

Manifestations of Moral Imagination during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Debates of Lithuanian Parliament

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Abstract : The COVID-19 pandemic brought important and pressing challenges for politicians around the world. Governments, parliaments, and political leaders had to make quick decisions about containment of the pandemic, usually without clear knowledge about the factual spread of the virus, the possible expected speed of spread, and levels of mortality. Opinions of experts were also divided, as some advocated for 'herd immunity' without closing down the economy and public life, and others supported the idea of strict lockdown. The debates about measures of pandemic containment were heated and involved strong moral tensions with regard to the possible outcomes. This paper proposes to study the manifestations of moral imagination in the political debates regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, moral imagination is associated with twofold abilities of a decision-making actor: the ability to discern the moral aspects embedded within a situation and the ability to envision a range of possibilities alternative solutions to the situation from a moral perspective. The concept was most thoroughly investigated in business management studies. However, its relevance for the study of political decision-making is also rather clear. The results of the study show to what extent politicians are able to discern the wide range of moral issues related to a situation (in this case, consequences of COVID-19 pandemic in a country) and how broad (especially, from a moral perspective) are discussions of the possible solutions proposed for solving the problem (situation). Arguably, political discussions and considerations are broader and affected by a wider and more varied range of actors and ideas compared to decision making in the business management sector. However, the debates and ensuing solutions may also be restricted by ideological maxims and advocacy of special interests. Therefore, empirical study of policy proposals and their debates might reveal the actual breadth of moral imagination in political discussions. For this purpose, we carried out the qualitative study of the parliamentary debates related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania during the first wave (containment of which was considered very successful) and at the beginning and consequent acceleration of the second wave (when the spread of the virus became uncontrollable).

Keywords : decision making, moral imagination, political debates, political decision

Conference Title : ICPET 2021 : International Conference on Political Ethics

Conference Location : Berlin, Germany

Conference Dates : July 22-23, 2021