be more foreign in China than in our alienation from the life around us. . . . It puts things of the world first. We put the things of the mind first. It knows what it wants better than we know what we want.”

This admission is more self-aware, West adds, than the reasons Chambers adduces for his joining the Communist Party: distress at the plight of the toiling masses under capitalism and an altruistic impulse to come to their aid. That, West says, “is great nonsense.” It is not only that many among these masses were doubtless in a far better state of psychological and social repair than Chambers himself. It is also that the background of Chambers’s decision to become a Communist is a far better clue to his conversion than is any lofty wish to help the proletariat. Chambers joined the Communist Party as an act less of self-sacrifice than of self-preservation. His new life gave him all that his old life had so miserably failed to deliver:

The Communist Party admitted him to a comradeship that spreads all over the world; and in addition it gave him constant employment and a dramatic sense of power over the community that had rejected him and his family. Any mention of uplifting the suffering workers was a useful device to enable him to forget that he was not getting these benefits free but was earning them by rendering services to the Soviet Union.

More generally, she adds, no middle-class child today can any longer expect to enjoy a secure, prestigious, and prosperous life built on the wealth of his parents. For that wealth is diminishing or at least uncertain. Only the children of the very rich, and sometimes not even they, can expect to live as their parents did. This predicament is a magnet for mem-

bers of the younger generation who are attracted by “the prospect of joining a secret society offering them membership in a world-wide organization and many advantages over the next man in getting a job, while enabling them to pretend that they are accepting these benefits for the sake of the needy proletariat.” And this explains two related phenomena. First, why the Communist Party was so successful in recruiting middle-class intellectuals during the Twenties and Thirties, two decades of maximum insecurity. Second, why many non-Communists were vitriolic in their campaign against Chambers and anyone like him who exposed Communist activity: These critics had “an aching sense that Communism might have been a way out for the stranded bourgeoisie”—an exit to privilege and respect—that indiscreet informers were wrecking.

Among Rebecca West’s posthumously published works is *Family Memories*, a series of recollections. Rejecting Communism, she says, was the “second most important thing” in her life (marriage to Henry Maxwell Andrews being the first). It was “a political decision I made when I was quite young and which I still hold to, or rather which still holds me as I approach death.” It cost her time and energy that she wished to devote to her novels. It weighed on her health and her nerves. It earned loathing from Marxists, such as George Lichtheim, and mockery from American liberals, including Mary McCarthy, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Richard Rovere. All were incredulous at West’s defense of the pre-McCarthy HUAC investigation into Communist subversion that netted Alger Hiss.

The subject of *Witness* understood West better than those critics did. In December 1947, before being dragged into HUAC’s investigation, Chambers penned for *Time* a long review of *The Meaning of Treason*, West’s study of British fascists. The appreciative review contains the lapidary observation that “Rebecca West is a Socialist by habit of mind, and a conservative by cell structure.”

Beyond cell and mind, Rebecca West possessed the spirit of a fighter for liberty. She has still to enter the pantheon of Western critics of Communism that houses George Orwell and Raymond Aron. After decades of neglect, it is well past time she enjoyed, in public reckoning, their company and stature. **NR**

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# Garner the Grammarian

BY BRYAN GARNER

## Perplexingly Pesky Pronouns

**D**URING the Democratic debate on March 15, Senator Bernie Sanders said, “One difference between Joe and I is . . .” Nearly three decades before, then-candidate Bill Clinton said, “Please vote for Al Gore and I.” It’s also a favorite bungle of Senators Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) and Cindy Hyde-Smith (R., Miss.). The misuse of a nominative for an objective pronoun is nothing new, and it knows no party lines: Republicans and Democrats alike make the mistake.

Americans in general seem prone to it today. A generation ago, it was one clear mark of the uneducated speaker, only a notch above *It don’t make no difference*.

The problem that pronouns raise for speakers of English is that we don’t normally inflect noun elements to reflect their function in a sentence. That is, *table* remains *table* when subject or object. (That’s not true in Latin, for example: The word changes its ending according to its function—*mensa* as subject and *mensam* as object.) With pronouns, however, it’s different: We have six sets of English pronouns that change form—*I/me*, *we/us*, *he/him*, *she/her*, *they/them*, and *who/whom*. Those are the only six.

Each of those six pronouns has two cases. The pronouns in the nominative (or subject) case are *I*, *we*, *he*, *she*, *they*, and *who*. The pronouns in the objective (or object) case are *me*, *us*, *him*, *her*, *them*, and *whom*. The objective case is called for whenever the pronoun is the object of a verb (*She called me*) or the object of a preposition (*She sat beside me*). Only linking verbs (such as *be*-verbs) take a nominative in the predicate (*It was I who called her*).

The trouble Bernie and Bill had arises typically when a pronoun is coupled with another word (*She called Jim and me*) (*She sat beside Jill and me*). There’s a weird tendency to want to use *I* in those instances. Teachers have traditionally admonished their students to leave Jim and Jill out of the equation: Omit the first element, and what would you say? You’d never say *\*She called I* or *\*She sat beside I*. (In linguistics, the asterisk indicates a nonstandard construction.) So the pronoun shouldn’t change with the addition of another noun element, when both are objects of the verb.

In the second paragraph of this piece, I called the nominative pronoun in this kind of construction a “mistake.” But is it really? Is it still considered an outright error to say *\*The difference between Joe and I is . . .*? Does it deserve an asterisk? It might surprise you that modern linguists and grammarians are divided on the point. The British are leading the charge on calling it Standard English. Two British grammarians, Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum, have said that the usage is “so common in speech and used by so broad a range of speakers that it has to be recognized as a variety of Standard English”

EDITOR’S NOTE: In this issue, we introduce a regular column on English grammar and usage by Bryan Garner, whose many books include *The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation*, *Garner’s Modern English Usage*, and *The HBR Guide to Better Business Writing*.

(*The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, 2002). A popular writer on language, the *Times* columnist Oliver Kamm, has blogged that “a pronoun within a coordinate phrase is free to take either nominative or accusative case.” Presumably he’d be happy with *\*Please call her and I*.

My own empirical findings are to the contrary. Big data allows us to assess the relative frequency of alternative constructions in a way that is most useful to grammarians and lexicographers. In 1820, the phrase *between him and me* outnumbered *\*between him and I* by a ratio of 93 to 1 in print sources. Today the ratio is 53 to 1. Granted, that’s big data, so included in the mix are all the instances in which novelists have tried to signal through dialogue that a speaker is ill educated or socially insecure.

But if you take the phrase *between you and me* versus *\*between you and I*, the ratio today is only 16 to 1. Much closer. Even so, the disparity in frequency is quite pronounced—and it’s not nearly close enough to call *\*between you and I* an example of Standard Written English.

But what about spoken English? Lawrence Summers, the president of Harvard University, used the phrase in an interview a few years ago. Is that enough to make it standard? I think not. But this gets into thorny questions of right and wrong, and the simple dichotomy disserves linguistic commentators.

That’s why, in 2009, I created the Language-Change Index to gauge the relative correctness or incorrectness of questionable usage. Stage 1 is clearly wrong; Stage 5 is clearly right. Here are the gradations: Stage 1 (rejected in Standard English); Stage 2 (spreading but widely shunned by educated speakers); Stage 3 (widespread but rejected by most copy editors); Stage 4 (ubiquitous but rejected by many punctilious copy editors); Stage 5 (fully accepted and objected to only by eccentric reactionaries). It’s rather like linguistic epidemiology. By Stage 2 we’re seeing community spread.

In my Oxford University Press book *Garner’s Modern English Usage* (2016), I’ve declared *\*between you and I* to be at Stage 2. Now, four years later, I might reluctantly put it at Stage 3, given the frequency of its appearance in the speech of educated speakers. Experience tells us that once it gets to Stage 4, then the next stage—full acceptance—is inevitable with time. And as we’ve seen, some Britons already want to peg *\*between you and I* at Stage 5.

Earlier I mentioned the “socially insecure.” Why? Because the misuse of *I* for *me* has for many decades been considered a hallmark of hypercorrection. That’s what linguists call it when an ill-schooled person makes an error by attempting to use a prestigious form of language—but gets it wrong. That is, people mistakenly think that *me* or *us* is somehow rural or uneducated. That’s because they’ve been corrected for saying *Me and my friends went to the playground* and admonished instead to say *My friends and I went . . .* Overgeneralizing, they came to think that there’s something wrong with the word *me*.

None of these problems have been helped by the tendency, throughout the English-speaking world, to drop grammar from school curricula—the subject of our next column. **NR**

Film

# Emma with An Edge

ROSS DOUTHAT

LIKE American geopolitical power and sitcoms set in New York City, the Jane Austen adaptation peaked in the 1990s, when one dizzy two-year period gave us the iconic Colin Firth mini-series version of *Pride and Prejudice*, the near-perfect Ang Lee adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, Amy Heckerling's brilliant Beverly Hills reimagining of Emma Woodhouse in *Clueless*, a lovely Gwyneth Paltrow turn as the original Miss Woodhouse in a handsome *Emma*, and a raw and effective *Persuasion* with a young Ciaran Hinds.

Every Austen adaptation since has been overshadowed by that remarkable run, with filmmakers mostly opting to work with minor novels—*Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, even the unpublished novella *Lady Susan*, which became Whit Stillman's *Love and Friendship*—rather than attempt to top Firth's Mr. Darcy, Emma Thompson's Elinor Dashwood, or Alicia Silverstone's Cher.

The notable exceptions have seemed aware that they need to do something different or distinctive, lest they fall into the shadow of the Austen peak. Thus in Joe Wright's 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*, we were given Austen by way of Emily Brontë, with primness abandoned for earthiness, an emotive, miscast Keira Knightley as Elizabeth Bennet, and a Darcy in Matthew Macfadyen whose undone shirts made him look less a prosperous landowner than a Byronic intellectual on the make.

This spring's *Emma* adaptation, oddly entitled "Emma." (the period is conspicuous), takes roughly the opposite approach. Under the direction of Autumn de Wilde, a longtime rock-music photographer making an interesting cinematic debut, the movie heightens the costumed formality, the precise ritual, the almost absurd theater of the Georgian gentry. Instead of heavy breathing and heaving bodices, this

Mia Goth and Anya Taylor-Joy in *Emma*

adaptation owes more to the pointillism of Wes Anderson, with its dioramic compositions, brightly colored symmetries, and fishbowl sets. Like Yorgos Lanthimos in *The Favourite* two years ago, de Wilde emphasizes the exoticism of the upper-class past—but with a blithely amused rather than black-humored spirit.

That amusement, however, doesn't prevent the movie from emphasizing the less-than-nice aspects of its heroine, who is played by Anya Taylor-Joy with a bit more edge than Paltrow and Silverstone brought to their incarnations. As a character, Emma Woodhouse is finely balanced between naïveté and snobbery, and Taylor-Joy's variation feels more coolly snobbish: Her attempts to keep her friend Harriet (Mia Goth) from marrying a decent farmer feel more sinister than daft, and her crucial, instantly regretted insult to the daffy Miss Bates (Miranda Hart, always welcome) seems less like a clumsy error to be repented and more like a damning exposure of her inner self.

This emphasis is an interesting choice, suggesting that Emma's moral maturation requires a steep ascent from a low beginning. But it fits uneasily with the movie's other major dramatic choice, which is to cast the shaggy, extremely handsome English folk singer Johnny Flynn as Mr. Knightley, Emma's neighbor, family friend, mentor, and eventual, unexpected suitor.

Flynn is an appealing, strong actor, and one of his songs plays over the cred-

its and it's great (so is the whole soundtrack, strong on hymns and folk songs). And in real life he's 14 years older than Taylor-Joy, which almost fits the 17-year age difference in the novel. But on screen he plays younger, much more her equal than any sort of elder, and the camera emphasizes their physical chemistry, playing up their sexual attraction from very early in the story. (That he makes his first appearance naked, awaiting dressing by his servant, is the movie's one Byronic touch.) So this Emma needs more moral instruction, perhaps, than other versions, but her instructor doesn't quite have the standing to instruct, since he's framed as her peer and potential lover from the start—to the point where all the other possible suitors seem even more like obvious distractions than in other versions of this tale.

If this combination doesn't quite work, though, the chemistry of the leads offers rewards of a different sort, and as in any decent Austen adaptation there are plenty of pleasures in the secondary work: Bill Nighy as Emma's hypochondriacal father, Josh O'Connor's unctuous vicar Mr. Elton (an interesting variation on his Prince Charles in *The Crown*), and an especially amusing take on the vicar's insufferable wife from Tanya Reynolds. This is not quite a movie for the Austen pantheon, but neither is it a waste of talent. And since you will almost certainly be watching it on demand, from the comfort of your quarantine, it serves one important purpose: It is definitely *cozy*. **NR**

# Happy Warrior

BY HEATHER WILHELM

## The Nintendo Solution

**E**ACH January, *Texas Monthly* unveils its annual “Bum Steer” awards, a tradition that celebrates an authoritative list—in the magazine’s view, at least—of a year’s worth of embarrassing behavior, ten-gallon villainy, can’t-make-it-up incompetence, and general ineptitude from Texans of all stripes.

“Last year,” the magazine intoned in its 2020 “Bum Steer” introduction, “many Texans comported themselves in an admirable, even heroic manner. But too many other Texans seemed quite happy to try to compensate for all that decency by acting in an idiotic, even malevolent fashion.”

One could squabble over whether some of the awards are deserved—even in the great republic of Texas, our “national magazine” often moseys to the political left—but the reasons for most are decidedly clear. Who, for instance, could fail to question the judgment of the Houston restaurant that recently unveiled a \$400 plate of fajitas? Who could possibly applaud Neiman Marcus for marketing a \$7,100 couch shaped like a giant hot dog in a bun? Moreover, who could defend the Lufkin, Texas, teenager who “was videotaped by her boyfriend opening a half-gallon tub of Blue Bell Tin Roof ice cream, licking it, and then replacing the lid and putting it back in the freezer”?

Ah, 2019—we did not know it then, but you were so innocent and quaint! Remember how people used to complain about how busy they were and how many places they had to be? Remember how, just a few months ago, one could waltz into a packed music festival or a crowded airplane or even a long line at a taco truck that might or might not have been sanitized in the past three days—or ever!—and fail to feel even a tiny flicker of fear? These days, defiling a carton of ice cream might get you sent to Gitmo in five seconds flat.

In the future, when the coronavirus pandemic remains only in the mists of our memory—and we all should earnestly pray this occurs sooner rather than later—we should first remember the heroes, helpers, and doers of this time: the doctors, first responders, truck drivers, grocery-store cashiers, donors to charity, and more. But this moment will have its own select list of Bum Steers, too.

Forget licking the Blue Bell. Here is an actual headline from the March 25 *New York Post*: “Influencer reportedly hospitalized with coronavirus after licking toilet.” Here’s another headline, also from the *Post*, a mere day later: “Woman who licked toilet seat for ‘coronavirus challenge’ wants to cough on Dr. Phil.” I’ll just sit back for a moment and allow this all to sink in.

The hall of shame goes on, unfortunately. Who could forget the knuckleheaded spring-breakers who flooded Florida beaches and enthusiastically spread the virus while posing for press photos to show off the innovative new drinking game known as the “butt luge”? Who could forget the public

officials in New York City who exhorted everyone in the nation’s most crowded urban area to attend as many shared-plate dinners and parades and festivals as they possibly could before finally backing away wide-eyed and whispering, “Whoops. Never mind!”

I could go on and on, but it might lead some of us to eat or drink our feelings, and heaven knows we’re doing enough of that already. I ate a whole loaf of cornbread last night! Instead, I’ll share my own coronavirus-related secret, which occurred on the day President Trump announced the European travel ban, which was also the day that many Americans realized that (a) things on our shores were getting real and (b) we would be staying home for a long, long time.

At that moment, I did something I swore I would never, ever do, shattering a promise I made to myself long ago. I ordered my kids a Nintendo, paid for next-day shipping, and then let them play it for hours and hours upon end.

Yes, it’s true: I did not use our canceled spring-break travel to enrich my children’s STEM education, shore up their Spanish-speaking skills, or develop their high-level crafting abilities, as many earnest Facebook posts encouraged me to do. For days, my kids played *Mario Kart* and *Zelda*, occasionally calling in their useful Gen X parents—we, that heroic generation whose youth was seasoned with summer boredom, structureless afternoons, and hours of aimless video-game playing—to get them past the really hard sections like Bowser’s Castle or *Zelda*’s Social-Distancing Gauntlet or whatever they’re called these days.

They were not reading the news; thus, they had a magnificent time. For my part, I read the news, spiraled into various brief panics, ordered all the wrong groceries, texted almost everyone I knew, promised myself I would stop reading the news, felt an occasional surge of perhaps unwarranted optimism, and then promptly spoiled it by reading the news again. I also finished reading all 858 pages of *Lonesome Dove*. (I highly recommend that last item in case you’re looking for something to do.)

For us, remote schooling starts today; the days of wanton video-game consumption have finally come to an end. At press time, it’s scary out there; we can only pray, help where we can, and do our best. We should all hope that we leave this period with a new appreciation for the most important blessings of life—health, food, shelter, family, and friends—as well as the things we took for granted before. The simple clementine orange. The fresh carton of blueberries. A carton of untouched Blue Bell ice cream. The simple, glorious, and elegant—let’s face it, you knew this was coming—roll of toilet paper. And, of course, Nintendo. I doubted you before, maligned video-game system. Now you have my grudging respect.

NR

Ah, 2019—  
we did not  
know it then,  
but you were  
so innocent  
and quaint!

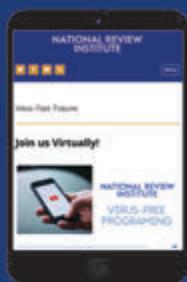
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