



The special exemption

I had separate conversations with five people over seventy this morning about their plans, should the government enforce a strict 'lock down' on those over 70 this coming weekend.

Precisely none of the five were planning to obey any such edict, though they put it in slightly gentler terms. The answer would go something like,

"Well you need to be sensible, so I won't be (going to Sainsbury's / going to the gym at peak hours/ getting my hair done for a bit—*choose one*) but I will be (taking walks in the park, guiding a tour to Kew Gardens, doing the basic shopping, visiting my sister who's unwell, doing street pastors - *choose one*)."

They absolutely understood the thinking behind such a government directive, but equally they were absolutely certain that it didn't apply to them. More than that, it shouldn't apply to them because they were perfectly healthy and/or were needed to do x or y. And they would point out that there was someone else they knew who was under 60 but had diabetes and *they* really shouldn't be out and about but the government hadn't done a directive about them. So it just didn't make sense anyway...

For those of us who are under 70, I think there may be a failure to appreciate quite how disempowering such a directive will be, and quite how much it will be resented. Because for the most part, the over 70s are an extremely capable bunch, and frankly, they shore

up vast tracts of society. To take just one church example, they are the bulk of the volunteers at our parent and toddler drop-in, for example.

At the same time, the people I spoke to were all under a delusion, which is this: that their lives were exceptional. To be fair, there probably are certain over-70s in exceptional circumstances, who should break any quarantine rule: you might argue the Leader of the Opposition is one. But quite clearly, none of the five people I spoke to were remotely in that category.

But it isn't just the over 70s. There are an awful lot of us utterly convinced that *we* make the difference, because of our absolutely special contribution to society and family, whatever that may be.

There are times when this is a strength, because it fosters deep rooted commitment and actually, people do make a difference. There are times, though, when it is a weakness, because it stops us seeing the bigger picture, which is that the greatest contribution any of the five people I spoke to can make is to stay at home and give no chance for either themselves to get infected or for them to infect anyone else.

In order to have a national policy, we all just have to accept it, and give up our 'exceptionalism'. Locating a model of appropriate behaviour in these next months is going to be very difficult, but we should guard against our egos tricking us into thinking that we are exceptions. We aren't.