

Some Comments on Psychologists' reactions to the "Covid-19 'crisis'"

John Raven

www.eyeesociety.co.uk

Version Date: 29 August 2020

The July/August issue of *The Psychologist* consisted of a number of articles loosely related to the theme *Towards a New Normal and Beyond*.

The present note was initially prepared in response to the editor's call for comments on these articles but failed to meet the deadline for publication.

As a context for what follows, it is useful to mention the titles of three of the articles: *10 Lessons for dealing with a Pandemic*; *Vaccinating against viruses of the mind* (which dealt with how to stop people believing "fake news" about the virus, but failed to discuss how to encourage people to question, and resist, the grossly misleading "information" generated and propagated by the WHO and national governments), and *How do we ensure the responsible and practical use of PPE?*

While one thing that shocked me was the apparently pervasive acceptance of the international story (mental virus) about the seriousness of the epidemic and the need for, and claimed effectiveness of, the "lockdown" measures, I was even more shocked by the authors' failure to so much as mention of the need to study the psychological effects of the deadly and socially destructive "lockdown" measures that have been introduced in the name of slowing the spread of, or even eliminating, the virus. So far as I can see, these measures mainly have the effect of replacing the death and destruction that *might* have been caused by the virus by the certain death and destruction of lives and livelihoods of a vast number of people.

How could psychologists fail to comment on these things?

Much more serious, however, was what these articles implied about many psychologists' perceptions of their role. It seemed that most saw their jobs as being to assist governments to administer policies generated through the political process.

In contrast, my father¹ argued that it was not the job of the clinical psychologist to help fix people. My undergraduate professor argued that, contrary to what Burt would have had us believe, it was not the job of the psychologist to help assign pupils to a government-decreed three-tier educational system. It is not the job of the lecturer to convey information from the notebooks of the lecturer to the notebooks of the student without passing through the minds of either in order that those students pass examinations. I have myself argued that it is not the job of the psychologist to contribute to the workings of a hierarchical, single-factor organised, and deeply destructive "educational" system. It is not the job of the psychologist to

provide counselling services to help people adjust to their assigned position in our “educational” or occupational systems.

If it is *not* the job of the psychologist to make government decreed policies “work”, what should we be doing?

As I see it, it is our job to question those policies, ask for, and examine, the “evidence” supporting those policies (and what is omitted), and highlight whatever our own evidence suggests needs to be done

Yet the vast majority of non-academic psychologists are employed in roles like those mentioned earlier ... which perhaps accounts for the preoccupations of the authors of the articles in this *issue*.

For me, as a psychologist, the most terrifying aspect of the “crisis” has been to see how easy it is for “leaders” to harness some threat (in this case the exaggerated fear of death from the virus) to lead people to march toward their self-destruction (in this case the widespread destruction of lives and livelihoods, never mind civil liberties more generally). (Note the parallel to harnessing the fear of communism to lead people to war in Vietnam or Iraq and other similar actions). There has been hardly a murmur of protest. On the contrary, we have been greeted with widespread public demands to elaborate the privations. Protests from civil rights organisations have been conspicuous by their absence.

The questions are: (1) Through what governance arrangements might it be possible to deter our “leaders” from creating such situations, and (2) how would it be possible to nurture in citizens the capacity to question and resist the temptation to comply (and even elaborate) such demands? (These two questions, of course, represent the opposite sides of the coin represented by the concept of “authoritarianism”.)

We have been bamboozled by claims to be “following the science” via a two-word, blinkered, slogan about “saving lives”. Neither the word “science” nor the slogan stands up to critical examination.

The “science” we have been treated to has been classic reductionist, non-systemic, “science”².

In common with most such “science”, it fails to examine and document more than a fraction of the inputs and outcomes that ought to have been considered.

Outcomes of the “lockdown” policies which ought to have been studied, discussed, and weighted against the probable effects of adopting alternative policies include such things as the death and destitution inflicted on persons in no way infected by the virus in this country and abroad³.

These effects will accelerate over time and come to include the devastating effects of poverty, isolation, and destruction of careers on the one hand and such things as the effects of humiliation at the hands of “welfare” agencies on the other.

These are things which psychologists should have been studying and insisting that they be taken into account alongside the effects of the biological virus itself.

In point of fact, although this is not the place to go into it, the “science” involved in studies of the epidemiology of the biological virus itself does not stand up to critical examination even within the limited framework of reductionist science. For example, predictions of the outcomes of the kinds of dynamic systems modelling exercises that have been conducted vary dramatically with the quality of the measures used and assumptions about such things as levels of immunity in the population⁴.

But that is not the point.

The point is that not only has there not been much encouragement to develop alternative models, there has been a widely-supported campaign (even advocated by a contributor to the July-August issue of *The Psychologist*) to render any questioning of the conclusions drawn from the model favoured by the government illegal.

Indeed, the normal communication channels which would have facilitated such questioning and protest have been greatly attenuated by the Lockdown and related⁵ measures themselves without much sign of appreciation of their significance, let alone protest.

Beyond this, there has been the conflation of “evidence” relating to the spread of the biological virus with “evidence” relating to the wider effects of the various measures taken in such a way that conclusions drawn about the former have come to dominate over, and obscure, the importance of the latter⁶.

In reality, the actual evidence to support the effectiveness of the quarantine and 2-cubit social distancing measures (which have been around since medieval times) is minimal⁷.

Yet these have been imposed by government after government across the world: the question for psychologists is “How has this happened?”

The climate of fear generated by erroneous and hard to justify epidemiological predictions has been enormous. In reality, COVID-19 is far from being the most serious that has swept the planet in the course of my lifetime⁸. And, with perhaps one exception, we have not been able to eliminate any of them. We have simply had to come to terms with them ... perhaps leaving them to wreak their worst havoc in far-away places like the Yemen, Africa, and South America.

In this context, the extent to which many people have come to believe that it is actually possible to create a “clean”, COVID-19-free, society billions boggles the mind. These viruses do not respect national boundaries.

But these are still not the most important things that have troubled me as a psychologist.

More troubling has been the way in which this mental “fix it” virus (meme), resurrected by a totalitarian regime with a long history of promoting hugely destructive mental viruses and

draconian policies (consider the “cultural revolution” and the current quest for “economic development”⁹), has swept across the globe like wildfire.

This meme, network of thoughtways, or mental virus, is infinitely more deadly than the biological virus. How was it bred? How did it spread?

And how extraordinary it has been to witness the way in which country after country has been able to recruit local “scientists” to produce “evidence” to support this imported meme.

How did this happen?

This is not the only simplistic mental, fix-it, virus (meme) that has swept across the globe in this way.

Consider the way in which the destructive “fix the problems of education by narrowing the curriculum and high-stakes testing” meme has swept across the globe. Or the way in which the current “the state must protect everyone from all adverse experiences by visiting unconscionable horrors (in many ways worse than burning heretics and stoning blasphemers a couple of centuries ago) on anyone deemed to have offended” meme has done likewise. And the way in which an international climate-change crusade (important though it is) has been built upon a single problem abstracted from its ecological context (the need to stem the destruction of the soils, seas, and atmosphere) and promoted at the expense of consideration of the context in which it is situated – viz the need to radically change our way of life¹⁰.

The task of studying such memes and their epidemiology is surely a task for psychologists.

Yet release of the funds needed to conduct the necessary research would require major changes in the way in which research is commissioned and conducted.

And, behind all these observations, lies an even more fundamental problem that has become more conspicuous as the imposition of destructive and short-sighted policies mentioned above has continued ... namely the way governance itself is conducted and authority exercised.

These issues merit urgent attention and research from psychologists.

For this reason it was nothing less than horrifying to observe that there seemed to be little recognition of the need for any of these things among those who penned the papers which comprised the July/August issue of *The Psychologist*.

I have developed my thoughts on some of these issues more fully in articles posted on my website – some might call it a “blog” – www.eyeesociety.co.uk

Most important in the current context is Raven, J. (July 2020). *Some abuses of “science”, logic, and authority illustrated from responses to the COVID-19 threat and especially in the Dynamic Systems Models being used by policy consultants.*

<http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/Abuses-of-Science-and-authority-COVID-19.pdf> This article is also available on the *Systems Community of Inquiry* website and on *Research Gate*.

¹ Raven, J., & Raven, J. (2018) *John Carlyle Raven and his legacy*.

<http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/J-C-Raven-Biography.pdf>

² See Shiva, V. (1998). *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*. London: Green Books; Raven, J. (2016) *The Pervasive and Pernicious Effects of Neglecting Systems Thinking (especially when combined with a disposition toward fascism)*.

<http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/Unwillingness-to-engage-in-systems-thinking.pdf>; and Raven (2020) cited below.

³ A fuller discussion of these issues will be found in Raven, J. (July 2020). *Some abuses of “science”, logic, and authority illustrated from responses to the COVID-19 threat and especially in the Dynamic Systems Models being used by policy consultants*.

<http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/Abuses-of-Science-and-authority-COVID-19.pdf> This article is also available on the *Systems Community of Inquiry* website and on *Research Gate*.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ E.g. severe restrictions on the right to protest.

⁶ This has partly been achieved by characterising concerns with the latter as concerns with the, widely disliked, “economy” and thus rendering their personal and social consequences invisible.

⁷ Swiss Policy Research (2020). *Facts about Covid-1.9*. <https://swprs.org/a-swiss-doctor-on-covid-19/> (A list of 30 fully documented facts is presented).

⁸ See the graphic <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/history-of-pandemics-deadliest/>

⁹ See the following graphic depicting the unbelievable change that has been orchestrated in China since 1980 <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/chinas-113-cities-one-million-people-population/> and the following videos of their plans for world development and economic takeover https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REtEOS_9Eic ,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZgNwysabko> ,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b07eafPe7pY>

¹⁰ .In reality, the proliferation of the wind farms, marine turbines, and other arrangements designed to generate clean, green, energy is likely to have effects which, while insignificant on a small scale, are likely to be every bit as ecologically destructive as burning fossil fuels ... but, as I show in the previously mentioned article, the way “science” is commissioned, funded, and promoted has prevented this insight coming to light.