

Introduction: The Philosophy and Economics of Pandemics

In response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics (EJPE)* invited scholars to reflect on the philosophy and economics of pandemics, in general, and on the current pandemic, in particular. We welcomed short, focused contributions—from methodological, ethical, public-policy, and historical perspectives—that target particular aspects of the pandemic, or of pandemics generally, and that articulate a single, incisive idea.

The result is this special issue, comprising ten articles—four by special invitation (Joelle M. Abi-Rached and Ishac Diwan, Krister Bykvist, Andrea S. Asker and H. Orri Stefánsson, Ethan Bradley and Mark Navin) and six through open submission. All accepted articles went through our external peer-review process.

This issue is organized around four central themes. The first theme deals with the *effects* of the pandemic—such as vulnerabilities at the individual level (Nora Mills Boyd and Matthew Davis) and at the national level (Jeffrey Carroll)—and the *obligations* that arise from them (Brian Berkey). Did the deterioration of non-market, neighborhood relationships exacerbate the negative impact of the pandemic? BOYD AND DAVIS argue that it did, which is all the more reason, they conclude, to cultivate fair-weather local networks. Crises, Robert Higgs once observed, are a sort of ‘ratchet’—they propel an indefinite expansion of government authority. But there is a way of escaping the current pandemic’s ratchet, CARROLL argues, by substituting private charitable funds for government subsidies. While Carroll’s argument for private charitable funds is of a consequentialist bent, a different pandemic effect, BERKEY argues, creates—on a broader range of views about distributive justice and at least for some individuals—obligations to donate: some have benefited from economic ‘windfalls’ and that benefit grounds a corresponding obligation.

A second set of papers deals with *responses* to the pandemic—those by governments to the current pandemic (Joelle M. Abi-Rached and Ishac Diwan) and those by economists to past pandemics (Mauro Boianovsky and Guido Erreygers). ABI-RACHED AND DIWAN’s contribution is motivated by an empirical puzzle: while the current discussion of public responses

to the pandemic is often grounded in a trade-off between ‘lives and livelihoods’, the data suggests that this trade-off does not exist *between* countries. Trust in government, ABI-RACHED AND DIWAN argue, has a role in explaining this puzzle and they elaborate, more precisely, what this role may be. BOIANOVSKY AND ERREYGERS are motivated by a different puzzle: in stark contrast to the overwhelming response of contemporary economists to the current pandemic, the ‘silence of the economists’ during the 1918–1920 Spanish flu pandemic seems deafening. After documenting the phenomenon, the authors propose a number of answers to the question: ‘Why this silence?’.

Third, a set of *methodological* papers reflects on how we ought to think about and model the pandemic—they deal with performativity (Philippe van Basshuysen, Lucie White, Donal Khosrowi, and Mathias Frisch), uncertainty (Malvina Ongaro) and how uncertainty complicates the moral trade-offs we face (Krister Bykvist). Performativity is front and center in VAN BASSHUYSEN, WHITE, KHOSROWI, AND FRISCH’s contribution. Epidemiological models, they argue, are just as performative as economic models. This might complicate forecasting, but, at the same time, it opens up new evaluative criteria—that is, epidemiological models can be assessed not just epistemically, but also on their behavioural impact. Uncertainty, ONGARO argues, is not a unitary concept—the pandemic has revealed and exacerbated at least three types of uncertainty we may face. And there is good democratic *and* epistemic reason to conclude that this, in turn, calls for a much more inclusive type of collective decision-making. Given such varied uncertainty—and fundamental ethical disagreement—how should policymakers handle difficult moral trade-offs? Not by the usual ‘apply your favourite moral principle’ approach of moral philosophers, BYKVIST argues; rather, we need to supplement *democratically approved* ethical platforms with ethical frameworks based on a more *local, domain-restricted* type of ‘moral modeling’.

Finally, a pair of articles *warns against drawing quick similarities* between features of the current pandemic and other phenomena, such as climate change (Andrea S. Asker and H. Orri Stefánsson) and free-riding on a public good (Ethan Bradley and Mark Navin). The large-scale coordinated response to the current pandemic, some commentators claim, is reason to be optimistic about a similar response to the threat of climate change. Not so fast, ASKER AND STEFÁNSSON respond. Not only is the individual decision problem in the two cases significantly different, but also government responses to the current pandemic suggest that, if anything,

coordination in the collective action problem of climate change will continue to fail. Contrary to much current discussion, BRADLEY AND NAVIN argue, vaccine refusal is *not* a case of free-riding; (most) vaccine refusers, the authors contend, fail to satisfy both subjective and objective criteria of classic free-riders. And if that is the case, then policymakers need to treat vaccine refusers accordingly.

In the midst of multiple types of uncertainty, one thing, we believe, is certain—the discussion on the current pandemic, and its past siblings, will be ongoing. We hope readers enjoy these texts and take them as a starting point for continuing this discussion. In the meantime, we thank the authors and the reviewers for making this special issue possible. We further gratefully acknowledge the impeccable, as always, editorial assistance by James Grayot and Chiara Stenico. Finally, we thank the Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics and the Erasmus School of Philosophy at the Erasmus University Rotterdam for their continued support of the *EJPE*.