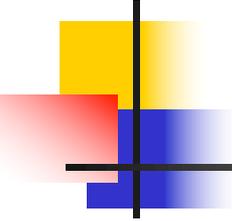


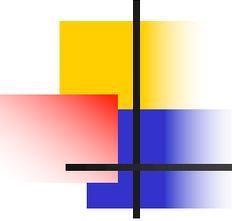
BEHAVIORAL ETHICS, COVID-19, AND THE WICKED PROBLEM OF LOCKDOWN FATIGUE FOR ALL OF US

Presented Virtually By: Derek Ireland
To the Foresight Synergy Network (FSN)
Friday March 19 2021
13:00-14:30



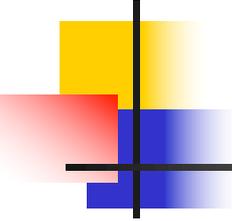
POSSIBLE SUB-TITLE TO THE WEBINAR

- A Very Novel Behavioural Approach
- To a “Very Novel and Wicked”
Coronavirus Problem and Crisis
- Which Makes the Pandemic Even
More Challenging and Threatening
for Everybody Including for
 - Elites and the So-called Experts



BACKGROUND

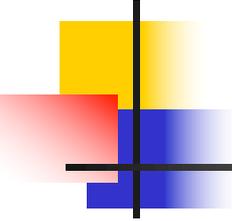
- For over 30 years, focused on bad opportunistic people doing bad things
 - Under competition, corporate, securities, consumer protection, privacy, other laws, regulations, social norms
- But was puzzled that the number of bad things taking place in the world
 - Seemed to be much greater than the number of bad people



BACKGROUND CONT.

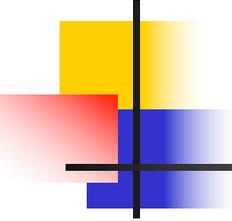
As stated during the financial crisis

- Very few corporate executives get up in the morning and ask themselves
 - How am I going to “screw” my customers today
- And yet bad things happened and
- Customer and broader “catastrophic” economic harm took place too often
 - During the crisis and at other times



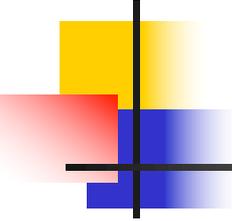
BACKGROUND CONT.

- Research of Feldman and colleagues on good people acting badly helps to address this puzzle in a manner that
- May help us to better understand human behaviour as we move from crisis to perceived and actual recovery
 - At different times over the past year of the “epic” COVID-19 pandemic



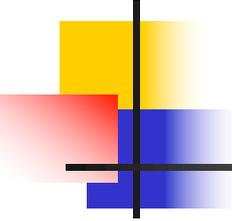
PURPOSE OF EARLIER PAPER AND THIS PRESENTATION

- Purpose of August 2020 article was to apply insights from the behavioral ethics literature of Feldman et al (see bibliography) on
 - Bounded ethicality and ethical blind spots, fading, erosion, corrosion, numbing, and fatigue
 - And good people acting badly and doing unethical (and often quite stupid) things
- To the behaviour of the general population during the 2020/21 pandemic
- Current presentation will update and extend these findings, insights and guesses to behaviour of other actors before and since August 2020



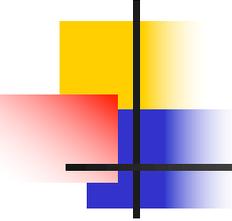
MAJOR ARGUMENT OF BEHAVIORAL ETHICS SCHOLARS

- ❑ Promoting compliance with laws, regulations and social norms should not focus solely on
 - ❑ Relatively few opportunists, villains, bad apples
- ❑ Instead should pay greater attention to the more frequent and often more consequential
 - ❑ Situational/contextual and thoughtless wrongdoing
 - ❑ Of normally good, ethical, socially responsible, law abiding, and cooperative people who are
 - ❑ Thoughtlessly & “blindly” pursuing their self-interest and personal objectives in various ways



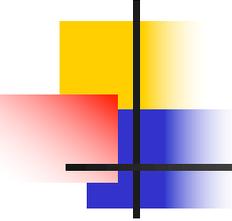
MAJOR ARGUMENT OF THE BEHAVIORAL LITERATURES CONT.

- Nobody is perfect and even good people can do bad things as a consequence of:
 - Social context and situation and interactions with like-minded people – doing bad things as part of a group is easier to rationalize
 - Ethical errors and lapses resulting from intuition, more unconscious and automatic thinking
 - And fast and frugal but flawed heuristics and other non-deliberative processes in system 1 of the human brain



MAJOR ARGUMENT OF THE BEHAVIORAL LITERATURES CONT.

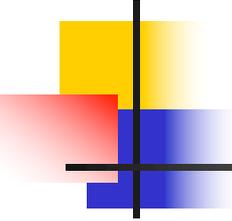
- ❑ Which they then can easily justify to themselves and others because
 - ❑ “Everybody else is doing it” as well as the
 - ❑ Mixed, confusing, muddled, conflicting and self-interested messages from virtually all “elites”
 - ❑ Including governments and their healthcare and other professionals, politicians, business leaders, and the media (discussed later)
- ❑ Justifications are made even easier
 - ❑ When supposedly good and “superior” elites are reportedly doing bad & hypocritical things



SOME OF THE KEY INSIGHTS FROM THESE LITERATURES

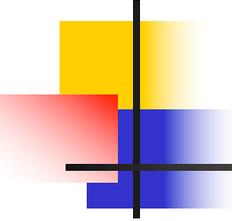
That appear especially relevant to the COVID-19 “crisis to recovery” challenge

- The ethical blind spot and “double standard”
 - We focus on and better recall the good things we do and the misdeeds of others
 - Compared with our own wrongdoing which is more easily justified and then forgotten
- Bounded ethicality and ethical fading, corrosion, numbing and fatigue after acting responsibly over an extended period
 - Being ethical and socially responsible are hard work



KEY INSIGHTS CONT (2)

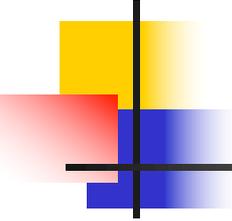
- Many if not most people have aversions to lying but in some group and other contexts
 - Employ half-truths and incomplete lying and cheating
 - Disguised and contingent/contextual lying and
 - Unethical acts of omission/doing nothing (trolley dilemma) and moral wiggle-room
- In order to protect their reputations and self-identities as good, ethical and law abiding people



KEY INSIGHTS CONT (3)

Heterogeneous nature of real human beings

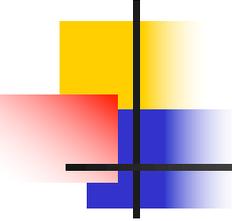
- ❑ Salience, vividness & meaning of COVID-19 information, messages, rules and experiences
- ❑ Can vary greatly between different individuals and groups leading to COVID-19 being seen as an
 - ❑ Irritant and abstraction by many people e.g. white, younger, male, middle-income plus, working at home etc.
- Also the intention versus action divide, the moral intensity and meaning of a situation and
 - Feelings of personal and social accountability
- Vary greatly depending on the individual, group and context



KEY INSIGHTS CONT (4)

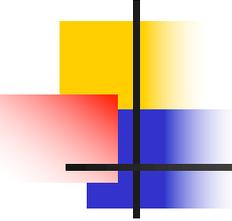
In short, treating all individuals

- ❑ As the perfectly rational and informed “representative agent” of conventional economics
 - ❑ Called “economan” by some behavioral scholars -- note the intentional gender bias
- ❑ Can be especially problematic when policy makers are dealing with global pandemics &
- ❑ Related wicked problems such as climate change, expanding inequality, crisis of democracy etc.



KEY INSIGHTS CONT (5)

- More automatic system 1 pathways leading to questionable behaviour because
 - Self-control/willpower are scarce resources that
 - Similar to muscles can become tired and “fatigued” from over-use
- Especially during extended periods of doing the right thing
 - Such as long lockdown periods during a global pandemic when
 - Many people feel that they have earned some fellowship and fun with family and friends

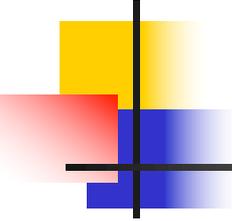


KEY INSIGHTS CONT (6)

- Depending on the person, crisis periods like COVID-19 also associated with a wider range of less positive emotional, behavioral and cognitive responses e.g.
 - Increases in negativity, skepticism, cynicism, rational apathy and ignorance, and learned helplessness
 - Reduced aversions to losses, risks, uncertainty, and ambiguity, leading to greater risk seeking and opportunism
 - Reduced feelings of independence, autonomy, self-efficacy, self-determination, agency, empowerment, and control

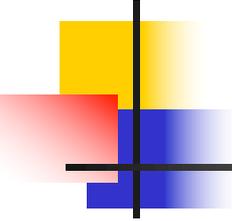
KEY INSIGHTS CONCLUDED

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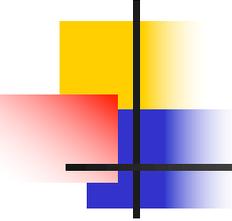


- Extended periods of crisis can also result in less confidence and trust in and expanding public concerns and criticism regarding the
 - Competence, credibility and legitimacy of governments, experts, other elites
 - And their formal institutions/laws and regulations and informal institutions/rules, norms and values
- Leading to higher risk, more reckless & socially irresponsible behaviour, by many but not all people
 - “What have we got to lose after many months of lockdown – let’s go party”

MY OTTAWA EUREKA MOMENT



- Fully realized the realism/relevance of the Feldman concept of good people acting badly when Ottawa
 - A higher income well-educated smaller urban region with relatively low population density considered to be
 - Relatively cautious, law abiding, unexciting, boring, “the town that fun forgot” -- with most public servants and high tech employees working at home during the pandemic
- Went from an early COVID-19 success story, except for the nursing homes/long-term care disaster, to an
- Ontario/Canada hot spot when the rules were relaxed in the early autumn of 2020 after the first lockdown



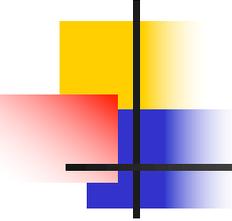
POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM RESEARCH & ARTICLE (1)

Where a behavioral ethics lens can provide guidance on a wide range of COVID-19 issues

- Continuing debates, controversies, and conflicts (some of them unresolved) on e.g.
 - Physical distancing, face masks, testing, contact tracing, COVID therapies, herd immunity, restricting foreign travel
 - Information, misinformation and conspiracy theories on COVID data e.g. whether confirmed cases & deaths are exaggerated or covered up
 - And now: immunity passports, COVID variants, and vaccine efficacy and availability: who, what, when, how many, and why

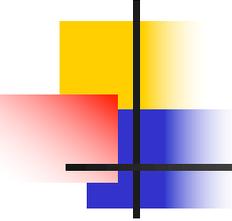
POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

CONT (2)



- And the implications for and negative impacts on:
 - Vaccine hesitancy and the rapid spread of negative information on a vaccine
 - And the extrinsic and intrinsic incentives of good people to comply with Covid-19 rules, social norms and protocols
- When receiving mixed, conflicting & muddled messages (see below) and
 - Experiencing information overload and related cognitive burdens

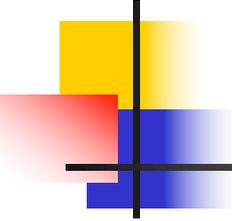
POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS CONT (3)



- Need for governments and their healthcare and other authorities and experts to better understand/address
 - The temporal, dynamic, situational, and other challenges posed by
 - Ethical fading, erosion, numbing and fatigue, and good people acting badly
- When designing, framing and implementing their future pandemic policies, rules, strategies and messages

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

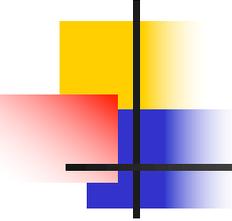
CONT(4)



- ❑ Negative effects on COVID-19 rule compliance, incentives to comply, and feelings of personal and social accountability of
 - ❑ Naming, shaming and stigmatizing certain demographic and other groups (young people) & economic sectors e.g. restaurants, bars, gyms
 - ❑ As well as other nation states with different governance regimes – the stupid “Kung Flu” joke
- ❑ Which makes it even easier for good people to act badly and then justify their bad behaviour
 - ❑ “I am still behaving much better than those guys”₂₁

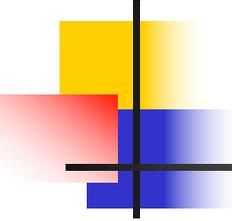
POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

CONT (5)

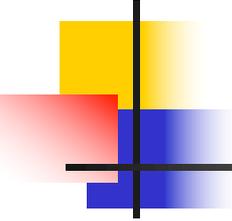


- ❑ Salience and meaning of COVID-19 to different individuals, groups and locations
 - ❑ And how these differences in salience, the vividness of COVID-19 information, and lived experiences should be addressed
 - ❑ When preparing for the crisis to recovery period, conducting natural experiments in future research
 - ❑ And getting ready for the pre-crisis period before the next pandemic
- ❑ Treating COVID-19 as a wicked rather than tame problem at every stage including the
 - ❑ Very beginning in the pre-crisis period when the next pandemic is lurking on the horizon

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS CONCLUDED (6)



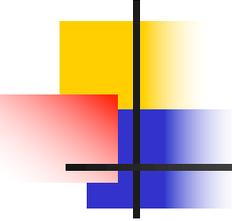
- Need a broader and richer array of voices at the next pandemic's policy table that
 - Goes far beyond government officials and healthcare/pandemic experts and related elites
 - Who unfortunately share the same priorities and biases such as loss and risk aversion, the status quo bias, extreme caution – undue emphasis on the precautionary principle
- Make sure the “wisdom of the crowd” is at the next table



EXTENDING THESE INSIGHTS TO OTHER ACTORS AND CONTEXTS

Behavioral ethics and related concepts and presumptions that support a form of lockdown fatigue

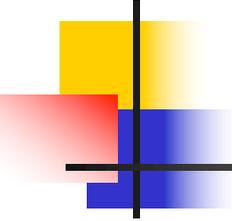
- For governments and their healthcare ministries, officials and other experts and elites such as:
- Cognitive misers with limited attention span, cognitive resources, bounded rationality & ethicality
- Finite pool of worry concept in behavioral economics
 - Whereby other challenging and more interesting (less boring) policy issues and worries are emerging during the extended lockdown period



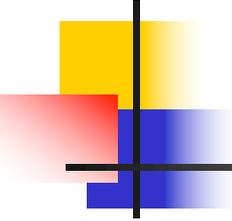
EXTENDING THESE INSIGHTS TO OTHER ACTORS AND CONTEXTS

- ❑ Tired of sending out and repeating (ad nauseam) the same messages on the same rules which are
 - ❑ Too often ignored after a long lockdown period because they are adding to the
 - ❑ Lockdown fatigue, skepticism, & cynicism of the general public
- ❑ Ensuring consistent messaging on all of the rules all of the time across all agencies and levels of government -- which is hard work in a democracy & especially a federation

EXTENDING THESE INSIGHTS CONCLUDED



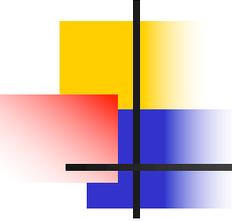
- ❑ Pandemics no joyride for sitting governments
- ❑ Forces them to misallocate scarce time and resources from their real job
 - ❑ Policy making, passing laws, strengthening the party base, and raising funds from party members, businesses and other elites
 - ❑ In order to ensure re-election -- the laws and raising funds are of course linked



EXTENDING THESE INSIGHTS TO OTHER ACTORS AND CONTEXTS

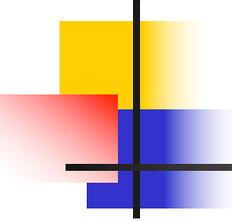
Growing evidence over the past seven months

- ❑ Various elites, who can be categorized (perhaps charitably) as reasonably good people acting less than good at times are
- ❑ Also afflicted by lockdown fatigue such as
- ❑ Large number of politicians, high profile healthcare professionals etc. who decided “we need a break this week/month”
- ❑ And travelled south this winter & ignored international travel guidance and prohibitions₂₇



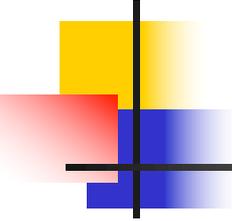
MORE EVIDENCE OF ELITE LOCKDOWN FATIGUE (1)

- ❑ Conflicts between governments and between different professional groups that
 - ❑ Appear to be more driven by self-interest than the public interest
- ❑ Governments bringing in controversial policies and programs under the cover of COVID
 - ❑ That are more political and ideological than COVID driven such as to name only a few the
 - ❑ Infamous We Charity scandal of Trudeau, and Ford's elimination of high value conservation areas



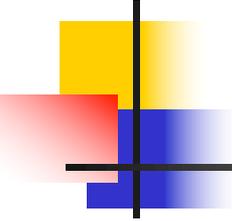
MORE EVIDENCE CONT (2)

- As illustrated by the early mask fiasco, messaging from governments, healthcare and other elites to the general public has been
 - Confusing, inept, lazy, flaccid, “going through the motions” and at times not credible and too often transparently self-serving
- If anything got even worse as the pandemic continued -- consistent with my elite lockdown fatigue hypothesis which for elites can be
 - Exhibited by expanding frustration, boredom and ennui with COVID issues and press conferences



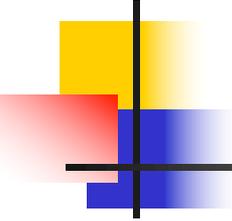
MORE EVIDENCE CONT (3)

- Ontario doctor who lied about being visited by a medical friend from the UK after the more dangerous UK variant had already been identified
- Restaurants, bars, other businesses that open up during full lockdown for “private parties”
- Elites who are jumping the vaccination cue
- Opposition critics who put forward positions that are
 - More political/ideological looking towards the next election
 - Rather than helpful to mitigating the pandemic crisis today



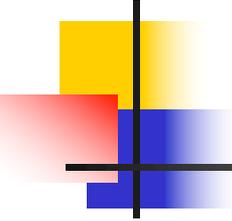
MORE EVIDENCE CONT (4)

- ❑ Suspicions that governments were failing or at least delaying the collection and reporting of unfavorable information on for example
 - ❑ Negative COVID impacts on ethnic minority, immigrant and other more vulnerable populations
 - ❑ Why the vaccine rollout in Canada has been a total and complete failure for three months
 - ❑ Canadian COVID disaster in long term care and nursing homes
- ❑ Where arguably half-truths and incomplete lying appear to dominate government statements



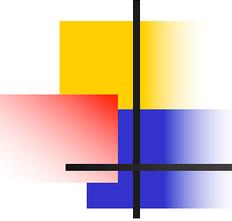
MORE EVIDENCE CONT (5)

- Elites repeating the same stale messages, platitudes, & half-truths despite mounting evidence to the contrary such as the federal government
- Repeating for weeks the same message that
 - All willing Canadians will be vaccinated by Sept.
 - When virtually no vaccines were entering Canada
 - And EIU and others were predicting that early 2022 would be more realistic and likely for Canada
- My response is that at age 78 I am placing bets
 - On whether I am vaccinated before turning 80; or after 80
 - When I become eligible based on current rules, “stasis” and Murphy’s Law – right now the odds are 50/50



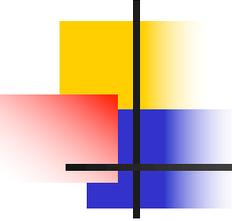
MORE EVIDENCE CONT (6)

- ❑ The more important issue is that, during times of crisis, governments and other elites
- ❑ Including business, academic and scientific communities and the conventional media should
- ❑ Provide honesty, clarity, modesty and humility
 - ❑ Be honest about what you don't know
 - ❑ Be transparent and clear using layperson's language about what you do know
 - ❑ And don't try to cover up and fake it for the many areas in-between
- ❑ After all this is a "novel and wicked" coronavirus, which like all wicked problems is now mutating



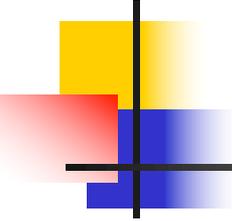
MAJOR CONSEQUENCES OF ELITE LOCKDOWN FATIGUE

- May be even greater in the longer-term than lockdown fatigue among the general population
- Individuals significantly less likely to comply with the rules and guidance of governments and other elites
 - That lack credibility and legitimacy and are seen as self-serving and hypocritical
- Makes it even easier for us “good people” to justify why we are ignoring the COVID rules and protocols
 - Which could be especially problematic if the COVID variants result in a substantial third wave



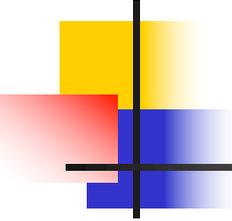
MAJOR CONSEQUENCES OF ELITE LOCKDOWN FATIGUE

- Elite boredom, frustration, lockdown fatigue, poor messaging and hypocrisy
 - Are undermining public confidence and trust in liberal democracy and its institutions
- Major driver is our responses to hypocrisy which are
 - Emotionally charged, generate moral indignation, outrage and desire for revenge
 - And have major influences on the quality of our preferences, judgment, choices, and decisions
 - Including arguably compliance with COVID rules and protocols in the future



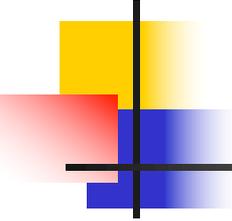
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- ❑ Because of ethical fading, erosion, numbing and lockdown fatigue among the general population
- ❑ Governments and their healthcare and other authorities should fully expect and plan for
- ❑ Considerable opposition, frustration, anger, pushback, & non-compliance from
 - ❑ New rules and restrictions introduced later in a crisis after long periods of lockdown & other restrictions



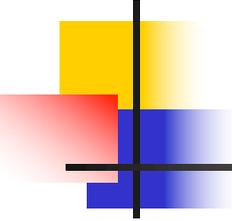
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- ❑ And from the reintroduction of rules and restrictions once the recovery period has begun
 - ❑ And the jurisdiction is being forced to partially or totally shut down again
 - ❑ Because of a major surge and/or the third wave in COVID-19 cases and deaths
- ❑ This in my view is now a major risk and threat given COVID variants, potential for premature openings, and universal lockdown fatigue



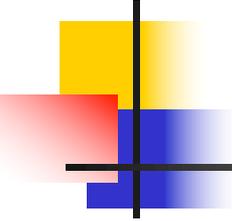
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- ❑ Negative responses to rules and restrictions
- ❑ Will be even greater when elite lockdown fatigue and hypocrisy as described above
 - ❑ Have further undermined public confidence and trust in current governments and elites and liberal democracy and its institutions more generally
 - ❑ And have provided the rest of us with even more and better excuses to ignore the hypocritical elites and their COVID and other rules and protocols



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

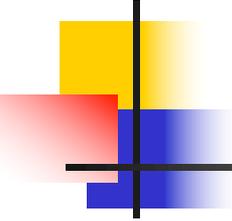
- ❑ Therefore, when scientists, healthcare and other experts and professions, and
- ❑ Government, political, business, civil society leaders and elites with status and power
 - ❑ Are obviously and blatantly ignoring and breaking the COVID-19 rules and other laws, regulations and social norms
 - ❑ And clearly exploiting the COVID pandemic in blind pursuit of their self-interest in order to achieve their own selfish goals



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- They need to fully recognize that they are promoting, encouraging, and justifying non-compliance with COVID-19 rules & social norms
 - By the rest of us “normally good people” through
 - Situational wrongdoing -- context and group pressures (going along with the crowd)
 - Thoughtless wrongdoing – doing bad things on auto-pilot with little thought and reflection
 - And/or a complex and toxic mix of the two

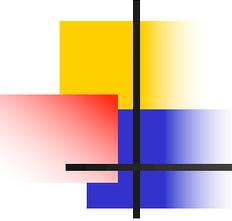
Leading to a very vicious (non-virtuous) behavior driven wicked problem type circle



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- ❑ “Why should I use my scarce and tired self-control and willpower
- ❑ When elites with power, status and money who should know better
- ❑ Are not using theirs, are ignoring COVID-19 and other rules and norms
- ❑ And are blatantly exploiting the pandemic in pursuit of their own selfish interests?”

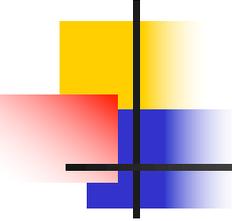
FINAL COMMENTS FOR DISCUSSION



Applying a behavioral ethics lens suggests that

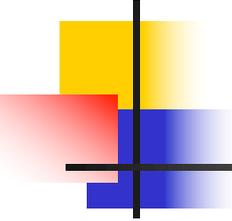
- ❑ General population has behaved more ethically and performed much better than
- ❑ Governments and other elites with power, control and status in Canada – for example
 - ❑ Upwards of 80% of COVID deaths in Canada are in long term care and nursing homes owned and operated and/or “regulated” by gov’t (mainly through non-benign neglect)
 - ❑ Inability of government to protect other more vulnerable citizens & communities and prevent rise in inequality
 - ❑ Incredible profits enjoyed by big tech etc. over past year
 - ❑ Evidence that media coverage is more harmful than helpful

FINAL COMMENTS FOR DISCUSSION



- And COVID has shone a very bright light on the strengths and weaknesses of Canadian governments which in general appear to be much better at
- Spending the money of taxpayers & bondholders, and money cranked out by the Central Bank (i.e. too often the money of future generations) compared with
 - Protecting the vulnerable
 - Procurement of vaccines, protective equipment etc.
 - Providing credible and helpful information and operating vaccine booking and other websites (gov't IT gap)
 - And designing and enforcing COVID regulations, rules and protocols that are deemed to be fair, and influence individual and social behaviour in the right direction

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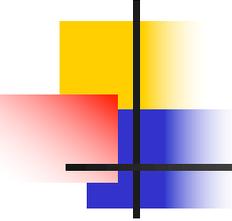
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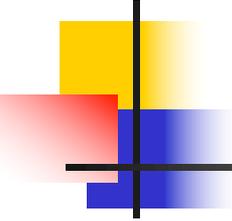
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FINAL DJI COMMENT

Now I Would Like to Hear Your Additional Comments

- On these ideas and “work in progress”
- On behavioral ethics, COVID-19, and the wicked problem of lockdown fatigue
- And I will be happy to send further material to you on request
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