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Philosophy, Politics and Economics of Health

Master in Philosophy of Science

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Week 9 – Pandemics, Emergencies, and Lockdown

1. **To lock down or not to lock down?**

*White, van Basshuysen and Frisch look at the initial decision to impose a lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in Spring 2020. What is their argument in favour of locking down the population in this situation?*

*Why do the authors focus on the UK?*

*Why do they analyse the initial, short-term lockdown only?*

*What challenges does this argument in favour of lockdown face?*

1. **Emergency ethics**

*According to Winsberg et al. 2020, “freedom [is] the default from which departures must be justified; the greater the imposition, the stronger the justification needed” (222). Discuss this claim.*

*State John Stuart Mill’s harm principle in your own words.*

*What are the limits of the harm principle? Can it be applied to defend lockdown policies?*

*Might the urgency of the situation change the epistemic standards to which policy makers should be held?*

1. **Emergency modelling**

*Why were early modelling studies criticised as “completely and totally wrong” (Cochrane 2020)? Were the critics right to claim this?*

*What is the distinction between predictions and projections, and how is this relevant to the evaluation of the criticisms?*

1. **Next Week: Vaccination**

*Readings:*

Chapter “Communicable Disease”, in James Wilson, *Philosophy for Public Health and Public Policy* (required)

Lucie White, “Can One Both Contribute to and Benefit from Herd Immunity?” (required)