

Londoner's Diary: New Covid website flags up 'consistently-wrong' sceptics

Robbie Smith

January 21, 2021

Coronavirus wars have been raging online with websites such as Toby Young's Lockdown Sceptics, but now there's a new force in town.

Anti-Virus describes itself as “dedicated to debunking common Covid-sceptic arguments, and highlighting the track record of some of the most influential and consistently-wrong Covid Sceptics”. Started by a group of think-tankers, journalists and one MP — rising Tory star Neil O'Brien — it went live this week.

Sam Bowman, a senior fellow at the Adam Smith Institute, tells us they're trying to “join up the dots” in the ecosystem of what they see as misleading claims. Anti-Virus has a list of sceptics, including academics, journalists and Twitter users, whose arguments it documents.

“Everybody makes mistakes,” Bowman says, but seeing the same people being “consistently wrong and in the same way, you wonder what's going on there”.

Bowman also reflected on the way coronavirus had divided those who were once ideological allies. “I find it really sad that a lot of people who I once would have considered fellow travellers have really gone off the deep end,” he said, adding “in another way it's nice to know there are people of every political stripe.... [who] think how should we solve this problem, how do we debate with each other”.

Bowman pointed to Right-winger Ryan Bourne of the Cato Institute. Bourne, he says, spends “so much time arguing with allies. People who are wavering are more likely to agree with someone who they agree with on nine out of ten issues. The value of having a Ryan Bourne saying ‘I agree with you on tax and regulation and the usual rules don’t apply here’. It’s done a huge amount of good.”

Bowman adds that “if even a few people read it and feel that they realise they have been misled by those who they once trusted that would be a really good outcome.”