



The Results are in: Authoritarianism Has Failed

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Britain has the highest amount of coronavirus deaths in Europe and the third highest when measured per capita.



Photo courtesy of James Eades - link at bottom

The test results are in: Britain has the highest amount of coronavirus deaths in Europe and the third highest when measured **per capita**. This means that the largest experiment in big government authoritarianism in modern British history has failed to achieve its objective. We sacrificed the economy, the current account deficit, civil liberties, the arts and culture, commemorations of VE and VJ Day, the nation's overall mental health and indeed the health of many thousands (if not more) who have fallen ill or died of diseases other than coronavirus. We did so in the vain hope that a tyrannical belief in the almighty power of the government could win a war against a virus. The war has been waged and the virus beat the government. Making matters worse, all that society has to show for it are the casualties mentioned above.

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because governments that were small in size and modest in ambition were able to govern with the consent of the population. This was largely true even before the Great Reform Acts of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Between the Royal assent of the First Great Reform Act in 1832 and the turn of the 20th century, Britain fought many epidemics. The country's leading scientists were able to combat these diseases in spite of frequent government scepticism of advances in medicine, including Sir John Snow's history changing theories on the origins of cholera. During this same period, civil liberties continued to expand and Britain was rightly regarded as the freest country in the advanced world.

As medicine continued to advance in the 20th century, many epidemics and pandemics came and went, but none of them had any significant impact on civil liberties. During this time, the greatest threat to civil liberties came as a result of the World Wars rather than the many strains of deadly influenza which came, wrought their tragic consequences, and left. In many respects, the coronavirus lockdown went beyond the restrictions of liberty that were invoked during the World Wars.

In the continued overreaction to the coronavirus pandemic, the government has decided to forgo a historical tradition in which the private, divisible and evolving power of science was used to make life better, whilst the course of society continued to function in the customary way. Instead, science is invoked by the government as though it were some pagan god, a singular and unchallengeable force whose only shortcomings arise because the plebeian masses fail to worship this deity with enough conviction.

This attitude by the government has not only undermined the noble cause of science, but it has conflated science with faith – something which is entirely un-scientific, whilst being deeply offensive to those who realise that genuine science, genuine philosophy and genuine religious faith each have important roles to play in society.

Once the dust finally settles, future political arguments will not be between left and right, nor will they be between populists and technocrats. The political arguments of the future will be those between champions of traditional liberty and champions of authority. Authority fails both the moral test and the practical test. Liberty has been sacrificed in the name of fighting a disease and this calculation has failed even by the standards of the authoritarians themselves.

Liberty alone cannot cure a disease, but it can allow society to use apolitical science to the best of its collective ability without stifling the freedoms whose sacrifice causes only harm.