

On Institutional Neutrality and Public Health

To the Editor

Peter Wood worries that institutional neutrality will empower the mob. The opposite is more nearly true. I have been affiliated with the University of Chicago for most of the Kalven Report era, and I have witnessed interactions between mob and Kalven up close. The latest is illustrative. Last academic year the mob came to occupy and disrupt our campus. Another mob descended on another large research university 20 miles to our Northwest with no tradition of institutional neutrality. Similar demands were made in both places. The Northwestern president caved. The Chicago president, after some dithering, evicted the mob. You can never be sure that Kalven made the difference, but we do have the Chicago president's testimony: his reason—his only reason—for acting as he did was to preserve institutional neutrality.

Mr. Wood also wants college presidents to stop hiding their views behind a shield of neutrality. But few care what the president thinks about the issues of the day, and even then, neutrality does not prevent the president from airing them. The real problem in-

stitutional neutrality grapples with is the vulnerability of the community of scholars to factions seeking to use the name and resources of the university for their own ends. These factions can come from within the community or without or both. They operate various levers—mobs with demands, organized campaigns within governing bodies, bully pulpits, petitions and all the rest familiar to AQ readers. The vulnerability of universities to such pressures has only increased as their communities have become more uniform ideologically. Institutional neutrality is a message to the organized factions that they will be unable to coopt the university in their causes. James Madison would understand.

Mr. Wood is correct that you do not achieve institutional neutrality by passing resolutions. But the requisite investment ought to be considered by any community of scholars seeking to preserve itself.

Sam Peltzman

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To the Editor:

I have enjoyed Peter Wood's NAS solicitation letters, but I am puzzled by his recent criticism in *Academic Questions* of the policy of institutional neutrality. I do not suppose he would want a college president to commit his institution to the recommendation: Vote for Trump, or to the alternative, Don't Vote for Trump.

Perhaps Mr. Wood was looking for a forthright statement that the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas was a terrorist act, justifying military retaliation against it. Would he also want a statement saying that the Israeli response has proceeded far beyond such justified retaliation and at this point constitutes a clear case of attempted genocide? As it happens, I agree with both of these statements, but I believe that college officials in their official capacity should refrain from endorsing either these or any other statements about controversial political matters.

It is true, as Mr. Wood and others have pointed out, that the claim of neutrality can be used as a device, among others, to cover the cowardice which has become endemic among college administrations. However, I regard neutrality as an essential aspect of a policy of robust defense of viewpoint diversity. It seems to me that this is the original intent of the Kalven report. To indicate what I have in mind, I will quote from a letter I sent to our college president suggesting the appropriate public stance which the college should take.

Letter to Paul Alivisatos

As the current tragedy in the Middle East continues to unfold, our institution should indicate its special concern for four groups among our faculty, staff and students.

First, there are Jews who, without getting involved in the current political conflict, nonetheless wish to openly practice their religion. Similarly, there are Muslims among us who also wish to avoid politics but without hiding their religious affiliation. On the other hand, there are some, both Jews and non-Jews, who wish to vocally express their support for the reaction of Israel to the Hamas attack. This includes some who have been, in the past, strong supporters of the government policies of the current Prime Minister as well as some who have been fiercely critical of behaviors of the Israeli government. Finally, there are those, Muslim, Arab and others, who strongly support the Palestinian cause. This includes some who have responded with enthusiasm to the Hamas attacks as well as others who deplore it but who are focusing on the effects of the Israeli reaction on the Palestinians in Gaza.

To all four of these groups we declare our concern for your physical safety. We will vigorously defend your right to be free from assault, threat or harassment, regardless of your affiliations or views. In addition, we defend the free speech rights of all involved. You have the right to express your views, even loudly, and to protest the statements of your ideo-

logical opponents. However, we will defend the rights of those opponents as well as your own. No matter how odious you regard the opposing views, we will defend your opponents' right to express them just as we will defend your right to air your own. In particular, we will not act to abridge their rights nor allow yours to be abridged. In these loud times, each of us must learn to understand, and even to accept, that some among us have beliefs which we regard as outrageous.

Defending the outrageous comments of members of the college community requires courage from administrators and will in turn need the policy of institutional neutrality to justify their defensive stance.

Let us consider a sample of remarks likely to require such a defense against one group or another.

Make America great again ... Too bad he missed ... Lock her up ... From the river to the sea, Palestine must be free ... From the river to the sea, Israel must be united ... Kill the Jews ... I dream of shooting whites and dancing on their graves ... John Brown, be like him — Dare to struggle, dare to win ... Most of my black students are in the bottom half of my classes ... Hamas is a terrorist group ... Antifa is a terrorist group ... Hamas is a legion of heroes ... Stop the steal... Islam is a religion of hate...The pro-Israel lobby has too much power in America...Laurence Olivier was great as Othello...

As the beleaguered college presidents said before Congress, it is a matter of context. I believe that people should be allowed to say these things in unofficial gatherings, shout them

from crowds, and post them as tweets or on Facebook, or even wear them on tee-shirts. I believe that colleges should defend these rights without requiring prodding from FIRE. Furthermore, most of these slogans might be defended as part of an argument occurring in a public debate.

In my view institutional neutrality extends to subunits of the college. Recently when a department had posted on its official website a resolution of support for the Palestinians, Columbia University required them to take it down. This was condemned as censorship, but I think it is not.

Consider the following three announcements:

1. We members of the Sociology Department announce our opposition to racism.
2. We, the members of the Sociology Department, announce our opposition to racism.
3. The Sociology Department announces its opposition to racism.

In my opinion the first is absolutely acceptable, although not as an official post, while neither of the other two should be allowed ...

At first glance, it would appear that there should be nothing wrong with a commitment to something as uncontroversial as opposition to racism. However, lately the meaning of the term "racism" has become highly controversial, as the political opinions of various conservative scholars have been denounced as racist. Such criticism and labelling by opponents of conservative views is

protected speech at the individual and group level but should not become the official position of a department.

I use racism as an example, but the same principles apply to more obviously controversial matters such as responses to the current situation in Israel and Gaza.

As a final point, I might add that it is important to avoid the Lovejoy-Popper error which might be described as “No tolerance for the enemies of tolerance.”

The policy I described above folds institutional neutrality into a version of the classic liberal defense of free speech *a la* John Stuart Mill. It is not itself a neutral policy. It is opposed by and must be defended against those who believe that certain views are so illegitimate as to be undeserving of discussion in an academic context and should therefore be banned and its proponents sanctioned. Example of such ideas which have been proposed as beyond the realm of legitimate discourse would be: The role of genetics in racial disparities, critical race theory, the advantages of a policy of eugenics, climate change denial, Holocaust denial, defense of colonialism, America’s history of continuous racism.

The illiberal proponents of such censorship should be met with argument. Protesters who demand cancellation of various persons, books, and beliefs have a right to air their case and to receive a response, an explanation of why their demands will not be met. Of course, if these people take control of the institu-

tion it is we who will be the opposition, vigorously criticizing their policies despite the risk of overstepping the limits with which they would hem us in.

For now, at least, I would want a college president to say something like this:

I have received your demand that the showing of D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* be forbidden on campus. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with representatives of your group. However, unless I am convinced by this discussion to reverse the current policy of tolerance for diverse views, I will not accede to your demand. You are, of course, free to protest my decision, the general policy on which it is based, as well as the actual movie itself, but disruption of the showing of the movie or threats to those who attend will be responded to with college sanctions as a violation of the rights of those who wish to be there.

Ethan Akin

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Peter Wood responds:

I’m grateful for the attention that Professors Peltzman and Akin have given my statement on “institutional neutrality.” Professor Peltzman upholds institutional neutrality as a way to protect the community of scholars from factions that usurp the name of the university for dire ends. The professed neutrality is a way of declaring, “You will not succeed.”

I’d say that’s a valid response when confronted by factions that seek to

draw the university into quarrels that are not rightly matters for the community of scholars. But some quarrels do indeed involve us. I can work in peace alongside academics whose views differ greatly from mine, but when they attempt to impose their will on me, neutrality is not a viable response.

Professor Akin rightly supposes that I do not want a college president to commit his institution to any party or candidate. Neutrality has its place—and it is a large place—in delimiting the role of the university in our society. That place is large but not without limits. I likewise agree that a college president would best avoid unnecessary endorsements of particular actions by Israel in response to the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas. But the behavior of students on many American campuses made “institutional neutrality” in “defense of viewpoint diversity” a practical impossibility. Declaring a campus “neutral” while students (and outsiders) camp on its ground, threaten (and sometimes assault) other students and faculty, vandalize buildings, and disrupt classes is capitulation, not neutrality. By tolerating such “protest,” the university is granting its legitimacy and taking sides against anyone who disagrees with the protesters. “Neutrality” in such situations is an empty phrase.

We definitely should want “viewpoint diversity” and want it to be robust enough to include views that we robustly disagree with. But viewpoint diversity supposes a context of civil order. When that breaks down, we need

a vigorous re-commitment to the abiding principle of respect for expression of opposing views. Institutional neutrality doesn’t get us there.

I think Professor Akin and I are largely in agreement over the substance of what “viewpoint diversity” should look like, but he puts more stock in “institutional neutrality” as a path to that ideal than I do. And I have a rather different view of the role of the college president.

It is better to know what your college president thinks about important topics than not to know. That is because what the college president thinks almost always has consequences, even if he is exceptionally discreet about his views. The weight of the college president’s opinion is sometimes invisible to many faculty members. They need not know why a new science building has opened or how exactly it was funded. They may take the prioritization of DEI in faculty hiring as just something that happens in higher education today. They may be enthusiastic about the sudden increase in research funding from China or Qatar. But behind all such developments sits a college president who has definite ideas about what is in his institution’s best interests.

“Institutional neutrality” is a doctrine that assists the college president when he decides he would rather *not* say what his views are. Not saying frustrates those who doubt the wisdom of a particular policy. I for one would rather know that the president of my university regards the college as systemically

racist and therefore in need of drastic interventions. We can debate the proposition that the college is racist. But debate is much more difficult when the institution's leadership implements anti-racist policies while declaring the college is "neutral" on the role of BLM, the 1619 project, the George Floyd riots.

The controversial topics on campus are controversial for a reason. They typically touch on matters of fundamental importance to higher learning. Is "settler colonialism" a valid description of how the state of Israel came into being? That's an academic question pregnant with real world consequences. There are others. Do carbon emissions from human use of fossil fuels cause significant global warming? Is the human species sexually dimorphic?

I can certainly understand why some college presidents would rather say: *Our university is institutionally neutral on these matters. We respect the freedom of all sides to express their views in civil discourse.* But the truth is more complicated. The university that espouses such a view may sidestep some confrontations, but it does so by forfeiting honest intellectual leadership.

Some topics are of enough moment that a university ought to have a position, even as it allows and respects dissent from that position. Not every controversy rises to this level. Let the university be "institutionally neutral" on which English translation of *The Odyssey* is best, or whether Bayesian or frequentist statistics are more reliable. And be sure the university stands apart

from endorsing candidates or parties. But a university that cannot find its way through the fog on whether China is a valid academic partner, whether America is an apartheid state, whether climate change is a crisis or a figment, or whether Israel merits extermination is a university that has lost its capacity to contribute to the public good.

It is the college president who is responsible for articulating the university's positions on such matters. If he is silent, more often than not it is because he fears heightening the tensions between two (or more) sides in a disagreement. He wishes to be Switzerland, but also to be lauded for his commitment to academic freedom. But he is seldom truly neutral and his commitment to academic freedom is usually a pose that falls away the moment someone proposes a truly controversial idea not backed by the threat of violence.

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To The Editor:

J. Scott Turner's review of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s book *The Real Anthony Fauci: Bill Gates, Big Pharma, and the Global War on Democracy and Public Health*, in the fall 2024 issue of AQ (J. Scott Turner, "American Lysenko") cites a number of claims by Kennedy which, perpetuated by Turner, may result in harm to public health. Indeed, some already have.

Among other things, Turner, in discussing what led Fauci to disagree with UC Berkeley molecular biologist Peter Duesberg, refers to “*dubious* theories about the connection between the disease AIDS ... and its *supposed* cause, [the virus] HIV,” [italics added] theories which Fauci endorsed and Duesberg challenged. I presume Turner here is citing Kennedy, who in addition to his other idiosyncrasies also appears to be, as is Turner apparently, an “AIDS denier.”

Turner distorts the timeline in maintaining that “As AIDS was first unfolding, Peter Duesberg challenged the prevailing consensus, that [the virus] HIV was the cause of AIDS.” But as AIDS was first unfolding in 1981, there was *no* consensus whatsoever as to the cause of AIDS, and it was only some years later that the HIV virus was isolated.

AIDS was first recognized in gay men. Duesberg hypothesized initially that AIDS was caused by a chemical taken by gay men to enhance sexual experience. While he later expanded his claims to include other substances, had he any epidemiological or medical experience, he might have realized how unlikely this explained heroin addicts who got AIDS after use of unsterilized needles, or those receiving a blood product to treat hemophilia.

After isolation of the HIV virus in 1985, consequent preventative measures led to the subsequent drop in AIDS cases in those receiving blood transfusions and in hemophiliacs after similar measures were taken. Despite this, with

undiminished vigor, Duesberg claimed AIDS had his postulated etiology and HIV had no causal role. Duesberg's view implied that costly medical approaches to AIDS were unnecessary. The South African government happily followed his advice, avoiding considerable expenditures on effective measures. This resulted in avoidable deaths of over 300,000 people.¹ Independent work has not supported Duesberg's claims, which is inconsistent with the epidemiology of AIDS. The Nobel prize for discovery of HIV recognized its connection to AIDS.

Duesberg was, Turner claims, abandoned by colleagues whose livelihood would be threatened by supporting him. Nonsense. He got no support from colleagues because his views appeared absurd. My late colleague at Berkeley, the epidemiologist Warren Winkelstein, gave him the benefit of doubt, and sought out Duesberg to review all the evidence relating to AIDS, hoping that his stance resulted from ignorance of pertinent data. Duesberg agreed with all the evidence presented, but refused to accept the final inference, like one who would accept all the steps of a Euclidean proof in geometry except its conclusion! His mind was made up, and he would and could not accept what was to him heretical.

Kennedy goes so far as to liken Fauci to a fictional Mafia figure, Vito Corleone. Turner likens him rather to the even more evil but real Soviet scientific rogue, Trofim Lysenko, whose practices and power led to famines that killed

millions, and misery if not death for a generation of Soviet geneticists. And Turner likens Duesberg to the martyred Soviet agronomist Nicolai Vavilov, who died in a prison camp after being denounced by Lysenko. Turner, presumably following Kennedy, states Fauci destroyed Duesberg's career because his livelihood and the supremacy of the NIAID which he headed was threatened by Duesberg's challenge of "AIDS orthodoxy." Simply to enumerate these absurdities—Duesberg a Vavilov!—is sufficient to repudiate them.

But there are a number of other disturbing claims in Turner's review. Among the many alleged faults and failures of the public health response to Covid-19 he refers to "the denigration of prophylactics like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin," implying falsely, they are effective. But there is no evidence for this. Indeed hydroxychloroquine may have a fatal effect on the heart. It is simply irresponsible for Turner to make such a unmodified claim which may lead readers of *AQ* to believe these possibly dangerous substances are useful for Covid-19.

He also comments on the alleged undue emphasis given to untested Covid-19 vaccines of dubious effectiveness. If anything counts as a modern medical miracle it has been the rapid production of the vaccines for Covid-19. At the time Covid-19 emerged, I remember experts predicting from previous experience with vaccines for new diseases that it might take up to four years to produce a vaccine. In the event

it took less than twelve months. That the introduction and development may not have been as smooth as one hoped does not undermine this achievement which should be celebrated.

Turner cites Kennedy approvingly, in stating public interest has a "vanishingly small" part in shaping public health policy at a national level. He claims the public health bureaucracy stampedes the public unnecessarily into "urgent action"—implicitly during the Covid-19 epidemic—to unleash streams of money to enrich themselves and their "partners in the pharmaceutical industry." This Marxist-like analysis of public health policy is absurd. Turner conflates consequences—necessary funding for public health action—with its' cause, the need to battle potentially harmful human diseases.

Moreover, Turner writes as if the NIH, and Fauci's Institute in particular, controlled public health policy. It has been rather primarily the Center for Disease Control [CDC] which has done so. Those at NIH, a group of research institutes, may affect policy in their personal roles as Fauci did in an advisory capacity.

I have not read Kennedy's book, but Wikipedia reports extraordinary accusations therein that Turner leaves uncited, perhaps because not even he could swallow them: "Kennedy alleges that Fauci sabotaged treatments for AIDS, violated federal laws, and conspired with Bill Gates and social media companies such as Facebook to suppress information about COVID-19 cures,

to leave vaccines as the only option to fight the pandemic.... He claims without proof that Fauci and Gates had schemed to prolong the pandemic and exaggerate its effects, promoting expensive vaccinations for the benefit of “a powerful vaccine cartel.”

One must inquire what has driven Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to write a 934 page invective-filled screed against Anthony Fauci, analogizing him to a Mafia figure, one which has so bamboozled Turner. As is well known Kennedy is a prominent anti-vaccine advocate and promoted the scientifically disproven claim of a causal link between autism and vaccines. Understandably, Fauci, the most prominent public figure associated with Covid-19 vaccines, has emerged as his bitter target.

Kennedy’s accusations of unalloyed corruption and self-aggrandizement against Fauci, echoed by Turner, come ironically from one who has endorsed Donald Trump after being offered the possibility of a Cabinet position. Yet Kennedy had said earlier his and Trump’s positions “could not be further apart,” that Trump was a “terrible human being”, a “discredit to democracy,” and “probably a sociopath,” to quote Wikipedia. Who is the corrupt one who has sold out for personal gain?

Lastly, what has driven Turner, not a fan of Kennedy, to his generally favorable review? Turner cites Kennedy’s account in support of his view that American science has become “Sovietized.” Turner claims without qualification, that, as a consequence “scientists to-

day are harnessed to politically defined ends.” (Not *a few* scientists, or *some* scientists, but apparently, *all*, at least in the U.S.) And allegedly, success follows from how well they promote those ends: “Political utility is the benchmark for success.”

This is a ludicrous hyperbole. Only a tiny amount of scientific endeavor has any direct political “utility.” The only examples Turner cites of this Sovietized science with political utility are for advancing what he terms “progressive pieties,” such as belief in climate change. Yet even to characterize climate change as a “progressive piety” is a knee jerk reaction to a complex issue. Can any reasonable person deny the reality of climate change? The political debate is about the extent human activities have caused it, and what we can do to improve climate.

Turner’s glib generalities, motivated I suspect by a few unfortunate examples, simply evade the nuances at stake. The vast bulk of scientists work in areas with little or no direct political implications.

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J. Scott Turner replies:

Dr. Hook is perturbed by my review of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s book *The Real Anthony Fauci*. I disagree with much of his critique, for reasons I will outline below. I stand by the principal point

of my review, though, to wit: Kennedy lays out a strong case against a public health establishment that has drifted far from its ostensible mission, is permeated with corruption and careerism, and is in need of serious reform. While Kennedy may be a flawed messenger, and while he tends to wander off-point, his case is substantial enough to be seriously engaged, rather than dismissed with glib insults of “denialism,” as Dr. Hook was quick to do.

Dr. Hook’s critique falls into three broad categories. First, he disputes various issues concerning the timeline of the emerging AIDS epidemic and its connection to HIV. Second, he takes issue with my characterization of Anthony Fauci as an American version of the notorious Soviet agronomist Trofim Lysenko, and of Peter Duesberg as an American Nikolai Vavilov. (He wrongly attributes the likening of Anthony Fauci to Vito Corleone to JFK Jr.: the simile was mine.) His third (and related) objection concerns the politicization of public health policy as it relates to AIDS and COVID-19. He takes particular offense at my assertion that American science has become indistinguishable from the Sovietized science that led to the rise of Lysenko (and by analogy, to the rise of Fauci).

Dr. Hook refers to the uncertainty during the initial emergence of AIDS in the early 1980s. He is correct about the uncertainty. During the emergence of AIDS, the uncertainty swirled around whether the HIV virus was the *cause* of the disease, or an opportunistic hitch-

hiker showing up in an immune system weakened by some other cause. Among these alternative causes was the prevalent abuse of amyl nitrate and other drugs, as well as other lifestyle issues surrounding the contemporary gay culture of San Francisco.² In such a climate of uncertainty, one would expect scientists to be most open to a wide range of hypotheses. That is how science is supposed to work, after all: falsify and eliminate hypotheses until you get to the one that withstands the test. That’s not what happened in the 1980s: the NIH and academic virologists immediately launched into a reflexive mode of “virus-hunting” until it found its convenient villain in HIV.

Peter Duesberg was the most prominent critic of the “AIDS hypothesis,” but was far from being the only one: Kari Mullis was also deeply skeptical, and the more temperate Luc Montagnier was far from convinced that HIV was the sole cause of AIDS. Nevertheless, Hook portrays Duesberg as a recalcitrant crank who simply will not listen to “the science”: an “AIDS-denialist” as Dr. Hook dismisses him.

In fact, Duesberg had good reason for his skepticism. You can read his argument and decide for yourself, in his book *Inventing the AIDS Virus* (1998). Duesberg opens with a detailed account of the 1970s emergence in Japan of a polio-like syndrome known as SMON (Subacute Myelo-Optic Neuropathy). The obsession to find a causative virus diverted the Japanese public health establishment for several years before it

was finally determined that the syndrome was attributable to side effects from a widely prescribed anti-nausea medicine. Even so, the virus-hunting obsession continued, even as the incidence of SMON declined to near zero once the medicine was banned. Others will come to their own conclusions about this story: the lesson I draw is that Duesberg had a compelling argument that the emerging “AIDS-hypothesis” was shaping up as a repeat of the “SMON fiasco,” and would produce similar adverse consequences for finding effective treatments for AIDS. In the end, it was a Japanese skeptic and dissenter that finally turned research on SMON toward the correct diagnosis, and the saving of patients. In contrast, instead of welcoming the views of a prominent and highly-qualified dissenter and skeptic, the NIH shut Duesberg down.

Dr. Hook also lays “avoidable deaths of over 300,000 people” in Africa at Duesberg’s feet and the South African government “happily” following Duesberg’s advice. If only the South African government had gone straight to anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs, Dr. Hook implies, 300,000 AIDS sufferers would have survived. Dr. Hook seems to ignore the very real and ongoing concerns surrounding the toxicity of ARV drugs like AZT, which can put patients at higher risk than HIV infection.

As support for his inflammatory accusation against Peter Duesberg, Dr. Hook cites a South African economist, Nicoli Natrass, whose figures

were drawn from flawed demographic models, not data. For an interesting alternative take on this question, I recommend two essays in South African journalist Rian Malan’s collection, *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* (2012). In “The body count,” Malan looks for all the projected excess deaths the dire demographic models were predicting, and not finding them, wonders where the demographers went wrong. His answer is a fascinating example of epidemiological detective work. In “Among the AIDS fanatics,” Malan meticulously details the political and social machinations behind the South African government’s dealing with the intense pressure to adopt expensive and toxic ARV drugs to curb the “AIDS crisis” that all the right thinkers were predicting, but was stubbornly failing to materialize.

In Dr Hook’s view, South African president Thabo Mbeki was the one “happily” in the thrall of the Duesberg pied piper. In Malan’s fuller and more informed account, Mbeki comes off as the only one in the room with a level head against “the army of hysterics who believed every word by the High Priests of HIV in Geneva.” There’s an object lesson in South Africa’s experience with AIDS that, as of 2020, we still had not learned, if our recent experience with COVID-19 mortality models is taken into account. When will we learn it? Soon, one hopes, but never if we adhere to simplistic narratives of one side good, and the other simply wrong.

Turning now to COVID-19, Dr. Hook finds it “disturbing” that I would call

out the denigration by the public health establishment of prophylactics like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin in dealing with COVID-19, which Kennedy documented voluminously in his book. Dr. Hook is not only “disturbed” by my reference to Kennedy’s claims but finds me “simply irresponsible” for leading “readers of *AQ* to believe these possibly dangerous substances are useful for Covid-19.” Thank you for your concern!

However, Dr. Hook ignores the long history of “off-label” uses of these drugs to safely treat a variety of disorders, including coronavirus infections. It is this very versatility and safety that gave emergency room physicians in the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic the willingness to experiment with chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine (and later ivermectin) in treating acute COVID-19 patients. From these experiences emerged the realistic protocol that HCQ used in the early stages of a COVID-19 infection, sometimes in conjunction with steroids and antibiotics, could see patients through their infection without resort to artificial ventilation, which when it did not kill patients often left them with permanently damaged lungs. Far more progress was made by emergency room physicians dealing first-hand with the disease than the vaunted “science” that was being peddled by the NIH.

Finally, dismissing these drugs as ineffective and dangerous, as Dr. Hook does, is to ignore the etiology of COVID-19 mortality, which was trace-

able to a derangement of the immune response of the lung mucosa to the COVID-19 antigen. What often did in COVID-19 patients was a so-called cytokine storm, a hyper reaction of the lung mucosa that led directly to a fatal or near-fatal pneumonia. Drugs like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin were effective for COVID-19 and other diseases precisely because of their broad tendency to damp the immune response to infection. Early treatment with hydroxychloroquine could head off the cytokine storm that sent many patients to ventilators or the morgue. Once the storm starts, however, these drugs are much less useful. None of these nuances seem to be admissible under Dr. Hook’s broad umbrella of denialism.

Similar blinders afflict Dr. Hook with respect to the much-touted COVID-19 vaccines. It is true that these vaccines were rushed to market by fast-tracking them through the usual safety protocols for developing vaccines. I agree that the usual multi-year slog through existing vaccine testing protocols is overly bureaucratic and could be streamlined. Speaking for myself, I thought the mRNA vaccines were a remarkable technological development, and at the time, I happily took them. So, one cannot reasonably claim that I am an anti-vaxxer (nor can Kennedy be so accused despite what Wikipedia has to say).

Despite my generally positive feelings about vaccines, however, our subsequent experience with the COVID-19 vaccine should prompt us to the reflec-

tive pause that hindsight should bring, but which seems to have evaded Dr. Hook. Even leaving aside the worrying claims of cardiomyopathy among younger recipients of the COVID-19 vaccines, their effectiveness has not lived up to expectation. They confer limited immunity against the disease, and little to no ability to block transmission. We are now at the point where even the elderly weather COVID-19 infections with little more than a few days' discomfort (full disclosure, I am in my mid-70s, stopped my COVID-19 booster shots after the third iteration, have since had two bouts with the virus that I'm aware of, and am still happily vertical).

Finally, Dr. Hook is particularly incensed that I would argue that American science has become "Sovietized." When it comes to my characterization of Anthony Fauci as an American Lysenko, and Peter Duesberg as an American Vavilov, he says that "simply to enumerate these absurdities — Duesberg a Vavilov! — is sufficient to repudiate them."

The logic is odd, to say the least, straight out of 1984. I would refer interested readers to two books. *Stalin and the Scientists*, by Simon Ings (2017), and *Freedom's Laboratory* by Audra Wolf (2018). Ings gives what I think is the most comprehensive and honest account of Soviet science during the Lysenko era, and Wolfe lays out very clearly the extent to which the U.S. science ecosystem was modeled after the Soviets.' The parallels are eerie ... and

chilling. Again, I would ask readers not to take my word for the claim that we are living in an era where "scientists today are harnessed to politically defined ends," but to read for themselves and draw their own conclusions about who is perpetrating "glib generalities" that "simply evade the nuances at stake."

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1. Nicoli Nattrass, "AIDS and the Scientific Governance of Medicine in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *African Affairs* 107, no.4 (2008): 157-176.
2. R. Shilts, *And the Band Played on: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (St. Martin's Press, 2000).