

Mad Groundhog Disease

Covid-19 may be caused by a new pathogen, but on a societal level it is just another outbreak of what might be called "mad groundhog disease". In the last 25 years, Britain has endured repeated, highly disruptive medical emergencies: new-variant CJD, the foot and mouth crisis, bird flu, swine flu, and now the corona virus pandemic. We seem resigned to accepting such crises, costing billions of pounds and thousands of human lives, as part of the natural order of things. Pestilences have been viewed as natural disasters since ancient times, but they are not purely natural phenomena like earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. They are driven by human activities.

At root, they all derive from a widespread practice that is in fact optional, namely meat-eating. Our methods of livestock husbandry allow bacteria and viruses to "jump species" into the human population. Most medical experts believe that Ebola and the Zika virus are also infections that jumped from animals to humans as a result of slaughtering wild animals for food. The problem is worldwide, not confined to Britain or to the West.

It is high time to publicize and keep publicizing the fact that one of the consequences of rearing animals for human consumption -- particularly as practised by modern, global agribusiness -- is repeated destructive upheavals. This hidden cost should no longer be kept hidden.

[Richard Forsyth, March 2020.]