

# Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog  
of Brad DeLong. Since 1999.  
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## Cowen: Reject the Great Barrington Declaration—Noted

**Tyler Cowen:** *Why I Reject the Great Barrington Declaration* <https://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2020/10/why-i-reject-the-great-barrington-declaration.html>: ‘My 2x normal length Bloomberg column on that topic... do read the whole thing...

...here is one bit....

Here are the key words of the Great Barrington Declaration on herd immunity:

The most compassionate approach that balances the risks and benefits of reaching herd immunity, is to allow those who are at minimal risk of death to live their lives normally to build up immunity to the virus through natural infection, while better protecting those who are at highest risk. We call this Focused Protection.

What exactly does the word “allow” mean in this context? Again the passivity is evident, as if humans should just line up in the proper order of virus exposure and submit to nature’s will. How about instead we channel our inner Ayn Rand and stress the role of human agency? Something like: “Herd immunity will come from a combination of exposure to the virus through natural infection and the widespread use of vaccines. Here are some ways to maximize the role of vaccines in that process.”...

In most parts of the Western world, normal openings for restaurants, sporting events and workplaces are likely to lead to spiraling caseloads and overloaded hospitals, as is already a risk in some of the harder-hit parts of Europe. Reopenings, to the extent they work, rely on a government that so scares people that attendance remains low even with reopening. In that sense, as things stand, there is no “normal” to be found. An attempt to pursue it would most likely lead to panic over the numbers of cases and hospitalizations, and would almost certainly make a second lockdown more likely. There is no ideal of liberty at the end of the tunnel here.... The Great Barrington strategy is a tempting one. Coming out of a libertarian think tank, it tries to procure maximum liberty for commerce and daily life. It is a seductive idea. Yet consistency of message is not an unalloyed good, even when the subject is liberty.... My worldview is both more hopeful and more tragic. There is no normal here.... We can do better—with vigorous actions to combat Covid-19, including government actions. The conception of human nature evident in the Great Barrington Declaration is so passive, it raises the question of whether it even qualifies as a defense of natural liberty....

If you argue, as many herd immunity critics do, that the elderly cannot be isolated, it seems you also should not be entirely confident that the currently non-infected can be isolated. The brutal truth is simply that a Great Barrington strategy put into practice would lead to rapidly spiraling cases and a rather quick and oppressive second lockdown, worse than what the status quo or some improved version of it is likely to bring. Total deaths are likely higher, along with more social trauma, due to the more extreme whipsaw effects...


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**Great Barrington Declaration:**  
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Those who are not vulnerable should immediately be allowed to resume life as normal. Simple hygiene measures, such as hand washing and staying home when sick should be practiced by everyone to reduce the herd immunity threshold. Schools and universities should be open for in-person teaching. Extracurricular activities, such as sports, should be resumed. Young low-risk adults should work normally, rather than from home. Restaurants and other businesses should open. Arts, music, sport and other cultural activities should resume. People who are more at risk may participate if they wish, while society as a whole enjoys the protection conferred upon the vulnerable by those who have built up herd immunity.

**About Tyler Cowen:**  
<<http://marginalrevolution.com>>  
Cowen has argued that libertarians 'should embrace a world with growing wealth, growing positive liberty, and yes, growing government. We don't have to favor the growth in government per se, but we do need to recognize that sometimes it is a package deal...'  
'I generally favor much more immigration but not open borders, I am a liberal on most but not all social issues, and I am market-oriented on economic issues. On most current foreign policy issues I am genuinely agnostic as to what exactly we should do but skeptical that we are doing the right thing...'



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