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**How Do I Deal With a Friend Who Thinks Covid-19 Is a Hoax?**

**By Kwame Anthony Appiah** April 22, 2020Updated 11:39 a.m. ET

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/magazine/coronavirus-hoax.html>

*A friend of mine whom I’ve kept in contact with over text message (we live in different countries) does not believe the Covid-19 pandemic is real. He is taking precautions and practicing social distancing, but he told me that he believes Covid-19 is a political, worldwide hoax to control people. I was flabbergasted to hear this. I tried to explain to him that the disease is no hoax: I know doctors fighting it, I know people who have contracted the virus and so on. But nothing has persuaded him.*

*Should I cut off my relationship with him or continue to talk to him? It is exhausting to argue with someone who believes in a conspiracy theory. I don’t feel I would lose much by cutting off ties with him, but how much of a responsibility do I have to make him understand the truth? It feels bigger than just our relationship.*Name Withheld

**Your friend believes** in an astonishingly complex conspiracy. It would involve a secret deal between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping and dozens of other political leaders on every habitable continent — people who haven’t managed to coordinate their plans on lots of other important matters, like climate change. It would involve doctors in Geneva at the World Health Organization, in Atlanta at the C.D.C. and in hospitals all around the world conspiring with data scientists at Johns Hopkins to produce a fantastic flow of fake information. Or, if your friend thinks that everything those politicians and scientists and health workers appear to be saying is itself made up, it would require an even more amazing capacity on someone’s part to control the media and the internet. And what possible purpose could it serve? You might as well propose that we are all living in the Matrix — though if we are, it isn’t just the pandemic that’s imaginary.

Now, I suppose that there’s a remote possibility that your friend suffers from clinical paranoia and needs professional help. If that’s what’s going on, there’s little you can do from over here. No harm in keeping in touch, but no point in exploring his delusions, either.

More than a few people believe some version of what your friend believes, however, and mostly, they’re not suffering from psychiatric difficulties. Instead, they’ve joined one of the self-reinforcing cohorts of the collectively unhinged, which have become especially salient in the era of social media. The pathology there is not individual but social. And if that’s what’s going on, there’s something to be said for telling him that you hope he’ll continue to take those precautions but that you’re not willing to waste time arguing with him. Losing your friendship might give him more pause than any possible arguments.

*I’m doing my best to avoid social contact, along with two other members of my household. We have sufficient supplies for a month. Despite that, one member insists on going out for trivial reasons, such as not liking the kind of apples we have. He’s 92. I’ve tried explaining and cajoling, using graphs and anecdotes to make the danger to all of us seem “real.” It doesn’t take. His risk of death is many times greater than mine, and he’s poking holes in a lifeboat we all have to rely on. What is the correct path?*Name Withheld

**Staying at home** is something you do as a domestic unit, and it won’t work if one member of every household feels free to come and go as he or she pleases. The additional risks may not be very great if your nonagenarian’s trips involve proper distancing, proper hand-washing, wearing a cloth mask (which, among other things, would reduce the chance of his touching his face), choosing an hour when the store is least crowded and so on. But someone who can’t grasp what’s wrong with going out for trivial reasons can’t be trusted to maintain the necessary precautions.

Given that you can’t lock him in or kick him out, you might see what can be done to address his needs. If he agrees not to go to the store himself, you can make a list of the things he wants and agree to go buy them yourself; you can practice the necessary safety measures more reliably than he might. But it may be that he’s just feeling stir crazy. If that’s the issue, perhaps you can arrange to go with him on walks in places where there are few people around (taking note of the C.D.C.’s current recommendations concerning the use of cloth masks in public). What you can responsibly do, of course, will depend on the conditions and the rules where you are.

Kwame Anthony Appiah teaches philosophy at N.Y.U. His books include “Cosmopolitanism,” “The Honor Code” and “The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity.” To submit a query: Send an email to ethicist@nytimes.com; or send mail to The Ethicist, The New York Times Magazine, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018. (Include a daytime phone number.)

This one is for fun:

(He is not a real judge, he is a comedian)

[**JUDGE JOHN HODGMAN**](https://www.nytimes.com/column/judge-john-hodgman)

# Judge John Hodgman on Saving Leftovers From Your Leftovers

**By Judge John Hodgman**

* April 16, 2020

**Dionna writes:** When I eat leftovers, I sometimes leave a very small amount in the container. My husband says I should eat it all or toss the rest. He gets disappointed when he sees a container in the fridge but finds that there isn’t enough, say, tuna salad for a tuna melt.

I should recuse myself, as this one is personal. Of all the meatloaves, potpies, grilled cheeses and other comfort foods we have been using to self-soothe during this time of anxiety and perpetual sweatpants, the tuna melt I had last Friday was arguably the most important sandwich of my life. Just thinking of your leaving some useless, sandwich-insufficient, dumb dollop of tuna behind to trick your husband makes me so mad I can barely type. Cease and desist this selfish practice. Cohabitation is hard enough right now, and leftovers are a critical resource. We don’t have time for your Tupperware mind games.