

We totter on the brink of extremism at present: there a...

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It struck me over the weekend just how brutal our society is becoming. Take this tweet, and the video to which it refers, as an example:

<https://twitter.com/adamwagner1/status/1350795675517263875?s=21>

It is fairly staggering for someone to say, quite blatantly, that some lives are 'less valuable', and even more so to the face of a person they are describing as such.

Saying that, I am not naive. I am aware that decisions are made on a routine basis that take into account the value of life. For example, decisions on whether to address accident black spots are taken on the basis of the likely risk to be eliminated, with the value of life being factored in. But the point in that case is that the life considered to be saved is generic: the risk is across the population as a whole. The risk being appraised is not of a particular life. It is a random life. Like many, I feel uncomfortable with such economic reasoning, but it is a fundamentally different approach to the basis of decision making to which Lord Sumption, an arch anti-lockdown campaigner, refers. He is suggesting particular lives are of lesser worth. I profoundly disagree.

The objection to lockdown campaigners is not from the left alone, either. This Tweet is from Neil O'Brien, who is a Tory MP:

<https://twitter.com/neildotobrien/status/1342921400173137920?s=21>

O'Brien is right to challenge the facts. He was also right to challenge, as he did in comments later in the thread, the claim that 'prior medical conditions' were a factor to take into account. Included in their number were asthma and mental health conditions. I gather high blood pressure and cholesterol also count. These things are very far from uncommon in the population as a whole, and the last two most especially in those over 50. But those making such claims do not make that clear.

Instead they offer what appears to be a profoundly eugenic view of life. There is a 'pure' form, blessed upon some of the young and economically active, plus those (maybe) of good fortune amongst the more elderly (where 'fortune' might very well

have an economic overtone), and then there are the rest, who are in this world view of marginal value, as Lord Sumption explicitly suggested.

The kindest description I saw yesterday of Sumption's comment was that it was a naive, school debating society, form of utilitarianism. I would add that it is one from which the very essence of empathy has been removed to justify a callous economic ethic of indifference. O'Brien got it right. The implication that there is lower life has deep political connotation to it, with profoundly uncomfortable overtones to it.

There is in Sumption's claim, the essence of the [Great Barrington Declaration](#). It too assumed that lives could be divided between those worth saving or not. Those not worth saving were to be removed from Covid infected society, to be locked away from view for the duration of the pandemic, so that those of pure form might continue life unhindered by those of lesser worth, even if they happened to be their parents, siblings or even offspring. The assumption was that the 'pure' would be happy with this, and would indifferently wait to see who if the impure might make it through to the end when the goal of herd immunity had been achieved, when the survivors amongst the impure might be welcomed back, like the survivors of The Hunger Games.

The ethic implicit in these claims is profoundly unacceptable, but the likes of Sumption and Toby Young, plus some media presenters, feel able to make them. They represent a worldview that is not just indifferent to many, but that is a profound threat to large numbers of people. And that threat only grows. There is, of course, truth in the progression that starts 'first they came for....'. That progression can start with claims like these at present.

We totter on the brink of extremism at present. Covid has presented an opportunity to those of such views that they seek to exploit. The universal right to be treated equally has to be proclaimed again, and again, without fear. There are no such things as 'less valuable' lives. Sumption is wrong. His worldview takes us in a very dangerous direction. It has to be called out. O'Brien did that. So do I. We cannot tolerate views that suggest we live in a fascist society.