

VIEWPOINTS

# COVID and the 3 Tests of Compliance



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*Commentary*

Jesus in the wilderness faced three temptations from the Devil himself: material comfort, fame, and power. Needless to say, he declined every temptation and passed all three trials.

So too did the couple seeking to enter the order of virtue in Mozart's "The Magic Flute." They blasted right through the tests of silence, isolation, and fear. In the opera, much celebration ensues.

Fairy tales too are often framed by three chances. The Miller's daughter is given three chances to guess Rumpelstiltskin's name, for example, and I'm sure you can think of other instances.

The final movement of the 6th "Tragic" Symphony by Gustav Mahler features three hammer blows, the third of which was later removed by the composer for superstitious reasons: the fear that the third signifies death. To this day, audiences wait in anticipation to see if the conductor will motion the percussionist to deploy the third or not. When he does not, the blow is even more conspicuous in its absence.

And here we are in year three of the times after the pandemic response sent our lives and those of billions into extraordinary upheaval. To most of us, it seems like a crazy blur of edicts, propaganda, revelations, fear, confusion, division, and shock, so much so that it is hard to keep the history straight. Indeed, many people just want everything forgotten or at least completely mis-remembered.

Daily, we are bombarded by fake history that we know is wrong. We lived through it. Brownstone has been accumulating all the receipts: the emails, speeches, edits, threats, impositions, demands, and so on. In the face of all this attempted revisionism, it's hard to keep one's bearing.

One way to think about these last three years is a succession of compliance tests: how much liberty and good sense are we willing to surrender to the regime and on what terms? The policies seem to be constructed for just that purpose.

As if to fit the model, they came in three great waves: lockdowns, masks, and vaccine mandates. Let's examine all three stages and reflect on their demands and terms. It begins to make sense, at least from the point of view of those in control.

## Lockdowns

“Thank goodness for the lockdowns; this will end the pandemic.”

The lockdowns hit us hard from mid-March 2020 and onward, imposed as if they were a conventional response to a circulating new pathogen, though they literally had no precedent in history. They were sweeping, closing churches, schools, small and medium-sized businesses, civic clubs like AA, bars and restaurants plus gyms, and even venues that host weddings and funerals. Many states imposed stay-at-home orders. The entire workforce was divided between essential and nonessential, while medical services were reserved for only COVID cases and other extreme emergencies while everything else was shut.

All of this was based on the astonishing announcement by the Trump administration: “Governors should close schools in communities that are near areas of community transmission” and “bars, restaurants, food courts, gyms, and other indoor and outdoor venues where groups of people congregate should be closed.”

At the March 16, 2020, press conference, not one reporter asked a critical question. Even if this was only for two weeks, as was promised, how is any of this compatible with law and the Bill of Rights? How is it that bureaucracies, without any vote of any legislature, can simply “shut down” an entire country? It was completely bizarre, so much so that most people figured that there had to be some legitimate underlying rationale.

Not everyone went along. Some hair salons, bars, and churches remained open but found themselves pilloried by the media. Then the cops arrived, even SWAT teams, closing them by force. The kids had to stay home too, and moms and dads were forced to leave the workforce to care for them at home, splitting their days pretending to work on Zoom calls while their children pretended to be in school on Zoom too. It was a massive crush of technology and everyone had to adapt.

There was nowhere to go and most American towns suddenly looked like ghost towns. President Trump announced that it would surely all be over by Easter but this itself was something of a shock: Easter was more than two weeks away, so his announcement amounted to extension of lockdowns. His advisers Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx seized the moment and successfully talked Trump into another full 30 days of lockdowns.

These weeks were excruciating. Many if not most people knew that there was something very wrong but it was unclear what. We could no longer meet with friends and neighbors to discuss. Plus many people in our online communities seemed to be all in on the lockdowns, fully believing that this was the way to control and eventually stop a pandemic.

And yet there we were, all of us living in this surreal scene, asked to believe the implausible and give up what we loved the most by deference to a handful of people who said that they knew more than we knew. Those who did not do the right thing were considered horrid and unscientific, insufficiently credulous toward our betters.

## Masks

“Thank goodness for masks; this will end the lockdowns.”

In these early days, there was no thought put into universal masking. It was never part of our history. There was a moment during the 1918 pandemic that one city tried masks but not only did it not work; it produced a massive political revolt. Not since then had masks for the general population ever been tried. Plenty of countries in the Far East had used masks to filter out smog on bad days but that problem had never been something that affected the US enough to make them a norm.

Plus, in those days, the experts told everyone not to bother with them. The masks should be saved for medical personnel. In any case, they don't really work to control the spread of viruses like this. They are not the equivalent of using condoms to avoid infection from AIDS. A respiratory virus is something else entirely, and we are a people informed by evidence and science. The evidence was nowhere in sight that masks achieve any real purpose.

Practically overnight, that advice changed. Part of the deal was that masks were the key to getting out of lockdown. We could leave our home again if only we would wear a mask. For those who don't like lockdown, now is your chance to leave it behind. You only needed to comply with this second round of edicts. The first round, true, was pretty rough, but who can object to putting a cloth on your face? Surely no one. As Bill Gates said, we wear pants so why not cover our faces too? It only makes sense.

People went along, and we went through a whole season or two in which we did not see smiles. Even the children had their faces covered. If you desire to breathe freely, you could fully expect to be denounced by strangers for daring to reject the demands of authorities. You could get thrown off a plane, and put on a list never to travel again. The hate was apparent everywhere, even in outdoor markets where gatekeepers would sternly instruct you slap that cloth on your face.

Those who resisted the masking demands were—like those who refused the lockdowns—regarded as miscreants and political rebels. I personally found the whole demand of masking to be so preposterous (masking has long been a sign of subservience) that I spoke out against them, only to find myself attacked viciously in many public forums as a grandma killer and a disease spreader. And this came from venues that previously had celebrated civil liberties.

This demand for masking was later nationalized once the Biden administration took over. It was to be 100 days of masking to defeat the virus. But by now no one believed anything coming from Washington. We knew for sure that the claim that it was only for 100 days—why 100?—was propaganda.

It eventually took a major court case to end the mask mandate for all travel: buses, trains, and planes. Even that is still being litigated to this day, as the Biden administration claims it has the power to impose such an order by virtue of the quarantine power of the federal government, first granted in 1944.



Looking back, the deal was pretty obvious: you can get out of lockdowns by masking. If you don't like complying with the first round of tests, here is another test for you: comply with this and all your kvetching about lockdowns can come to an end. Just go along! What kind of pathology do you have to keep from continuing to indulge this pointlessly rebellious habit? You are probably a conspiracy theorist or QAnon or hanging around people from the radical right.

Just do what you are told and then everything will be fine. Things are not fine because you irrationally cling to your “freedumb.”

Of course, the government broke the deal. Masking didn't really end the restrictions. They continued on anyway. And many are still with us, even the track-and-trace surveillance and restrictions on movement. The signs that demand we socially distance still festoon airports and malls even if everyone ignores them.

## Vaccines

“Thank goodness for the vaccines; they will end the lockdowns and the masks.”

Eventually, there came a third test of compliance. This time it was more explicit: if you don't like lockdowns and masking, the way out is pretty simple: get the shot. If you get the shot, you can travel around freely and you can even take off your mask. This is the way we end this pandemic but there must be broad compliance. Everyone authorized to get the vaccine under the "emergency use authorization" should do it.

New York City shut down to everyone but the vaccinated. Refuseniks could not go to restaurants, bars, theaters, libraries, or any other public house. Boston and New Orleans followed suit. The mayors said that they were keeping the city safe and reviving the economy because the only way to avoid getting COVID was to be around only vaccinated people. We were further told that the unvaccinated were prolonging the pandemic. Their patience was running thin: get the jab or lose your job.

Many had to get it, and thousands were fired for refusing. Millions were displaced because of all this. And this only intensified the campaign, which was then extended to children. Then came the booster and the bivalent. All the while, the news concerning their effectiveness got grimmer. It did not stop transmission, thus removing all "public health" rationale behind the mandates. Moreover, it did not stop infection. You would get COVID anyway. In fact, by virtue of immunity imprinting, you could be even more vulnerable.

The thinking behind the third hammer blow turned out to be a lie too. Your decision to surrender your bodily autonomy to the vaccine that did work did not gain back your freedom any more than the mask or the lockdowns did. All three compliance demands, each predicated on the idea that it would make the virus go away and gain back rights and liberties, turned out to be ruses of one sort or another.

Crucially, the new demand came with the promise that if you just believe in and comply with the newest thing, the older thing that you hated will go away. So what's the problem? Just give in to this new thing and all will be well.

And yet the vaccine mandate was the most egregious by some measures. If lockdowns were the war, the vaccine mandate was conscription. It took hold of your own body and demanded you allow—via a needle in your skin—in a government-funded and indemnified potion about which you knew nothing. It was the equivalent of drafting young people out of their prime to kill and be killed in a foreign land, and we know how that has ended for states that have tried it: not only riots but revolutions.

So the third test for many was the very act that flipped the switch in many people's minds. It was a bridge too far and the act that caused millions to rethink everything about the pandemic response and their compliance all along. Even for those who went along with it, the bitterness remains and grows.

From legend and literature, this is how things usually are presented, not with one inviting temptation to go along but rather with three chances to comply, each with assurance that all will be well if we just give up our recalcitrant desire to think and act for ourselves. At each stage, every one of us faces enormous pressure, and not just from government but also from family, friends, and coworkers.

- “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” ~ material comfort
- “If You are the Son of God, throw yourself down” ~ fame and social approval
- “All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me” ~ power

The three tests in this case turned out to be more like the hammer blows in Mahler's symphony, signifiers of disaster and death, in this case pertaining to our rights and liberties.

Sure enough, even now, the remnants of all three are still with us. There are still capacity restrictions in place as remnants of the original lockdowns. Masks are still required in many cities and venues. And the vaccine mandates are still being enforced. And the pandemic emergency is still in place and will be for several more months.

Just as one is ending, you can be sure that another is beginning. The New York Times just sounded the alarm about H5N1 bird flu, which they say could kill half of humanity if it crosses over from birds to humans. And we can be certain that the three trials will be visited upon us again.

Have we learned? What will be our response in the next round of trials?

*From the Brownstone Institute*

*Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.*