Humanising Science and Medicine

Critical Paradigmatic Conversations

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– with 14 others

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Publisher's note:
The cover illustration is *The School of Athens* ,
a painting by Raphael, located in the Vatican.
It is usually said to depict Plato (left) and Aristotle (right) in the central figures, with many notable Greek philosophers in the groups surrounding them. Socrates, known for his 'Socratic dialogue', is a leading figure on the left of the painting (the group on the back cover of this book).
The scene is one of philosophers engaging in dialogue, even their gestures saying something about their respective philosophical/religious orientations, for example the arm gestures of the central figures, the one pointing to the heavens, the other to the earth.
An arena of many dialogues, it seemed very appropriate as a backdrop for this book. Indeed, many of the issues coming out of Greek philosophy still play into the debates of today; and that Socrates faced a death sentence for certain views he expressed, has had sobering parallels in the centuries and millennia that followed, right up to our own times.

Chapter 3

Dissent in Science and Medicine

Professor Brian Martin in conversation

Note: this interview was conducted in the spring and summer of 2021, and is **not previously published**.

Richard House [RH]: Brian, I'm so honoured to be doing this interview with you. I recently came across a brilliant piece you'd co-written on science and patriarchy, about which there is sadly so little written in the literature (Bowling & Martin, 1985); and it was only after we'd then made contact that I realised you were also the editor of a brilliant book on expertise that came out in the 1990s (Martin, 1996), and which I was really taken with at the time. And then to discover your cornucopia of writings in this broad field! (see www.bmartin.cc/pubs/index.html – I only wish I'd been aware of your huge body of work well before now.

Can we start with you sharing something of your own professional and academic journey, and how you came to be interested in the issue of dissent in medicine and in science more generally, to the extent that much of your career's research has been concerned with these much-neglected but culturally vital issues?

Brian Martin [BM]: In the late 1970s, I was working in applied mathematics at the Australian National University. On the side, I was active in the environmental movement. I heard about a few cases in which scholars who taught or did research on environmental issues came under attack, for example by having publications blocked or being denied tenure. This may sound strange today, but back then it was

considered radical to take a strong position on environmental matters.

I started collecting information about such cases until I had documentation concerning ten instances of suppression of environmental scholarship in Australia and New Zealand, and I wrote a paper about it. In seeking comments on a draft of the paper, I heard many more stories. After the paper was published (Martin, 1981), I learned more. I was attuned to seeing the signs of suppression of dissent, and once I had some visibility, people wrote to me with further stories.

I gradually broadened my interests in suppression beyond science and the environment, leading me into the study of academic disputes, whistleblowing and much else. The same sorts of processes occur in a wide variety of fields.

Why did I notice a pattern of suppression in the first place? One contributing factor was my personal experience a few years earlier. In 1976, after finishing my Ph.D. at Sydney University, my first full-time job was as a research assistant in the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES) at the Australian National University. You might think that as an environmental activist I would have been right at home, but not so. At the end of my first year at CRES, my contract was not renewed, I think because I was a bit too outspoken, even though from my perspective I tried to keep a low profile.

However, even if I had been penalised for my views, there was insufficient evidence to prove it. This helped me realise that there's a lot more suppression of dissent than ever becomes visible.

The next year I obtained a position in applied mathematics, and I wrote a critique of CRES (Martin, 1977) – which burned all my bridges there!

RH: I'm thinking as I write that your academic memoirs would make an enthralling read, Brian! Huge respect for your courage – Michel Foucault's inspiring notion of 'fearless speech' immediately comes to mind (Foucault, 2001). It surely requires huge integrity to take up such positions when one knows that one's career progression is likely to be adversely affected as a consequence.

Surely anyone who is genuinely concerned with, and about, truth and integrity in science will be greatly concerned with what your

experience and research have unearthed – surely a veritable elephant (or mammoth!) in the room that is allegedly 'objective' empirical science. And presumably a major part of the problem will be that at least some of those who claim to be the 'custodians of excellence' in science are often the very people who play such unscrupulous power games – just as philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend prophetically cautioned way back in the 1970s (e.g. Feyerabend, 1975a, b; 1978).

Based on your professional and research experience, I'm wondering whether you think those who suppress dissent are *from their viewpoint* doing this for ethical reasons (what's sometimes called 'noble-cause corruption') – however distorted we think those ethics might be (i.e. with a self-story going something like this: 'I know where the truth resides, and I'm doing a service to science in stopping these damaging counter-views having any exposure'); or whether it's more to do with the naked deployment of self-interested positional power (or perhaps a complex combination of both, and more besides!); I realise it may be difficult to give a generalised answer to this question.

Can you also say something about what it was that alerted you to the issue of dissent suppression specifically in the field of medicine – which is also of direct relevance to the concerns of this book.

BM: Thanks for your nice comments. However, I don't think of myself as particularly courageous. Mostly I've done things I think are worth doing, and nearly always this involved taking careful account of the risks.

As for the motivations of those who suppress dissent, it has long been my view that they, like nearly everyone, have the best of intentions. They sincerely believe that those you and I call dissenters are poor performers, malcontents, disrupters or deceivers. These 'dissenters' are threats to those doing the right thing. They threaten the good work and good name of the group to which they belong. Actions against such individuals are justified; they are defence against attack.

Decades ago, I wrote a booklet titled *Changing the Cogs.* In it, I wrote,

> … it is of relatively little use attacking individuals or replacing them without altering the structures which condition their

> actions. Amazing as it may seem, almost all people – including the President, the Pope and the Prime Minister – mean well for all of society in what they do. (Martin, 1979, p. 10)

Then I provided a quotation from an electric power company official:

> And I know that we very often just cannot get the point across, but I know many people in the industry, and certainly in our company, and I know that most of us have the best intentions. We are trying to do what is right for the people, for the public. And we are trying to do the right thing as far as the environment is concerned, also, in terms of balancing things. (Quoted in Novick, 1976, p. 208)

Given that this was my view about people's conscious motivations, I collected quotations from various authors saying the same thing. For example, Michael Parenti (1974, p. 51), writing about the US founding fathers, stated 'All persons believe in their own virtue'.

Some of my friends in the anti-nuclear-power campaign believed that their opponents – namely, the leading public proponents of nuclear power – were lying. They just had to know they were telling falsehoods. My friends simply couldn't believe that those on the other side were sincere.

It's all very well forming a view that others almost always have the best of intentions, and finding quotations from those who agree. What about research?

Years later, I read psychologist Roy Baumeister's insightful book *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty.* Instead of relying on fictional or other outsider accounts, Baumeister turned to information giving the perspective of murderers, terrorists and torturers. He makes the case that the usual perceptions of evil-doers as malevolent or uncaring are wrong. Actually, Baumeister found, they are like most others, seeing themselves as victims or as justified. Baumeister sought to expose the 'myth of pure evil'

- in which victims are innocent and perpetrators are evil, sadistic, malicious or senseless; and
- to show what it's like from the evil-doer's perspective, without justifying what they do.

This perspective applies to the suppression of dissent. Those we might think are malicious often see themselves as the victims and as justified in their actions.

The term 'suppression' involves taking a stand; it's a value-laden label. I've yet to meet anyone who sees their own actions as suppression of dissent. More commonly, they see themselves as defending themselves and others from dangerous views and damaging actions.

RH: Well that's the most thought-provoking of answers, Brian – something we can really get our dialogical teeth into and see where we go with it. Just to mention, first, that I note the term 'victim' comes up a couple of times in your answer, regarding what we might call dissent suppressors' views and experiences. This is fascinating, as it has much relevance to Jill Hall's work on what she terms 'the Victimhood Archetype' (Hall, 1993, 2025). Hall writes at length about how, in the dynamic, so-called 'Drama Triangle' of Victim–Persecutor–Rescuer (which is something of a staple in Humanistic Psychology – e.g. Weinhold & Weinhold, 2024; West, 2023), people can so quickly and seamlessly flip from one ego-state to another, often with little if any awareness that they are indeed flipping – for example, from Victim to Persecutor. Perhaps we'll return to this fascinating dynamic later; and it would be interesting to hear if it chimes at all with you in relation to your wide-ranging research experience.

One way of construing what you've said in your previous answer might be that people are very adept at telling themselves *a self-justifying ethical story* – yet one that might well be riding roughshod over not only societally/commonly shared mores, but also over the evidence, as most would perceive and evaluate it. We know that if someone is sufficiently determined, they'll be able to find a way to make 'the evidence' look as if it supports their viewpoint, whatever it might be; and this needn't at all be a deliberate, conscious deception: it can be a *psychodynamic* process (assuming we accept some kind of psychoanalytic cosmology) whereby the person sincerely believes the morality of their self-justifying story, even as at a deeper level, unconscious subterfuge might be afoot.

Now I'm by no means wanting to posit this as a general thesis; I'm just making the point that it is at least possible, in principle if not in practice, for all kinds of self-justifying games to be played with morality and ethical self-justification. I wonder if you've pursued such a line at all in your own researches. (In passing, I think your phrase 'the structures which condition their actions' is very important and opens up a whole new avenue for exploration; but perhaps we can return to that one later.)

Just one way in which this could work would be when free-market ideologues essentially worship the sanctity of the 'hidden hand' of the market and the profit motive, as overriding ethical goods that trump all others – which stance can then be deployed to self-justify all manner of lower-level actions that many if not most citizens would deem to be unethical. Or put differently, because such people do sincerely believe in the overriding ethical probity of the market mechanism for allocating resources, they can then tell themselves a self-justifying ethical story that can successfully legitimise all manner of behaviours, attitudes etc.

It's surely very salutary, too, that as you say, 'I've yet to meet anyone who sees their own actions as suppression of dissent'; for 'dissenters' are experienced as 'threats to those [who are] doing the right thing'. I wonder whether, and if so how, this model fits in the case of the corporate pharmaceutical industry, or indeed the tobacco industry, where, over decades, many hundreds of millions of dollars have been paid out in law suits against drugs that have harmed or killed large numbers of people (cf. Černič, 2018). Černič's Table 22 (ibid., p. 403) lists the ten largest settlements and judgments made against the pharmaceutical industry from 1991 to 2015 – the largest being US $3,400 million against GSK for financial violations.

Do just pick up on what feels important, Brian.

BM: You've raised many fascinating issues. Let me engage by starting with one angle that has interested me: the psychology of whistleblowers and those who attack them. Whistleblowers are people who speak out in the public interest. Most commonly they are employees who see something wrong, such as misuse of funds, personal abuse or

hazards to the public, and report it to someone in authority. Usually they start with their boss and then, when the problem isn't addressed, go to others inside the organisation and then to outside bodies, such as ombudsmen.

A bit of background at this point. I started my learning about these issues with the concept of 'suppression of dissent'. About the same time, the concept of whistleblowing was becoming prominent. There's an obvious connection between these two ways of thinking about struggles within and outside of organisations. Reprisals against whistleblowers, which are quite common, can be considered suppression of dissent. There are some differences. Dissent doesn't have to be speaking out – but we'll set that aside for the moment.

The term 'whistleblower' draws attention to the person who speaks out, whereas 'suppression of dissent' draws attention to 'suppression' – namely, the actions by those seeking to silence dissent, and that is why I liked 'suppression of dissent'. Think of famous whistleblowers, for example Daniel Ellsberg who made public 'The Pentagon Papers', and Edward Snowden who released documents about spying by the US National Security Agency. The trouble is that so much attention is put on Ellsberg, Snowden and other whistleblowers as individuals – with discussions about their motivations and about whether they are traitors or heroes – that *what* they spoke out about receives second billing. There is less attention to the motivations of US policy makers who waged war in Indochina and to the motivations of US spy-agency leaders.

Despite my personal preference, there was enormous momentum behind the term 'whistleblower', and I eventually gave in and stopped trying to promote 'suppression of dissent' instead.

There is an intense interest in the motivations of whistleblowers, and there's research on it, too. Companies would love to develop some screening device, a questionnaire or other probe, to determine whether a prospective employee, or indeed a current one, is likely to blow the whistle. That's so they could prevent them speaking out, by not hiring them in the first place or by insulating them from information. However, it seems there exist no reliable ways that will predict whistleblowing. What this suggests is that people become whistleblowers due

more to circumstances than personal characteristics.

Compared to the great and continuing interest in the motivations of whistleblowers, there is very little material about what drives those who attack whistleblowers and dissenters – I've been on the lookout for such material for many years. The most useful insights I've discovered are provided by Robert Jackall in his book *Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers*. Jackall, after considerable effort, gained access to two US corporations and was able to carry out what can be called an anthropological investigation. His book is filled with insights, including about two instances of whistleblowing. I devoted several pages of my book *Whistleblowing: A Practical Guide* to outlining Jackall's findings. Whistleblowers need to know what they're up against. Here is part of my summary:

- Morality is doing what seems appropriate in the situation to get things done. Morality is doing what the boss wants. Having independent principles is a prescription for career stagnation or disaster.
- The symbolic manipulation of reality is pervasive. For any decision, managers discuss various reasons in order to settle on a way to give legitimacy for what the corporation does.
- Public relations is simply a tool. Truth is irrelevant. (Martin, 2013, p. 45)

Here's how Jackall sums up the nature of the organisation in so far as whistleblowing is concerned:

> Bureaucracy transforms all moral issues into immediately practical concerns. A moral judgment based on a professional ethic makes little sense in a world where the etiquette of authority relationships and the necessity of protecting and covering for one's boss, one's network, and oneself supersede all other considerations and where nonaccountability for action is the norm. (Jackall, 1988, p. 111).

Richard, you ask about corporations carrying out criminal activities, sometimes leading to convictions and billions of dollars in fines. Your question implies that there is a single mind in charge of the operation, and furthermore a mind that has a conscience. Jackall and

others who have studied bureaucracies offer a different picture. There is no single mind in charge. As argued by Deena Weinstein (1979), bureaucratic organisations are akin to authoritarian political systems, and the way they operate squelches or neuters individual moral concerns, at least for most employees.

It would be illuminating for researchers to try to carry out studies like Jackall's, including in organisations other than US corporations, for example in churches and government departments, to better understand the mindsets that enable corruption and abuse. Alas, there seems to be very little along these lines that directly addresses whistleblowing. At one point, I applied for a research grant to study this very phenomenon, but it wasn't funded (Martin, 2000).

RH: I'm so grateful for the introduction to Jackall's work, Brian – I wasn't previously aware of it. Just one of the many reasons why conversations like this are so fructifying! – thank you. Your statements that 'The symbolic manipulation of reality is pervasive', and 'Public relations is simply a tool. *Truth is irrelevant*' (my italics) should be a hugely concerning wake-up call for anyone concerned with justice, truth and democratic free speech, especially in the still-unfolding Covid crisis.

I'm grateful that you've picked me up on the issue of 'a single mind in charge of the operation', and that Jackall offers a different picture. I used to teach a lecture and seminar of 'Max Weber and Bureaucracy' at Winchester University, and Weber certainly has so much of prescience to contribute to this conversation. Also, Weinstein's view that bureaucratic organisations are akin to 'authoritarian political systems', with 'the way they operate squelch[ing] or neuter[ing] individual moral concerns', is another bracing insight. It leaves me wondering, first, what might be the most effective way to 'out' such pervasive authoritarianism in human institutions (including in those that often pretend to be 'democratic'); and whether you're aware of any institutional forms of human organisation that succeed in transcending such neurotically dysfunctional organisational processes and phenomena.

In relation to science per se, Brian, in your chapter 'Suppression

of dissent in science' (Martin, 1979, online), you write that 'One of the key bases or supports for legitimacy in contemporary societies is scientific and technological expertise…. When technical experts unanimously agree on a policy or practice, this provides a persuasive justification for that state of affairs.' I wonder if you could say more about this dynamic which your research has uncovered, and whether you've come across any systematically successful – and replicable – strategies for effectively challenging such dissent-silencing deployment of 'the expertise card' (to coin a phrase).

Also and relatedly, in the same piece, you wrote:

> Legitimacy based on science is precarious…. A few dissenting experts are sometimes all it takes to turn unanimity into controversy. The existence of controversy, even when one side has many more numbers and prestige, usually serves to undercut the legitimacy of the dominant position. (online)

I think this sheds much light on what has been happening in the current global Covid event (as I write). It seems very likely that those pushing the mainstream narrative about Covid, including mass vaccination against Covid (governments, scientists, international organisations, the mainstream media…) know the truth of what you're saying here; so their response has been to silence in every conceivable way, within the law, the very considerable numbers of scientists, doctors and other experts who take a significantly (or very) different view from the mainstream narrative.

I suppose I'm wondering whether these people, with their 'behavioural insight teams' and PsyOps teams, are clever enough to have realised that to retain control of the situation, they have had to embrace mass censorship. And if you agree with this analysis, I wonder what your assessment is of *the cultural and scientific price* we may all be paying for this power move? (In your previous answer, you also wrote, '"suppression of dissent" draws attention to "suppression", namely the actions by those seeking to silence dissent' – which I assume leads these people to try to find ways for their suppression moves themselves to not be visible to the public! To what extent can they succeed in this aim in the age of social and alternative media platforms, I'm

wondering?)

I'm also aware that there have been big-name 'whistleblowers' in the current Covid event; if we have time, perhaps we could look later at whether the experience of these key whistleblowers has been consistent with your own research findings – or whether the establishment has 'upped its game' in terms of the means they use to discredit and silence this (often highly authoritative) dissent.

Verbal diarrhoea from me again… – do pick up on what feels important, Brian.

BM: You've raised quite a number of fascinating issues. Let me respond by using the example of Covid-19, in which there are plenty of examples of suppression of dissent.

First, though, it's worth emphasising that to talk of 'suppression of dissent' is to make a judgement about both dissent and suppression. I always presume that few players in the games of knowledge and power think in terms of 'suppression of dissent'. We don't know exactly what goes through people's minds, and furthermore people can act on the basis of non-conscious motivations. As discussed earlier, most players are completely sincere. They believe they are acting for reasons that are right and proper. Maybe not in all cases, but that's my starting point. After all, people are far more effective when they're sincere rather than being consciously devious.

I'm reminded of a story told to me, many years ago, by an academic dissident, 'James'. A friend of his attended a staff meeting where he was discussed. Those present said, 'James is paranoid'. Then they proceeded to discuss what actions they would take against him. It sounds crazy, but it can be understood as reflecting complete self-belief, attributing deficiencies to James, not themselves.

So on to Covid. There has been a dominant narrative by medical and political authorities, covering seriousness of the disease, treatments, vaccines, origins and control measures. Against this, quite a few citizens and some scientists have questioned the dominant view. This is a classic set-up for suppression of dissent.

Those supporting the dominant narrative sincerely and reasonably believe that lives are at stake. Hardly anyone disagrees with this.

They also believe that criticism of the dominant narrative poses a serious threat to people's lives. If too many people start believing the wrong thing – about masks, treatments, vaccines, lockdowns or whatever – then public health policies may be undermined. This might mean that Covid gets more out of control and kills more people. In this context, taking measures to silence or otherwise marginalise criticisms is warranted. After all, it's all about people's lives.

Critics have a different view, naturally enough. They believe the dominant narrative is wrong or, more cautiously, that it needs to be questioned. They might think that it would be better to rely on natural immunity, that vaccines are risky, that lockdowns are more harmful than beneficial, or that there is too great a sacrifice of human rights. All these views can be supported by evidence and logic. They constitute dissent from the dominant narrative.

You can see that the stage is set for suppression of dissent, in which all those involved believe they are acting for the common good. Note that this is not a matter where science can provide a definitive answer. Setting aside scientific uncertainties, which are considerable, there are important ethical, political and economic dimensions to the issue. For example, how much should young people, who are far less vulnerable to Covid, have to sacrifice to protect older people, who are the most vulnerable? How wise is it to roll out new types of vaccines whose long-term effects have not been assessed? What is the appropriate trade-off between damage to people's livelihoods from control measures and benefits from reduced disease? (see Martin, 2021).

Medical and political authorities would like people to believe that the issues are purely technical, and that people who don't follow expert advice are being irrational or even malevolent. This raises a meta-level issue: how should decisions be made? Authorities basically say, 'Trust us', or sometimes, 'Do what we say, or else….'

Those who challenge messages from authorities like to point to scientists and doctors who are critical of orthodoxy. This might be considered deferring to alternative experts. So you can see why, from the point of view of the authorities, it is important to silence or discredit critics who have credentials or significant followings.

In the struggle between experts and counter-experts, there can

be an illusion that the issues are primarily technical. This means technical disputes become proxies for disputes over values.

There is also another approach for challengers, which is to argue for public participation in decision-making. This does not guarantee that the critics' views will win out, but it does change the dynamics of the struggle considerably.

RH: There's so much in this rich response, Brian – thank you for outlining the parameters so clearly. As a former therapist, it rings very true to me that in relation to dissent suppression, 'We don't know exactly what goes through people's minds, and… people can act on the basis of non-conscious motivations'. There's certainly a place for some serious phenomenological research on this issue, that seeks empirical data on people's conscious motivations in dissent suppression, and factoring in the emotional, political and economic context and its impact on behaviour and beliefs – as long as people could be found to participate in such research, of course! Laura Dodsworth certainly managed to interview some key insiders for her best-selling book *A State of Fear* – so such research might well be feasible.

You say that with the suppression of dissent, 'those involved believe they are acting for the common good', and that 'this is not a matter where science can provide a definitive answer'. For me, this raises what is a prior (and crucial) question – namely, by what process do these people reach their view about what constitutes 'the common good'? Moreover, how do these suppressors manage to convince themselves that what they're doing is in the public interest when, as you say, the science itself underpinning their position is uncertain? Surely such people should be especially careful to expose themselves to all conceivable counter-arguments to the mainstream view, in order that they can be as sure as they can be that they're not making a catastrophic error. But perhaps this is precisely where the political and economic dimension comes in – and has a major impact in terms of imposing one particular, narrow 'regime of truth' (to use Michel Foucault's term) that has far more to do with politics and ideology than it has to do with dispassionate, objective science.

In the current Covid-19 event (as I write), here in the UK we've

certainly seen 'medical and political authorities [wanting] to believe that the issues are purely technical, and that people who do not follow expert advice are being irrational or even malevolent'; and also the 'silenc[ing] or discredit[ing of] critics who have credentials or significant followings'. If you'll excuse the double-negative, and notwithstanding your previous answer – I'm still not convinced that there's not at least *some* bad faith involved in all this, and that it's not more accurate to say that these dissent suppressors have at least some sense that they are doing *something* that borders on the malign, but *tell themselves a story* that constructs a self-justifying rationale for their position, rather than genuinely and honestly believing that they are on the side of truth and the good (cf. the notion of so-called 'noble-cause corruption' – e.g. Klockars, 1980; Miller, 2017). But there's some pretty complex psychology going on in all this, I fancy, that (I think we both agree) a crude conspiracy-theoretic account doesn't get close to explaining or sufficiently accounting for.

Can I also ask you about your enthralling 2018 book *Vaccination Panic in Australia*, Brian? – as the issues it addresses have much relevance to this book, and also to the Covid-19 event. As you write in that book, 'In 2009 in Australia, a citizens' campaign was launched to silence public criticism of vaccination. This campaign involved an extraordinary variety of techniques to denigrate, harass and censor public vaccine critics'; and you refer to 'the extraordinary range of methods used to curtail free speech in a public scientific controversy'. Leaving aside the question of whether this is more a manifestation of suppression 'for the wider public good', or the capture of modern culture by Big Pharma's worldview, can you say to what extent you have witnessed similar suppression tactics in relation to the Covid-19 'vaccines' programme? And can you say more about your intriguing point in the book that 'science is only part of what drives scientific controversies'; for example, is this another way of referring to what you previously called 'technical disputes becom[ing] proxies for disputes over values'; or is there more to it than that?

I was also taken with your stated preference in the book that 'vaccination policy be influenced by deliberations of randomly selected citizens, in what are called citizens' juries', and your related arguing

for 'public participation in decision-making'. This sounds similar to what philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend was recommending way back in the late 1970s in his book *Science in a Free Society*. Do you see any prospects that science might be democratised in this way? – or has the Covid-19 experience perhaps taken us even further away from that democratic possibility?

Lots there, Brian; do pick up on what feels most interesting and relevant to your interests and commitments.

BM: Over a great many years, I've studied quite a few public scientific controversies, including those over nuclear power, pesticides, fluoridation, nuclear winter, climate change and vaccination. In every one, I found considerable evidence of suppression of dissent, for example dissident scientists who were reprimanded, had publications blocked, were denied tenure or lost their jobs. This is so common that it is predictable. When there are powerful groups with a stake in the outcome, suppression is to be expected.

Experts who dissent are prime targets, whereas citizen opponents are less likely to be suppressed. Why is that? The most plausible explanation is that when there is a near unanimity of expert opinion, the existence of dissident experts turns the issue into a debate. In such a situation, citizen campaigners can be dismissed as uninformed.

The Australian vaccination debate was different in that a major attack was mounted against citizen critics who were doing no more than expressing their views. I defended the critics' free speech, and myself became a target for attack. It was a remarkable experience. There I was, studying suppression of dissent, and finding myself in the middle of an astounding attack on dissent (Martin, 2018).

When citizen campaigners are involved in grassroots mobilisation and civil disobedience, they can become targets, often of state repression. Think of the bomb explosion that nearly killed Judi Bari, the US forest campaigner. The use of beatings, arrests, imprisonment, torture and killings I call repression. It is common in authoritarian states. Scientific experts can be subject to repression too, but the softer techniques of suppression are more common.

Sometimes, attacks do backfire. The Philippines was long ruled

by dictator Ferdinand Marcos. In 1983, popular political opposition figure Benigno Aquino returned to the Philippines and was assassinated on arrival. This caused widespread popular outrage, triggering the mobilisation of opposition that culminated in the non-violent overthrow of the Marcos regime three years later.

For the past two decades, I've been studying cases like this – cases in which attacks backfire, generating more support for the target of the attack (Martin, 2007). I gradually became aware of common tactics by perpetrators to reduce public outrage and thereby reduce the risk of backfire. The common types of tactics are to cover up the action; devalue the target; reinterpret events by lying, minimising, blaming and framing; use official channels to give the appearance of justice; and intimidate people involved. These same five types of tactics are found in cases of sexual harassment, police beatings, massacres and genocide (see 'Backfire materials' at tinyurl.com/2s397rca).

I was not surprised to find the same tactics used in the suppression of dissent. Ivor van Heerden spoke out about the responsibility of the Army Corps of Engineers for the collapse of levees during Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans in 2005. His disclosures should have been welcomed. Instead, figures at Louisiana State University, where he worked, subjected him to a series of adverse actions, and he lost his job. All five types of tactics were used by the university administration (Martin, 2017).

The flip side of this analysis is suggestions for countering suppression. To counter each of the typical perpetrator tactics, targets and their supporters should expose the action, namely expose the suppression. They should validate the targeted individual, for example by emphasising accomplishments. They should label adverse actions as injustice. They should avoid official channels and instead mobilise support. And they should resist intimidation.

The most counter-intuitive recommendation is to avoid official channels. Dissidents and whistleblowers often report problems to managers, use appeal procedures, make reports to ombudsmen or go to court, expecting that someone in authority will do the right thing. Most commonly, as in van Heerden's case, these formal channels are a trap (Martin, 2020).

I've talked to a great many dissidents and whistleblowers and made recommendations along these lines. Most of them decide to do it their own way: they believe their case is so strong that they want to use official channels. They are reluctant to 'go public' with their story, thereby helping the perpetrator keep it out of the public eye.

Nonetheless, I've been encouraged that so many have responded favourably to my book *Whistleblowing: A Practical Guide* (Martin, 2013). It seems that the same sorts of things happen to whistleblowers and dissidents in a wide range of occupations and across the globe. In one way this is disheartening, but there's an optimistic angle too: more and more people are learning, often the hard way, about how to be more effective in challenging wrongdoing.

RH: The only frustrating aspect of this interview experience is the reality of finitude, Brian! – for while I'd love this conversation to go on for much longer, I fear that space constraints mean that this had better be my final question. But I want to say that I have enormous respect for your courage in speaking truth to power. You write, 'I defended the critics' free speech and became a target for attack. It was a remarkable experience.' In my view it is a priceless democratic service to be exposing these shameful practices perpetrated by those aspiring to the mantle of 'science' – knowing full well that you yourself can easily become the target of demonisation and character assassination. This is Foucauldian 'fearless speech' par excellence (Foucault, 2001); and in my view, far more people in positions of influence urgently need to discover such courage at the present time.

I just also read your piece on Covid dissent (Martin, 2021) – thank you for researching and formally writing up these instances of the systematic suppression of Covid and vaccine dissent. I'm reminded of what you wrote earlier, when you said, 'The moral panic about vaccine criticism has diverted attention from other possible routes to individual and population health'. *Hear hear*.

One key question that arises for me from this litany of censorship and suppression is, What conceivable justification could those who *genuinely* believe in democracy and free speech have for these blatant censoring activities? Or do you think we might be on a slippery

slope towards authoritarianism across the globe, with the State and the democratic polity having been comprehensively captured by global corporations? – a process that is now unashamedly aided and abetted by Big Tech, as you presciently point out (Martin, 2021).

Thank you also for introducing me to the notion of what is termed 'undone science' (Hess, 2016), where, as you write, 'research… is not pursued or disseminated as much as it might be because the findings might be unwelcome to powerful groups' (Martin, 2021, p. 23). One could hardly wish for a clearer (and more outrageous) contemporary example of your statement that 'the search for knowledge is not a purely rational and disinterested enterprise, but is shaped by all-too-human passions, biases and conflicts of interest, in a struggle with many facets' (ibid.).

And finally, Brian – can you summarise what you see as being the core implications to be drawn from your extensive research with regard to science today: i.e. what needs to happen – scientifically, politically/democratically, corporately, culturally… – such that mainstream science maximises its legitimacy, and minimises its being compromised and distorted by power moves and the abuses of positional institutional power? I thought I'd leave you with a simple one to finish with!

Thank you so much for this interview, Brian, and for the brilliant 'truth-to-power' research you have done over some decades. You've performed a great service in fearlessly laying bare the ways in which scientific truth is routinely compromised and distorted by positional power and its toxic dynamics. The final words are fittingly yours.

BM: Richard, you ask about how people justify their actions. To understand this, I find the 'two-minds model' most insightful. The idea is that each one of us can be thought of as having two minds that operate semi-independently. Jonathan Haidt (2012) provides the most vivid labels: the elephant and the rider. The elephant is your mind that is intuitive, fast and judgemental. It's necessary for survival. When you see an object hurtling towards your head, you don't pause to calculate its speed, mass and direction, but instead just duck to avoid it. The rider is your logical, slow mind, carefully weighing up options or making

calculations.

Haidt and his colleagues carried out fascinating psychological experiments showing that the elephant is driven by six 'moral foundations': care, fairness, liberty, authority, loyalty and sanctity. The care foundation, for example, evolved from the survival value of humans protecting their children from harm, and has expanded to include others outside the family unit. When you see a stranger in danger and rush to their aid without thinking, that's the elephant responding to the care moral foundation.

Haidt says that in many circumstances, the rider – the rational mind – doesn't try hard to steer the elephant, but instead figures out a plausible explanation for the elephant's behaviour. In other words, the part of our mind called the rider comes up with a rationalisation or justification for actions driven by the elephant.

Imagine, in the case of Covid, that your elephant is outraged by control measures which offend your sense of freedom. This is the liberty foundation in action. So you flout rules demanding the wearing of masks. To justify this, your rider searches for studies showing that wearing masks doesn't protect against Covid, or has damaging health effects of its own (and there are indeed studies along these lines). Here's the surprising thing: the smarter you are, the more adept you are at finding rational justifications for your elephant-motivated behaviour.

Others have given different labels to the two minds, and there are other excellent popularisations available. Daniel Kahneman (2011) in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* uses the terms System 1 and System 2. Timothy Wilson (2002) in *Strangers to Ourselves* refers to the conscious mind and the adaptive unconscious. *Thinking Twice* (Evans, 2010), a more academic treatment, includes a table listing the multitude of labels used for the two minds.

When I see someone doing something that seems to need explanation, I think, 'What might be the moral foundation that is triggering their behaviour, and how are they interpreting that foundation?'.

The second part of this question is important, because moral foundations don't automatically map on to behaviours. Consider, for example, invoking the care foundation in relation to Covid. Those

supporting control measures and vaccinations naturally see this as caring for others. However, those opposing control measures and vaccinations can also see this as caring for others, believing that more people are being harmed than benefited by lockdowns, masks and vaccinations. The key point is that in either case, the elephant, the intuitive mind, may be dictating a viewpoint, and the rider, the rational mind, is enterprisingly searching for evidence and logical arguments to justify that viewpoint.

Finally, let me respond to your big question about what needs to happen with science. Critics have argued for decades that science – or what might be called 'establishment science' – has been 'incorporated into the dominant political and economic system (Rose & Rose, 1976). The goals of scientific research are shaped by vested interests, especially those of governments and corporations. This is most obvious in the case of military-related research, where intellectual frameworks, research projects and results are oriented to serve military goals. This affects nuclear physics, chemistry, biology, oceanography, mathematics, computing, psychology, communication theory, education and much else (Martin, 2001). Part of the problem is that scientists are trained to be obedient problem-solvers (Schmidt, 2000). There are always enough scientists available to undertake just about any project set before them. Due to corporate priorities, the task of figuring out how to make the froth on beer more attractive is important, whereas solving problems affecting the poor is off the agenda.

What to do? There are many scientists pushing for different directions, challenging abuses and trying to develop different bodies of knowledge and practice. However, changing science from within is extremely difficult. From the time I started studying these issues, my general view is that it is more promising to change the way society is organised. If this can be done, science will follow (Martin, 1998). For example, if workers and local communities, rather than politicians and corporate executives, have a greater say in what products are manufactured, this will lead to different priorities, and scientists will have different puzzles to solve. The often-cited example is the Lucas Aerospace workers, who developed their own preferred set of projects (Wainwright & Elliott, 1982). Management didn't want a bar of it, of

course.

The problems with science are closely tied up with the way society is organised. If you want to help change things, you can start with scientific research – or just about anything else, and science will eventually follow.

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About the interviewee

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