



Policy Paper-4

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Summary

COVID-19 provided an opportunity for the authorities of politicisation of fear that has been pervading and shaping public life globally, especially in the West, to the extent that a new form of life designed by the restrictions of pandemic became normal, even useful, for many. However, as a corollary to the rise of the politics of fear there emerged an exhaustion of belief in the principal ideologies and causes of the 20th century and, political movements failed to generate a positive view of the future.

Politics of Fear bred a fatalism, which resulted in the belief of “There is no Alternative”, which was formulated by Thomas Hobbes, urging the population to give up freedom in exchange of security formulated as “Public Health”. Our future need not be pre-determined by forces that are beyond human control and the virus should not shape our way of life. Contrary to the wisdom of public health entrepreneurs, the constitution of the future is not reducible to a defence against a threat to human health. In the end, the new reality will be determined by whether or not we see ourselves as the subject or the object of a changing world. As it happened in the past, crises and catastrophes may provide an opportunity for the creation of a better life for humanity.



Politics of Fear in the Era of Permanent Pandemics

by Professor Frank Furedi

The politicisation of fear pervades public life in the Western World

A striking illustration of this trend was provided by the Prime Minister of Belgium, Alexander De Croo in a speech in September 2021. Pointing to ‘Climate, Vaccines and Terrorism’, he stated that ‘nobody is safe until everybody is safe’¹. The linking together of three different threats – can be interpreted as a form of joined up scare mongering.

Relying on Fear as an instrument of public policy was widely evident during the coronavirus pandemic. Take the example of the UK: Recently, it was revealed that in March 2020, a paper written for the British Government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) was concerned that the public was too relaxed about the pandemic and that Government had to subject it to the fear of God. Dated March 22, the paper written by the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Behaviours (SPI-B) stated:

“A substantial number of people still do not feel sufficiently personally threatened; it could be that they are reassured by the low death rate in their demographic group, although levels of concern may be rising ... the perceived level of personal threat needs to be increased among those who are complacent, using hard-hitting emotional messaging”².

Some members of SAGE are now embarrassed about the use of ‘hard hitting emotional messaging’. One member of SAGE acknowledged that: ‘The British people have been subjected to an unevaluated psychological experiment without being told that is what’s happening’³. It turned out that official scare tactics have worked only too well and the government now concedes that levels of compliance with lockdown rules have exceeded its expectations.

Remarkably, a significant section of the public has adapted to life under lockdown to the point that they have internalised many of its features as part of their new lifestyle. A study published in 2021 indicates that a third of the public regard the previous year as similar or better than average for them personally. A majority - 54 per cent - claim that they will miss aspects of Covid-19 restrictions. One in five indicate that their finances are better than they were in the pre-pandemic era.

Acquiescence to or the celebration of the lockdown often co-exist with a reluctance to get on the commuter train or get back to the office. It has become fashionable to declare that Covid has taught us to work “better” or “smarter”. These utopian sentiments overlook hard facts about the way that society works. While some occupations can rely on people working at home, others, especially those who run our infrastructure and transport, pick up our garbage, build our houses, provide us with the necessities of life in supermarkets, actually need to go out to work.

The corollary of the rise of the politics of fear was the exhaustion of belief in the principal ideologies and causes of the 20th century⁴. In the absence of a credible positive vision of the future society is much more responsive to calls



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arguing for the avoidance of evil than to appeals of hope. Political movements have found it difficult to generate a positive view of the future. Even their calls for reforms is often defended on the grounds that unless something is done the situation will deteriorate.

Exhaustion of politics – loss of meaning

1. Fear has become a perspective adopted by all sections of the political spectrum
2. Elevation of Threat. --- they are all existential – and far too complex for finding a solution
3. Expansion of the meaning of safety -safety and security are existential questions rather than merely physical ones
4. Diminished sense of agency – people lack the resources to deal with the increasingly complex threat faced by humanity

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Breeds Fatalism

Politics of Fear best understood as an approach that encourages **Deference To Fate**. This orientation was most coherently promoted by Thomas Hobbes – who developed a politics of fear that explicitly advocated the idea that *There Is No Alternative*. Hobbes regarded the fear prevailing in society as political resource for promoting an authoritarian/ absolutist sovereign. His social contract based on the premise that a fearful public worried about its security would give up its freedoms in exchange security. It promotes a mood of passivity – which is most strikingly captured by the idea that **There Is No Alternative. The Politics of There Is No Alternative in the Domain of Economics** was most strikingly captured by former British

Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher's dictum of there being no alternative to the market.

Today it is Public Health that most effectively advocates Deference to Fate to the point that it often appears that the behaviour of a virus determines the journey that we make from the present to the future – towards a world that is often described as the New Normal. It is through Public Health that the classical Hobbesian trade-off between individual freedom and security is most effectively expressed. The Politics of Fear claim, that there is no alternative downsizes humanities' capacity for agency. People are seen as lacking the intellectual and moral problems confronting humanity

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We Must Not let Public Health Become Our Tyrant

The refrain '*The world will never be the same after Covid-19*' is constantly drummed into our heads by media commentators, policy makers, scientists, and a veritable army of amateur experts. In one obvious sense they are absolutely right. The history of major catastrophes shows that humanity learns from its tragic experience and develops new technologies, new practices, and customs in order to prevent the recurrence of such an event or at least to minimise its consequences.

However, what life is going to be like post-Covid-19 is not a tale foretold. Our future need not be pre-determined by forces that are beyond human control. Most important of all, human ingenuity can be applied to assuming a degree of control over its destiny. In other words, we can choose between adopting different courses of action. We can choose between passively deferring to Fate or opting to develop our capacity to control the circumstances we face. Unfortunately, today's chorus of 'the world will never be the same' does not serve as an invitation for the power of human creativity to improve our life in the future. Instead, it acts as a warning demanding that society adapt to forces beyond its control.



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Our future need not be pre-determined by forces that are beyond human control. Most important of all, human ingenuity can be applied to assuming a degree of control over its destiny.

One warning after another insists that people will have to change their behaviour and adopt practices that are entirely alien to their way of being. 'I'm sure that some form of facial protection will become the new norm' claims David Nabarro of the World Health Organisation. Like his boss Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who contends that people will need to learn to live with a 'new reality', Nabarro suggests the 'new reality' is not going to 'simply disappear'⁶

The 'new reality' that is projected into the future is one where public health mutates from a sensible project of protecting health and life into a medium of regulating people's behaviour and lifestyles. So, the demand that people wear a mask is motivated by the imperative of impression management and only partially on health grounds. As Nabarro explained masks can provide 'reassurance' for millions of anxious people⁷. While they are advocating rituals of reassurance, WHO is determined not to let a virus pandemic go to waste. Wedded to the project of lifestyle regulation, it calls for restricting access to alcohol during the emergency, since it believes that 'consuming any alcohol poses health risks'⁸.

Typically, the 'new reality' is portrayed as one where we have no choice but to submit to the dictates of the authority of public health entrepreneurs. It seems, that one of the main missions of these entrepreneurs is to pathologise the human touch. Since Dr Anthony Fauci, President Trump's chief advisor on the pandemic, declared that the handshake could become a relic of history in the post coronavirus era, numerous commentators have confidently written an obituary to this age-old practice⁹.

It is not just the shaking of hands that has become the target of busy-body behavioural experts. No-touch policies are not only directed at physical contact between

people but also touching yourself! On BBC Radio4's *World at One* and in the press, Professor Susan Michie the director of the Centre for Behaviour Change at University College London, has been lecturing the public about not touching their face. Her mantra is 'do wash your hands, do stand 2 meters apart – but don't touch your face'¹⁰. Since she is apparently a behaviour expert, the BBC treats her like a minor Goddess. Professor Michie recommends that we all learn to overcome our ingrained habit of touching our face by making a conscious effort to keeping our hands below shoulder level at all times. Since studies indicate that on average, we touch our face 23 times a day, changing this way of living our life literally requires that we adopt forms of behaviour that is totally alien to our persona.

Nor is touching the only form of human contact that goes against the grain of the 'new reality' being planned for us by so-called experts. Biosecurity experts at Cambridge University have cobbled together a list of 275 suggestions for reducing the spread of coronavirus. Many of them pertain to developing practices that will increase the physical distance between people as they make their way in the world¹¹. Predictably discouraging, kissing and hugging outside family and a small 'bubble' of close friends is highlighted as the new normal of the new reality¹².

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No choice but...

There is something deeply disturbing about the enthusiasm with which the project of altering human behaviour is pursued. Age old practices through which people signaled their friendship, affection and love are casually dismissed as not really that important. 'We don't need to shake hands' said Fauci before insisting 'just forget about shaking hands'. And of course, he is absolutely right; we don't need to shake hands. Nor do we need to embrace one another or signal



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our affection by stroking the head of a child or a friend. Possibly we can live our life wearing masks and gloves and adopting routines that minimise physical contact to the absolute minimum. As the Faucis of this world will tell us, 'it is for our own good'!

There are two important problems with the public health projection of a new reality. First, such projections are profoundly fatalistic. They assume that there is a fixed and powerful reality to which humanity must defer and accommodate. This view signals the conviction that the future has already been established by forces outside our control. The role of humanity is to change and adopt forms of behaviour that are demanded by this omnipotent power. The sense of pre-determination communicated by the authors of the new reality has a quasi-religious quality. All that this narrative lacks, is a supernatural construction of Fate.

The mantra that the world will never be the same constitutes the latest version of the dogma of TINA – there is no alternative. From this perspective there is little room for discussion and debate. The refusal to accept advice will provoke the response that you are putting others at risk. Not changing our behaviour is not an option for responsible people.

Whenever a society is told that people have no choice but to change their behaviour it is only a matter of time before advocates of the new reality will raise the cry 'that something must be done'. That 'something' usually leads to calls for new laws, the policing of people's behaviour and the expansion of regulations managing our lives. The behaviour expert, Susan Michie explicitly endorsed his trend, when she stated that the what the pandemic showed is that 'collectivism is absolutely necessary'. She added that in a pandemic and the climate emergency, no one can go away and protect themselves, It's not like that anymore¹³. Imposing collectivist solutions on society is the second problematic outcome of the projection of a new reality. The right to make individual choices and the exercise of freedom are the inevitable target of a collectivist orientation to the world.

There will be more and more calls asserting that 'it's not like that anymore'! And these calls will be justified on the ground that 'it is for our own good'. Losing our freedom

to touch may appear as a small price for the sake of public health, but once our intimate personal behaviour becomes the target of intrusive regulation than our capacity to live freely becomes seriously compromised. That is why we must resist attempts limit the exercise of freedom on the ground that it is necessary for public health.

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We need not defer to Fate

The world may not be the same after Covid-19, but it is up to us to influence its future direction. We can decide to temporarily modify our behaviour until the worst is over with a view to adopting a lifestyle that is most consistent with what we valued in the past and what we want to value in the future. If we do go down the road of touch rules it will not be because there is no alternative but because of a failure to imagine other more creative and human alternative.

If you like me do not want to live in a world where we all wear masks and fear to touch one another we can choose to find ways that makes human contact an integral part of the new normal. We need not 'forget about shaking hands' if we apply the powers of human creativity to tackling the challenges that we face. It all depends on whether we decide to defer to Fate or assume responsibility for the fate of humanity.

Although catastrophes exhibit disturbingly destructive powers, humanity has often managed to turn adversity into an opportunity. Time and again our fears of natural disaster has served as a catalyst for the rise of human ingenuity. The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 encouraged the application of science to the construction of an urban infrastructure. After the terrible floods that hit Holland in 1953, the Dutch constructed an ingenious system of



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dykes that represents one of the technological wonders of the world. Social reform is often the progeny of a disaster. Improvements in working condition were promoted after employees died from the infectious fever that scourged the cotton-mills of Manchester in the 19th century. City-planning took off in the United States after the Chicago Fire of 1871. After the 1909 Cherry mine disaster that led to the death of 259 workers in Illinois, new health and safety laws were institutionalised. The sinking of the Titanic led to a major review of passenger safety leading to a significant reduction in the hazards of sea.

There is no reason why Covid-19 cannot stimulate new and exciting innovation in health care and pharmacology. What turns out be the new reality of the future is not pre-determined by a virus. Contrary to the wisdom of public health entrepreneurs the constitution of the future is not reducible to a threat to human health. In the end the new reality will be determined by whether or not we see ourselves as the subject or the object of a changing world.

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(Endnotes)

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- 4 This development is discussed in Chapter 7 of my study, *The Politics of Fear*, Furedi(2005).
- 5 This development is discussed in Chapter 7 of my study, *The Politics of Fear*, Furedi(2005).
- 6 <https://www.euroweeklynews.com/2020/04/14/who-warns-that-the-world-will-need-to-learn-to-live-in-this-new-reality-as-covid-19-will-not-simply-disappear/>
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About the Author

Frank Furedi, a Professor at the Kent University, completed his BA in Political Science at McGill University, MA in African Politics and PhD in Research at the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University. Professor Furedi is a sociologist and social commentator. His research is oriented towards the study of the workings of precautionary culture and risk aversion in Western societies. He is the author of over 20 books, including *Paranoid Parenting* (2001); *Therapy Culture* (2003); *Politics of Fear* (2005), *How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century* (2019), and *Why Borders Matter: Why Humanity Must Relearn the Art of Drawing Boundaries* (2020). His book titled "Culture of Fear (1997) was translated to Turkish under the name of "Korku Kültürü". Professor Furedi has published in many academic journals and has received several international awards.



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Imagining A Common Horizon for Humanity and the Planet

The world is passing through an extremely troubled period in its history, with a seemingly new challenge encountered at every turn. Serious economic, social, cultural, environmental and political crises at a global level are exacerbated by those being felt in individual countries. The challenges we are facing take a variety of forms, from financial collapses to climate change, from international terrorism to regional conflicts, and from the refugee problem to xenophobia.

All of these crises are being aggravated by the impact of the pandemic, revealing the inability of humanity to tackle them collectively, and invalidating the romantic discourse of globalization. As history continues its march, we are reminded that the answer to the common problems of humanity cannot be found by becoming more introverted, polarized or prejudiced. No matter how severe our problems, our destiny should not be seen as unchangeable. The problems we experience are primarily a result of human activity, and can be overcome only through human effort, but we should remain aware that there are many different hurdles to be passed if we are to rid ourselves of the crises being experienced in many parts of the world.

Only through conscious, patient and collective effort can we overcome the problems of humanity. Now is the time for dignified people from the different cultures and geographies of the world to come together in solidarity. It is time to speak with full respect of human dignity, setting aside the importance we place in our individual identities. An alliance of people who see truth and justice as the major pillars of our kind, will be able to open the door to a new era of solidarity for humanity. A dignified future is possible. We believe that Turkey holds a special, if not privileged, position, based on its geographical, historical and cultural characteristics, and can serve as a host to this joint effort of humanity.

Our goal within the scope of this project is to bring together the leading thinkers of the world, to create an international intellectual platform that draws its strength from human dignity, and that aims to build for the future of humanity and the planet with a holistic synergy with a view to offering humanity a common horizon. As Cappadocia University, our vision in this regard is to provide an academic platform from where esteemed intellectuals from around the world can share their visions for a common future of humanity and our planet, and to comment on the challenges and opportunities they envisage.

You can find detailed information about the Project at <https://commonhorizon.kapadokya.edu.tr/en/>

Cappadocia University (<https://kapadokya.edu.tr/en/>) is a young foundation (private) university in central Turkey, Cappadocia. The main goal of the university is to raise generations of opinion leaders who can read the 21st century realistically, and whose views therefore carry weight and significance – go-to men and women who are highly knowledgeable in their fields, who are happy to share their knowledge, and who will thus be respected and trusted by others. Cappadocia University is home to a highly successful dual-pronged system of academic and vocational programs that act in support of each other.

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