

Evil in Our Time: Naomi Wolf on the COVID Response

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What changed in March 2020? How have things played out? What are the causes? What can we expect, looking ahead?

Those are the key questions Dr. Naomi Wolf addresses in her new book, [The Bodies of Others – The New Authoritarians, COVID-19 and The War Against the Human](#) (All Seasons Press, Fort Lauderdale, May 2022).

Naomi Wolf is perhaps best known as a chief spokeswoman for third-wave feminism, a bestselling author and advisor to the campaigns of Bill Clinton and Al Gore. In her new book, Wolf’s subject is not so much the SARS-CoV-2 virus as the worldwide reactions to its spread, and the consequences of those reactions. Reactions unprecedented in their severity; never before have whole nations been locked up in their homes for weeks, even months on end, to battle a respiratory virus.

Wolf’s book is a travel through time, starting in March 2020, ending this spring. She switches between discussion and analysis of the situation at each stage and different aspects of it, and a kind of personal diary of how she and those around her were affected.

The book starts with a description of normal pre-pandemic life. The author is at a conference in London surrounded by friends, when she first hears about the lockdown in Italy. This is March 8, 2020. Reflecting, Wolf now sees the news of this first lockdown in Europe as an indication of a strike against the foundation of free Western society: “The flower of Europe was being struck down.”

She moves on to give us a vivid picture of normal life in her New York neighbourhood in the Bronx, its bustling life in all its diversity, suddenly struck down by the lockdown. She and her husband leave the city: “We had both been in conflict areas and we had both lived in close societies – we recognized their movements. We both knew something very bad was on its way; whether natural or political, or both, we could not yet tell.”

To Wolf, lockdown is more than just a way to slow the spread of a virus; it is an abandonment of free society; it signifies a new kind of society; a totalitarian oligarchy, and the fact that we allowed it means we have lost our freedom for the unforeseeable future.

Wolf was not a skeptic from the outset. At first she believed the official narrative, feared for herself and her loved ones, but slowly she started to discover the strange discrepancy between the narrative and the facts. She started questioning the data presented, the usefulness of the countermeasures, the psychological harm of mask-wearing, especially to children, and she describes how perplexed she was witnessing the utter lack of critical thinking on behalf of the media. She discovers how the fear of the virus has turned into a cult, the virus taking on the form of "Milton's Satan."

Wolf discusses the interests at play and explains how lockdowns have benefited certain business sectors, especially Big Tech, large corporations at the expense of small businesses. She suggests the proliferation of restrictions may have been driven by the elites, with a goal of disempowering the masses in order to grab their assets. The fact that someone benefits from a situation is of course not proof they caused it. But the financial interests are certainly there and there is little doubt that once the lockdowns and restrictions were in place, many of those who gained the most by them have certainly done much to support the narrative.

To Wolf, this is not about a conspiracy, but a mindset of arrogance and indifference among the elites of society: "But the point was that these people did not need to gather in the shadows or be part of a cabal. Why would this group need a secret sign or a secret meeting? They simply owned the global stratum in which they operated, and they were accountable only to one another."

In the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben [analyzed](#) the situation based on three key concepts in his philosophy, *Homo Sacer*, *the State of Exception* and *Bare Life*. *Homo sacer* is someone who is at the same time sacred and excluded. *Homo sacer* has in some way broken the taboos of society and is therefore already consecrated to the gods, he can be killed with impunity, but he cannot be sacrificed; he is subject to the power of government, but not protected by the law.

Homo Sacer is condemned to bare life, *zoe* in the original Greek sense; existing not as a citizen, but as a human stripped of all rights to take an active part in society. The *state of exception* is realized when law and constitution are abandoned and the executive arm of the state takes the reins, usually based on a declaration of a state of emergency.

As Agamben explains his seminal work, [State of Exception](#), the *Third Reich* was based on a state of emergency throughout, as the *Weimar* constitution was in fact "unplugged" right at the beginning, while formally being unchanged the whole time.

Who are the *homines sacri*? In Biblical times the lepers, in modern times the prisoners of Auschwitz, refugees; homeless, stateless, at the mercy of the charity of foreign rulers.

Agamben's suggestion, in his first blog posts on the coronavirus in 2020, is that with the lockdowns and other restrictions we have all become *homines sacri*; we are outside civil society, yet subject to the power of the rulers, unlimited now, based on the emergency declarations.

We are all *homines sacri* now, Agamben says; a long-term development has culminated in

biopolitical totalitarianism. But as Wolf shows us, we may need a bit deeper analysis: She describes the joy of meeting up with her health-freedom friends in the woods late last year, away from the prying eyes of the police and the panicked, vaccine touting self-righteous majority.

And those people, the health-freedom group in the woods, they may be the *homines sacri* of our time, outside of society, they have broken the taboos, they are a threat to the obeying mass, to the friends who refuse to meet up with an unvaccinated person.

But still, those people, hiding away in the woods, talking, hugging, free from fear; those people are free. Free in the sense they can live and interact as normal human beings. It is here where the glimpse of hope lies according to Wolf; within the biopolitical regime, it is the outlaw, *homo sacer*, who still enjoys some level of freedom.

Then, let us look at the citizens of Wuhan in early 2020 or in Shanghai just now. Stripped of their citizen's rights for sure, but more importantly now stripped of even life as an outcast, as *homo sacer*. Isolation, deprivation of human connection; this is the essence of the lockdowns; they signify the abolition, not only of rights and freedom, but of our existence as humans.

And what of those still in the grip of an absurd narrative, those who obey without questions, who ostracize their neighbours for not wearing a mask, for refusing the vaccine? They are surely still part of society, but are they free? "A fat servant is not a great man. A beaten slave is a great man, for it is in his heart that freedom resides," to quote Icelandic author Halldor Laxness's 18th century historical roman [*Iceland's Bell*](#).

Broadly speaking we can distinguish between three layers of freedom. The outermost layer is the freedom to work, to make money and keep the proceeds of your work. This is what political debate is mostly about in a free democratic society; how high should taxes be, to what extent should business be regulated and so forth.

The next layer is the freedom of expression and freedom to influence society through political participation. This layer of freedom is generally not debated in free democracies.

But within this layer there is yet another one; the freedom to live as a human being. The freedom to go to a restaurant or go shopping, to go for a walk, the freedom to meet your friends in the park, the freedom to recognize facial expressions, the freedom to smile and be smiled at. And of course the freedom to decide for yourself whether or not to be medicated. It is this layer of freedom that was being attacked during the coronavirus scare, by the authorities, by the media, and, first and foremost, by a hypnotized mass scared out of their wits over a virus.

This layer of freedom is so fundamental that it isn't even a part of the definition of freedom. It is like the freedom of the horse to sprint, of the dog to bark. It is our freedom to live according to our nature.

The Bodies of Others is a valuable account of an unprecedented situation. Wolf paints a vivid picture of the contrast between normal human life and life under Covid restrictions. She describes the despair of the children deprived of the company of their peers, the emptiness in the eyes of the old and frail kept away from their loved ones by force, withering away in isolation, the crushed communities.

How basic moral principles, empathy and respect for other people's privacy evaporate as the state assumes a "central role, and limitless authority, in managing our own bodies and the bodies of others."

Wolf wonders about the possible causes. Unlike many authors, she does not offer a single, simple explanation, no single culprit; no conspiracy at play. "How could otherwise nice people have come to do such evil?" she asks. "How could they have allowed the suppression of young children's respiration or consigned friends and colleagues to eat in the street like outcasts? How could it have happened in "enlightened" New York City that cops would have been sent to arrest a woman with a terrified nine-year-old child for trying to visit the Museum of Natural History without "papers?" To Wolf, this suggests "evil beyond human imagination," a "spiritual dimension of evil."

To her own surprise, and as it seems a bit of embarrassment as an enlightened modern intellectual, Wolf turns to her Jewish religious tradition "in which Hell (or "Gehennom") is not the Miltonic hell of the later Western imagination, but rather a quieter interim spiritual place."

And this is where the battle takes place, "between the forces of God and negative forces that debase, that profane, that seek to ensnare our souls. We have seen this drama before, and not that long ago." *The Bodies of Others* is a personal, deeply empathic and excellently written tribute to the innermost layer of freedom, the very core that defines us as human beings. Or in Naomi Wolf's own words: "The object of this spiritual battle? It seemed to be for nothing short of the human soul."

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