



The 'holy' war between ingroup vs. outgroup prevents the urgently needed scientific discourse in pandemic response

This is hopefully my last BrainCandy on the Corona pandemic. I have stayed out of the discussion for over a year, after all there are too many voices on Corona. But as such fascinating patterns are emerging in social behaviour internationally, I'm going to go weak once more. And encourage us to recognise and consciously leave group-think. It's mostly from a German perspective – but the patterns are truly international.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the German then Health Minister, Jens Spahn, said "we will have to forgive each other a lot". Did you actually hear apologies? Or just a penetrating self-praise by those in power?

If you look at the discussion in Germany from a behavioural science perspective, I see a kind of extreme tribalism. There seem to be only two 'ethnic groups' left that are at enmity with each other. The vaccination opponents and the vaccination supporters. But that is not the aha-moment for me, because this is not the insight. For me, the whole thing is based more on the principle of ingroup and outgroup - and in such a radical form that I have never encountered before. There seems to be no in-between any more. On the one hand, we have the huge group of, let's call them for the sake of simplicity, Covidists. That is, the group that is putting all its energy into fighting the virus. Here, a basic conviction is shared. That the virus can and must be controlled with the right measures. Consequently, this is also where all the latent panics gather.

And then there is another group who do not want to allow the virus to rule over their lives. Who counter the Covidists' theses with the counter-thesis that the measures are scientifically questionable and the collateral damage disproportionate. That we are dealing with a kind of flu. That it is really about profits, from Big Pharma to alternative social order. This smaller tribe of people are disparagingly called the Covidiot by the Covidists.

Why has the synthesis position not played a role since the beginning of the pandemic? There is currently no third force with a strong reach. The interested masses gather in one of the two tribes and consider their own position to be without alternative. To the followers in the tribe it gives the feeling that one has one's life under control, that one is self-efficacious, even if one has to suffer somewhat under the circumstances. This deprivation, coupled with the certainty of understanding the pandemic, is psychologically very valuable and one draws self-affirmation from one's group-beneficial behaviour. Both when one simply believes the current Health Minister Lauterbach's incessant warnings with it, and when one gets a pulse as soon as one has to read somewhere: "Lauterbach warns..."

What amazed me was how rigidly the Covidist tribe acts. Any criticism is defamed as dangerous insecurity of the population. Doubters who are obviously not covid deniers, but who recommend other strategies, are



seen as a threat to the population's playing along against the virus without resistance. Worse still, one is quickly assigned to the Covidiot. And this despite the fact that the knowledge of pandemic control is in flux. That's exactly what the Covidiot do. Anyone who criticises only some of the defence strategies and measures and welcomes other parts is a naive Covidist. No room for synergies.



I follow many renowned scientists on social media channels and experience this tribal effect. Anyone who dares to express new intelligent explanations and hypotheses is hit with the full force of the tribes. And usually from both sides at the same time! But this does not only happen there, but directly on the part of the politicians and their carefully selected model scientists. Deviants from tribal doctrine are caned. In many ways. The American Expert, Anthony Fauci, has said in several interviews that anyone who doubts his statements is going against science! That is what I call pure narcissism. In America, of all places, critical scientists have been and are being muzzled. Projects are not approved.

The censorship on Google, Facebook and Twitter of critics of the tribal laws has led to even top academics from elite universities withdrawing from the discourse or else only voicing their criticisms very carefully so that

they can still communicate at all. The FDA (similar to the EMA, but funded by industry) recently overrode its own scientific oversight body and released the boostershots for children that are essential for tribal well-being - just one day after Pfizer's press release on their successful clinical trial. On 19 January 2022, Soumya Swaminathan a senior researcher at WHO says: "There's no evidence right now that **healthy** children or **healthy** adolescents need boosters, "No evidence at all." The WHO focuses on the unvaccinated worldwide.

Remember the Great Barrington Declaration of over 5 000 scientists and doctors worldwide? They recommended a targeted approach early in the pandemic. Maximum protection of risk groups instead of universal lockdowns. The reason: the risk of death in the over-70s is known to be 1000 times higher than in the under-20s. I am not concerned with how good or bad this declaration was. But there are sufficiently renowned scientists involved that one cannot speak of a dilettante's gathering. Fauci immediately defamed these representatives of top universities personally. The central criticism of the Great Barrington Declaration has now been confirmed. You cannot permanently manage a respiratory virus via fundamental lockdowns, school closures and vaccinations. The resounding failure of Zero Covid in Australia, and presumably soon in China, is abundantly clear.

Tribalism has ignored even glaring forecast errors. Do you also remember the first predictions of the Imperial College of London? The seemingly inevitable catastrophe fueled panic and the toughest measures worldwide. Even when major calculation errors in the model were proven shortly after publication, nothing changed. A first hint of how strong the narrative would become.



Likewise, the mostly surprisingly early breaking points of the waves were never foreseen. Politicians spoke of the prevention paradox and simply pinned it to their lapels as a success. The stories of the tribes remained intact.

What surprised me was the role of the media. For the mass of the media has joined the Covidist tribe. They played the warning mouthpiece of the dominant narrative instead of remaining an effective check on government action. Here I observe two main forces at work. On the one hand, the personal involvement of the editorial staff - the fear of the imminent catastrophe, for themselves and their loved ones. No checks on the ingroup belief. And the unexpected financial jackpot because the user numbers went through the roof. Do you know any relevant media that cannot be assigned to one of the tribes? At some point, I ended my Der Spiegel (a leading German political magazine) subscription and, to my own amazement, took out a Welt (Daily Newspaper) subscription. Because some Welt editors, like Tim Röhn, question narratives in a fact-based way. Without me having the feeling, as with Bild (Biggest German Tabloid), for example, that this is done purely opportunistically. Die Welt itself comments that they have been staring at the new figures of the federal government for too long and have taken them at face value.

The next illustration, a Twitter meme, serves to lighten the mood, but it is not entirely wrong.



Another big effect I noticed. The chiefs of the Covidist Tribes are shifting the burden to the tribal Indians. The fight against the virus rests almost entirely on the shoulders of the people. The Indians have to restrict contacts, get vaccinated, have to forgo culture and sports, are only allowed to visit shops and restaurants with 2G status. They are supposed to go to the home office if possible, but at the same time they have to take care of the children of the closed schools and kindergartens. Children were and are put in strict clan custody to protect the frightened adults - in one of the most important phases of their personality development. According to a recent German study, very few children have died from covid - and not a single healthy child among them. While Lauterbach travels to every talk show offered to him. And Boris Johnson's people enjoyed parties in Downing Street No. 10 while the Queen had to say goodbye to her husband alone and lonely. But the latter is not what I am getting at.



Governments around the world have consistently avoided measures that they themselves would have been responsible for implementing. This is only possible with blatant disregard for scientific knowledge. By far the most serious case is that most measures are still based on the original droplet transmission hypothesis. Even the WHO has only rowed back very inconspicuously. Droplet transmission places the responsibility solely on the citizen. They must keep their distance, wear unfit clinical masks, forgo holidays, and disinfect surfaces and hands. Shops and restaurants invested in almost useless Plexiglas barriers. Schoolchildren were put in glass cages, no joke. Aerosol researchers pointed out the central importance of aerosol transmission as early as the mid-2020s. Aerosols are much more dangerous indoors because they can travel long distances and hang in the air for a long time. That's why many people get infected in the loo, because the predecessor doesn't just leave behind a cloud of scent. We have had air purifiers at K&A since September 2020, now one large one per employee. You can imagine a light ocean noise.

However, recognition of aerosols would have shifted the responsibility to politics and public administration. Concrete specifications would have had to be made as to how exactly indoor spaces must be ventilated, what filtration is necessary, in offices, factories, public transport. And as a public employer and operator of offices, schools and universities, they should have delivered. This did not happen. The virus is controlled in restaurants via the ineffective 2G rule, and through mask, only when standing up. In Italy, masks are currently compulsory. Outside. Completely gaga. The overreaching prime ministers cancelled Christmas markets and drove socially starved people indoors. Apparent maximum security, whatever the cost.

Nice to be less affected yourself. Especially the new privileged laptop class. Like myself.

Why are there still no certified rapid tests? In November, it was decided that vaccination services must become more low-threshold and that pharmacies are now also allowed to vaccinate. This still does not work! Probably because of the lack of a data link to the RKI (Robert Koch Institute – similar role to CDC). Don't pharmacists have a fax? Joke. The health minister is on the talk show and warns the exhausted population anew. Meanwhile, PCR test capacities are in short supply. Allegedly, the city of Vienna now has more capacities than Germany as a whole. There is still no outcry, and the ingroup protects those involved.

To design effective measures, we would urgently need high-quality, detailed and up-to-date data. In Germany, we have a Corona data fog instead. No one seems to have a plan on how to collect detailed health information in a timely manner that complies with data protection laws. But that doesn't seem to bother the decision-makers. After all, this is an elegant way to evade transparent review of the measures. Bavaria, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Hamburg have provided drastically wrong figures on the ratio of vaccinated to unvaccinated in hospitals. And thus supported the narrative of the pandemic of the unvaccinated. With a shrug of the shoulders, one moves on to the next item on the agenda. The third force is missing. By the way, not even the data on the Ministry of Health's website is up to date.

Poor data are partly to blame for the fact that we know too little about the risk groups for severe disease progression. So-called comorbidities. And these do not only occur in old age. Severe obesity is associated with particularly bad covid courses worldwide.



Severe obesity is a widespread problem. Politicians don't want to know that. Since all initiatives to stop the growth of the middle section have failed so far, politics would have to react here with a real show of force. And in doing so, take on many market forces. What happens is: nothing. The citizen is responsible for being overweight. And anyway, who wants to be accused of fat shaming today? One would rather look for a parliamentary poet. (no joke either!)

And another glaring failure to act: after two years of pandemic, we have fewer intensive care beds instead of more! The citizens will just have to cut back. Unfortunately, clapping on balconies did nothing.



Reviewing one's own policies is uncool among Covidian chiefs. Lauterbach says that the policy measures are not related to the exploding mental health problems among children and young people. Nor with the three-fold increase in suicide rates among children in the spring 2021 lockdown compared to 2019. German child psychiatrists have a very different experience. Brown University has studied brain performance in children in 2020 and 2021 and found reduced verbal, motor and cognitive performance compared to those born before the pandemic. It is so incredibly sad.

I sincerely hope that the predictions of permanent developmental disorder do not come true, but I am not optimistic at all.

Can I conclude with a positive outlook? Yes and no. I experience that Omicron could be an accelerator, because suddenly many more people have a concrete contact, and this new context can significantly change the perception and the tendency to fear. If there are actually infected people in one's own environment - and hopefully they have rather mild courses, more people will question the cautionary tale. Even politicians leading scientist, Drosten, is already noticeably distancing himself from the permanent warnings of Wieler (Head of RKI) and Lauterbach. The latter being still oracular about a terrible fifth wave caused by an as yet unknown delta mutant next winter.

A recent tactical mistake by Lauterbach could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Last weekend, Lauterbach and the RKI shortened the convalescent status to 3 months. And, incidentally, also the double vaccinated from 6 to 3 months. This means that from one hour to the next, almost 20 million citizens with only basic vaccination status are no longer covered by the 2G regulation. Tim Röhn is getting more support than ever before. The studies cited by the RKI as justification are not tenable, by the way.

Germany stands alone in claiming that recovery does not produce a more comprehensive immune response than vaccination. The same Lauterbach is then allowed to make the statement on Lanz (Late night show) two days later that it is permissible to relax more in the UK because more people are vaccinated there. The editorial team of Lanz is not able to do a quick fact check. Germany leads in the game with 72% to 70%.

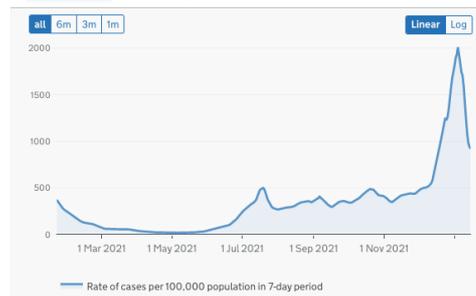


Will we see better politics in the future? I doubt it. For that, one would have to experience political humility. People are hungry for honesty. I don't see that anywhere. That is why I am afraid of the political fight against climate change. Another issue of the highest complexity. Here, too, I expect a lot of black-and-white actions with huge, unanticipated collateral damage. It's a pity I can't give this BrainCandy a confident conclusion.

Or maybe it is: MEP Sonneborn, otherwise known for his disrespectful dismantling of political action, just tweeted fact-based (!) about the Omikron wave in France.

He is pleased that despite the highest infection rates, intensive care units are hardly affected. And in the UK, the number of infected people is falling faster than it has risen. The old normal is giving us a cautious wave. Let's look forward to it.

Cases in United Kingdom ▾



Book recommendation

By Ralph Ohnemus, Uwe H. Lebok, Florian Klaus:

Context marketing

The key to consumer behaviour To [order](#)



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