



Editorial

Moral lessons from the pandemic

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In critical life situations, it is always good to stop and learn the lesson that is being offered. Nowadays, we are facing the coronavirus pandemic. We have not been in such a situation since the Spanish flu, i.e. for almost a hundred years. It is not unsurprising that we are having trouble dealing with it. However, let us try and think about the moral lessons from the ongoing pandemic.

First, we must appreciate the nurses and other medical workers. Most of them have accepted the risks and remained at work. In Italy, many medical workers have died. The approach of medical workers is not new; they have behaved in this manner during every pandemic. Let us remind ourselves of the behaviour of Czech medical workers after 1990. Back then, many public assets were privatized. Medical workers did not build marble palaces, nor did they buy expensive cars. They bought medicaments and devices for available finances. In just a few years, Czech healthcare achieved a level comparable to that of developed European countries. Medical workers have always done well morally in difficult situations – and we can be proud of them.

For this reason, we should be careful in blaming medical workers for anything in a difficult situation. Recently, the British newspaper 'The Sunday Times' criticized British doctors for using the protocol for critical situations too early. Many seniors were rejected so that beds be available for those whose prognosis was better (according to the protocol). However, if British doctors had occupied all beds according to the patients' arrival, they would have been criticized for allowing many young people to die. In Britain, human rights were prioritized over protecting people from the spread of the pandemic. The people should not blame doctors, but the politicians who had made that decision.

The pandemic has reminded us of one moral rule: when something is impossible to achieve, how can we punish some-

body for not doing it? Paramedics have asked me why there was not a special law for their field. In acute situations, there was no time to explain anything to the patients, nor could the paramedics request an informed consent. I explained that such a law was not necessary because everyone knew that requesting or explaining was not possible in such situations. During natural disasters and other catastrophes, we see many injured people and few devices, and it is not possible to help everybody. In such situations, medical workers use those devices to help those who are most likely to survive. This approach is called a triage. It must be well organized. If we want to protect the conscience of medical workers, someone else must decide about the fate of the injured. These decisions are very difficult, and it is necessary to keep medical workers from them. It is good that Czech politicians work hard on not allowing the equipment and medical workers to become insufficient. Many countries are willing to help.

This pandemic has also confirmed the old rule that it is reasonable to listen to experts. Meeting the wishes of voters is not always the best political route. People like to travel and do not like to wear masks. In the summer, experts knew that the virus had merely been suppressed. For this reason, it was unreasonable to travel much. The first signs of the return of the pandemic caused the measures to be reinstated. Czechs did not want to listen to these warnings and the politicians complied with their wishes. Summer holidays at the sea were made possible and the implementation of the necessary measures was delayed. The pandemic then sped off with all its adverse consequences.

Fortunately, people learn from critical situations, and we can have faith that we will handle the pandemic and react better and more successfully with every relapse. Our anxieties can be calmed with the knowledge that the vaccine is in sight...

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