УРОКИ ПАНДЕМИИ

DOI: 10.22394/2070-8378-2020-22-6-68-71

# АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ЭТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ СОВРЕМЕННОГО ОБЩЕСТВА В КОНТЕКСТЕ БОРЬБЫ С ЭПИДЕМИЕЙ КОРОНАВИРУСА

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**Аннотация:** В статье раскрывается основная этическая проблема соотношения свободы и безопасности, которая приобрела особую актуальность в условиях пандемии COVID-19, и ряд актуальных вопросов, стоящих перед отдельными государствами и всем мировым сообществом: «кого защищать в первую очередь», «спасать экономику или людей», а также ряд морально-этических проблем, связанных с персональной ответственностью каждого человека за жизнь и безопасность сограждан.

Представлен обзор основных научных теорий (теории соотношения свободы и безопасности Т. Гоббса и Ш. Монтескье, категорический императив в этике И. Канта, утилитаризм И. Бентама и Дж. С. Милля, «вагонеткология» Ф. Фут) применительно к разрешению этических проблем, с которыми столкнулось человечество в «эпоху коронавируса». Особое внимание уделяется взглядам современных зарубежных философов и социологов (П. Сингер, Дж. Эверетт) на сложные процессы осмысления обществом «новой реальности», которая возникла в результате остановки глобальной экономики и беспрецедентных мер массовой изоляции и карантина.

Автор анализирует с точки зрения этики действия, предпринимаемые правительствами разных странах для обеспечения безопасности граждан и реализации базового права на жизнь в условиях пандемии. В статье отмечен неоднозначный характер этих мер, которые могут иметь далеко идущие последствия как для отдельных обществ, так и для всего человечества в целом.

**Ключевые слова:** этические проблемы, COVID-19, свобода и безопасность, утилитаризм, вагонеткология

Статья поступила в редакцию 5 июня 2020 года.

*Шишова Ж.А.* Актуальные этические проблемы современного общества в контексте борьбы с эпидемией коронавируса. *Государственная служба.* 2020. № 6. С. 68–71.

## CURRENT ETHICAL PROBLEMS OF MODERN SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIGHT AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

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**Abstract:** The article reveals the main ethical problem of balancing freedom and security, which has become particularly acute in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The author highlights some other significant issues facing both individual states and the entire world community: the problem of choosing “who to save first”, “save the economy or the people”, as well as several moral and ethical problems related to individual responsibility of each person for the life and safety of fellow citizens.

The article provides an overview of the main scientific theories (“Freedom is good, but security is better” by T. Hobbes, correlation of freedom and security by Ch. Montesquieu, the categorical imperative in ethics of I. Kant, the utilitarianism of I. Bentham and J. S. Mill, and the “trolley problem” by P. R. Foot) concerning the ethical problems faced by humanity in the “epoch of coronavirus”. Special attention is paid to the views of modern foreign philosophers and sociologists (P. Singer, J. Everett) on global society’s comprehension of the “a new reality” that has emerged as a result of the global economic shutdown and the unprecedented introduction of mass isolation and quarantine measures.

The author analyzes from the point of view of ethics the actions taken by governments in different countries to ensure the safety of citizens and the guaranteeing of the basic right to live at the peak of a pandemic. The article notes the ambiguous nature of these measures, which can have far-reaching consequences for society and humanity.

**Keywords:** ethical problem, COVID-19, freedom and safety, utilitarianism, trolley problem

The article was received on June 5, 2020.

*Shishova Zh. A.* Current ethical problems of modern society in the context of the fight against the coronavirus epidemic. *Gosudarstvennaya sluzhba.* No. 6. P. 68–71.

**Introduction**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, civil society in all countries faced the heightening of common ethical problems as well as the emergence of new challenges that face not only doctors, politicians, officials, and businessmen but also ordinary citizens. Search for optimal ethical solutions in the context of time-tested and new social theories can become one of the primary conditions for overcoming the global crisis and returning to sustainable development.

The fundamental ethical problem is the dilemma of freedom and safety, which manifests itself in the form of finding an optimal balance between unlimited freedom and guaranteed safety in the context of an existential threat to the life of each individual (COVID-19 infection).

There are some other ethical issues which can also be identified, namely:

the problem of choosing "who to save first", which consists in making quick decisions on the provision of first aid to patients in conditions of limited resources available to doctors and the medical system as a whole;

the dilemma of choice to "save the economy or the people" that arises before the leaders of states and representatives of the political class, since they are responsible for the safety of their fellow citizens and their well-being;

a wide range of moral and ethical issues corresponded to responsibility for the life and safety of all citizens and authorities at all levels, in particular, in the face of severe restrictions that the state is forced to impose in a pandemic.

These ethical problems are not new because, in different epochs and different historical moments, mankind has tried to solve them. The COVID-19 pandemic only once again demonstrated their global, common human nature and, at the same time, revealed fundamental differences in approaches to its solution that are suitable for different states, societies, and cultures.

**Return to the logic of the common good**

The ethical dilemma of freedom and safety was considered in the works of such philosophers as Thomas Hobbes, Charles-Louis Montesquieu, and Georg Hegel. In the 17th century, scientists were interested in the question of whether the restriction of freedoms leads to increased safety [Hobbes, 2001]. Later, in 1748, the following statement appeared – "safety is the first form of freedom" [Montesquieu, 1999]. For Hegel, the actions taken by the state do not pose a threat; their necessity is obvious to everyone, which means that they do not violate the established order in civil society. The measure of safe actions of both individuals and the state is the safety of the whole [Hegel, 2007]. The dilemma of freedom and safety is closely related to individualist and collectivist theories. The problem of the collective and the individual is fundamental to sociology as well as to ethics. For example, the founder of the French sociological school, Emile Durkheim, raised the fundamental question of how to combine individual liberation of a person, on the one hand, and collective life, on the other. In the case of a pandemic, we are talking about whose interests are protected by the state – an individual or a collective. Does the state really violate human rights?

In most countries, to combat the spread of the coronavirus, strict surveillance has been introduced over the actions of an individual. Authorities of states control the main spheres of people's life: health condition, freedom of movement, economic activity, and even contacts with other people. Most citizens are forced to give up many familiar comforts in the interests of society. This is where the interests of the individual and the collective collide. We are witnessing a paradoxical choice of society in favor of protecting the interests of an individual by severely limiting the fundamental rights of both the individual and the collective as a whole. During a pandemic, there is a return to the logic of the common good.

**Ethical concepts of utilitarianism**

The solution to the ethical problem of "who to save first" may be in the context of well-known and widespread ethical concepts of utilitarianism, which are characterized primarily in Anglo-Saxon society. The authors of the concept, Jeremiah Bentham and John Stuart Mill, called the need to achieve "the maximum happiness for the greatest number of people" as the main good for the whole society and argued that when making moral decisions, one should take into account the principle of benefit, but you should distinguish benefit from profit (understood as self-interest). J. S. Mill believed that we should "be guided in our actions by such a rule that can be recognized by all rational beings with the benefit of their collective interest". Namely, his work, published in 1861 in Frazer's Magazine, was called Utilitarianism. As the concept of the benefit, J. S. Mill understands "the greatest sum of the total happiness of all". Adhering to the moral philosophy begun by Aristotle and Epicurus, and in opposition to Kantianism, Mill formulated the fundamental moral principle – the principle of utility. Francis Hutcheson's formulation is similar and has the following interpretation: "The action is considered the best, when it provides the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people" [Hutcheson, 1973, P. 174].

As a particular case of solving the above problems, the so-called "trolley problem" should be mentioned. The foundation of the "trolley problem" is a thought experiment introduced in 1967 by the English philosopher Philippa Foot. The main plot of it is that an uncontrollable trolley rushes along the rails, and there are six people on its way (five in the main way, and one in the side path). The people will die if the trolley reaches them. But we can save them if we switch the arrows at the fork and send the trolley along a side path. But in this case, the trolley will kill one person. We have two options for events: do nothing and let the trolley kill several people or redirect the trolley to the side path and save five at the cost of one life. "Utilitarianism" prescribes to switch the directional arrow. The concept of the "trolley problem" argues that switching the directional arrow is not the only acceptable one, but, morally, it is the best decision.

These theories try to answer the questions: how to reconcile the interests of the minority and the majority; how to get the maximum effect for many without harming a particular person; how to relate resource constraints and ethical problems of survival in emergency conditions.

**Saving the economy or the people?**

The dilemma of "saving the economy or the people" can also be viewed within the framework of the utilitarianism concept. Unlike most politicians who deny such formulation of the question, modern "specialists on ethics" are increasingly turning to the ideas of utilitarianism. But are utilitarian ideas suitable in decision-making to contain the COVID-19 virus? After all, we are talking about hundreds of thousands, and even about millions of human lives. Should pandemic decisions take into account the interests of a minority – people over 65 or with comorbidities and members of other vulnerable sectors of society? Or, is it important to take into account the interests of the majority of people who find themselves isolated and in some cases unemployed? In the second scenario, older people must agree to die, since in this case, the economy and the well-being of young people will be saved.

Modern utilitarians do not have a consensus on the question of which measures will be more efficient for society and will bring more benefits from a strategic perspective. Who should be saved in the first place: individual citizens or the entire society by lifting economic restrictions necessary to save the lives of vulnerable groups of the population? According to Jim A. K. Everett, professor at the University of Kent and research fellow at the Center for Practical Ethics at Oxford University, specializing in moral judgment and perceptions of moral character and limited altruism, "the benefits of utilitarianism are based on the fact that through its ideas it is possible to expand the circle of those who will receive protection and medical care (circle of caring) without harm to society".[1]

The well-known utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer believes that "saving lives should take into account the harmful consequences of decisions (the introduction of isolation) not only on the economy but also on health and well-being of people".[2]

**Priority of duty over virus threat**

The ethical problems correlated with the moral responsibility of a person were studied by such philosophers as Socrates, Leibniz, and Kant. With his categorical imperative, Immanuel Kant reminded us of responsibility and the need to always act in such a way that the maxim of an act could become the principle of universal law. A person does his duty not because of any external purpose but for the sake of the duty itself. The duty is above the individual, selfish interests of a single person.

In the pandemic conditions, in the mass media and on the internet, we often see how people condemn and criticize the actions of officials who do not comply with the regime of restrictions which was introduced by themselves. And here is an example – a scandal regarding Professor Neil Ferguson, who was forced to leave the post of adviser on the coronavirus epidemic in May 2020 (he was convicted of repeated violations of self-isolation).[3] Ferguson argued on introducing strict rules on sanitary distancing in the UK and a prohibition on social contact, even between immediate family members. A society that is ready to sacrifice its economic interests in the name of safety is strictly monitoring the authorities' compliance with those tough measures and is not ready to put up with their selective use.

It is interesting to study modern ethical constructs, which are reflected in practical government decisions taken to combat the pandemic. Most countries in the world follow a strategy with extremely severe measures – restrictions on the personal freedoms of citizens, namely: a prohibition on leaving home, holding sports, entertainment, and other mass events. The need to save the lives of as many citizens as possible is cited as a moral justification for such unprecedented restrictions.

But not everyone agrees with this formulation of the question. In the United States, society has been divided into those, who advocate opening up the economy as soon as possible, and those who support the idea of isolation to protect the lives of the most vulnerable segments of the population. The supporters of the first strategy are ready to sacrifice the minority for the sake of economic development and the welfare of the rest of the people. Commenting on the strikes in the United States, Indiana Congressman T. Hollingsworth said: "We are going to have to look Americans in the eye when we are asked if the best decisions were made during the coronavirus pandemic for the whole of America and Americans".[4] Most other governments think the same way, convincing their citizens of the need for tough isolationist measures.

Sweden is one of the few countries that have shown an unusual approach to the fight against coronavirus in the spring of 2020 by refusing to impose tough restrictions. Public places, cafes, elementary schools, kindergartens were not closed in the country, and public transport continued to work. In their strategy to fight the virus, Swedish authorities relied only on measures which benefit has scientific justification. This was stated by Professor Johan Giesecke, an epidemiologist, adviser to the Swedish government, and the Secretary-General of the World Health Organization, in an interview with RBC news agency. "In our opinion, there are only two such measures. First, we need to wash our hands, and we have known about it for 150 years. Second, it is necessary to maintain social distance, that is, do not get too close to other people," he said.[5]

Ten countries (Albania, Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, San Marino, and Serbia) warned of a possible derogation from the observance of the rights to liberty and security of person, to a fair trial, to respect for private and family life, freedom of assembly and association, education, protection of property and freedom of movement.

1 https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/23/us/reopening-country-coronavirus-utilitarianism/index.html

2 https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/23/us/reopening-country-coronavirus-utilitarianism/index.html

3 https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-52553229

4 https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/23/us/reopening-country-coronavirus-utilitarianism/index.html

5 https://www.rbc.ru/politics/05/05/2020/5eb03ea39a7947268b42bc33

The Council of Europe (CoE) report "Respecting the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in times of crisis" notes that forced deviations from human rights standards must remain proportionate to the threat of spreading the virus and are limited in time. The report says that the measures taken by the authorities in the context of COVID-19 "will inevitably encroach on the rights and freedoms of citizens". Restrictions are only permissible if they are "strictly necessary" to combat the pandemic and do not lead to arbitrariness.[6]

**Conclusion**

According to classical theory, the problems of security and freedom are always in dynamic balance. The pandemic has increased the importance of safety at the expense of human rights in many diverse societies: from China to Norway, from Brazil to India. In addition to that, the pandemic has caused a situation in which a specialist who makes decisions that are vital for other citizens (for example, a doctor) is placed in conditions of internally conflicting moral choices. A person is left alone with a serious moral problem. There is a strong need for detailed and socially justified regulation of the professional's actions in such situations.

There is a dilemma of choosing "saving people or saving the economy". Its denial or understatement might have repercussions in the post-pandemic recovery process.

Violation of moral or legal norms has shown that for this, there will be a punishment not just from the point of view of law but this also poses a threat to life, human health, and the existence of the whole society. Thereby, the issues of professional ethics have become global and have gone beyond professional communities.

6 http://www.ng.ru/politics/2020-04-12/3_7841_rights.html

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## Человечество перед лицом пандемии: осмысливая опыт 2020 года




2020 год кардинально изменил привычную жизнь человечества: пандемия коронавируса стала испытанием на прочность для всех стран мира. Требовались немедленные и нетривиальные решения со стороны государственных органов, медицина перестраивалась и мобилизовала свои лучшие силы, ученые препарировали вирус и бились над его загадками, обычные граждане осваивали правила социального дистанцирования. Нормативное регулирование не всегда успевало за реальной жизнью, экономики оказались в кризисе.

Все эти перемены требуют осмысления и анализа, ставят вопросы, ответы на которые должны дать исследователи общественных отношений. В издательстве «Дело» вышло комплексное междисциплинарное исследование «Общество и пандемия. Опыт и уроки борьбы с COVID-19 в России»[1]. Издание посвящено всестороннему изучению кризиса, спровоцированного пандемией COVID-19, и имеющемуся опыту реагирования на вызовы. Главным редактором книги стал ректор РАНХиГС Владимир Мау, в редколлегию вошли помощник Председателя Правительства РФ Георгий Идрисов, ректор НИУ ВШЭ Ярослав Кузьминов, директор Института ЭМИТ РАНХиГС Александр Радыгин, ректор МГУ Виктор Садовничий, ректор ВАВТ Сергей Синельников-Мурылев.

Исследователи привели подробную хронологию наступления коронакризиса и проанализировали реакции и механизмы, к которым в форс-мажорных обстоятельствах прибегли сферы здравоохранения, образования, социальной поддержки. Авторами всесторонне изучены модели реагирования на COVID-19 в экономическом и управленческом секторах, уделено внимание психологии кризиса и социальной солидарности. Подробно рассматривается система мер, которые предпринимались в России для борьбы с эпидемией. Кроме того, в исследовании приведены интервью руководителей федеральных ведомств, непосредственно участвовавших в принятии решений и реализации противоэпидемических мер в период пандемии.

«Вызов COVID-19, брошенный всему человечеству, вынудил принимать срочные решения. Власти прибегали к экстренным и неординарным мерам: закрывали границы, останавливали работу предприятий и сферы услуг, вводили ограничения на передвижение по городу. Врачи, ученые, волонтеры с первых дней оказались на передовой линии противостояния с коронавирусом. Все мы старались сделать мир вокруг безопаснее, оберегая родных и близких, пожилых и детей. Достаточно ли мы сделали для этого? … Книга написана большим коллективом авторов. Они не только были наблюдателями острейшего кризиса, но и выдвигали предложения по мерам, направленным на противостояние инфекции, на смягчение ее последствий и формирование посткризисного развития», – с такими размышлениями авторы обращаются к читателям.

Работа предназначена для исследователей, преподавателей, студентов, аспирантов, а также широкого круга читателей, для которых данная тематика может представлять интерес.

1 Общество и пандемия: опыт и уроки борьбы с COVID-19 в России. Издательский дом «Дело» РАНХиГС, 2020.