

The Crisis of the Medical Establishment

by George Friedman - February 11, 2021

It has been about a year since the world entered a medical crisis for which there had been no cure. For much of the pandemic, the best solution was to **contain the spread of COVID-19** while **scientists developed a vaccine**. It required a radical restructuring in how we lived our lives. More, the nature of the virus was such that any of us could be infectious without being sick. Anyone could be carrying the disease, so it was best to stay away from everyone, or so the thinking went.

Humans are by nature social animals – not just in the pleasure we take in being with others but in the way we produce the things we need to live and the things we need to live well. **I went on vacation last week** and felt as if I were venturing into a strange and dangerous world unlike any I had lived in before. We took a walk down a street for the pleasure of passing by strangers – a real but hitherto unknown need. The street was crowded with others who shared the need. Walking down a street is dynamic. It isn't fighter planes holding inviolable positions relative to each other. People change course, they stumble, they stop to look in store windows or at other people. Keeping six feet of separation is impossible. Unpleasant but not impossible was wearing a mask on a sweetly warm subtropical day, inhaling and exhaling my own damp heat.

There is a constant sense of danger, a constant feeling that the pleasure of a walk, and the infusion of a Goombay Smash (if you haven't tried a double, do), is a reckless act that not only endangers your life but threatens our social structure. Humans cannot live their lives like Phil Connors did in "Groundhog Day," a movie that depicts a man awakening every day only to relive the previous. It is a funny and horrifying movie. Life is finite; it can't be put on constant replay, not knowing when the song will move on. This was, in effect, **the consequence of the medical solution**.

This was the first vacation I took in over a year, and I took it with a sense of reckless youth. It was a good feeling, one clearly shared by many. The use of masks was random, distances weren't kept, bars were filled. These were not the know-nothing rednecks that are imagined to be the primary source of such behavior. They were the denizens of luxury hotels. The sense of joyous rebellion was clear. It occurred to me then that the world's ministries of health would not declare the end of social distancing and masking but rather a new way to measure risk, and I think it is taking place now.

The virus is dangerous, albeit less so than, say, smallpox, diphtheria, cholera or Ebola, and the prevailing wisdom is that those younger than 65 years old who have no comorbidities are far less

likely to die. The total number of dead is horrific in spite of this. During the polio epidemic of the 20th century, which primarily afflicted children, often killing or maiming them, doctors did not decree that all of society abort their normal lives. They accepted random disease as a possibility inherent in being human. We went on, and some wept. They knew doctors were working on a vaccine, but that work had been underway for years, and no one knew when or if there would be one. In the meantime, they lived their lives. Doctors didn't demand that we suspend our lives for an unknown period. How long can you go without seeing your children and grandchildren, without going to a relative's funeral or wedding, without constant awareness of the risks of living?

In the end, a polio vaccine was developed and the disease went away, but we were not expected to halt our lives in the meantime. When it was developed – I was about five years old – everyone was quickly and joyously given the vaccine. It is very important to see the different views not only of the disease but of the vaccine. Everyone embraced the polio vaccine. But vast numbers of people all over the world have declared to pollsters at least that they will not take the COVID-19 vaccine. Some are afraid that microchips to control us will be inserted. Others that the whole disease was invented to enrich Big Pharma. There are those who have rejected vaccines for a long time. But there are also now those who simply do not trust the medical community. Some fear the breakneck speed at which the vaccine was developed. Others believe that the medical establishment's pretense to scientific rectitude is an illusion. In short, **they believe doctors don't know what they're doing**. And this is compounded by the belief that the risk of the disease is less than the risk of the vaccine.

I am not sure where this distrust started. For me it was with eggs, a trivial matter. When I was young, I was given eggs to eat constantly. Then I learned later that eggs were dangerous for one's cholesterol levels. More recently, I learned that on the contrary, they were good. For most of us, our contact with science is the media declaring the latest food to promise eternal life or catastrophe all announced with utter confidence. It seems to many as if they have no idea what they are doing but are at all times certain. My perception may be wrong, but it is a social force nonetheless.

I am certainly taking the vaccine. I also understand the dynamic of scientific research, and that at each point they were doing the best they could do. But the fact is that the only solutions they had at the beginning were unsustainable in the long run and failed to take into account the price those solutions imposed. In other cases, life went on and the individual could determine action. In this case, the world changed its shape to deal with the disease. And that imposed a disease of the sort medicine is not meant to deal with, changing the fabric of the lives we have built for ourselves. I saw while on vacation on the street the eagerness, even with risk, to get on with life. I also sense the distrust that, fairly or not, has grown between scientist and civilian. The unwillingness to take the vaccine is a signal of the problem.

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