Editorial

Josef Kuře¹

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, caused by SARS-CoV-2, is a unique phenomenon in modern history. It represents the deadliest respiratory virus pandemic since the Spanish flu, affecting all areas of social and individual life of the global population and, in many respects, bringing unprecedented challenges. From the epistemological point of view, this pandemic raises questions about information, misinformation, hoaxes, manipulation, dealing with scientific facts, etc. It affects many aspects of social life such as social distancing, loneliness, patterns of social behaviour, quality of social life, ostracism, discrimination, vulnerability, protection of the vulnerable, social coherence and social justice. The COVID-19 pandemic creates an enormous load for health care systems, challenging access to health care and its fair distribution in a situation of limited resources, including issues such as triage, transparency, or vaccination. On the level of administration and governance, it not only questions epidemiological approaches, policies and the moral responsibility of different actors, but also significantly influences politics (e.g. populism), economies (the costs of diverse measures, including lock-down) and the basic understanding of democracy.

This special issue of the *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)* brings a collection of papers devoted to ethical reflection on this global phenomenon.

Andrea Klimková departs from the general assumption that any good decision requires good knowledge and correct understanding. She applies those general epistemic conditions to the current pandemic, analysing epistemic and moral responsibility of relevant actors, including scientists and politicians. Ethicists and philosophers can challenge political decisions, without being necessary epistemically arrogant. The contribution of Peter Gurský addresses the issue of the safety and danger of ‘viral’ information. He focuses on how the epistemic subject receives information which is decisive for any information transfer. He argues that the only way to overcome danger and the fear of misinformation and disinformation is exposure of the mind of an individual in a comparative (and critical) perspective. In this way, one also fulfils their potential to become free.

Rudolf Novotný and his colleagues discuss triage of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Triage, as a consequence of the lack of resources in health care, is analysed and exemplified on the cases of Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Martin O’Malley, Jürgen Zerth and Nikolaus Knoepffler in their ethics of vaccination against COVID-19 propose an integrative approach towards vaccination prioritization and compulsory vaccination. Georgios Kalaitzidis addresses the COVID-19 vaccine’s scarcity and its equitable global allocation and distribution. His paper calls for the need for fair vaccine allocation and distribution. Anetta Jedličková deals with the ethical implications of protocol adjustments of clinical trials during the COVID-19 pandemic – as procedural changes and protocol modifications are necessary during the current pandemic, however those adjustments may impact the risk (and benefit) and safety of clinical trial participants.

Leszek Koczanowicz examines, in his paper, the impact of the pandemic on democratic societies, paying attention to the question to what extent a pandemic, as one of the many global crises, can alter the trajectory of democratic development.

¹ Masaryk University Brno (Czech Republic); jkure@med.muni.cz; ORCID: 0000-0001-5287-5835

The paper by Jana S. Rožker provides an intercultural perspective on the global pandemic, using traditional Confucian ethics and its tools such as interpersonal solidarity or autonomous self-discipline. She also demonstrates that those attitudes based on Confucian ethics and applied in Southeast Asian countries were more successful and effective in elimination of the epidemic in comparison with the strategies of Euro-American regions.

In the COVID-19 discourse, primarily in triage discussions and in some vaccination debates, classical utilitarian arguments have been presented. Francisco Lara in his paper asks the question whether some possible neuro-enhancements should be accepted by utilitarian ethics. Zlatica Plašienková and Martin Farbák, discussing a new paradigmatic approach to human enhancement proposed by transhumanists, criticize the value imbalance in the transhumanist conception of enhancement.

Despite all previous efforts and measures such as vaccination or lockdown, the COVID-19 pandemic has reached a new and intense wave recently. The papers of this issue of *the Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)* hopefully contribute to the reflection on this significant global phenomenon.