

GLOBAL ETHICS AND POLITICS OF CARE:  
TRACING GENDERED VULNERABILITIES

GLOBALNE ETIKE I POLITIKE BRIGE:  
PRATEĆI RODNU RANJIVOST



## EDITORS' NOTE

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It is difficult to deny that human beings are, among other things, vulnerable, dependent and interdependent creatures from the moment we are born to the moment we die. As such, human beings are in profound need of care. Though this simple truth has often been neglected both in mainstream academic discussions and public policy, the (still ongoing) COVID-19 pandemic has brought it to the forefront. By exposing human vulnerability, dependency as well as interdependency in a dramatic way, indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance and value of care for human life. Moreover, this global crisis has created the opportunity to consider what might be morally wrong with some of the ways in which individuals act and in which existing societies function as well as how we might repair and rebuild our morally broken societies. With this background in mind, thus, this thematic issue seeks to “re-discover” care through an interdisciplinary examination of the notion of care as well as of care’s potential for a critical evaluation of the status quo and for pointing to a way forward.

The Rediscovering Care thematic issue opens with a paper by Larisa Orlov Vilimonović. In her *The Ethics of Care in the Late Antique Christian Discourse*, namely, Orlov Vilimonović takes us back to the time of early Christianity and examines the ways in which the discourse about care has been employed and disseminated as part of political ideology and public discourse. Moreover, the author analyzes how care was understood within the context of Byzantine theology; that is, Orlov Vilimonović argues that care, as the primary virtue of a true Christian, was conceptualized as fervent love for the community (*agape*). Finally, Orlov Vilimonović provides insights into the notion of care from the perspective of gender and the newly established cult of the Theotokos which degendered the concept of maternal thinking and maternal care by making it a universal experience and the new moral code for all Christians.

Following up on a series of online reading workshops on the ethics and politics of care in the context of the Balkan semi-periphery, Ljiljana Pantović and Zona Zarić address the importance of taking care seriously in their joint paper entitled *Care in the Anthropocene*. Pantović and Zarić situate their discussion within the Anthropocene understood as the geological era in which man - *anthropos* - has become a geophysical force transforming the biosphere and which is marked by a lack of compassion and understanding of our biospheric reality.

That is, they pose the following question: if care is everything we do to repair and maintain this world, what does this process entail in the Anthropocene?

In *Institutional Ethics of Care in Serbia During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Jelena Čeriman, Jelena Hrnjak and Andrijana Radoičić Nedeljković seek to determine the institutional hardships which people from marginalized groups faced during the COVID-19 pandemic in Serbia. Specifically, the authors analyze the adequacy of lockdown measures and their effects on girls and women trafficking in persons survivors. The analysis of the data collected in semi-structured interviews with girls and women showed that three central elements of the institutional (ethics of) care - the purpose of care, recognition of power relations and the need for pluralistic tailoring of care to meet individuals' needs - were not fulfilled during the pandemic and that the logic of institutional care has had a politicizing character in Serbia.

The final essay in this thematic section, *The Ethics and Politics of Care in Times of Crises*, is based on a round-table discussion about the possible contribution of the ethics of care to germane moral and political issues especially at the global level. Organizing this round-table discussion, which was held in June 2021, was motivated by a two-fold idea. One idea was that although the (ongoing) COVID-19 pandemic changed our lives dramatically and abruptly, many of the issues it has raised are intimately linked to long-running questions in moral and political philosophy. The second motivating thought behind the round-table discussion was the impulse to draw on certain moral ideals to consider what might be problematic both within and between contemporary societies as well as how a better world could be like as we attempt to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and its many consequences. After all, great crises and opportunity often go together. There are at least two reasons for this. By radically disrupting the status quo, namely, crises invite us – individually and collectively – to pause and to reflect on our current situation. Perhaps even more importantly, crises prompt us to think about how an alternative future might and ought to look like. Beyond this, crises require that we ought to take drastic steps in executing this task. In this way, they either remind us or demonstrate to us what we are capable of and what is possible to achieve. By showing that alternative social and political arrangements are possible, crises have the potential to motivate people to seek socio-political change as it becomes more difficult to simply wave the white flag and lament over the troubling and supposedly inevitable status quo. This essay, accordingly, considers some of the major issues which were engendered or, more precisely, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic from the framework of *the ethics of care*. With its emphasis on the inevitable and ubiquitous human vulnerability, dependence and interdependence as well as on the importance of particularity and situatedness of “concrete others” who have distinct life stories and circumstances, indeed, an approach to moral and political theorizing from the perspective of care provides a stimulating point of departure not only for assessing individual and collective conduct but also for envisioning a different and a more caring future.