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Certified Corona-Immunity as a Resource and a Way Back to Normality[†]

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As a result of the Corona crisis we are living in a state of emergency. But we are desperate to get back to normal quickly. Some people are losing hope and economics costs of lockdown measures increase rapidly. However, as the disease spreads the crucial resource for overcoming the crisis is growing. That resource are people who are immune to Corona. This vital resource must be *employed* effectively, it must be *certified*, it must be *sought* for, it must be *found*, and it may even be actively *produced*. How can this be done?

CORONA IMMUNITY AS A GROWING RESOURCE

It seems generally accepted that in most cases the course of the COVID-19 disease is mild, often resulting in no or few symptoms. The probability of full recovery is high for many people, especially for younger people and those without previous illnesses. Those who have survived the disease are, according to current knowledge, largely immune. The probability of contracting exactly same virus a second time within a few years and passing the disease on is small compared to a first illness.

There are now potentially millions of people who have been infected with the Coronavirus and who are now immune. Their immunity makes each of them individually a

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valuable resource in the fight against the virus, a resource that grows as the number of people infected increases. Antibodies from immune people might even be used to produce blood serum as a potential treatment. Moreover, from a societal perspective, the larger the stock of persons with immunity, the lower the risk of infection for the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions. As the number of immune people grows, restrictions on all but the most vulnerable can be gradually relaxed. Those who are already immune could go back to their economic and social activity immediately and could even provide active support to the health care system. Their engagement and contribution to society and the economy would reduce the risk of overburdening the health care system and would reduce the potential for social breakdown. The resource of immune people is already much greater than we know: All those who have been infected with the virus are immune, but many may not have even realized that they had the disease (asymptomatic cases). Consequently, they have never been tested.

Employ immune people: Immune people can be reinstated to all activities and can pursue all social contacts as usual, but more importantly they could be employed in the care of the elderly and the sick without endangering especially at risk people. The quickest possible and most comprehensive engagement of immune people is therefore sensible from a public health, an economic, and a social perspective. Their employment is necessary for our society to return to normality.

Issue immunity certificates: To make full use of their power, people with immunity must once again be able to move freely, without any restriction and without fear. To do so, they must know for sure that they are immune, and other people must be able to distinguish them from the non-immune. That is why they need a reliable immunity certificate for proving immunity which can be based on having antibodies or having experienced the illness. This immunity certificate serves as a kind of “passport” to normality and certifies the value of the resource. Such certificates should not only be given to the domestic population, but coronavirus immune doctors and nurses from, for example, China should also be certified accordingly.

Search for immune people: Like other valuable resources, people immune from the novel coronavirus must be sought out, and this requires broad administration of tests. Testing is not only about identifying virus carriers in order to protect society; it must also be about the fact that immune people can help to save society. On the one hand, tests for viruses can be used to identify people who are currently infected and who are then known to be immune around two weeks after infection when potential symptoms and infectiousness have subsided. On the other hand, tests for antibodies can be used to find people who have never been tested – but were infected and had no symptoms of the disease – and are now already immune. These

people do not yet know about their immunity. Since the test capacity is still small today despite rapid growth in facilities, the first step is to search for immunity in infection hotspots. Over time, better and better tests will be introduced and searches will be conducted worldwide to find and certify immune people.

Find immune people: The value of the immunity certificate facilitates the search for people who are already immune. Those who are certified immune no longer need be anxious about the disease, nor do they need to remain in isolation as they resume a reasonably normal life. This systematically provides incentives for healthy people who may have been infected to think about whether they may have had mild symptoms of the disease, such as loss of smell and taste. Active cooperation with authorities to obtain the immunity certificate becomes particularly rewarding. The same applies to patients with mild symptoms, who are currently suffering from fears of stigmatization, preventing self-identification as potentially sick.

Produce immune people: Like other resources, immunity may even be actively produced. Individuals may want to seek immunity voluntarily (under medical supervision) through self-infection. Self-infection can be managed and organized by public or private health service providers and supported, if necessary, by regulatory rules. Thus, the production of immunity can potentially be organized without any major externalities, and actively increasing immunity can help in the fight against a pandemic.

Until a truly effective treatment or vaccination is available, already immune people are the crucial resource in the fight against Corona. This is true even under substantial uncertainty; moreover, it holds if current government measures are relaxed for the general population because of their enormous economic and social costs, or if we see a change in the assessment of the dangers of Corona. After all, Corona is certainly dangerous for the elderly and for people with health problems. Understanding immune people as a resource is therefore essential and will enable a faster return to normality from such a crisis situation.

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