EXITING COVID

Post-Pandemic Guideposts

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CARDUS

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> The conservation of health . . . is without doubt the primary good and foundation of all other goods of this life.
>
> —René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637)

> One has one's little pleasure for the day, and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has regard for health.
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885)

INTRODUCTION

Crisis changes us, as people, as societies. But plagues are a special kind of crisis. The COVID-19 crisis has been perhaps the most comprehensive, thoroughgoing crisis in Canada since the Second World War. Imagine Canada like a car: we've just had the rare experience of smashing our economy, culture, and society into a brick wall at high speed—whether through the disease itself or our response to it. And like crash-test engineers, we now have to perform the analysis. What did we learn? How did we fare? What performed better than expected, and what worse? And, most importantly, where do we go from here?

This paper seeks to answer these questions. In Part I, we will scan expert opinions, from think tanks, media, and academics across the country. What have they learned from this crash test, and where do they think we're headed? We'll see that these experts have focused on **seven key questions**, and they do not all agree on the answers:

- What exactly happened in this pandemic? Is the pandemic a **reset** of society, or is it an **acceleration of existing trends**? Should we expect fundamental and permanent change, or a greater intensification of what was already there?

- What do we mean by **value**, and how do we measure it? Do we really value what we thought we did, when crisis bears down on us with its bracing and clarifying light?

- Whom can we **trust**? Did the pandemic exacerbate trends of polarization, isolation, and fragmentation, or did it pull us closer with a common goal, against a common threat?

- What is **science**, and how has its practice and reputation been tested during this crisis? When we talk about "believing in science," what do we mean? How well does our society organize the actual application of scientific ideas or insights?

- Do we know how to understand **risk**, and are we able to understand and apply models of risk at a large scale, under significant pressure? Which risks are tolerable, and which are not? On what basis do we decide?

- Is **justice** technocratic? In other words, are the fundamental decisions that affect us all best made by specialized experts, or by generalist leaders after they have received the experts' array of technical advice and weigh the options? Is this distinction helpful? How did and should government leaders weigh expert input against their own unique task to pursue public justice?

- And finally, what exactly do we mean by **government**? A veritable torrent of criticism has washed over governments of all levels, at home and abroad. What is it that we expect from our different levels of government? How are these levels arranged so as to deliver or fail to deliver on our expectations? What lessons can we learn about democratic governance during crisis?

In Part II, we will zero in on several key sectors in Canadian society and culture that the experts highlight as especially vulnerable and that bear out the consequences of uncertainty in the higher-level questions of Part I. We will look more closely at the following:

- Education,

- Family,

- Health care,

- Work and labour,

- Social solidarity and charity,

- Trade and geopolitics, and

- Rights, freedoms, and democracy.

How did these sectors in particular weather the pandemic storm, and how do our big, society-level questions show up in these sectors' challenges? Where do we see them succeeding, where did they fail, and what are their prospects going forward in a post-pandemic world?

This paper will conclude with a return to our initial set of questions, but with evaluation in mind: do we *like* where we're headed? Whether the question is one of value, trust, authority, risk, or justice—or if we drill down more specifically into family, health care, rights and freedoms, education, or trade—what we at Cardus observe is this: While the pandemic did indeed intensify the stress on many parts of North Atlantic society and culture, nowhere has that stress been more dramatic than on the ties that bind, on the tether that holds these sectors together, on—in a phrase—our common life.

The pandemic has shown that at our most basic, the commitment that Canadians hold in common is a kind of pragmatic, biological security. It is a Secular[1] platform on which each person chooses among the moral and transcendent codes on offer. There is no common moral language or framework (with "moral" here meaning "defining the good life") that rises above a utilitarian ethic of bodily safety, personal autonomy, and the material prosperity that makes this safety and autonomy possible. "Simply put," writes Yuval Levin, "both modern science and modern political philosophy have put the avoidance of pain and the prevention of death at the forefront of our public life."[2] The religion of Life, as Don Cupitt calls it, is a kind of framework, a kind of moral language. But can Life serve as its own sacred anchor? Is it enough for Life to simply exist, finding its own way, its own path, its own destiny? Can such a framework give meaning and dignity to questions of value, trust, risk, and justice? Can it inform a consensus for education or family, for work, and for our rights and freedoms? We at Cardus don't believe it can. So might COVID-19 give us the chance to refocus on the fraying ties that bind, and imagine together how to revitalize and reweave these common cords? Or will we all just go back to "business as usual"?

I. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED? THE EXPERTS' TAKE

"Everyone appeared to know right away what COVID-19 meant," writes former *Ideas* producer David Cayley.[3] Some called it "nature's wake-up call to a complacent civilization," others sensed the arrival of a new-deal welfare state, and others "welcomed the chance to test drive a new health-security state," but "everyone agreed that the world had changed forever" and that a "new normal" was dawning. What amazed Cayley about the coronavirus has been "the extent to which its fearsome reputation has eclipsed and occasionally exceeded its actual effects."

And yet, taken as reputation or effects, more than a year on and with some sober retrospect, experts agree that some perennial themes have emerged from the virus and from our response to it. The Future of Canada Centre released a handsome report focusing on the transformations in people, industry,

1 C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

2 Y. Levin, "Putting Health in Perspective." *New Atlantis* 36 (Summer 2012): 23–36. https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/putting-health-in-perspective.

3 D. Cayley, "The Prognosis: Looking the Consequences in the Eye." *Literary Review of Canada,* October 2020. https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2020/10/the-prognosis/.

and societal systems.[4] How can Canada thrive, it wonders, beyond the year 2030? Even before the pandemic, we were a nation stuck "in neutral." Bold intervention is needed and is now possible, for equity and inclusion and "future-ready" skills (people), more globally competitive industry and corporate innovation (industry), and a society prepared for the next crisis (societal systems).

C.D. Howe convened an impressive table of academics, business leaders, and policymakers to tackle health policy (crisis, vaccine development, long-term care, and tele-medicine), business (restarting business, opening trade, energy crisis, planning recovery), household income supports (labour markets, wage subsidy, emergency-response benefit, education, and childcare), and monetary policy (Canada emergency business account, backstopping provincial finance, deflation and inflation).[5] Their recommendations were both tactical and transformative, if also technical and immediate (recommendations are dated by the day).

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Montreal Economic Institute, Second Street.org, Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, Canadian Constitution Foundation, and columnist Anthony Furey collaborated to offer advice and predictions about government spending, health reform, economic growth (with less government), a retrospective on what government did well and did poorly, a rights review, and a democratic inventory.[6]

Opinions are not, in short, lacking. In this section, we will survey Canada's experts, and some experts abroad, to see what leading organizations and thinkers consider as the broad, cross-sector trends that will shape our recovery. These are phrased as questions because they are open trends: *Is* this where we're headed? Is it where we *want* to be headed?

THE GREAT RESET, OR THE GREAT ACCELERATION?

An early publication from Fareed Zakaria, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*, argued that the COVID-19 crisis expedited and enlarged already existing trends rather than reset or disrupt the world.[7] If a sector was weak, the pandemic eviscerated it. If a sector was resilient and adaptable, the pandemic actually improved and enlarged it. Social scientists call this the Matthew effect (after Matthew 25:29): crisis separates the anti-fragile from the vulnerable, we lean into what is already there, and trends that might have taken years or even decades to mature seemingly climax overnight. This is what Lenin meant when he allegedly said, "There are decades when nothing happens, and then there are weeks when decades happen."

4 "A Vision for a Thriving Canada in 2030." Catalyst 01: Future of Canada Centre. Canada at 2030. Deloitte, 2020. https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ca/Documents/fcc/ca-catalyst-canada-2030-aoda-en.pdf?icid=en_report_hero_section.

5 G. Bishop, et al., eds. "Climbing out of COVID." C.D. Howe Institute, Policy Study 48, November 2020. https://www.cdhowe.org/sites/default/files/attachments/research_papers/mixed/Climbing%20out%20of%20COVID_0.pdf.

6 C. Craig, et al., *Life After COVID: What's Next for Canada?* (Montreal: MEI, May 2021). https://www.iedm.org/e-book-life-after-COVID-whats-next-for-canada/.

7 F. Zakaria, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World* (New York: Norton, 2020).

Canada's federal government, on the other hand, has argued that the pandemic is an opportunity for a "great reset" of the Canadian social and political bargain. Its diagnosis is not that different from what we hear south of the border: a new deal, like Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression-era program to pull the United States out of economic stagnation and decline. Other historical analogies are aplenty: the post-pandemic world will be like the Roaring Twenties, or like post-war reconstruction in 1945. Some analogies are more ominous than others, but what they presume is that COVID-19 is a basic reconstruction of social and political systems, and that the crisis has given us an unprecedented opportunity to build back differently, more equally, more justly, more ambitiously.

Not all experts share the historical scale of our politicians' grandiosity. For example, the historian Niall Ferguson argues that while COVID-19 has been disruptive, on the broader historical scale the disruption is far, far less than politicians suggest.[8] We're miserable, to be sure—the Macdonald-Laurier Institute even kept a COVID Misery Index, in which, as of April 21, 2021, Canada ranked tenth in the world.[9] But most of us are still convinced that "life" will return and that less will actually change than it did after World War II. There remains genuine nostalgia for going back to the way things were. There was far less nostalgia for returning to the good old times of imperial rivalry in 1914 or fascist expansionism in 1939. There is, in a word, less appetite today for social and political transformation. Instead, what we are likely to get is more of the same, but faster or more intensely. We want our lives back, not changed.

Don't let the political branding fool you: "new deals" or "great resets"—the menu hasn't changed. We're just being offered second and third helpings of what the chef already had on the burner. This isn't meant to sound fatalistic; the menu isn't all bad. Ross Douthat refers to the available options as "decadence," but he doesn't use the word entirely critically.[10] Echoing Patrick Deneen's criticisms of liberalism,[11] he says we are victims of our own extraordinary success. Douthat's "four horsemen" of decadence—the accelerating trends of stagnation, sterility, sclerosis, and repetition—are all manifestations of a culture that doesn't desire change. As a culture, we like what we have. We like it how it is.

Douthat's analysis should temper just how radically novel or ambitious the resets on offer appear. A reset and new deal we do not have; instead, the pandemic has been a giant accelerator in the direction that we were already moving. A federal budget, even one as enormous as this past spring's, doubles down on trends long in the making. And even federal budgets have their social and cultural limits. Much of what we will see in our sector scan in Part II has a political element, but it is not only or even fundamentally driven by politics.

8 N. Ferguson, *Doom: The Politics of Catastrophe (*New York: Penguin, 2021).

9 "COVID Misery Index." Macdonald-Laurier Institute. https://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/COVID-misery-index/.

10 R. Douthat, *The Decadent Society: America Before and After the Pandemic* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2021).

11 P. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

WHAT IS VALUE(D)?

If somebody had asked you months before the pandemic about a hypothetical scenario in which a pathogen would close many businesses temporarily or even permanently, revert much white-collar employment to digital platforms, and shutter or stunt blue-collar employment, you would almost certainly have concluded that the economy would drop into free fall. And yet, the Canadian economy, as we measure it, seems to be roaring. What's the explanation?

Here, again, we have doubled—tripled, quadrupled—down on an emerging trend, a hyper-Keynesian model, globalized during the 2008 financial crisis and brought forth most dramatically during this pandemic. The first pandemic budget from Canada's federal government unveiled the largest economic-relief package, in the words of Minister Freeland herself, since the Second World War.[12] On the eve of the budget, Canadians were assured that the budget deficit would likely not exceed $400 billion. This is on top of a federal debt that recently crested $1 trillion.

Canada may have taken the hyper-Keynesian consensus from 2008 to its most dramatic conclusion, but it is hardly alone. In the United States, European states, and countries all over the globe, experiments in heavy fiscal and monetary stimulus are the order of the day. Markets have responded in kind, with the unlimited support of taxpayers subsidizing costs. Market speculation is in overdrive, as historic fiscal stimulus meets historically low interest rates meets a soon-to-reopen economy. The new 2020s, some experts predict, will make the old Roaring Twenties look like a dress rehearsal.

Traditional economic theory has predicted that inflation—rising costs—would cause central banks to exercise prudence on fiscal and monetary stimulus. But some argue that this theory is now economic history, fit for a world before 2008. Can low interest, high stimulus, and increased money supply all co-exist, without summoning the spectre of inflation? Ian Lee, associate professor of management at Carleton University's Sprott School of Business, says that unemployment at the very worst of the pandemic never crested 15 percent and the disproportionate stimulus the federal government injected has removed critical flexibility for the years to come.[13] In the midst of the pandemic, he says, only two countries—the US and Canada—saw incomes rise, not decrease, even while GDP was sinking.

It's not, Lee hastens to add, that federal debt-to-GDP is so worrying but that provincial and municipal debt—Newfoundland's debt crisis being only the first of many examples to come—push Canada's debt-to-GDP ratio to among the worst of the European states. The federal government is the de facto guarantor of a huge conglomerate of subsidiary debt, and by overspending in this crisis it has left itself with fewer options for the sub-sovereign debt crises to come.

12 "Canada Unveils Largest Economic Relief Package Since WW2." BBC News, December 1, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55139229.

13 G. Friedman, "Canada 'Overstimulated and Overspent' on Myth of Pandemic Recession: Ian Lee," Down to Business podcast, episode 102, *Financial Post*, May 19, 2021. https://financialpost.com/news/economy/myths-about-canadas-pandemic-recession-sprott-school-of-business-ian-lee.

Mark Carney, in his book *Value(s)*, wonders what exactly we mean by "value," or, indeed, "the economy," when we make these arguments.[14] Yes, the government's stimulus programs are an effort to redress the obvious financial inequalities of the pandemic—the "she-cession," the blue-collar vulnerabilities, the deeply uneven financial burdens on workers across sectors. There is anxiety about a K-shaped recovery in which white-collar, digitally adaptive sectors are booming but lower-wage, vulnerable sectors don't recover at all. Lee argues that even the term "recovery" is a misnomer: 90 percent of jobs were hardly affected, he says, but 10 percent were annihilated.

Francisco Ferreira and colleagues argue that a real connection exists between the pandemic's increase in mortality and the higher poverty caused by the economic losses.[15] The "economic consequences of the pandemic in terms of increased poverty cannot be treated as being of secondary importance," they write. "This severe global economic shock has caused the first reversal in the declining trend in global extreme poverty (measured as the share of the world's population living under $1.90 per day) since the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997—and only the second real increase in world poverty since measurement began in the early 1980s. This increase in extreme deprivation comes with its own suffering and anguish: jobs and homes were lost and people struggled to feed their children and themselves. Many asked whether they 'would die of Coronavirus or hunger?'"

But Carney is after an even more fundamental question than inequality and GDP loss. How, he wonders, do we measure *value*? The stock market may be roaring, but financial speculation has never been a stable measure of economics. We can stabilize household incomes with monumental fiscal and monetary stimulus, but if businesses are not producing and workers are not working, what is an economy actually producing, what is it actually worth? Yuval Levin describes our nascent recovery as "booming economy, shattered institutions."[16] Is this really what it means to be rich? The very concept of value and wealth comes into different focus during a crisis like COVID-19: is money in the bank *worth* as much as a stable marriage, parents invested in the education of their children, and a supportive community with high social capital? The wealth in this crisis may well turn out not to be measured by dollars and cents but by bedtime stories and family board games.

Andy Crouch warns about "jubilation without jubilee," a concept from the Hebrew Scriptures that argues for intergenerational justice at the centre of economic revitalization.[17] Without it, he worries, we may well repeat the sins of the Roaring Twenties, leveraging enormous indebtedness—financial, demographic, moral—until there is no more borrowing to binge on. We will run the ledgers down until all of our store of wealth, however we measure it, is depleted.

14 M. Carney, *Value(s): Building a Better World for All* (Toronto: Penguin Random House, 2021).

15 F.H.G. Ferreira, O. Sterck, D.G. Mahler, and B. Decerf, "Death and Destitution: The Global Distribution of Welfare Losses from the COVID-19 Pandemic." *LSE Public Policy Review* 1, no. 4 (2021). http://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.34.

16 D.E. Burns and Y. Levin, "Our Post-Pandemic Institutions: A Conversation with Yuval Levin." *Public Discourse*, May 1, 2021. https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2021/05/75576/.

17 A. Crouch, "After the K-Shaped Recovery." *Praxis Journal*, May 17, 2021. https://journal.praxislabs.org/after-the-k-shaped-recovery-67d3225e09f.

WHOM CAN WE TRUST?

"Covidiots" is the catch-all term for a spectrum of discontented citizens, from lockdown skeptics to anti-vaxxers. Contemptuous polarization was hardly new when the pandemic hit our shores, but it has expedited much of what sociologists such as Charles Murray[18] have described as an advancing social and cultural fragmentation. Christopher Dornan at Canada's Public Policy Forum calls it the trust challenge. "Small wonder," he argues, "that coronavirus disinformation proliferated. The engines of distrust were already in place and already primed."[19]

In *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from a Culture of Contempt*, Arthur Brooks argues that contempt is a powerful combination of two primal human emotions: anger and disgust.[20] When we feel contempt for someone, there is no longer an effort to debate, convince, or even tolerate them. We have lost the common ground needed for reasonable disagreement. Instead there is only posturing, outmaneuvering, and defeat. What we are left with is the presumption that the motives of my group are noble and true, and the motives of yours are repugnant and false.

Such asymmetry seems more common in the pandemic because we have had too much *communication*, adds Yuval Levin, and not enough *communion*.[21] Says Levin, "When we act together, when we interact with other people, there's an element of communication and there's an element of communion—that is, broadly speaking, of exchanging information and of being together. And, you know, the pandemic has forced us to separate these two out, and to not have any communion, but to have plenty of communication. . . . To be able to still *communicate* is not nearly enough to actually sustain a lot of our institutions."[22]

It's a trend, he says, that we've seen developing in the world of social media for years. But the pandemic has shot it across the sound barrier. Communication, he says, is overrated, and communion is underrated. Communication is efficient, but communion is creative, innovative, restorative. The COVID-19 pandemic was perhaps unique as a crisis because it specifically targeted what many have come to think of as our weakest pillar in modern, North Atlantic society: our social cohesion, our common ground. Some question if the pandemic was even one pandemic—if English Canada, for example, suffered COVID in the same way as French Canada or as other specific communities did. Public outreach lagged in many of these communities, and trust between groups, and between groups and governments, was low enough that public-health messaging was significantly impeded.

It is as though the crisis was readymade to target society's weakest link, our mutual trust and solidarity, and then drive a twenty-ton sledge right at it. The pandemic necessarily drove us apart,

18 C. Murray, *Coming Apart* (New York: Crown, 2012).

19 C. Dornan, "Science Disinformation in a Time of Pandemic." Public Policy Forum, June 11, 2020. https://ppforum.ca/project/science-disinformation-pandemic/.

20 A. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from a Culture of Contempt* (New York: HarperCollins, 2019).

21 Burns and Levin, "Our Post-Pandemic Institutions."

22 Burns and Levin, "Our Post-Pandemic Institutions."

creating a coercive social distance just when we were already *Coming Apart*. And the rupture was not just between communities but within communities, within families. People will never forget who gathered when they shouldn't have, who wouldn't mask, and who wouldn't get vaccinated. On the one hand, a Leger survey in May reported that more than 60 percent of Canadians say that their trust in federal (63 percent) and provincial (62 percent) government has eroded, either a little or a lot.[23] On the other hand, writes journalist Jen Gerson, pessimism and fear harden into a way of life, and suspicion and even civil disobedience seem virtuous.[24]

Yet we should also be careful not to let extreme anecdotes during a crisis paint us an inaccurate picture of Canadian society. Polarization is a real trend, the pandemic has accelerated and intensified our deficits in trust and anxiety, but, as David French warns, we cannot let *nutpicking* define our reality.[25] Nutpicking is what he calls the extreme anecdotes that circulate and become generalized views of reality. We see a news story of a dad and son who are ticketed for playing alone in a park in Ottawa, and we viscerally react. We hear about anti-mask protests that cause super-spreading, and it fuels contempt. But are these stories actually representative of law-enforcement activity, or citizen activity, during the pandemic? The answer is no.

In fact, social and civil trust is still higher in Canada than in many other jurisdictions. According to an early poll from the Media Ecosystem Observatory, a broad centre still holds, in which Canadians agree on:[26]

- The risks of the disease,
- What measures should be taken to fight it, and
- How much income support governments should be providing.

In a survey published in April 2021, nine in ten Canadians say that they are complying with face-mask requirements, and three in four definitely or probably will get vaccinated.[27]

23 "COVID-19 and Trust: A Postmedia-Leger Poll." Leger, May 26, 2021. https://leger360.com/surveys/COVID-19-and-trust-a-postmedia-leger-poll/.

24 J. Gerson, "The Case for Optimism." *The Line*, May 7, 2021. https://theline.substack.com/p/jen-gerson-the-case-for-optimism.

25 D. French and A. DeSanctis, "Episode 58: Nutpicking." *National Review*, podcast, April 24, 2018. https://www.nationalreview.com/podcasts/ordered-liberty/episode-58-nutpicking/.

26 P. Loewen, T. Owen, and D. Ruths, "COVID-19 Is Helping to Unite Canadians Like Nothing Has in Years—and We'll Need Unity for What's to Come." CBC News, April 9, 2020. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/opinion-partisanship-COVID-19-government-response-1.5525186.

27 "All in This Together? Canadians' Views on Masks, Vaccines and Lockdowns During the COVID-19 Pandemic." Confederation of Tomorrow, April 2021. https://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/documents/research/reports/confederation-of-tomorrow-2021-report1_apr6.pdf.

For others, there is the opposite concern: has the pandemic fundamentally expanded the range of actions that political authorities can take and still be viewed as legitimate? Are citizens now willing to comply with or tolerate heretofore unheard-of limits on their civil liberties? And has our bar for what counts as such a crisis been lowered to such a degree that we can now expect these sorts of civil-liberty suspensions more often?

We want to shore up trust, to be sure, but we also want this trust to be embedded in a web of relationships and rules that seem fair and consistent. How should we define and strengthen this web, not only from one citizen to another but also with our most essential institutions?

WHO'S PAYING FOR ALL THAT SCIENCE?

When it comes to trust, one institution came out strong in the pandemic: science. "I believe in science" became a statement of identity and certainty. And it is probably true that the most extraordinary success story of the pandemic has been the science. In April 2020, the *New York Times* was predicting that a vaccine would take, at minimum, twelve to eighteen months to arrive.[28] Even that was a nearly unthinkable time-scale for vaccine creation, which was usually estimated to take ten to fifteen years, even with a lot of money and luck. Americans began receiving their first vaccinations before 2020 was even out. And to compound this unprecedented success, scientists have created not one or two, but half a dozen vaccines that are effective against most strains of the virus and will prevent hospitalization and death. An embarrassment of riches indeed.

Many experts agree not just on the vindication of our science, but on the public-private partnerships that drive our science as well. Canadians in particular became aware that if we were waiting for the government to spool up domestic design and manufacturing of a COVID-19 vaccine, Canadians could expect to rejoin global society in their old age. This isn't a joke. While it's true that the weakness of domestic Canadian pharmaceutical manufacturing, fueled by decades of monopsonist procurement and drug-price controls, has been widely pilloried as just this side of a scandal, the government would hardly do better on its own.[29] Canadian vaccine salvation came at the hands of some tardily negotiated agreements with large multinational (not Canadian) corporations.

These corporations have now become the target of an international campaign at the World Trade Organization to release their patents under a waiver to the trade-related aspects of intellectual property (TRIPS). Yes, some argue, these companies were very successful, but their success was predicated on enormous public subsidy and support over decades. And the patents themselves are not enough. To successful globalize vaccine manufacturing, technology and expertise must be transferred with the patents. Is such an aggressive socialization of life-saving medicine possible under our current global system? Is it desirable?

28 S.A. Thompson, "How Long Will a Vaccine Really Take?" *New York Times*, April 30, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/30/opinion/coronavirus-COVID-vaccine.html.

29 T. Lindeman, "Canada's Vaccine Mess." *The Atlantic*, April 6, 2021. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/04/canada-vaccine-rollout-problems/618516/.

Is the design and production of pharmaceuticals one that can or should be left to market forces? And how should governments manage the ethical questions now facing it in a world of resurgent (vaccine) nationalism?

WHAT IS RISK?

"When I was young," writes David Cayley, "nobody told one another to be safe."[30] The rise in securitization, what Cayley calls the insurable fortification of modern life, is undoubtedly related to what Shoshana Zuboff calls *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.[31] Ulrich Beck in 1986 was already called it "the risk society."[32] Our perceptions of reality increasingly run through an often poorly understood algorithm of risk, a concept that is now almost an organizing principle for political and cultural management. Nowhere is this more dramatic than in health care, where an enormous amount of good indeed results from screening and checking patients who are at risk of various conditions. But, jokes health researcher Alan Cassels, this future-thinking makes us "pre-diseased," viewing ourselves in statistical rather than in human terms.[33]

A society that was already accustomed to on-the-fly risk calculations has now entered into its most rigorous real-world application of the probabilistic sciences: does re-opening the economy carry with it *too much* risk? Are schools likely spots for transmission? Which demographics are most vulnerable? How much backyard-visit time is safe, and how much moves us into danger territory? —and so on. The sad fact is that human beings, as a rule, are terrible at such on-the-fly assessments, not only because of our deficiencies in math but also because our psychology of risk tends to overwhelm the actual statistics with innumerable cognitive biases.

One of the major biases that became apparent was the error of anthropocentrism: that just because we have done something, that something must be the cause of any change we witness. "Doing something" naturally has a catharsis all its own, particularly for the political class who are expected to make a show of doing things in times of crisis, but whether these things are the right things, and whether they in fact do produce change in the desired direction, became curiously difficult questions to answer in a public conversation that was dominated by confidence in probabilistic, not definite, causality. The polarized opinion about lockdowns might be the most interesting case here. When polled, most Canadians said that they believed lockdowns to be effective. This seemed to settle the question politically, but it hardly settles the question in truth. Lockdown enthusiasts insist that the data show early and complete lockdowns limited the spread of the disease. This could be. But other jurisdictions with much looser restrictions followed similar curves. Could third factors be at play? If the murder rate rises at the same time as ice-cream sales surge, we cannot conclude that consuming ice cream provokes people to commit murder.

30 Cayley, "The Prognosis."

31 S. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).

32 U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992).

33 As quoted in Cayley, "The Prognosis."

A genuine lack of curiosity about the effectiveness of these significantly limiting public policies is a fascinating surprise when we assess the Canadian response to the pandemic. Few dismiss lockdowns entirely, but many do wonder if it might be worth asking more questions about whether our public policies *actually work* in the way that we insist they do. Canada is often too comfortable with politically signaling change, with a troubling incuriosity about evidence that the signaled change actually resulted in change after the fact. It is enough to say we have done something. And that we have followed "the science" as well as the polls.

Another cognitive bias that influences risk assessment, argues Martha Fulford, is that our human threat perception tends to settle quickly and shift slowly.[34] We knew within months of the first wave, she argues, that the mortality risk was disproportionately weighted to the older and infirm, yet public policy—and indeed significant parts of public perception—continued to insist on society-wide, top-down lockdowns. Even more confusing, the goal posts of that policy continued to shift as the threat perception escalated. We have moved a long way from "flattening the curve" to what some now advocate as the implausible "COVID-Zero." Finally, policies designed to safeguard hospital capacity—in Ontario in particular—were always going to increase the threat in the public's mind, since almost any pandemic, including, Fulford argues, the seasonal flu, regularly pushes our hospital system beyond capacity. That is simply the nature of Ontario's hospital system.

This is why, Cayley argues, Canadian society has been practicing for this pandemic for decades.[35] We did not meet this crisis with new or surprising methods. Rather, we doubled down on already existing mobilizations of safety and risk. Don Cupitt argues that "life" has taken on the social and cultural power that "God" once had in our society.[36] Life itself is now the devotion-inspiring, divine, sanctifying presence. Charles Taylor reflects on this at greater length in *A Secular Age*, where he describes our age as one characterized by the "anthropocentric turn," that is, one in which human self-actualization (choice, autonomy) is seen as the highest moral and cultural good.[37] Argues Cayley, "The most important consequence of this new religion of life, in the present case, is the attitude it engenders toward death. When life is something that we *have*, not as a loan or a gift or a quality, but as a possession we're duty-bound to secure, conserve, and extend, death becomes an obscene and meaningless enemy. . . . The most terrible aspect of the obsession with saving lives, for me, has been the way the old have been left to die alone during these past few months. This is unconditionally wrong. To justify it as an unfortunate, temporary trade-off—or as a necessity in service to the greater good—misses something fundamental. The dying should be accompanied and held, comforted

34 S. Whatley and M. Fulford, "Episode 67: With Pandemic Management 'It's Not the Economy vs. Health, It's Health vs. Health.'" Macdonald-Laurier Institute, Pod Bless Canada (podcast). https://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/ep-67-pandemic-management-not-economy-vs-health-health-vs-health-dr-shawn-whatley-dr-martha-fulford/.

35 Cayley, "The Prognosis."

36 D. Cupitt, *The New Religion of Life in Everyday Speech* (London: SCM Press, 1999).

37 Taylor, *A Secular Age*. See also J.K.A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014) and R.J. Joustra and A. Wilkinson, *How to Survive the Apocalypse: Zombies, Cylons, Faith, and Politics at the End of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

and mourned by those they have loved and who have loved them. No calculus of health and safety should limit this defining obligation: it simply belongs to us as human beings."[38]

IS JUSTICE TECHNOCRATIC?

Michael Lewis, the genius journalist who can turn baseball statistics and subprime mortgages into heart-pounding, best-selling thrillers, has already offered a retrospective on the pandemic, *The Premonition: A Pandemic Story*.[39] It follows a group of medics and scientists who try, early on, to get the US government to take the pandemic seriously. In a *New York Times* interview in January 2021, Lewis described it as "a superhero story where the superheroes lose the war."

Governance is our last but maybe most significant theme to emerge from our expert scan. Lewis's question "What went wrong?" is for some a eulogy for modern bureaucratic government: a technocratic behemoth so burdened by sclerosis, conflict aversion, and buck-passing media terror that it never stood a chance against an adaptive and super-spreading crisis of this proportion. The modern nation-state's bureaucracies can operate at a scale unknown before in history, but that very scale produces the state's fragility. It is slow. It is nearly impossible to change. It rarely adapts.

To answer this problem, many jurisdictions in Canada defaulted to a form of technocratic governance, deferring to health experts, chief medical officers, and hospital administrators. The logic of it seemed to make sense. If legislatures are too slow, suspend them. If government bureaucracy can't respond fast enough, cut the red tape between the experts and the policy, put the best possible science in front of the people, and let that drive decision-making. The result was chaos.

The problem, as Lewis and others detail, is at least two-fold. First, science changes. The early stages of pandemic communication were replete with calls to trust the technocrats, only to find that what the technocrats in various jurisdictions said was confusing or outright conflicting. This is true even after taking into consider that as the experts learned more about COVID-19 scientifically, their advice would necessarily change. Public communication needs to be clear, uncomplicated, and confident. Early science is none of these things. So as mandates about masks and means of contraction changed, sometimes the policies and practice lagged. We're still wiping down surfaces and growing the Great Pacific Garbage Patch with our single-use-plastic protective gear. The science has long since settled how the virus is spread, yet here we are, our pandemic theatre unabated.

"Science" itself became an essentially contested term. We weren't sure what we meant, argues David Cayley: at the beginning, there was very little science to believe in or follow, and as time went on, we had informed guesswork instead of controlled, comparative studies. Does science mean "merely the opinions of those with the right credentials, or does it refer to tested knowledge, refined by careful observation and vigorous debate?" When premiers and prime ministers invoke science, they are referring to the former but giving it the authority of the latter. The result, Cayley argues, is "the

38 Cayley, "The Prognosis."

39 M. Lewis, *The Premonition: A Pandemic Story* (New York: Norton, 2021).

worst of both worlds: we are governed by debatable positions but can make no appeal to science."[40] This both disables science and cripples policy. Science becomes, in effective, a political myth.

Second, technocrats are narrow experts in their fields. Politicians are elected to settle disputes between diverse claims and needs. Rule by technocracy exacerbated the groupthink and policy sclerosis of Canada's many levels of government. #believinginscience sounds great in theory, but in practice we still need the human art of politics. Public justice is not a quantitative field awaiting better data; politics is in fact not a pure science at all. Political deliberation stopped, says Cayley, precisely where it should have started.

And this was a story not just about government but about many of our institutions. Yuval Levin, echoing our experts' intuition about acceleration, argues that "the pandemic, broadly speaking, has shown us that America is what we have thought it was, but more so—for good and bad. Our weaknesses are exacerbated, but our strengths are demonstrated too."[41] Yuval speaks here of America, but his assessment applies to the North Atlantic world in general. At least one of these trends of fragility is a growing frustration with the technocrats themselves. He writes, "We have a huge elite problem in America. And I think that the populism of this moment is justified to the extent that it is dissatisfaction and frustration with our elites." The irony should not be lost that populist mistrust and frustration has crescendoed in many jurisdictions just as we have doubled down on technocratic elitism.

WHAT IS GOVERNMENT?

So is it time to write the eulogy for large, centralized bureaucracies? Those like Fareed Zakaria disagree. What we need is not less government, he argues, but more, not necessarily more in quantity but in kind and quality. The unholy trinity of "fast, open, and stable," appears under various names, but the concept is the same: of these three characteristics, systems can have only two. Technologists such as Jared Cohen speak of "openness, speed, and security." Economists refer to the Mundell-Fleming trilemma, in which countries can choose only two of the three: free-flowing capital, independent central banks, and fixed exchange rates.

When we talk about "government," we typically mean large, centralized, relatively conflict-averse, stable bureaucracies. Our governments are open and stable; but they are not generally fast. This is a good thing. We do not want too much innovation in our governance. We want predictable consistency. Yet this kind of government has its limits, and our shorthand term "government" is not entirely accurate. Modern government is in fact a vast array of departments, responsibilities, and projects.

Governments themselves recognize this. Take just two government responsibilities in Canada, health care and defence. In health care, one centralized system would be too inflexible, too top-down, and so we have adopted a method of subsidiarity to remedy the trilemma. The centralized

40 Cayley, "The Prognosis."

41 Burns and Levin, "Our Post-Pandemic Institutions."

federal system does what it does best—the large-scale collection of resources—and distributes them to the provinces. Provinces then manage and deliver the health system. This is one way in which we see that the question is not how big or small government is, but what kind or quality of government is needed for each task.

Defence functions differently. As Rick Hillier famously put it, defence is not just another government department; "Our job is to kill people."[42] But even so, the job is not as simple as it sounds. War is an incredibly fluid environment. How can you design a government department to adapt, quickly and efficiently, to shifting threats? Canada's answer here is not decentralization or downloading to the provinces. Instead, the answer is in part a matter of design. Defence does have large, centralized, relatively inflexible forces. But it combines those traditional forces with much smaller, adaptive, rapid-response units. In other words, the Department of Defence is not one single monolith. There are different kinds and qualities of Canadian forces for the different kinds and qualities of threats.

Some states understood and applied this. Early in the pandemic, there was a troubling romance about the "Beijing option": stable and fast, but the opposite of open. The truth of the matter was complicated, however. It soon became clear that Beijing's lack of transparency and accountability endangered not only its own citizens but those of the world. Now open, liberal democracies such as South Korea and Taiwan have become the models to emulate, with their governments that enviably balanced openness with speed and stability. No doubt we're at least a half-decade out from being able to draw firm conclusions; Zakaria argues that South Korea and Taiwan benefit from effectively being islands as well as other cultural and social factors related to disease and disease control that probably advantaged them. Ferguson adds Israel to the list and says that paranoid societies (his term for societies that live under constant threat) did better. But the point stands: it was not big, authoritarian systems that outfoxed dim-witted federal democracies in this pandemic; it was smart and prepared government that outfoxed one-size-fits-all behemoths. Bureaucratic PowerPoint slides and bulky pandemic-preparedness binders were no match for states accustomed to dealing swiftly and efficiently with existential threats.

We do not need less government. We need *smarter* government. We need to learn the lessons and limitations of large, centralized systems and begin experimenting with more adaptive, responsive, subsidiarity governance—not for everything, but for some things. We don't want adaptive-responsive innovation in the Department of Justice or the Canada Revenue Agency. We want consistent, scalable, equitable centralization. This kind of government is a bedrock of a society based on the rule of law. This was the kind of government that expedited CERB payments at record speed, keeping families above water. We would be foolish to jettison it. But we might want different kinds of government for different kinds of problems.

42 D. Leblanc, "General's Talk of Terrorist 'Scumbags' Praised." *Globe and Mail*, July 16, 2005. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/generals-talk-of-terrorist-scumbags-praised/article18241070/.

"Government" is not one thing, and the longer we tarry in the cul de sac of debates about government size disconnected from purpose, the longer we'll have a bloated or a starved centralized system. No matter how much you feed or starve that system, you will never get speed and innovation from a design intended for stability and openness.

II. THE SECTOR-LEVEL STRESS TEST

High-level, culture-wide trends are one way to assess the pandemic, but we're also interested in the particular stresses on particular sectors of Canadian society. How have the trends that our experts identified, as discussed in Part I, manifested themselves in specific ways? Do we see these stresses showing themselves in health care, education, or trade, for example? In this section, we offer our evaluation of how some of the key sectors have fared. Do the trends discussed in Part I show up clearly? And what, if anything, might these trends and sector tests contribute to helping us find our COVID exit?

EDUCATION

The World Economic Forum estimates as many as 1.2 billion children were out of the classroom during COVID-19. Online education may have positively influenced students' ability to retain information and may have increased efficiency, but such possible benefits were unevenly experienced. Reliable technology was an ongoing challenge. While 95 percent of students in Switzerland, for example, had stable online access, only 34 percent of those in Indonesia did. Socioeconomic privilege was also a significant predictor of success in online learning, compounding the Matthew effect: the rich got richer, but those with limited access or less home support lost ground.

The positive potential of online education, retention and efficiency, was present mainly in upper-level grades. Among younger children, the loss of structure and in-person pedagogy was borderline catastrophic. Children and childhood education may be the least-recognized casualty of this pandemic. Even when provinces signalled that education was a priority, it was often for the sake of parental engagement in the workforce. Little of the public discussion was genuinely child centred, and almost none of it prioritized especially vulnerable children, whether younger, with special needs, rural, or otherwise disadvantaged. In truth, the real cost of pandemic education is unknown at this stage. The losses to early-childhood formation and education will begin to be measured only in the months and years to come.

David Hunt argues that in education, too, we have witnessed an acceleration of existing trends.[43] He describes much of the current provincial system as inflexible, unequal, and inefficient, as a system already buckling under increasingly diverse needs and unable—in its top-heavy, centralized

43 D. Hunt, "Flexible Education in an Age of Disruption: Embracing Innovation and Diversity in Ontario K–12 Education," Cardus, May 25, 2020. https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/flexible-education-in-an-age-of-disruption/.

fashion—to adapt and innovate in the midst of a major pedagogical crisis like enforced remote teaching. He concludes that, by contrast, "Ontario's independent schools responded much faster and more fully to the crisis, not only because they are nimble, but because they are profoundly accountable to parents."

Deani Van Pelt extends Hunt's analysis one step further, calling for a reimagination of school that is "person-centred" and "place based."[44] Both independent education and homeschooling showed major signs of growth and renaissance during the pandemic, modalities that have long emphasized more localist and person-centred pedagogy and governance. Increased diversity in education certainly seems like one possible response to the lessons of the pandemic. And yet the challenge of fragmentation and decentralization, what we at Cardus identify as a central pandemic lesson, might deepen with further diversification. How can we encourage diversity with cohesion in a post-pandemic education recovery?

QUESTIONS WE'RE WATCHING

- When schools reopen in the fall, what will the final tally be on the damage to student advancement and child development that occurred with remote instruction? How will we measure this damage, and will we have the resources to address it?

- What will be the result of greater parental involvement in Canada's major public education systems? Will we see more preference for parent-directed education, for greater diversification and localism, or will we see efforts to reform the existing state systems?

FAMILY

Few sectors seemed as stressed as the family during the pandemic. Routines were disrupted, daycare suspended, and education was forced into the same cramped living rooms that laundry and living already occupied. Particular concern was expressed about where and how domestic obligations would fall. The *Economist* reported that during crises, families in the North Atlantic world seem to default to more patriarchal patterns, with women absorbing disproportionate amounts of the domestic responsibilities.[45] The prime minister even referred to a "she-cession," confirmed by

44 D. Van Pelt, "The Pandemic Made Us Reimagine Work. Schools Should Be Next." *The Hub*, April 28, 2021. https://thehub.ca/2021-04-28/deani-van-pelt-the-pandemic-made-us-reimagine-work-schools-should-be-next/. See also D. Van Pelt, "Some Schools Thrived During the COVID-19 Crisis. What Can They Teach Us?" *The Hub*, June 16, 2021. https://thehub.ca/2021-06-16/deani-van-pelt-some-schools-thrived-during-the-COVID-19-crisis-what-can-they-teach-us/.

45 "The Pandemic Has Pushed Working Mums out of the Labour Force." *The Economist*, February 27, 2021. https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2021/02/25/the-pandemic-has-pushed-working-mums-out-of-the-labour-force. See also "Women Reported that They Performed Most of the Parental Tasks in Their Household During the Pandemic, Including Homeschooling." Statistics Canada, December 14, 2020. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/201214/dq201214b-eng.htm.

Statistics Canada,[46] that pandemic job losses had a greater impact on women than on men. From March 2020 to February 2021, women accounted for 53.7 percent of year-over-year employment, although, says Alicja Siekierska, some of those numbers relate to losses in sectors where women are disproportionately represented.[47]

Certainly, the federal government's signature, big-ticket item in its Exit-COVID budget was targeted at exactly this concern: support for and facilitation of women in the workforce via a nationally subsidized daycare program. Public support for families themselves almost always necessitates the adjective "working" before "families." In our public policy today, "the family" is typically viewed first through an economic lens.

The calamitous drop in birth rates in the North Atlantic world is also seen through an economic prism. "The baby bust is real," argues Stuart Thomson, bursting the bubble of some who predicted that plenty of time at home together might lead to more rather than fewer babies.[48] Already in March 2020, Lyman Stone correlated declining births with times of other historical disasters. Brookings reports that the pandemic will result in half a million fewer children (300,000 to 500,000) being born, based on fertility modeling from the Great Recession (2007–2009) and the 1918 Spanish flu.[49] The conclusion: economic uncertainty tends to lead to a baby bust, not a boom, no matter how much time parents are closeted together. Interestingly, this is not just a trend that afflicts the North Atlantic world. China only this spring has changed its family policy, permitting now three rather than two children. But it's too late for many, and while public policy could certainly suppress birth rates, it can't really do much to avert the downward trend.[50]

Creative policy ideas do exist. Ken Boessenkool, for example, argues that public policy in Canada could at least play a supportive role to families, by a more generous, flexible, and paid parental-leave program, building up childcare infrastructure with tax credits and baby-bonus vouchers, and boosting child benefits.[51] Samuel Duncan argues that governments should prioritize a "family lens," looking at key issues, such as housing affordability, first and foremost with a family-centric approach.[52]

46 "COVID-19 Related Disruptions in the Labour Market More Severe for Women." Statistics Canada, May 26, 2021. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210526/dq210526a-eng.htm.

47 A. Siekierska and S. Speer, "Getting out of the She-cession." *Crisis Management* (podcast), Yahoo Finance Canada, May 31, 2021. https://www.amazon.com/Crisis-Management/dp/B08JJQJ286.

48 S. Thomson, "The Baby Bust Is Real. Here's How the Pandemic Is Permanently Changing Canada." *The Hub*, June 2, 2021. https://thehub.ca/2021-06-02/the-baby-bust-is-real-heres-how-the-pandemic-is-permanently-changing-canada/.

49 M.S. Kearney and P. Levine, "Half a Million Fewer Children? The Coming COVID Baby Bust." Brookings, June 15, 2020. Updated December 17, 2020. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/12/17/the-coming-COVID-19-baby-bust-update/.

50 "Why Has the U.S. Birthrate Dropped?" *Wall Street Journal*, May 5, 2021. https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-has-the-u-s-birthrate-dropped-11620242450.

51 K. Boessenkool, "The Time Has Come for a New Family Agenda." *The Hub*, June 4, 2021. https://thehub.ca/2021-06-04/ken-boessenkool-the-time-has-come-for-a-new-family-agenda/.

52 S. Duncan, "Families Should Be the Focus of Post-COVID Growth." *The Hub*, June 4, 2021. https://thehub.ca/2021-06-04/samuel-duncan-families-should-be-the-focus-of-post-COVID-growth/.

These are important ideas, as far as they go. But fewer and smaller families (due to lower rates of marriage or partnering, and of fertility), and viewing the family primarily from an economic perspective, are not trends that originated with the pandemic. The economic impact, in terms of labour force, pension, and social supports, are enormous, but we at Cardus can't help but wonder if tackling the crisis of the family as an economic puzzle is part of the problem, rather than the solution. How, after all, do we factor in the work that mothers and fathers contribute to their homes if we can't measure it in the GDP? If a mom spends time reading to her toddler before bedtime and the Department of Finance can't quantify it, does the book still get read? What is its *value*? When a dad does the dishes and make sure that the kids get their homework done, instead of working overtime hours at the job site, does what we consider productive, economic activity actually drop? What is family *for*? There are answers here that technocrats cannot provide.[53]

QUESTIONS WE'RE WATCHING

- How will the enforced domestic bubbles of the pandemic experience change our homes and our work-life balance? Will families return to the often-frenetic pace that they kept prior to the pandemic? Will parents return to their former work-life patterns? If not, what kinds of shifts will we see?

- Will the pandemic have a major effect on childbearing in the long run, or will we see a baby boom follow the recovery? How will this eventuality fit with already plunging demographics in the North Atlantic world?

HEALTH CARE

The crisis in health seems only too obvious: a hospital system running at maximum, routinely overwhelmed by even the seasonal flu; long-term and end-of-life care facilities that were already under-resourced and understaffed. It did not take a table of experts to predict the outcome of the stress test on this sector. One British study estimated a 20 percent rise in cancer deaths from delayed treatments due to COVID-19 capacity constraints.

Writing for the *Globe and Mail* and in his own book, *Neglected No More: The Urgent Need to Improve the Lives of Canada's Elders in the Wake of a Pandemic*, André Picard agrees that the pandemic has underlined the urgency of reform in elder care.[54] Report after report has been issued, he says—he counts at least 150 inquiries, parliamentary hearings, taskforces, and commissioned reports about the sad state of long-term care, homecare, and eldercare—and yet "very few of the recommendations get implemented. The result is neglect by institutional indifference …for which elders have paid a heavy price, before and during the

53 A. Mrozek, P.J. Mitchell, and B. Dijkema, "Look Before You Leap: The Real Costs and Complexities of National Daycare." Cardus, May 2021. https://www.cardus.ca/research/family/reports/look-before-you-leap/.

54 A. Picard, *Neglected No More: The Urgent Need to Improve the Lives of Canada's Elders in the Wake of a Pandemic* (Toronto: Penguin, 2021).

pandemic."[55] The vulnerable voices of the elderly, like those of the children and of others disproportionately affected, were heard too late in this crisis, and by that time the situation was already grim.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information released a study in 2011 showing that on "any given day, more than 5,200 acute care beds across Canada are occupied by ALC [Alternative Level of Care] patients. Nearly 85 percent of ALC patients are age 65 and older; many (35 percent) are older than 85."[56] In 2018, we at Cardus argued that health policy and practice needed to expand the continuum of care available and to increase the diversity of social institutions equipped to support end-of-life care. What sociologist and palliative-care expert Allan Kellehear described then as the unimaginable "social and economic costs in permitting the 'professionalization' of death" are in fact no longer unimaginable at all.[57]

And yet with the increasing availability of physician-assisted suicide (MAiD), what David Cayley calls the "health-security state" has helped to clarify what we mean by *health care*: it is what, most basically, people decide that it is. Health care risks becoming the professional medicalization of personal autonomy. But it often goes unnoticed that to live autonomously, our choices have to be recognized and accepted by others. In other words, to be autonomous requires influence, power. Under this system of health care, therefore, equity and inclusion will always be in crisis.

What Aaron Kheriaty calls "the other pandemic" is the crisis in mental health, loneliness, and isolation.[58] "Small price to pay," was the casual response, for lockdowns that kept the vulnerable safe. But the Centers for Disease Control released a devastating report already in June of 2020 that mental health, substance abuse, and suicides were all major, rising concerns. It was not merely the underlying biological conditions of our health—our weight, our asthma, our diabetes and heart conditions—that accelerated the worst effects of the pandemic; it was also our mental and spiritual conditions.[59] In June of 2020 we at Cardus found similar evidence in Canada: 33 percent of Canadians said they did not have friends or family they could count on to provide financial assistance in an emergency, 18 percent were not certain they had someone to depend on for emotional support in a personal crisis, and 23 percent reported being very lonely or very isolated.[60] Early evidence suggests that the stress was felt most acutely, again, on the already marginalized and vulnerable.

55 Picard, *Neglected No More*, 162.

56 "Health Care in Canada, 2011: A Focus on Seniors and Aging." Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011. https://www.homecareontario.ca/docs/default-source/publications-mo/hcic_2011_seniors_report_en.pdf?sfvrsn=14.

57 As quoted in Cayley, "The Prognosis."

58 A. Kheriaty, "The Other Pandemic: The Lockdown Mental Health Crisis." *Public Discourse*, October 4, 2020. https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/10/71969/.

59 M.É. Czeisler, et al., "Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, June 24–30, 2020." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 69, no. 32 (August 14, 2020): 1049–57. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s_cid=mm6932a1_w.

60 "Loneliness and Social Isolation." Cardus, June 29, 2020. https://www.cardus.ca/research/health/reports/loneliness-and-social-isolation/.

QUESTIONS WE'RE WATCHING

- Will Ontario's experience with private long-term care facilities sour the government on public-private partnerships for this sector? What lessons will be learned that can give the vulnerable and elderly more dignity and voice?

- How will we measure the impact on early-childhood development and children's mental health? What pathways can we develop for the vulnerable to have their voices and concerns heard, not only in normal times but especially during a health crisis?

- Are we reflecting in new ways on the meaning and experience of death and dying?

WORK AND LABOUR

The disruptions in work and labour were some of the most remarkable that Canada has experienced outside of wartime. In May of 2020, Statistics Canada reported an unemployment rate of 13.7 percent, the highest in Canada's postwar history. This rate did not include those who were not "actively seeking work," a difficult task when being told by Public Health to stay at home. In fact, Jim Stanford estimates that the rate may have been as high as 30 percent.[61] Of those that remained employed, significant transformations—in personal protective equipment, social distancing, or teleworking—have subsequently become the norm. What kind of long-term impact can we expect?

At least one impact will be on health in workplaces, including workplace safety and sick-leave policies. Tolerance for "toughing it out" on the job site or in the office will be limited. Flu season in workplaces may come to resemble the so-called East Asian mask culture, with face masks making regular, seasonal reappearances. Other public-private partnership-driven measures, such as paid sick leave, may also need to be considered.

Working from home itself became a common occurrence for nearly five million Canadians during spring 2021. This surge will not last, Stanford predicts, though it may lead to some increased flexibility in work arrangements. Prithwiraj Choudhury, at Harvard Business School, likewise does not predict the wholesale transformation of work, but he does argue that we should expect a lot more "work from anywhere" than before.[62] Some of these changes are here to stay. This raises other questions, about mobility, living arrangements, urbanization, commuting, and more.

The cleavage between blue- and white-collar workers when it comes to on-the-job safety and precarity in employment is also a trend that needs attention. Temporary and agency staffing models were responsible in part for the catastrophe that unfolded in long-term care homes. If we want to

61 J. Stanford, "Work After COVID-19: Building a Stronger, Healthier Labour Market." Public Policy Forum, July 21, 2020. https://ppforum.ca/publications/work-after-COVID-19/.

62 P. Choudhury, "Our Work-from-Anywhere Future: Best Practices for All-Remote Organizations." *Harvard Business Review*, November–December 2020. https://hbr.org/2020/11/our-work-from-anywhere-future.

value workers—especially those in the care, cleaning, and retail sectors—much more needs to be done to prioritize their safety and protection.

Workplaces, overall, were among the most innovative and adaptable of sectors, in part because of need, in part because they were already organized to tackle logistical problems of this nature. In some cases, such as in the auto sector, the public sector *followed* the private sector in learning what measures were effective and how to keep critical industries open, safe, and flexible.

And yet after reviewing these various trends, we are left with an underlying question: what is work actually for? If work is for income, for Canadian families to make ends meet, but is otherwise just a tolerable drudgery, then the pandemic should be one of the best test-drives of a society in which the welfare state in the primary economic engine. In fact, what we found is that work and labour are a moral good beyond simply the material benefit they provide. We measured unemployment regularly with rigour, but the consequences of *underemployment* may be one of the lasting legacies of this pandemic. "Work is for man," as Pope John Paul II says in *Laborem Exercens*, "not man for work." Can our public policy respond to such basic distinctions? And if, as Jim Stanford argued in *Policy Options*, we are going to need a "Marshall Plan to rebuild after COVID-19,"[63] what could post-pandemic labour policy look like if it considered work as a good in and of itself?

QUESTIONS WE'RE WATCHING

- What goal posts will the Bank of Canada and the government set for job recovery after the pandemic? What will we mean by "full employment," and which sectors will struggle to recover?

- How did the crisis affect blue-collar and white-collar experiences, income, and work environments?

- Which workplaces will transition to more telework, and what will some of the long-term benefits and drawbacks of increased reliance on remote work be? How will these affect innovation and creativity?

- What effect will these employment changes have on our cities? Will the trend toward urbanization shift? How should municipal policy adapt?

63 J. Stanford, "We're Going to Need a Marshall Plan to Rebuild After COVID-19." *Policy Options*, April 2, 2020. https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/april-2020/were-going-to-need-a-marshall-plan-to-rebuild-after-COVID-19/.

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND CIVIC CHARITY

"In times of crisis," writes Ágnes Kövér (Institute of Social Studies, Budapest), "the pluralist and social democratic visions that underlie the effective workings of civil society often fade."[64] In some cases, she writes, "governments overestimate the voluntary financial and physical efforts of the population fighting the virus, utilizing or even abusing the basic value of solidarity. In other cases, governments take advantage of the emergency to further strengthen pre-existing positions, moving ever closer to the elimination of democratic control and advancing authoritarian forms and structures."

In fact, few countries were able to effectively exploit the potential of civil society, but those that did so "effectively reduced the consequences of the calamity while increasing a sense of solidarity and belonging in their societies." Generally, liberal democratic regimes fit somewhere on the spectrum of civil-society engagement, and some have more success than others. Challenges to civil society here include both the growth of the social welfare state, which crowds out civil-society organizations—and the increasing marketization and professionalization of civil-society organizations, which crowd out grassroots volunteerism. The second of these divisions may deepen during the post-COVID period. This is cause for concern, since local community organizations proved to be more flexible and responsive in an emergency.

Other countries failed to leverage civil society and used the crisis as "a single-actor play on stage."[65] Authoritarian societies, which tend to be more polarized between supporters and opponents of the regime, fit this model. But plenty of romance was on display in liberal democracies, in the media and elsewhere, for more-authoritarian governance to centralize the public-health response and limit freedoms of mobility and association. Will this sentiment quietly drift away after the pandemic, or will people continue to give priority to authoritarian safety over decentralized civic activity?

We at Cardus issued a call to action to equip Canada's not-for-profit sector to contribute to decentralized civic activity of this kind. Sean Speer and Brian Dijkema argued, as the Nonprofit Policy Forum did, that a single-actor play would be a major mistake.[66] Instead, an already existing network of community-based institutions could be supported to provide food and housing security, help those with physical and mental disabilities, and more. Could these charities serve as "shock absorbers when crisis hits" and meaningfully help to address the material needs of Canadians in crisis while also increasing a sense of civic solidarity?

64 Á. Kövér, "The Relationship Between Government and Civil Society in the Era of COVID-19." *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 12, no. 1 (2021): 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2021-0007.

65 B.G. Jeong, and S.-J. Kim, "The Government and Civil Society Collaboration Against COVID-19 in South Korea: A Single or Multiple Actor Play?" *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 12, no. 1 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2020-0051.

66 B. Dijkema, and S. Speer, "A Call to Action to Support Canadian Civil Society in Response to COVID-19." Cardus, March 20, 2020. https://www.cardus.ca/research/social-cities/reports/a-call-to-action-to-support-canadian-civil-society-in-response-to-COVID-19/.

This is still a partnership opportunity for Canada's not-for-profit and public sector. As more research emerges about what kinds of partnerships worked well during the pandemic, it's clear that one-size-fits-all governance is not the solution in times of crisis.

QUESTIONS WE'RE WATCHING

- How will Canada compare to other G-7 countries in the recovery of its civil society? How will our own charitable sector recover relative to other sectors of the Canadian economy? Was there variation in how charities weathered the pandemic?

- What will the recovery look like for religious institutions, and places of worship in particular? Will the pandemic accelerate secularization? Will it contribute to the difficulties that religious and nonreligious Canadians may have in understanding one another?

- What do demographic trends and rising debt mean for our intergenerational solidarity?

- How did the media interpret the pandemic to its readers or listeners?

TRADE CORRIDORS AND (DE)GLOBALIZATION

"Plague is a disease of trade," writes historian William Bernstein.[67] The perceived trade-offs, though speculative and at times specious, between trade, economy, and health security took centre stage as the pandemic crisscrossed our globalized world in late 2019 and early 2020. An integrated and globalized economy has brought unparalleled advantages—including the aforementioned pharmaceutical innovation—but it has also brought us vulnerability at a speed and scale that may have been unique in the history of humankind. Policymakers and economists raced against the disease to argue for and create the conditions within which open borders and open trade could continue. Trade more or less persisted, bundled immediately into special concessions, but the travel of regular people declined and eventually nearly halted. "However necessary," writes Charles Kenny in his history *The Plague Cycle*, the "COVID-19 exclusion has tragically illustrated the measure's [border closures'] immense cost as a response to disease in the modern world; it has spurred the most rapid contraction of the global economy in a century. We'll see that it has also demonstrated the counterproductive futility of most travel bans on a globally connected planet."[68] It remains to be seen exactly how effective the combination of border closures has been, though public confidence in Canada remains high: a Leger poll in late May 2021 found that 72 percent of Canadians wanted mandatory hotel quarantines to be extended to land travelers and 63 percent wanted stiffer penalties, including jail time, for violating quarantines.[69]

67 W.J. Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008).

68 C. Kenny, *The Plague Cycle* (New York: Scribner, 2021), 96.

69 "Lifting Safety Measures and the Return to Normal." Leger, May 26, 2021. https://leger360.com/surveys/legers-north-american-tracker-may-26-2021/.

Just as after 9/11, this crisis ably demonstrated that one of Canada's driving concerns was its trade corridors. Yet unlike in 9/11, this trade crisis has come with major questions of geopolitical alignment. Janice Stein, at the Munk School, argues that Canada's geopolitical options have dwindled to two: either Canada will push for more access to the American market, perhaps even for an integrated North American economy, or it will have to continue pleading for special exemptions from American protectionism while also courting additional trade with markets in Asia, especially China.[70]

The so-called "third option" of Canadian political economy—a diversified trade portfolio that depends on American markets to the extent that it must, but also works to build a larger array of partners and deals—is complicated not only now by geopolitics (a rising, assertive China) but also by its effects on the polls back home. Canadian public opinion has swung dramatically against China on the back of its hostage diplomacy, and while plenty of criticism can be lobbed at the government in Beijing for its duplicity and misinformation in the pandemic's early stages, this criticism pales in comparison to what will come if miscalculation, error, or malice at the Wuhan Institute of Virology truly did have a role in the emergence of this deadly pathogen.[71]

The world is getting smaller, and with it, so are Canada's options—economic and geopolitical. Vaccine nationalism now makes headlines on a regular basis, a development that Canadians initially lamented as countries that could—the United Kingdom, the United States—monopolized vaccine production and prioritized their own populations. What to make of vaccine nationalism now, as rich Canada begins to outpace the poor of the world, as Canada's twelve-year-olds line up to receive vaccinations while developing countries desperately fight to keep their genuinely vulnerable populations above water? For all our rhetoric about being an enlightened and liberal country, is Canada actually any different from other nations in this regard?

QUESTIONS WE'RE WATCHING

- With the election of a new president in the United States, and more openness to progressive economic agendas such as climate, will the Trudeau government stay the course on trade diversification, or can we expect new economic integration with the Americans? How will this government navigate the necessary tensions that such a course will elicit with China?

- What is the future for international borders, now that we have had a large-scale dress rehearsal for shutdowns? Should we expect more casual closures for epidemiological or other reasons? What will be the effect on international business, and on leisure travel?

70 J. Stein, "Canada Needs to Walk and Chew Gum When It Comes to China." *The Hub*, April 27, 2021. https://thehub.ca/2021-04-27/janice-stein-canada-needs-to-walk-and-chew-gum-when-it-comes-to-china/.

71 J. Rogin, *Chaos Under Heaven: Trump, Xi, and the Battle for the 21st Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021).

RIGHTS, FREEDOMS, AND DEMOCRACY

Christine Van Geyn, at the Canadian Constitution Foundation, argues that the "COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in severe restrictions on the basic and most fundamental rights of Canadians."[72] Yet the suspension of these rights and freedoms during the pandemic has been received, on the whole, with equanimity—the broad majority of Canadians continue to support them.

Canada does have a history and indeed even an explicit legal framework (including the Emergency Powers Act) recognizing that reasonable limits on rights and freedoms may occasionally prove necessary in order to achieve larger, proportionate goods. The Charter's limitation clause in section 1 allows governments to justify certain infringements, provided they serve "a pressing and substantial objective" and are "rationally connected to that objective," and further that the law must "minimally impair the right and there must be proportionality between the limit on our right and the benefit gained."[73]

But, Van Geyn argues, it remains unclear whether many of the government's actions would meet this bar, including mandatory hotel quarantine (which continues to be subject to litigation), disproportionate restrictions on places of worship, inconsistent or dubiously defensible closures of some businesses paired with tolerance or approval of large-scale gatherings for social protest, stay-at-home orders and curfews (in Quebec), the introduction of new, sweeping police powers (in Ontario, immediately repealed), and restrictions on movement between provinces. These do indeed represent significant reductions in the rights and freedoms guaranteed to Canadians, but the question remains whether governments can demonstrate in both the court of law and the court of public opinion that these limitations were rationally connected to the larger objective of public health and safety, and that the impairment was minimally sufficient and proportionate. To the surprise of some, the court of public opinion has been far more compliant than the court of law. We have seen a clear preference emerge among citizens for safety over freedom, for security over rights. But was this, in fact, the necessary trade-off? Will it become clearer, as the dust settles, that these restrictions were reasonable, and that (or to what extent) they objectively achieved the substantial goods claimed? And perhaps most importantly, could rights and freedoms be endangered if governments invoke emergency measures more casually in the future, in the name of health security?

The supreme institution in which this debate should have taken place, of course, is Parliament. But unlike during the world wars, it was this very institution that was largely missing in action for much of the crucial early window of the pandemic. It took weeks to eventually recall Parliament, and then it was recalled only online. Formal budgets and regular debates were suspended entirely for whole seasons. Jay Cameron, writing for the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, argues that this crisis displayed a "voracious taste for executive power and the bypassing of the sometimes inconvenient and uncomfortable scrutiny and debate of the people's elected representatives."[74]

72 C. Van Geyn, "Rights Review." In C. Craig, et al., *Life After COVID.*

73 Van Geyn, "Rights Review," 72.

74 J. Cameron, "Circumventing Our Democratic Institutions." In Craig, et al., *Life After COVID.*

The basic constitutional structure of Canada requires "free public discussion of affairs" (Supreme Court of Canada, 1987) and that "neither Parliament nor the provincial legislatures may enact legislation the effect of which would be to substantially interfere with the operation of this basic constitutional structure." It is precisely in an emergency that democratic representation and oversight is most critical. Such a conviction has been upheld through world wars and even after the destruction of the parliament building by fire in 1916.

Cameron details provincial violations of democratic safeguards through the extension of emergency powers in Alberta (Bill 10: Public Health [Emergency Powers] Amendment Act), British Columbia (Provincial Health Act), Manitoba (Public Health Orders), Saskatchewan (Public Health Orders, Disease Control Regulations), Ontario (Reopening Ontario Act), and the federal government. In the name of public safety, these measures delegated enormous authority without constitutional safeguards, including:

- No requirement for health officials to inform the minister of health,
- No requirement for the legislature or Parliament to review or debate the health officials' reports, and
- No requirement for public consultation.

Writes Charles Kenny in *The Plague Cycle,* "The world still reacts poorly to new disease threats. Rather than deal with the risk before it emerges, through better sanitation and stronger health systems—or, as it happens, through better surveillance, screening, isolation, and research—we respond late and in panic, often with unnecessary acts of cruelty and abuse of human rights."[75]

All of this relates clearly to our experts' theme of justice and governance: what is it we *want* from our political institutions? Are health security and economic growth the hierarchy atop which our common life stands, and if so, will these ends justify the suspension of our traditional democratic means? The contest between what has been called the Beijing option and our Westminster model is no longer an imaginary fiction; it is our question, now, right here at home.

QUESTIONS WE'RE WATCHING

- How will the Canadian public view the newly introduced and exercised emergency powers after the pandemic has subsided? Will Canadians' tolerance for emergency measures during health crises change significantly? Now that we have crossed these constitutional lines, should we expect to see them crossed again, more regularly?
- What constitutes reasonable limits on Charter rights? Will civil and legal entities challenge the levels of Canadian government on the proportionality of their measures? How will the

75 Kenny, *The Plague Cycle*, 186.

courts determine the balance between the limitations enforced and the public good that is sought?

- How well did Parliament survive the test as an institution? What level of importance will Canadians assign to their democratic and parliamentary procedures? Will they increasingly see these safeguards as impediments to effective policy-making (the "Beijing option")? Or will they rally to reopen these institutions and exercise their displeasure with restrictions that are viewed as disproportionate?

CONCLUSION: IS THIS THE RIGHT EXIT?

Whether it is a question of value, trust, authority, risk, or justice—or if we drill more specifically into sectors such as family, health care, rights and freedoms, education, or trade—the key conclusion that we draw from our survey is this: While the pandemic did indeed accelerate the stress on many parts of North Atlantic society and culture, nowhere has that stress been more dramatic than on the ties that bind, on the tether that holds all these sectors together, on—in a phrase—our common life.

As we stated in the introduction, the pandemic has shown that at our most basic, the commitment that Canadians hold in common is a kind of pragmatic, biological security. It is a Secular[76] platform on which each person chooses their own vision of the good life. There are no shared commitments beyond a utilitarian ethic of bodily safety, personal autonomy, and material prosperity.

The religion of Life, as Don Cupitt puts it, is a kind of framework, a kind of moral language. But can Life serve as its own sacred anchor? Is it enough for it simply to exist, finding its own way, its own path, its own destiny? How can we determine what values to hold most dear, for example, or which rights to uphold over and above others? What, if anything, is worth living, and therefore *worth dying*, for, if Life itself is the ultimate aim?

Value, trust, authority, risk, justice, governance—all of these grand themes that our experts so persuasively place at the centre of our pandemic retrospective have in turn, at *their* centre, the crisis of the ties that bind them all together, that gives them coherence and definition. Yes, some sectors fared better than others, but this crisis has affected all sectors of our common life. What is Life *for*? Only after we find some consensus on the answer can we begin to address the crises in value, trust, authority, risk, and justice. Or, as the great moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre put it, we can answer the question "What am I to do?" only after we answer the prior question "Of what story am I a part?"

This, our Great Untethering, is an old crisis, now being accelerated. But the conclusion that we are drawing here helps to explain the chaos and disagreement as the crisis struck, not just about the

76 Taylor, *A Secular Age.*

prudential judgements that were made but also about the fundamental questions of constitutionality, freedom, authority, and risk, among others. And it helps to explain which arguments won out, and why. It accurately locates the operating moral framework of North Atlantic culture and society: Life.

"This is no modest claim," argues Yuval Levin, "It asserts for health a place at the very top of the heap of human goods. And it is a view that sits at the heart of the modern turn in philosophy: A form of it is evident in our political thought almost as clearly as in the thinking underlying modern science. Modern politics, too, sees the preservation and protection of life and health as the primary functions of society."[77]

None of this is to say that we in the North Atlantic world failed to recognize any other goods. Again Levin: "The pursuit of health does not *necessarily* conflict with other goods and obligations, but in those cases when it does conflict with them it tends to overcome them." Nor does it mean that no one recognizes an ultimacy beyond Life itself; clearly many do. But it is to say that the common denominator of North Atlantic politics and culture can no longer depend on an ultimacy greater than the civil religion of Life. Life is both the greatest, and the common, good. Life itself—its self-referential actualization, and present-day persistence—is our lowest common denominator. "Present day" is an important addition, because such Secularity, as Charles Taylor terms it, entails a tyranny of the (adult) majority and of the present, what he calls "a pitiless ingratitude toward the past." Life without voice or vote, especially those of the vulnerable in our society—children, the elderly, the disabled, others—is in far greater danger under this new moral code. And such a conclusion is all the more ironic in that Life ought to give priority to those who are weakest and most in need of it.

A society centred on Life may still be a comfortable one, a rich one, and to a degree, a happy one. But it will almost certainly not be a noble one, or a beautiful one, or a generous one, the kind of life that we might be willing to die for. Argues Levin, "Unbalanced and unmoored from other goods . . . such a regard [for health] can become a vessel for self-absorption and decadence. It can cause us to abandon our commitment to our highest principles, and to mortgage the future to avert present pain."[78]

Can work and education, trade and family, flourish in such a North Atlantic world in which Life reigns supreme? Has the pandemic given us the opportunity to reassess our common life afresh, to think together about what the ancients would call not Life, but living well[79]? If this is our COVID exit, is it the right exit?

77 Levin, "Putting Health in Perspective."

78 Levin, "Putting Health in Perspective."

79 "While it [the polis] comes into existence for the sake of life, it exists for the good life." Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b.

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