

Book launch

Corona – A Historical Perspective on the Pandemic of Our Time



FREDRIK CHARPENTIER LJUNGQVIST presents his new book
Corona – Ett historiskt perspektiv på vår tids pandemi
(Corona – A Historical Perspective on the Pandemic of Our Time).

Comments by H. ORRI STEFÁNSSON.
A Q&A session will follow.

Please note that while the book is written in Swedish, the event will be held in English.

Thursday, 3 December 2020, 2:15 p.m.

The event will be held via Zoom:
<https://uu-se.zoom.us/j/63194521263>

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FREDRIK CHARPENTIER LJUNGQVIST, Pro Futura Scientia XIII Fellow at SCAS and Associate Professor of both History and Physical Geography at Stockholm University, presents his new popular science book (written in Swedish) *Corona – ett historiskt perspektiv på vår tids pandemi* (Corona – a historical perspective on the pandemic of our time) (Stockholm: Dialogos Förlag, 2020). He will discuss how “catastrophe scenarios” have prevailed over empirically-founded science during the pandemic, how statistical data has been misinterpreted in media and among policy makers, and especially how historical knowledge from past pandemics has been surprisingly absent during the covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, he will touch upon the role of science and of scholarly publishing during the pandemic, and media interpretations of uncertain and controversial scientific findings.

The various measures taken during the pandemic, and their success rate, have many historical predecessors that appear surprisingly unknown. In fact, almost nothing with the covid-19 pandemic is particularly novel besides the rather extreme responses to it, along with the enormous hope put in a vaccine. What is instead almost unique is the lack of serious pandemics since the Hong Kong Flu 1968–1969 and, hence, a lack of both mental preparedness for and societal acceptance of deaths in pandemic diseases. The absence of a serious pandemic for such a long time, in a connected world, is a remarkable thing from a historical perspective – not the fact that we now finally got one. Another noteworthy thing is the distinct age-related mortality pattern in covid-19.

Now by the end of November 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that approximately one billion people have been infected by covid-19 world-wide, of which 60 millions are laboratory confirmed cases, with a global infection fatality rate of less than 0.2 %. Some countries, and parts of countries, are approaching “herd immunity” from natural infection – the usual end-state of pandemics throughout history but, by many, considered unacceptable today. The covid-19 pandemic is, from a historical point of view, actually not particularly severe or deadly. In most ways, in terms of morbidity and mortality, it is rather comparable to the Asian Flu (1957–1958) and the Hong Kong Flu (1968–1969). Still, the covid-19 pandemic will go to history as the pandemic that probably had the most severe social and economic consequences since the Black Death (1346–1353).

H. ORRI STEFÁNSSON, Pro Futura Scientia XIII Fellow, SCAS, and Associate Professor of Practical Philosophy, Stockholm University, will comment on the book.