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## Covid: a curfew for what?

The French were stunned to learn that their government considers a public order measure, a curfew, to be effective in preventing an epidemic. Everyone, having understood that no virus breaks according to schedules set by decree, and given the many previous mistakes, asks the question: who is angry about a curfew for what?

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**President Emmanuel Macron had chosen the star journalists of France2 and TF1, Anne-Sophie Lapix and Gilles Bouleau, to interview him on the Covid-19 epidemic. He announced a curfew to them as a health measure.**

Several Western countries think they are facing a new wave of Covid-19 epidemic. Populations that have already suffered a lot, not from the disease, but from the measures taken to protect them from it, find it difficult to accept new public order measures on health grounds. This is an opportunity for us to analyze behaviors.

Governments know that they will have to account for what they have done and what they have not done. In the face of the disease and even more so in the face of this pressure, they have had to act. How did they think about their strategy?

In developing it, they relied on the advice of specialists (doctors, biologists and statisticians). Immediately these were divided in each discipline and opposed each other so that the government could only continue with some of them. But on what criteria did they choose them?

### **Many uncertainties**

While public opinion is persuaded :  
▶ that the virus is transmitted through respiratory droplets;  
▶ that contaminations can be contained by wearing surgical masks and maintaining a distance of at least one meter with one's interlocutors;  
▶ that it is possible to distinguish healthy people from sick people by the use of PCR tests;  
Specialists are much less assertive. On the contrary, some say :  
▶ that the virus is mainly transmitted not through respiratory droplets, but through the air we breathe;  
▶ that, therefore, surgical masks and social distances are useless;  
▶ that the PCR tests that are performed do not measure the same thing in different laboratories and that, therefore, the cumulative statistics are like adding apples and pears together.

Thus, despite the reassuring messages from the authorities, there is still a great deal of confusion about the characteristics of this epidemic.

### **What can be done about it?**

The problem facing the authorities was new. No professional training had prepared them to face it. So they turned to specialists. While the former gave them clear advice, everything became complicated when others came to contradict them. They were overwhelmed.

If the rulers were politicians, they could only react according to their political experience. As they grew older, they learned to propose even better, not 0.5 percent increase in the base salary like their competitors, but 0.6 percent, even if it meant finding an excuse not to have to keep their promises. Caught unawares, they went into a bidding war with their neighbors, making more drastic decisions one after the other to show that they were superior to them. Above all, they masked their incompetence by resorting to authoritarian measures.

If they were technocrats, they could only react according to the experience of their bureaucratic body when faced with large-scale disasters. But it is difficult to adapt to a health crisis the experience gained from fighting floods or earthquakes. As a reflex, they therefore turned to pre-existing public health administrations. However, the political leaders had already invented new structures that duplicated the previous ones, without specifying the distribution of competences. Instead of joining forces, each of them was trying to preserve its own square.

If the rulers had been chosen on the basis of their authority, i.e., both their firmness and their attention to others, they would have approached the problem according to their general culture.

In such a case, they knew that viruses need the people they infect to live. As deadly as Covid-19 was in the first weeks of its outbreak, it did not seek to kill humanity, but would adapt to humans. From then on, its lethality would drop rapidly and there would never be another epidemic peak. The idea of a "second wave" seemed highly unlikely to them. Never since viruses have been distinguished from bacteria has a viral disease been observed in several waves.

The rebounds we are seeing today, in the USA for example, are not small additional waves, but mark the arrival of the virus in new populations to which it has not yet adapted. The national accumulation of the number of sick people masks a geographical and social distribution.

Moreover, unaware of how the virus is transmitted, governments would have assumed that it is transmitted like all other respiratory viral diseases: not through respiratory droplets, but through the air we breathe. Similarly, they would have known that in all viral epidemics, the majority of deaths are not due to the virus itself, but to the opportunistic diseases that occur during them. As a result, they would have decided to recommend that everyone should air their living spaces thoroughly and would have made it mandatory in all jurisdictions. In addition, they would have recommended that everyone should not disinfect their hands, but wash them as often as possible. They would have ensured that points were installed for this purpose as widely as possible.

In fact, these were the two main measures that WHO had advised at the beginning of the epidemic, before hysteria replaced reflection. No wearing of surgical masks, no disinfection, no quarantine, and even less containment of healthy people.

**Science does not provide a definitive answer, it just pushes away questions**

The way in which the scientists were staged illustrates a clear misunderstanding of what science is. Science is not an accumulation of knowledge, but a process of knowledge. We have just verified the virtual incompatibility between the scientific spirit and current practice. It is absurd to demand from scientists, who are just beginning the study of a virus, its propagation and the damage it causes, a remedy for what they do not yet know. It is pretentious for scientists to answer such questions.

#### **A change in society**

Some of the measures taken when this virus erupted can be explained by misjudgements. For example, President Macron initiated the practice of generalized containment when he was intoxicated by the catastrophic statistics of Neil Ferguson (Imperial College London) [1] He announced at least 500,000 deaths. There were 14 times fewer, according to official figures that are known to be overestimated. In retrospect, it appears that this serious attack on liberties was not justified.

However, the choice of the curfew, a few months later, when there was a slight rebound in deaths, is incomprehensible in democratic states: everyone could observe that this disease was much less lethal than feared and that its most dangerous period was over. There is no current data to justify such an attack on freedoms.

President Macron himself has justified it by referring to a second wave that does not exist. If he was able to take it on such an unconvincing argument, when will he be able to lift it?

It must be noted that this time it cannot be an assessment error, but rather an authoritarian policy under the guise of a health crisis [2].

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