

Correspondence

Solidarity as a companion virtue in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

ABSTRACT

This paper establishes that there is a need to turn to virtue ethics in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. It argues that the virtue of solidarity can be a companion virtue to compassion for medical frontline workers and other individuals involved. Like compassion, the virtue of solidarity is a reminder that everyone is in this crisis together and that each is responsible for all.

Keywords COVID-19, virtue, moral distress, solidarity

Almost a year since the spread of the COVID-19 as a pandemic, the shortage of hospital beds and medical frontline workers is still growing. Also, there is an existing dilemma since younger patients are more likely to recover compared with older persons with comorbidities; care, therefore, is often more focused on the former. Because of this practical situation, the prevailing ethics is more consequentialist, specifically utilitarian, and less deontological, which looks at one's duty toward the other person.¹ In effect, this causes certain moral distress on medical frontline workers. Like grief, experienced today both by medical frontline workers and families of victims, this moral distress can become overpowering on a personal level. There is, therefore, an urgent need to turn away from the consequentialist and deontological ethics and look more into the insights of virtues and virtue ethics.

In cases like this, the kind of help that a person needs is the discussion of one's inner dispositions. Talking about and understanding one's virtues can be a therapeutic exercise.² To talk of virtue ethics is to talk about the influence of forming habits in personal development and flourishing, even in the face of tragedy. The goal of looking into one's virtues is not to escape from distress, moral or otherwise but to understand that distress is a natural corollary of the task at hand.

A recent correspondence published in this journal claimed that there is a need to integrate virtue ethics in the public health sphere. Specifically, a virtue ethics of compassion,

where there is a show of sympathy toward the suffering of others, is necessary for successfully overcoming the so-called third wave of the pandemic.³ In addition to the virtue of compassion, the author would like to suggest that the Christian virtue of solidarity is also a necessary virtue and can go side by side with compassion. Solidarity is 'the firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good'.⁴ Despite coming from the Christian tradition, the virtue of solidarity also has a secular application. Solidarity is not vague compassion on one side, nor is it shallow distress on the other. Rather, solidarity promotes the awareness of the need for interdependence among individuals.

John Paul II sketched the central role of solidarity in any healthy society, which is 'undoubtedly a Christian virtue',⁵ closely related to charity. Through solidarity, the person sees the other not only as a human being with fundamental rights but also as a living image of God. The rationale for carrying out one's duties as a medical frontline worker, therefore, is not only in the pragmatic business of saving the planet and the human race, but in that every person's worth is inalienable because they are patterned after the Creator.⁵

Finally, the virtue of solidarity is a reminder that everyone is in this crisis together. It teaches us how to live well in the face of hardship and distress. Solidarity points out that each are responsible for all, much like compassion.

References

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