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Jonathan: From Amsterdam, this is Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute. A treasure trove of the best and the brightest of American thinking. I'm Jonathan Groubert, and this episode's guest is a voice you and seven presidents are probably familiar with.

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Dr. Fauci: Sometimes you have to tell presidents inconvenient truths, and if you are afraid to do that because you're afraid that they won't ask you back then you've destroyed your own credibility. So I made a decision that I would always go in there and telling the truth, no matter what happens. And if it turns out the president gets upset and shoots the messenger as it were, then so be it.

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Jonathan: That's right. It's Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Brooklyn born and raised director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the chief medical adviser to the president. This was an online interview conducted by Damiaan Denys, himself a professor of psychiatry at the University of Amsterdam. You heard him on an earlier podcast interviewing Michael Pollan. This was a wide ranging conversation, including some discussion on topics I've never heard him talk about before, such as: Will we wear masks even after the pandemic ends? The upside of the pandemic? That's right, there is an upside. And why, in the end, telling the truth is always worth it, even if it makes you a lightning rod. Dr. Denys started off by asking why Dr. Fauci called the corona crisis his worst case scenario.

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Dr. Fauci: Well, it's extraordinarily unique if you look historically at the outbreaks of respiratory borne diseases that have the capability of wide spread throughout the world. Historically, we had probably, certainly in recorded history, the worst outbreak. In 1918 of a new pandemic influenza. Since that time, the world has experienced other pandemics exclusively with influenza because of influenza's extraordinary capability of spreading. So we had pandemic influenza in 1957. We had them in 1968 and we also had one in 2009, which was relatively mild. It spread a lot, but it was relatively mild. So when you have pandemics, if they have two characteristics that make them just devastating. The 1918 pandemic had that, it was able to have an extraordinarily efficient capability of spreading from person to person with the potential of a high degree of morbidity and mortality. And when I said that the coronavirus turned out to be my worst nightmare because in all my experience, being the director of the Institute for thirty seven years and having to deal with outbreaks like ebola, like Zika, but particularly influenza, I always said my worst concern was that they would be the evolution of a new virus likely jumping species from an animal reservoir, which all the other pandemics did. Clearly, now infecting humans and having the capability of being extraordinarily efficient in transmission and being able to do a lot of damage with regard to killing. And unfortunately for the world, we now, all of us, you and I, while living through the worst pandemic in the last hundred years, which is the reason why I called it my worst nightmare now.

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Damiaan Denys: So in your opinion, I mean, if you look at it more closely, our modern society has been unable to protect us against viral outbreaks such as corona. Do you think that our lifestyle with global trade and travel increases chances of new outbreaks?

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Dr. Fauci: Well, I think it does. Whenever... 75 percent of the new infections, namely infections that have never involved humans, 75 percent of them are zoonotic, in that they jump species and adapt themselves to humans. Many times when you have a pathogen, usually a virus, but not exclusively a virus, but usually a virus that jumps species. It may not really have a great impact on society because it doesn't adapt itself very well to humans. But every once in a while, you get a pathogen that does that. It not only jump species, but it adapts itself to transmission in humans. In our lifetime, one of the most daunting one has been HIV aids, which jump species from a non-human primate to a human and now chronically of now it will be 40 years next month that we first recognized HIV even before it had a name or even had any [inaudible] agent. And that has involved over 75 million people worldwide and has killed over 35 million people. So it doesn't have the acute mis of the coronavirus but over a period of decades, it is really devastated the world. Mm-Hmm. With regard to coronavirus, coronaviruses, generally speaking, have been relatively mild viruses that have been the cause of about 15 percent of all the common colds that we experience. However, in 2002, we had our first glimpse of the pandemic potential of coronavirus with Sars that again originated from China in Guangdong province, spread throughout the world, infected about 8000 people and led to almost 800 deaths. That was a warning sign that coronaviruses have the capability of doing something well beyond the common cold. And then in 2012, we had MERS, which was also of pandemic potential, but never really spread efficiently throughout the world. And it's still smolders a bit in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia. But then the third pandemic is the one that we're dealing with now. So it is something that we really must continue to pay attention to future. But regarding what you said, it's the encroachment upon the animalhHuman interface, for example, we have always been concerned with influenza, but now with Sars about conditions in China in which the human species comes into contact with animal species that generally are dissociated from human population and when they come close together, it always leaves up the opportunity of jumping species. We see that with influenza, which is fundamentally a bird or a fowl virus. It tends to when it evolves in places like China, where you have ducks together with chickens, together with pigs, together with people, it's kind of a mixing bowl of being able to jump species. The wet markets in China are particularly problematic because you bring in these exotic animals from the wild that generally don't interact with people and you put them in a market so that people can come and shop and get them for festive dinners and things like that. And that's where we know there's the possibility that that's where that jumping of species occur.

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Damiaan Denys: So are we humans in part responsible for these outbreaks?

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Dr. Fauci: You know, indirectly we are. We encroach upon the environment. We push back rainforests. We perturb the interaction between animal species and humans. So the modern day style of life is conducive to this. And the other thing that we have now that we didn't have centuries ago is the travel situation. So right now, as we all know, you can get on a plane in 18 hours later, you could be on the other side of the world. Mm-Hmm. So an infection that maybe a couple of centuries ago would never have gotten out of a country like

China or any other country, and not just China. It could be any of the country and we would never leave. Or if it did, it would take months and months, if not years. Now it can happen overnight. Yes. On a plane ride.

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Damiaan Denys: So we had these warning signs. We have our lifestyle and we all agree that COVID remains a global disaster. Even worse, according to a recent report. The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, which is an independent panel in Europe. According to them, it was a preventable disaster, but they claim that global leadership was completely absent. So why were we and in particular governments not prepared, even though you and other experts had warned us?

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Dr. Fauci: Well, you know, it's one of those things in human nature that when you have various priorities to get people to focus on something that has not happened, that might happen compared to what is happening now. The priorities always shift. So what is going on right now? So even though there has been preparedness to some extent, clearly it was not adequate. You know, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health had judged the United States to be the best prepared for an emerging pandemic. And as you know, history has shown us that we have suffered terribly. We are one of the top three countries in the world, together with Brazil and India, to have suffered the most as of yesterday. We have five hundred and eighty five thousand deaths in the United States from this pandemic, which is horrible. But obviously, our public health preparedness, although we thought it was adequate, is was obviously not the one thing I must mention, that was a very important factor of proper preparation was the scientific enterprise. The investment that was made in basic and clinical biomedical research that allowed us in record time, unprecedented time to go from the discovery of a new virus in January of 2020, to have doses of vaccine that are going into the arms of individuals in December of that same year, 11 months. If you and I were having this conversation 10 years ago, we both would be saying that would be absolutely impossible to develop from a brand new pathogen 11 months later to have a highly effective vaccine that's now saving Millions of lives. So the scientific enterprise was is a success story, the public health enterprise is not a success story.

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Damiaan Denys: OK, now talking about talking about these vaccines, I mean, still, I mean, despite the fact that they are present, that we can take them. I think that one in four Americans and Europeans do not want to take the vaccine. Talking about science and a preparedness, how do you explain this, this widespread conspiracy and paranoia regarding pandemics and vaccines? It seems as if people and governments have lost their trust in medical science.

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Dr. Fauci: Unfortunately, a certain segment of the population have done just what you are suggesting, and that is very, very troublesome. It would almost be inexplicable why, when you have a pandemic that has already killed 3.5 million people worldwide and in the United States, which there is an anti-science sentiment among some which has already killed almost 600.000 people, it seems extraordinary that when you have a highly effective vaccine that has been proven beyond the shadow of a doubt to be able to protect you against this deadly

disease, how we still have a relatively high percentage of people who don't want to get vaccinated and what has happened in the United States. Unfortunately, and to some extent, I would imagine in the European Union and other regions of the world is that a global health or a public health issue has become politicized? I mean, in the United States, as you know, there's been this argument that even wearing a mask or not, has undertaken a political connotation. Unfortunately, we're seeing the same thing with vaccines, because if you do surveys, people of one political persuasion are much, much more likely to not want to get vaccinated than others. That just doesn't make any sense at all, because a public health issue, is a public health issue. It's not a political issue, and yet it has entered into the realm of politics, which is really unfortunate.

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Damiaan Denys: It has been politicized. You have been, you're seen right now as an advocate for science and the facts become a symbol of scientific integrity, particularly with the last Trump administration. You stick to the science and to the facts. How difficult is it in the in these circumstances?

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Dr. Fauci: Well, it is very much so, because although I am often praised for high integrity, sticking to the facts, sticking to the data, sticking to the evidence, I've also been polarized and there are some people who are very adamantly against me for doing that, which again, is very difficult to understand, why you would be opposed to someone whose only goal is to tell the truth. And make recommendations based on data and evidence how that person can be a lightning rod of opposition is again as inexplicable as people not wanting to get vaccinated. It all falls under the same the same umbrella as it were now.

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Damiaan Denys: Because you're... Joe Biden is now the seventh president you have served a particularly for Europeans. I mean, we're fascinated what is the impact of the US president on these national and even international strategies against pandemics?

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Dr. Fauci: Oh, it's profound. I mean, the United States president has a considerable amount of power, not only as the president of a very, very rich country, but also because he's the leader of the political movement of his party. So when you have... I mean, some examples of, of what presidents can do: back in 2002, President George W. Bush sent me to southern Africa to determine if anything the United States could do to help the poor countries in southern Africa during the HIV aids pandemic, which were still going through because he felt that it was it was morally unacceptable for people in rich countries to have access to the lifesaving drugs that have transformed HIV/aids and to have access to prevention modalities. And yet there was so many people in the developing world, particularly in southern Africa, who don't have that. So what he did, he sent me to Africa and said, put together a transforming program that would save the lives of many, many people in low and middle income countries. So I did that in 2002, and to his great credit, just by the power of his presidency, he established the president's emergency plan for AIDS Relief, which has now saved anywhere from 14 to 18 million lives. So you're asking me, does the president of the United States have the capability of having a major impact on infectious diseases? The answer is absolutely yes, and I think PEPFAR is a classic example of that. Yeah. So that's one

of the things that we're talking about right now is what can we, in the United States, as you know, one of the world leaders, which everyone looks to the United States as being a world leader, what can we do to try and get an equitable distribution of vaccines to countries that don't have the capability of developing and distributing vaccines on their own? There are a lot of different ways to do that. We're doing some of it, but more needs to be done. We need to cooperate with other countries, such as countries in the European Union, the U.K., Canada, Australia, to be able to figure out a way to quickly get doses of vaccine to the world. Because if you say, well, we'll do it, but we'll it'll take three years. By that time, you'll have another couple of million people dead. And that would be unacceptable.

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Damiaan Denys: So, and on a more personal level, you have been the personal adviser of many presidents. What is your survival tactics with different temperaments and characters?

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Dr. Fauci: Well, it's one consistent tactic and that is: always stick by the truth and the evidence and the science. And sometimes you have to tell presidents inconvenient truths, things that they don't really want to hear. And if you are afraid to do that because you're afraid that they won't ask you back then you've destroyed your own credibility. So I made a decision. I made up my mind that I would always go in there and telling the truth no matter what happens. And if it turns out the president gets upset and shoots the messenger as it were, then so be it. But I found out that that actually worked, because what happens is that you get a reputation that you are a straight shooter and that you will always tell the truth. And even though the truth may mean something that is disturbing to the president, that has worked extremely well over the last thirty seven years for me, I obviously, as you know, because it's pretty public, got into a little difficulty with the last administration. I survived.

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Damiaan Denys: Yeah, you did. Yeah, remarkably, but you did. Yeah, sure. You're of course, not blind for other aspects of the pandemic, even social problems. In an address at the college in Atlanta last week, you said that the coronavirus outbreak and I quote you "shown a bright light on our US society's failings". And you were obviously referring to how the virus devastated minority communities and referred to the effects of racism in the US. So how, what are the consequences of corona and racism? Could you tell us a bit more about the impact of corona and social inequality and how we can change that?

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Dr. Fauci: Yeah. Well, what I meant in that commencement address was really quite clear. If you look at the statistics in the United States that brown and black people, African-Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans have a greater likelihood of getting infected because of the nature of the jobs that they have, which put them out directly into the community to do necessary jobs. But importantly, when they do get infected, they have a much higher incidence of underlying medical conditions that we know make it more likely that they will have a severe outcome, namely hospitalization and deaths. And those are things like diabetes, hypertension, obesity, chronic renal disease, cardiovascular disease. Those are not racially determined. Those occur because of the long standing social determinants of health. And what I was referring to is that because of the fact that there's undeniable racism in our country that goes back centuries, we are doing much, much, much

better. But we still are not where we need to be and the conditions under which many African-Americans and Hispanics find themselves in that beyond their control, even from birth, the lack of accessibility of a proper diet, the lack of accessibility of good medical care. That's the reason why, when they become 20, 30, 40 years old, we have diabetes, hypertension, chronic renal disease, obesity. It isn't because they're brown or black. It's the conditions under which they live. And that's what I mean when I said: the undeniable effects of a long history of racism, and we've got to correct that. I mean, like I said, we're doing much better than we were, but we have a long way to go.

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Damiaan Denys: Do you think that the pandemic, I mean, if you look at it from a more positive perspective, could offer an opportunity to rethink social circumstances and change these, the ways minor communities live in the US and globally.

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Dr. Fauci: Well, the answer is yes, and that was part of my commencement address because the next paragraph that I said after I pointed it out, I said, hopefully what we've experienced during this extraordinarily dramatic challenge to all of us, that we will have the corporate memory when this is all over to realize that when we look back at what happened and the disproportionate suffering among minorities will prompt us to say we must do something about this, we can't forget it when the outbreak is over and then just go on to something else. Just as these disparities in health took decades, if not centuries, to occur. We have to have a decades-long commitment to correct them.

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Damiaan Denys: Yeah, yeah. So on the same positive note, I mean, last year there was a 50 to 80 percent increase in medical literature. Has corona increase our medical knowledge already?

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Dr. Fauci: Oh, absolutely. I mean, no doubt. I mean, if you look at, first of all, in the field of vaccinology, what we were able to do with various vaccine platform technologies, with the use of structured based vaccine designed to get the right confirmation of the spike protein, which was highly immunogenic, leading to a highly effective vaccine. That was all due to the stimulus upon the biomedical research community to get this thing rolling, which also reflected decades of investments in biomedical research.

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Damiaan Denys: OK. And you think that this well of information, that it changes medical communication, particularly in these I mean, difficult circumstances regarding information, and so on?

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Dr. Fauci: Absolutely, what has emerged during this is something really relatively unique and that is what's called the preprint servers where you can do an experiment, get a result and the next day put it out on a server that people can see. Now the advantage is that you get information almost immediately that people can scrutinize and analyze. The somewhat, and I wouldn't say dangerous but shaky aspect of it is that it's not properly peer reviewed. So it may be that it isn't exactly correct, but the balance that we're seeing is that most of the

time, the things that you see on these preprint servers, most of the time they're quite correct. Maybe a little fine tuning when it gets peer reviewed. But at the end of the day, it's very unusual that it would be completely incorrect. And so the advantage is on balance that you get information very quickly. That's a whole new way of communicating in science because usually, understandably, the scientific process is very slow, getting an important observation of discovery. You submit it to a journal, it takes several weeks, sometimes a couple of months, to get reviewed. They it sent back, you revise it, you send it back before you know it. Six seven months. Maybe more go by before the general public sees it. What is the new way of doing it, you know about it in days instead of months now.

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Damiaan Denys: So that's communication with, I mean, between the scientific groups. But does it reach? Does that accurate information reach... I mean, just the general public?

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Dr. Fauci: Yeah. Well, again, when you get into the situation of information, that's when the social media comes in, and that's good news and bad news. The good news is that you get the wide dissemination of potentially important information. The bad news is that misinformation can also spread very effectively on social media. So we're going through an interesting period right now, where it's information overload almost because constantly in 24 hour news cycle, everything comes out. People are talking about things within minutes without even being able to evaluate it. So there's it's a mixed blessing. It can be very positive in some respects, but it can be really negative in other respects.

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Damiaan Denys: You mentioned earlier on that in terms of preparedness. I mean, science was prepared, but we as humans were not prepared. What I mean could or should be the first step that we, as global community should take to become better prepared for the next pandemic.

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Dr. Fauci: Yeah, I think what we need to do is have a reckoning where we all get together, all the different countries. You know, the W.H.O. should be doing that. You know, the W.H.O. has had its problems, I think with the new director who is not 'new' anymore, but he's been there for a couple of years. Dr. Tedros is really trying to really get that organization on a footing where they could be the global leader in getting things coordinated so that as a planet, as a total global effort, we could be together doing the kind of preparation that's necessary.

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Damiaan Denys: We are nearly to the end. So my last question is the following on: how will this corona pandemic end? Is the virus here to stay?

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Dr. Fauci: That's a good question. If you look at the history of human pathogens, we've only eradicated one particular pathogen in all of the history of mankind to eradicate. And that was smallpox. We've eliminated in certain regions of the world a number of pathogens. Polio in many countries no longer exists. Measles in certain countries no longer exists. That's what's called elimination. And then there's control. Control means you don't get rid of it, but

it goes to such a low level that it doesn't become a public health issue. I believe that by the time we get the world vaccinated, and I hope that that's sooner rather than later, we will wind up somewhere between elimination and control, where you may not get rid of it completely, but the world will be protected against it by vaccination so that it will be only an unusual event that you would get an outbreak. I believe that's where we'll be. It likely will take a couple of years for the world. Maybe sooner than that for the developed world, like certain European Union countries and the United States.

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Damiaan Denys: So how will this look like in the future? How does post-pandemic life look like for us? I mean, do we still carry masks and have this distance and so on? Well, how does daily life?

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Dr. Fauci: I don't think so. I think we can get back to normal. But I do think. Some people will do, electively, on their own. I said this one sentence it had a big blow for people saying that Fauci says you got to wear a mask all the time, which is not the case. But I believe that in other parts of the world besides Asia, during seasonal outbreaks of things like influenza and respiratory syncytial virus, I think people will elect to wear masks the way the Asians often do during the season of respiratory illness. I'm not saying it's going to be mandated by anybody, but I think people are going to say, you know, the one thing that was a positive impact on this is that in Europe, in Australia, in the United States, we barely had a flu season during the winter because people were wearing masks and was staying separate. So even though coronavirus was raging, there was almost no influenza. Most people think that that's because a lot of people were wearing masks.

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Damiaan Denys: Thank you. Well, thank you.

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Dr. Fauci: Thank you very much for having me. Thank you, Damiaan, for the interview. I appreciate it.

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Jonathan: Dr. Anthony Fauci, interviewed by Dr Damiaan Denys at the John Adams during a live online event last May 2021. Did you know that you can go to our website? www.john-adams.nl/videos where there's a link to the video of this extraordinary event. We also have a newsletter you can sign up for and a veritable treasure trove of great American thinkers and speakers at www.john-adams.nl And while you're there, why not become a member of the John Adams? Not only will you support what we do. You get a discount to future live events. In the meantime, you should go to wherever you get your podcasts and leave a review of this show. This will help get the word out, and we can keep on sharing the very best of American thinkers in Europe with you, free of charge. That's it for this week's show. Our theme song is called La Prensa by the Parlando's. Our editor is Tracy Metz. From Amsterdam, this was Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute. I'm Jonathan Groubert. Thank you for listening.