

2 July 2026

Dear Mr. Ridley,

Last year, nearly to the day, I co-authored a response<sup>1</sup> to the paper you wrote with Professor Anton van der Merwe, which was published in *The Telegraph*.<sup>2</sup> That response was published at *The Conservative Woman*. I am not aware that you responded to or acknowledged it.

In that piece, we observed that your argument rests on a series of assumptions not established by the evidence you presented. Those assumptions include:

- A novel virus emerged suddenly in Wuhan in late 2019.
- It caused a new disease.
- It spread or transmitted efficiently from human to human.
- It circumnavigated the globe from a point source.
- It caused the mortality events attributed to “COVID-19.”
- It was not “caught” in time because the relevant people and institutions failed to act, or acted dishonestly.

You framed (and continue to frame) the origins issue as *lab versus market*. We said this is a false dilemma which excludes at least two other possibilities: that there never was a new virus causing a new disease, or that the entity later named SARS-CoV-2 was already present, perhaps widely, but was novel to detection rather than novel in any meaningful biological or epidemiological sense. Separately, I’ve written to the possibility that SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 are both “something” – even something that could be construed as lab-related – but may not have the same or related “origins.”<sup>3</sup>

I’ve reviewed the transcript of your recent interview with Jan Jekielek.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, your persistent claims about Wuhan, DEFUSE, the furin cleavage site, Proximal Origin, and the behavior of Chinese and Western scientists still do not advance your hypothesis in the manner you seem to think they do.

A lab can be engaged in unsafe, stupid, unethical, or illegal activities. Scientists can be dishonest. Research proposals can be alarming. Databases can be hidden. Agencies and officials can cover themselves. Peter Daszak can be (or seem) conflicted. Fauci and Farrar can behave badly. Kristian Andersen and others can collude against intellectual opponents and change their minds.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.conservativewoman.co.uk/this-covid-narrative-collapses-under-the-slightest-scrutiny/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20250601111235/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/covid-19-lab-leak-origin-most-likely-matt-ridley/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://woodhouse76.com/2025/05/12/is-there-any-possible-way-for-sars-cov-2-and-or-covid-19-to-have-a-lab-origin-and-origins-distinct-from-one-another/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://singjupost.com/american-thought-leaders-w-matt-ridley-heres-what-they-hid-in-wuhan-transcript/>

None of these things, however, speaks to whether a novel, risk-additive, transmissible pathogen departed a lab and caused the events of spring 2020. *That* is the step your position keeps taking, without “showing its work”.

In the interview, you say SARS-CoV-2’s alleged early infectiousness and relative genetic stability imply prior exposure to human cells. You also say WIV’s work in humanized mice means that, if such a virus escaped, “of course it would cause a pandemic.” You say as well that lockdowns failed because the virus was too infectious, including in asymptomatic people. And you invoke “20 million people” as though the global COVID death-attribution has been established and isn’t rife with serious problems.

Each of these claims simply “imports” a major component of the official story rather than proving it.

I do not expect you to read every article I have written on these matters. However, I have spent several years examining the very premises your argument relies upon: what was named, what was detected, what was assumed about novelty, what was claimed about transmission, what intelligence and agency statements actually said, and whether spring 2020 mortality events can be explained by the entity called SARS-CoV-2. Some of this work has involved primary documents, FOI records, correspondence with scientists, and engagement with the technical literature. I mention it (and have inserted the references in a single footnote)<sup>5</sup> not as an appeal to my own authority, but because these are the questions lab-origin proponents, including you, often move past too quickly.

“It came from the market” is a scenario within the natural-origins view, which, as you’re aware, is closer to what evolutionary biology has always advanced, minus the sudden novelty element. A natural-origins position “accepts” zoonosis, animal coronaviruses infecting humans, and infective contact (transmission, spread) between animals and people. It also assumes sequences representing stable, disease-causing viral agents can be found, named, and linked to such contact. (Whether these ideas *should* be accepted or are, in truth, well-supported by robust scientific evidence is another matter; I am stating what various fields have presumed in the past.)

Given your DPhil in zoology, I would think you would be more attentive to the evolutionary assumptions built into the lab-origin argument. I had good conversations and correspondence

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<sup>5</sup> Naming and classification: “[Q&A with Dr Alexander Gorbalenya, Lead Author on the Paper That Named and Classified SARS-CoV-2](#)”; “[The SARS-CoV-2 Name Game](#).” Detection, novelty, and transmission: “[Early Emails Between Virologists Who Developed the First RT-PCR Test for 2019-nCoV Suggest Low Certainty About Sequencing, Novelty, and Transmission](#)”; “[Questioning the First Known Person-to-Person Transmission of SARS-CoV-2](#).” Intelligence, Baric, CIA, and “cover-up” storyline: “[Follow-up: CIA Assessment of COVID-19 Pandemic Origins vs. New CIA Director John Ratcliffe](#)”; “[Observations and Comments About the 30 October 2025 Document Release Involving Ralph Baric and the CIA](#)”; “[The CIA’s COVID Cover-Up Cover-Up](#).”

with a British academic evolutionary biologist last summer who offered a line of questioning and points worth your consideration. I've paraphrased these queries below:

1. *Do you still accept the conventional view that SARS and MERS had zoonotic origins?<sup>6</sup> (If you do not accept the conventional view of SARS-CoV-1 and MERS, then your position is broader than a SARS-CoV-2 lab-origin argument and should be stated as such.)*
2. *Do you accept that SARS-like coronaviruses are widespread and diverse in bats?*
3. *Do you accept that many thousands of human infections may occur every year as a result of zoonotic spillovers, as [Sanchez et al. 2022](#) suggests? If not, what prevents this? Is it lack of prior adaptation? If so, then it seems you are putting adaptation before infection, rather than seeing infection as one of the conditions under which selection can occur. Evolution does not work by pre-adapting a virus for an event that has not yet happened. It works through variability, repeated encounters, failures, and successes.*
4. *Do you accept that a virus could be highly successful at making copies of itself if it has little or no deleterious effect on the host?*
5. *If spillovers occur with any regularity, why would they select for dramatic virulence rather than relative innocuousness?*
6. *Can you at least concede the possibility that sequences which would test positive under the protocols developed in early 2020 may have been widespread before the alleged lab leak? That is, can you concede the possibility that the novelty was in the naming, testing, searching, and attribution, not necessarily in the biological thing itself?*
7. *Do you accept that furin cleavage sites are found in other coronaviruses? If so, then the presence of one is not, by itself, evidence that the sequence had extraordinary properties, correct?*
8. *If your claim isn't simply that a sequence was unusual, but that SARS-CoV-2 was novel, highly transmissible, highly stable, unusually adapted to humans, and capable of causing global mortality waves, then you are making a much stronger claim than "lab leak." You are claiming that people working in a lab created, selected, or trained a virus that surpassed anything Darwinian evolution had produced. Is that what you mean to suggest?*

Addressing such questions is the burden the lab-origin argument has to carry. It isn't enough to point to suspicious behavior or "cover ups" thereof. (Indeed, "lab leak cover up" – not "lab leak" – has become the real star of the show, and keeps directing attention away from some very basic questions.<sup>7</sup>)

As far as I'm aware, you've yet to address:

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<sup>6</sup> Your references to SARS-CoV-1 and SARS-like coronaviruses in the interview are not entirely clear to me. At some points, you seem to rely on the conventional distinction between SARS-CoV-1, where infected animals and vendors were reportedly identified, and SARS-CoV-2, where you say no comparable animal source was found. At other points, your lab-origin orientation seems to cast suspicion on the entire category of SARS-like coronavirus emergence. Are you now saying that SARS-CoV-1 may have been a lab-related event? Please clarify.

<sup>7</sup> <https://woodhouse76.com/2024/10/18/the-most-basic-questions-about-sars-cov-2/>

- *how* the entity named SARS-CoV-2 got from a lab in Wuhan to everywhere else;
- when it began affecting humans in a unique way, distinguishable from influenza-like illness, colds, pneumonia, frailty, medical injury, and the consequences of policy;
- why it appeared to “arrive” synchronously in geographically disparate places;
- how something allegedly so contagious and dangerous could be spreading with no meaningful impact on all-cause or respiratory mortality until after emergency declarations, mass testing, coding changes, panic, and medical protocol changes began;
- why some cities allegedly exploded with “cases” (positive tests) and deaths, while similar cities did not; and
- why the early mortality geography does not look anything like what the public was led to expect from a novel spreading respiratory pathogen.

Respectfully, your “of course it would cause a pandemic” comment is a leap that evidence doesn’t permit. A manipulated entity might enter lab workers, be detected by tests, or do nothing of consequence. “Pandemic” is not the automatic result of “lab accident” (or lab “release” for those who assign intent).

Likewise, when you say, “20 million people are dead,” you seem to be accepting the state’s (establishment’s) COVID death-attribution wholesale. Is that your intent? *Dead with a positive test, dead after policy and protocol changes, dead under altered coding rules, dead in overwhelmed or mismanaged institutions, and dead from a novel virus* are not interchangeable categories.

Nor does saying “lockdowns” failed because the virus was too infectious, including in asymptomatic people, solve the problem. It protects another central tenet of the official story. What evidence, independent of mass testing and circular case definitions being deployed, establishes widespread asymptomatic transmission of a novel pathogen?

Consider the “Asian-country” problem (framed here with input from the academic I mentioned earlier):

Major destinations for Chinese travelers include neighboring Asian countries. Official figures show no early 2020 death waves in countries such as Vietnam or Taiwan<sup>8</sup> at the time testing and lockdowns in Europe and the US began. Do you accept that the virus you appear to believe had properties setting it apart from anything in nature should have been able to spread to those countries at the same time as Europe and the US, if not before?

If the “answer” is *prior immunity in Asia*, then from what? If from SARS-CoV-1 or related viruses, are you saying those viruses spread invisibly and more widely than recognized? If so, then you are conceding that SARS-like viruses can be “in” human populations without producing obvious catastrophic disease.

If the “answer” is *non-pharmaceutical interventions*, then why were less severe measures in some Asian countries supposedly more effective than far more severe measures in Europe? And

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<sup>8</sup> I regard Taiwan as a country; the WHO does not.

if the answer is “Asian prior immunity,” why did it seem to work for Asians while they were in Asia, but not necessarily for Asian populations elsewhere?

(Stating the obvious: A good number of these Asian countries are islands, as are Australia and New Zealand, which also reported low mortality in 2020. Does it occur to you that these places *had* to be “success stories” for keeping the virus out, initially?)

The “variants” story creates more problems. You have argued, as many lab-origin proponents do, that the original virus was “suspiciously” well-adapted from the start and did not evolve in the way one would expect from a recent zoonosis. But then what happened when Alpha, Delta, Omicron, and the other variants came onto the scene via sequencing? A conventional-biology view would assert that nature repeatedly produced variants which “spread” across countries and continents in weeks. So, the remarkable feat supposedly achieved by lab workers was then repeated by ordinary viral evolution several times over. But if a coronavirus subject to normal evolutionary processes could not plausibly produce the original SARS-CoV-2, then why could it produce variants?

As you can no doubt see, the contradictions accumulate because the lab-leak argument keeps too much of the official narrative intact. It also maintains the assumption that the “found” sequence eventually called SARS-CoV-2 explains New York City, Lombardy, London, Madrid, and other spring 2020 mortality events, not to mention a stopover in Iran. In other words, *lab leak* changes the origin “scene” or circumstances from a zoonotic event but leaves the plot largely untouched. As I wrote in [this short piece](#), you believe it; I do not.

You might also be interested in knowing that the market-versus-lab frame was, in fact, planted very early on in *The Wall Street Journal*<sup>9</sup> – the same outlet in which you have published numerous articles, including two related to origins in spring 2020.<sup>10</sup>

Is it possible that you were, through no real fault of your own and without realizing it, cast in the role of Lab-Leak Spokesperson and sent down a path that is wholly inconsistent with the body of literature in your field – and offends common sense besides?

In the interview, you praised the DRASTIC Team. I understand why. But because I was at one point placed into a Signal group with some members of (and individuals adjacent to) that team, I have questions about why and how it was assembled, what lines of inquiry were encouraged or discouraged, and who benefited from the direction its publicized sleuthing efforts took. Are you aware there was a defector who challenges the lab leak hypothesis?<sup>11</sup> Have you spoken to him?

Circling back to your argument, I can accept the following:

- Dangerous research was happening in Wuhan and in other labs, in the sense that the research was dangerous to lab workers due to the nature of the materials they worked

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<sup>9</sup> <https://woodhouse76.com/2026/04/10/the-earliest-seed/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-bats-behind-the-pandemic-11586440959?st=FH2MFj&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-bats-behind-the-pandemic-11586440959?st=FH2MFj&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink) | [https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-bats-behind-the-pandemic-11586440959?st=aRgDNv&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-bats-behind-the-pandemic-11586440959?st=aRgDNv&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.michaelpsenger.com/p/drastic-founder-renounces-lab-leak>

with, and dangerous because such research is directed toward vaccine development and deployment.

- China concealed, and is still concealing, information, as did – and do – many other countries, including the UK and US.
- EcoHealth, NIH, and other actors misled the public.
- “Proximal Origin” was a less-than-good-faith exercise.
- The DEFUSE proposal is disturbing, albeit fantastical.

All of these things can be true, while the foundational question remains unasked and unanswered:

**Was there ever a novel SARS-like virus causing a new disease, spreading human to human (or in the air) and producing the events now called “the COVID-19 pandemic”?**

Until that is established, the question of “where” the thing came from is premature.

We can do better than government-sanctioned email releases and other non-evidence that chiefly validates the claims of organizations and individuals whose pandemic narrative should itself be on trial.

Sincerely,

Jessica Hockett, PhD  
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