



Workshop: Moral Theories and Disasters

University of Prešov, Faculty of Arts

COST Action IS1201 Conference, 13th – 15th May 2015

Abstracts



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The Morality of Disasters: Time and Space in the lived experience of a disastrous event

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Disasters impact on the world around us. A loss of our surroundings is detrimental. Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, talked about our inter-subjectivity. According to Husserl, inter-subjective experience plays a fundamental role in the constitution of our selves as objectively existing subjects, other experiencing subjects, and the objective spatio-temporal world. Inter-subjectivity refers to a condition or that ‘meeting-place’ somewhere between subjectivity and objectivity, which describes a phenomenon that is both personally experienced and collectively experienced. Our surroundings become our familiarity and define our situation, namely what Husserl called our ‘life-world’. During a disaster, our familiarity is rearranged, causing and creating a disruption of our world-view and the meaning we place onto objects to get a sense of the world around us.

Humanitarian intervention, by virtue of its nature, imposes a normative foundation upon an existing framework in another country’s society and culture/s. A disaster is often framed as a trauma, and thus equated with pathology; the psychiatric definition of trauma being Judith Herman’s description as an ‘event outside normal human experience’. There is a pre-scription of suffering.

In this paper, I draw on the lived experience of a disaster and how this impacts on descriptions of trauma in practicing medicine in disaster zones. I will specifically highlight the referential of ‘space’ and the ways we formulate normative descriptions about suffering. Psychiatrist, Derek Summerfield, states in criticism to the diagnosis Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a citizen is “as weak or as strong as his/her society assumes them to be”. The morality of a disaster, then, is crucial to the lived experience of the affected individual/s. I conclude by developing further the notion of ‘space’ as a response to disaster trauma.

Methodological Potential of Personalization of Deontological Moral Theory and Disaster Ethics

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Renewal of deontological tradition of moral obligation requires, especially in conditions afflicted by catastrophe and disaster, broader methodological perspective which could enable deontology to cross its own limits. The demand on pluralistic research approaches places challenging requirements on formation of a hybrid moral theory, characterized as a proactive approach. Personalistic approach to a human being, based on principles of integrity, responsibility and solidarity and aiming at wellbeing of a person, can be an inspirational source for formation of such a proactive approach.



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Victims of disasters: how to understand and approach their suffering?

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Victims of disaster suffer, not only at the very moment of the disaster, but also years after the disaster has taken place, they are still in an emotional journey. While many moral perspectives focus on the moment of the disaster itself, a lot of work is to be done years after the disaster. How do people go through their suffering and how can we take care of them?

Research on human suffering after a major catastrophe, using an ethics of care perspective, is scarce. (Roxberg et al, 2001, Raholm, 2008) People suffering from disasters are often called to be in distress and their emotional difficulties ‘medicalised’. (Crocq, 2002) This brings them often into a situation of long term use of medication, and one can wonder if medication is of help to them in the long run.

In our paper, we will explore another moral perspective, focusing on the importance of the victims’ narrative and their lived experiences. We will use Paul Ricoeur’s phenomenological reflections from ‘Suffering is not the same as pain’ (Ricoeur, 1994) for conceptualizing human suffering and how to apply it to victims of disaster. Ricoeur suggests that suffering is not a quantity that can be measured, but a characteristic that should be studied qualitatively in interpersonal and narrative contexts. Above all, the perspective of care and listening could offer an opportunity to reconcile people from their loss and suffering (Roxberg et al, 2001).

Natural Evil, Human Evil, and Moral Responsibility for Outcomes of Natural Disasters

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There is a long tradition in philosophy and theology to draw distinction between human evil and natural evil. Human evil is understood as suffering resulting from human activities, while natural evil occurs without human involvement. Historically, some of the most frequently discussed examples of natural evil were natural disasters, such as 1755 Lisbon earthquake. Current thinking has it, however, that the distinction, as applied to natural disasters, is deeply problematic. Natural disasters are complex events that are triggered and shaped by a set of both natural and manmade causes and initial conditions. This paper discusses several reasons why it is difficult to establish firm causal and conceptual links between human activities (either actions or omissions) and outcomes of natural disasters. First, human activities constitute only a part of causal process leading to the outcomes. Second, relevant human activities often are collective actions in which contribution of a particular individual is very small (e.g. contribution to global warming). Third, where probability of occurrence of a natural disaster is sufficiently low, post hoc arguments to the



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effect that particular human agents had positive obligationsto take preventive steps in order to mitigate the outcomes of the disastercannot be easily produced. Fourth, the unpredictable and catastrophic natureof natural disasters makes it extremely difficult for an agent to foreseepotential outcomes of her activities. The paper claims that any moral theorythat attempts to analyse the element of human moral responsibility in naturaldisasters will have to take these four reasons into account.

Moral act sub specie temporis

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The essay deals with the problem of moral act in relation to the dimension of time. By eliminating the time dimension, the Kantian ethics offer quite one-sided perspective; they provide no substantial characteristics of human act resulting from its immersion in time: irreversibility; causality; asymmetry between past and future related to the gained knowledge. From the side of moral philosophy, the corresponding theories to these characteristics are: the principle of responsibility; the principle of consequences (consequentialism); and virtue ethics with its focus on wisdom (or prudence, more specifically). The essay considers the difference between the linear homogenous time which is measurable and the experienced time with its perplexities and crises, which are the crucial moments for decisive act. From the side of the society, “ethics for technological civilization” (H. Jonas) needs an increased focus on time dimension, because of the enormous – and often quite unintended - impacts of the technological systems: foreseeing enabled by science includes assessing risks and balancing probabilities in relation to the values (while the values in question are established in Human Rights documents).

Disaster Issues in Non-Utilitarian Consequentialism (Ethics of Social Consequences)

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Ethics of social consequences as a form of satisficing non-utilitarian consequentialism is one of the approaches to disaster issues. The primary values in ethics of social consequences are humanity, human dignity and moral rights, which are developed and realized in correlation with positive social consequences, expressing the consequentialist value orientation of this theory. The above fundamental values are followed by other values, which developed in connection to positive social consequences. Secondary values in ethics of social consequences include justice, responsibility, moral duty and tolerance. Their role and purpose within this structure is given by their ability to contribute to reaching and realizing moral good. Fair treatment within moral issues stems from applying primary as well as secondary values.



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These are not values that can be filled with an exclusive content in ordinary circumstances. However, in extraordinary circumstances (disasters), it is not necessary to consider all requirements resulting from the whole value structure of ethics of social consequences. In extraordinary circumstances, values are prioritised and realized. Therefore, primary values are realized prior to secondary ones. Regarding primary values, the realization of positive social consequences, or, at least, minimising negative social consequences, takes priority over other primary values. Especially in disaster bioethics (including medical ethics and health care ethics), it can often be necessary to search for a way to minimise negative social consequences; thus, actions with prevailing positive social consequences are preferred.

Beautiful theories and ugly compromises? On the ethics of decision-making in disaster settings.

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According to some scholars, the emergence of bioethics in the 1970's saved the life of ethics, as a segment of moral philosophy, as academic ethics was brought back to our everyday social sphere. Although the success of bioethics fuelled a renewed interest in ethical theories, but in a fresh and challenging context of everyday conflicts, dilemmas, and issues that were usually originate from health care or hospital environments. Contrary to this applied focus of much of today's ethical theorizing one would scarcely find a similar academic interest in the role and concept of compromise in the ethics of decision-making in health care. Compromise is usually regarded as a valuable concept in business, in politics, in law, but not in morality. We are successors of a philosophical tradition that sees compromise in moral issues as wrong, as it forms a danger to our moral life, as it is simply a betrayal of principles and moral theories, and as to practice compromise is to demolish our moral integrity. With reference to the work Martin Benjamin - who confronted this tradition, and introduced a positive concept of moral compromise into ethics – my paper focuses on the concept of *integrity preserving compromise* and its potential role in ethical decision-making in disaster settings. I summarize the major elements of the dominant view of compromise in ethics and assess its relation to ethical theorizing (theories, codes, principles). After explicating the concept of integrity preserving compromise I try to assess the potential roles it might have in situations where nothing is normal.

Ethics of social consequences and decision making during the disasters

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Neither in theory nor in the practice exists one model of decision making. It is very difficult to identify this or those models, which would be most useful during the, and after the disaster



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happens. During the time surrounding the disaster (as a difficult and complex situation), specific moral dilemmas arise. Each of the theories (of decision making) tend to be associated with a different assumptions about human nature, quality of the decisions made and about manner in which they are made. Different assumptions might bring different tools and subsequently different consequences. The paper will introduce the ethical decision making model in general, and will suggest two ways of how the decisions in ethics might be made. With help of the contemporary ethical theory – ethics of social consequences which is used as methodological base, the article will discuss the difference (and possibly even rightness) of making decisions based on intuition and reason. Paper will try to suggest answer for questions such as: which type of ethical decision making is better in a specific situations such as disasters are? Is there necessity to exercise different decision making models (from ethical point of view) during the disasters, than during different times?

Why helping the victims of disasters makes me a better person? Towards an anthropological theory of humanitarian action.

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The standard way in which we have so far attempted to cope with disaster situations is by virtue of a kind of a cost-benefit analysis which usually enables us to set up a mechanical way of calculating in advance how to provide humanitarian help and support to people affected by disaster in a particular context. So what matters, according to this theory, is the situation and not the hundreds of thousands of people who have been victimized by the disaster. The cost-benefit kind of moral theories, like Utilitarianism, tend to see the victims of disasters as mere numbers to be treated, disregarding the essential differences which may exist among them (e.g. babies, aged or handicapped people).

However, there may be an entirely different way of dealing with disasters which focuses upon the victims rather than the situations of the disasters. This is a further elaboration of the duty we have to help the others when they are in need, starting from everyday life situations and moving progressively to situations of disasters. A duty which prescribes the agent to help the victims of life, regardless of the situation they are in, provides an internalized way of looking at disasters, since the help provider sees in the face of each victim herself, if their situations have been reversed. Moreover, this kind of moral theory also contributes to the character development of the help providers, be they ordinary people or humanitarian aiders. For, in providing help and support to those in need, knowing that she may be in their place one day, the agent does not act indifferently, nor with an intention to take advantage of them, but instead she acts out of a sense of duty she has to promote the happiness of others, especially of those in need. And in doing so, she at the same time cultivates her will to acquire gradually the virtuous disposition according to which the respect for the law becomes the only motive of her actions.

Virtue Ethics Applied to Disaster Issues

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The distinctive characteristic of disaster (bio)ethics is based in specifics and challenges of disasters and their differences from everyday situations. This creates the necessity to ethically evaluate actions resulted from the disaster (and post-disaster) situations from different perspective.

Traditional ethical frameworks are challenged as they are often too rigorous for being applied to such issues. In this paper, the author will focus on one of the traditional ethical frameworks and its possible application to the issues of disasters, namely virtue ethics. Inspired by the Rosalind Hursthouse's study *Applying Virtue Ethics*, the author will argue that virtues ethics has strengths which deontological and consequential theories miss as they are too deeply concern with principles, rules, and duties. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, is capable to overcome this problem as it focuses rather on the *virtuous* action of the moral agent than on the ethical argumentation and following the *right* principle or duty. In issues like disasters, when most of the ethical principles fail to work and succeed, might be this characteristic of virtue ethics important tool for ethical evaluation of actions resulted from disaster context.

In the context of geo-political and economic decisions and actions, which are often made outside of any ethical frameworks, are these virtuous acts of individual moral agents even more significant and successful in ethical approach to disaster situations (civil wars, emigration, floods). This will be showed on the example of the war in Ukraine and the approach of Slovakia (as one of its neighbourhood country) to ethically answer this case.

Ideal and Nonideal Moral Theory for Disaster Bioethics

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Moral theory has generally focused on resolving ethical dilemmas by identifying ethically sound options. Whether the focus is on consequences, duties, principles or virtues, ethical cases are often approached in ways that assume morally sound solutions can be found and followed. Such 'ideal morality' assumes that moral goodness is always possible. Moral theory is seen as a method of helping people act ethically, leaving them confident that they have done the right thing. Moral dilemmas, in this approach, either do not really exist or show that further analysis is needed to identify ideal ethical solutions.



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When such an approach is brought into disaster settings, its inadequacy becomes apparent. Often no good solution is available, and instead disaster responders must choose between bad alternatives. This paper will examine recent work on nonideal moral theory as a useful model for disaster bioethics. This approach views moral dilemmas as situations of unavoidable moral wrongdoing. Instead of aiming for ideal solutions, nonideal morality accepts that in some situations, no choice is ideal; all options have a bad side. The aim then becomes identifying the least worst option. In such situations, feelings of regret or guilt will often be the norm. This paper will explore the benefits of using nonideal moral theory for moral dilemmas in disasters. The practical implications of such approaches will be explored, including how disaster responders will need to prepare to wrestle with such tragic decisions and their nonideal dimensions.

Charlie Hebdo and the lesser evil theory

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The article focuses on the theoretical reflection of a particular incident – the attack on editors of the french satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. It will try to provide some basic conclusions using the theory of lesser evil as one possible theoretical background for the reflection of terrorism, its causes, consequences as well as the fight against it. The freedom of speech and press will also be discussed, with an emphasis on its limits and possible restrictions. The basic argument the lesser evil theory of the trade-off (provided by Michael Ignatieff) between values of security and rights will be provided with its application on the particular phenomenon of Charlie Hebdo attacks. The analysis of conflict between the basic democratic freedom of speech/press and the value of tolerance is of crucial importance and can serve as a background for more practical solutions when dealing with the issues of redeemable violence or its terroristic counterpart. The analysis of Charlie Hebdo phenomenon can serve as a basis for further discussions dealing with contemporary issues of terrorism.