

The Great Divide

April 24, 2020

The current pandemic panic and crisis, Brian Doherty noted in *Reason*, “is a harshly vivid example of Americans’ inability to understand, fruitfully communicate with, or show a hint of respect for those seen to be on other side of an ideological line.”

Mr. Doherty, who profiled me in his book *Radicals for Capitalism*, calls the two major positions “Openers” versus “Closers.”

They do not trust each other, and their respective policy prescriptions — opening up society to normal commerce *versus* keeping it closed, under lockdown — are poles apart.

Doherty doesn’t mention how we treat experts. Virologists, medical doctors and

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epidemiologists *also* form ranks on both sides, and these experts sure seem to be talking past each other, too.

Which seems neither professional nor scientific.

Doherty concludes by asserting that, even



after obtaining answers to questions regarding “the disease’s spread, extent, and damage” or coming to an eventual conclusion regarding “the long term damage to life and prosperity the economic shutdown is causing,” we must admit that “human beings of goodwill and intelligence might come to a different value judgment about what policy is best overall.”

Sure. But, looking over the divide as he presents it, I am afraid I see one side — the Openers — concerned about a *broad* number of possible disasters (economic dislocation and even mass starvation in addition to illness and death) while the other — the Closers — obsessing about fighting a disease about which there remains limited knowledge and little agreement.

The Openers seem a whole lot more open to diverse considerations.

Including the possibility that freedom might result in a better collective response than orders issued by mayors and governors and the president.

Which strikes me as more like Common Sense.

I’m Paul Jacob.