

Comment on  
**Robson, D. (2020) Vaccinating against viruses of the mind.**  
*The Psychologist*, July/August 2020, 40 – 43.

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I started drafting this article as *comment* on the above article with a view to dropping it into the “comments” space allocated to the online version. But then I realised that, if I did that, the post would lose the referencing system and formatting. The best I could do was drop in a one-line *comment* to the effect that readers could find this version here. Then I realised that, not having to conform to the limitations of space available in the *comments* sections of *The Psychologist* meant that I could expand my discussion of some of the issues.

I found Robson’s article deeply disturbing – especially after I had tried, several times, to play the “Bad News” game to which links are given within the article. Both my wife and I, and a colleague who I asked to play it, found it utterly bizarre. One was forced to try to play a role in a “game” which had prescriptions as crazy as the current network of lockdown policies<sup>i</sup> and those of the extraordinary, but largely unformulated, insidious network of Woke prescriptions (and de-platforming activities) relating to the avoidance “offence”, “harm”, and sharing of “unacceptable” information. It therefore seemed to be designed, in an Orwellian way, to lead one to accept this bizarre twittering world as normal - and thus, again in an Orwellian manner, to have exactly the opposite effect to the manifest objectives of the author.

But I also found the article disturbing for another reason: I count myself as among those who wish to challenge current government policies and the disinformation – including that conveyed by omission of key information – on which they are apparently<sup>ii</sup> based. Anything I might say would be liable to be construed as the kind of “misinformation” Robson rails against and thus likely to be eliminated by the very processes the author recommends!

The misinformation and disinformation (including support generated by failure to collect information vital to policy evaluation<sup>iii</sup>) in current government statements and prescriptions relating to COVID19 is paralleled by that which lies behind a swathe of government legislation such as that designed to force us toward a mythical, and actually physically unobtainable, thing called “green energy”<sup>iv</sup>. This in turn is grounded in a misguided, and ultimately self-defeating) effort to stem global warming without tackling the deeply embedded systemic causes of the destruction of the soils, seas, and atmosphere<sup>v</sup>. It is likewise paralleled by government policy and social action designed to create an (equally unobtainable) society free of hate, harm, and abuse by inflicting unprecedented harm and abuse through the law<sup>vi</sup> and via personalised attack (de-platforming and “cancellation”) on those deemed to have offended<sup>vii</sup>. These punishments in turn parallel the stoning to death of religious heretics and offenders against moral codes in the past<sup>viii</sup>

The irony is, of course, that the comments made in the last paragraph will be viewed by many – including perhaps the author of the article – as dangerous misinformation meriting deletion and, perhaps, wider action designed to silence me<sup>ix</sup>.

Yet understanding processes like those mentioned above and finding ways to curtail them (rather than finding ways to advance current government policies or ameliorate their effects as advocated by articles published in *The Psychologist*<sup>x</sup>) should be at the heart of psychologists' preoccupations and actions. I mean action specifically *as psychologists qua psychologists* - and not merely as citizens<sup>xi</sup>.

How have we been led into a situation in which the creation of a pervasive climate of fear has generated massive support for government usurpation of powers previously associated with totalitarian regimes<sup>xii</sup>? How has it come about that one simplistic, non-systemic, policy after another - in education<sup>xiii</sup>, discussions of energy production, fixing climate change<sup>xiv</sup> and so on - has cross-nationally been inflicted on the populations of one country after another with barely a murmur of protest? Like the policies being implemented in the name of halting the spread – indeed elimination – of COVID-19, the promotion of such policies has spread across national boundaries like the most virulent of biological viruses. They amount to the spread of misinformation having disastrous consequences on a grand scale.

All of this raises fundamental and deeply problematical questions, not addressed Robson, of how to define “misinformation”. (But see Mylonaki & Tigas, 2018 for such a discussion).

At root, many of these problems stem from our neglect of systemic thinking and our enthrallment to non-systemic (reductionist) science. By “non systemic science” I refer to studies which fail to investigate the multiple consequences of an “experimental” intervention. To illustrate: In agriculture, study after study has demonstrated the “benefits” of fertilizers, but failed to study the effects on the fertility of the soils and the poisoning of micro-organisms, birds, and other creatures in the food chain ... and, thus, ultimately ourselves. Historically, steam engines were presented as conferring great benefits in terms of efficiency. But they were, and are, only “efficient” if one neglects their effects on the soils, seas, and atmosphere and their contribution to massive social division and unrest. Economic “development” has been presented as an almost unbridled benefit when it is perhaps the most serious disaster, worse than the largest meteorite, that has ever been inflicted on the planet.

Put another way, they stem from a constricted framing of issues, from blinkered tunnel-vision of a form usually associated with some forms of mental illness.<sup>xv</sup>

How have we come to accept these thoughtways as standard?

The mental viruses which have spread around the world and facilitated these policies and developments are much more concerning than the mental viruses supporting the spread of the disinformation Robson seeks to address<sup>xvi</sup>. They are much more deadly than the biological virus<sup>xvii</sup>. How do these mental viruses, including this extraordinary mental blindness (tunnel vision), this neglect of the obvious, spread? How come they release such draconian attacks on civil liberties by governments and interpersonal

viciousness (de-platforming paralleling the classical stoning of heretics and dis-believers) between individuals?<sup>xviii</sup>

There is certainly room for interventions to inhibit this international sociological/psychological flow of information, disinformation, and thought process. But the targets are not those who seem to be in the David Robson's sights.

And core questions to be addressed in seeking a way forward may include asking what leads so many politicians and public servants to propagate these single-factor-based perspectives? What leads researchers to propagate non-systemic research which fails even to discuss its limitations? What leads Google and other internet platforms to join this campaign to eliminate posts deemed to promote misinformation - which turns out<sup>xix</sup> to be anything that someone in this transnational, unaccountable, authority does not like.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> For evidence of their craziness see eg Swiss Policy Research (2020), Kendrick (2020), Szwarc (2020), and Raven (2020, July). Beyond that, according to *Recovery* (2020), the UN World Food Programme has warned that 270,000,000 people face starvation as a result of the global impact of current lockdowns and restrictions. This alone makes the response to Covid the single most lethal policy that Governments have ever adopted, potentially killing many times more than Mao, Stalin and Hitler combined.

<sup>ii</sup> The real problem with the COVID-19 policies is that they are *not* nationally based in the way they are presented by eg the BBC with numerous references to national "experts". They are *international*. Understanding how this has come about is perhaps the most neglected problem of all. The very belief that they are somehow nationally generated (and can thus be nationally altered) is perhaps the most important "misinformation" to be undermined and resisted. A *psychological* explanation of the international nature of the Lockdown culture might found in seeking an understanding the nature, generation, and diffusion of simplistic mental viruses. In this particular case this shows up as: "Here we have problem and it is to be fixed by these and these simplistic, non-systemic, interventions". But an analogous situation is to be found in other areas such as education (see Raven 2020k) and climate change (see eg Raven, 1995, 2018). A *socio-cybernetic* explanation might revolve around the operation of a complex network of social forces (Raven, 2009, 2010; Raven note, 2021). A sociological/political/economic explanation might revolve around the political/economic interventions of one or more power groups (eg China [see eg Senger, Rudin, *et al* (2021), Lennox, 2020], the World Economic Forum [see <https://winteroak.org.uk/2020/10/05/klaus-schwab-and-his-great-fascist-reset/> ] and the deliberate creation of a moral panic (Such an explanation has been offered by Cooper & Navarro-Genie [2020] among others).

<sup>iii</sup> This extends to the almost total neglect of, first, the much more serious effects of lockdowns by way of destroying the lives, livelihoods, and deaths of millions (see eg Szwarc op.cit., Raven op. cit., OECD/Ramos and Hynes, 2020, UN world food programme) and, second, the even more serious destruction of civil liberties that are likely to lead to the introduction of totalitarian states worldwide (see eg Sumption, 2020, 2021). Put another way, not only has there been little comprehensive evaluation of COVID-19 policies qua COVID policies, there has been even less comprehensive evaluation of the wider effects of those policies.

<sup>iv</sup> The very idea that energy can be obtained and used from any source *without* having serious ecological consequences contradicts basic physical laws relating to the conservation of energy and matter. (For a fuller discussion of this point see Spash, 2016. For discussions of specific examples see: Royal Statistical Society (2019) discussion of the ecological effects of marine and wind farms [even the electronic radiation generated by the sea bed cables needed to convey electricity from

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- marine wind and tide farms has dramatic impact on marine life]; McKie (2021) for destruction inflicted by mining for cobalt for batteries; and Bhutada, G. (2021) for mining of rare earths required in the manufacture of many components in electrical and electronic devices, including computers.
- <sup>v</sup> See Raven (1995) Rees (2020).
- <sup>vi</sup> See Hate Crime Bill currently being progressed through the Scottish Parliament and proposals of English Law Society. (See Raven [2020h] for a commentary on the former).
- <sup>vii</sup> See the website of the Free Speech Union [www.freespeechunion.org/](http://www.freespeechunion.org/) for numerous examples of this.
- <sup>viii</sup> Murray (2020), Cooper & Navarro-Genie (2020).
- <sup>ix</sup> The extent of the extraordinary lengths the international big-tech companies (Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube) have taken to silence Trump and thousands of his supporters have only come to light since I drafted this *comment*. (See Rubin Report, 8 January 2020 for a discussion of these activities).
- <sup>x</sup> Studies of the second kind seem to dominate those listed at <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-33/april-2020/coronavirus-psychological-perspectives>
- <sup>xi</sup> I make exactly the same claim in other areas such as “education” and mental “illness”. It is not the psychologist’s job to advance government policy in these areas: it is to challenge the framing of the issues. (See Raven, 1994, 2020k)
- <sup>xii</sup> Sumption (2020, 2021), Good Law Project (2021)
- <sup>xiii</sup> Narrowing of the curriculum and High Stakes testing (see eg Raven, 2020k).
- <sup>xiv</sup> Eliminating “misinformation” on climate change is one of Robson’s explicit objectives. Yet most discussions proceed as if it can be fixed by the single-factor intervention of reducing CO2 emissions. Few underline that it can only be fixed by systemic intervention which simultaneously tackles the massive destruction of the soils, seas, and atmosphere created by the way we live. Radically change the way we live means getting rid of our cars, computers, energy intensive agriculture, and most trade as we know it. (See Raven 1995)
- <sup>xv</sup> The current craze to re-introduce with policies that have just been shown not to work (perhaps expecting a different effect) is also an easily recognisable mental illness.
- <sup>xvi</sup> As an aside relating to Robson’s belief that a knowledge of how effective propaganda is generated can some kind of inoculation against it one may note that, in what might be considered the ultimate insult to German intelligence, Hitler, in *Mein Kampf* described in detail how such manipulation was to be achieved *and then required all German citizens to read the book*.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Actually the links between the biological virus and its links to health and immunity have been less well studied than might be expected .... see Koops (2020), Kendrick (2020), Yeadon (2020) ... but such information as we do have undermines all faith in the mediaeval magical beliefs about 2 yard distancing and quarantine. On the other hand, the evidence that the imposition of these policies is having devastating effects worldwide is abundant, cumulating, according to an estimate from the UN Health Organisation’s that they will lead to 270 million deaths worldwide.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Of course, as noted in endnote 2, some authors have argued that these policies have not spread in this way but have been pushed along by eg the deliberate intervention of some powerful group (eg China or the World Economic Forum) or have are a product of the operation of a network of socio-economic forces.
- <sup>xix</sup> Mylonaki & Tigas (2018)

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Raven Note (2021). A pertinent illustration of the role of feedback loops leading to social destruction comes from the way in which the cumulative pursuit of self-interest leads to communal destruction and eventually the deaths of 270 million people and eventually self-destruction (the “tragedy of the commons”).

The basic problem is that, if one does not actively oppose these medieval Lockdown policies, which are no more effective than blood-letting, one is actively promoting the murder of these 270 million people worldwide

Yet, if one opposes them, one is, rightly, perceived as advocating “doing nothing”. This is unacceptable in a culture which has come to embrace the idea that all harms can be eliminated and all problems solved via one ideology or another (regulation, criminalisation, privatisation, communism, “green energy”).

What is worse, it defies “common sense” - because, obviously, I can stay at home and reduce my chances of infection.

Unfortunately, that triggers a “tragedy of the commons” sequence. Staying at home means I have to rely on others to look after me. Thus, if we all stay at home the commons collapses.

If I really stay at home, the first thing that happens is the guys in Bangladesh, who make my “non-essential” jumpers, get no money and starve.

But it soon emerges that we cannot all stay at home if I am to survive.

And so, given that, as quarantine and 2-yard safe distancing policies over the centuries have shown, viruses don’t actually respect closed doors, enacting the felt need to “do something” actually results not only in people dying of the virus, but even more dying as a result of the very Lockdown policies that have been introduced.

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