On the Problem of the Common Good and Paternalism in the Current Political Context

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Abstract:

Aim. The aim of this article is to explore and analyze the tension between the individual rights of citizens and the demands of the common good in the context of the modern democratic state, focusing on the paternalistic measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article seeks to clarify how crisis situations reveal the limits of liberal democracy in balancing personal freedom and the public interest.

Concept. The article (1) explores the tension between the personal interests of individuals and the common good; (2) analyzes relevant philosophical categories, such as freedom, moral autonomy, and the common good; (3) draws on the discourse of political and moral philosophy to identify the theoretical limits and practical consequences of paternalism towards individual rights in the modern democratic state; and

(4) focuses on the paternalistic measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic as examples of situations in which the principles of liberty and autonomy come into conflict with the declared public interest.

Results and Conclusion. The article highlights the conflict between personal interest and the demands of the common good in democratic states, which was fully manifested during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theoretical-methodological analysis shows how paternalistic measures restrict individual freedom and how they are applied to protect public health in crisis situations. The conclusions emphasize that democratic societies must be willing to seek practical compromises in political decision-making.

Itroduction

The tension between the personal interest of individual citizens on the one hand and the common good (or public interest) on the other can be characterized as a problem of the modern democratic state. It is a latent and subtle problem that normally stands in the background and only comes to the surface in times of crisis - most recently very explicitly during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022). However, it is also reflected less intensely in the context of long-term problems, such as the environmental crisis and the conditions of sustainable development.

In a liberal democratic order, freedom and individualism are traditionally placed on a pedestal, which in practice means that each person has the right to determine his or her own course and to decide about their own life and happiness, without unnecessary interference from the state or other authorities. Principles such as individual rights, personal responsibility, moral autonomy, and the need for self-fulfillment are highlighted, emphasizing the importance of personal identity. The normative framework is based on a plurality of forms of the good life, which shapes the value neutrality and the uniqueness of each person. However, political decision-making in a liberal democracy also takes into account the interests and needs of society as a whole.

These two currents can conflict when personal interests prove incompatible with the common good or public interest. For example, when it comes to public health issues such as vaccination, the state may restrict some individual rights for the sake of protecting the population, and, conversely, interfere with individual liberty through paternalistic measures by commanding or nudging. Conflicts between autonomy and paternalism often arise in the field of bioethics and medical ethics, specifically in cases such as refusing treatment that can save a patient's life, intervening in suicide attempts, and lying to patients about their health status, when a doctor insists on withholding certain information from the patient for the patient's own good (1, pp. 4-5).

In this article, we focus on specific paternalistic measures applied during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Slovak and Czech political space. These and similar practices within the framework of declaring a state of emergency in a democratic society open up the problem of ambiguity and the necessary revision of basic categories of political and moral philosophy, such as, above all, freedom, moral autonomy, the common good, and the public interest.

The problem of the relationship between individual interest and the common good

Political and moral philosophy discusses, among other things, whether individual interest and the common good (or social utility) are mutually supportive or contradictory. Strauss characterized it by stating that "for political philosophy, or political science is based on the premise that political things are in a class by themselves, that there is an essential difference between political things and things which are not political or that there is an essential difference between the common good and the private or sectional good" (2, p. 132). Even in the second half of the 18th centu-

ry, J. J. Rousseau rightly observed that these two quantities can be in conflict with each other, since it usually happens that the "advantage of one party is the detriment of the other, and private interest is almost always contrary to the public" (3, p. 31). As a suitable example of the manifestation of this conflict, let us take the text of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, the content of which, as solemnly proclaimed by the Constituent National Assembly, was inspired by many of Rousseau's ideas (first version of 26 August 1789). The preamble to this important historical document declares that the purpose of every political institution is to preserve the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man. However, it also states that the demands of citizens, as long as they are based on simple and undeniable principles, should always be directed toward the preservation of the Constitution and the good of all people. The first idea requires that individual rights be protected regardless of the circumstances, but the second idea suggests the possibility of modifying or limiting citizens' rights in the interest of the common good.

This problem resonates further in the very first established articles of the Declaration – Art. 1: *Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good;* Art. 2: *The goal of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, safety, and resistance against oppression.;* and Art. 6.*: The law is the expression of the general will. All the citizens have the right of contributing personally or through their representatives to its formation*. Apart from the fact that the first three articles of the Declaration inscribe the slogan of the French Revolution "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*" (although in this case the primacy of equal rights over liberty is evident), it emphasizes that all people are to be free and equal in rights. However, social differences can undermine this ideal, since the definition of the "general good" is vague and therefore easy to manipulate. Moreover, the right to resist oppression may conflict with existing laws and power, creating the risk that individual freedom and rights will be suppressed in the name of protecting the *general will*. Therefore, this definition is paradoxical - a law that is meant to protect the rights of individuals may serve to violate them when it comes to the question of the general good.

The above problem would immediately disappear if we accepted that the satisfaction of personal interests directly leads to the common good. This could, for example, happen through the market, as first described by B. de Mandeville in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), from which comes the famous phrase "private vices, public benefits." Selfish individualism, as one of the ideas of liberalism presented in Mandeville's satire, assumed that individuals pursuing their own interests create a positive effect for the whole society, so that society is actually an "aggregation of self-interested individuals necessarily bound to one another neither by their shared civic commitments nor their moral rectitude, but, paradoxically, by the tenuous bonds of envy, competition, and exploitation" (4, p. 1). Mandeville supported in principle the concept that was later designated in political economy as *laissez-faire*. These social conditions create *the best of all possible worlds* in the Leibnizian sense, where all state intervention and moral prohibitions are unjustified, and all considerations of the creation of the common good are, in short, completely unnecessary (5, pp. 111-112).

This consideration also inspired A. Smith, who wrote in *The Wealth of Nations* that an individual focused on his own benefit is "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention," and "by pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it." The individual, on the other hand, (also naturally) does not take into account "promoting the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it" (6, p. 456). Here, Smith's "invisible hand" serves as a metaphor for a special kind of rationality, where the personal interests of individuals spontaneously contribute to the general good without any need for intervention.

Smith outlined this concept in an earlier work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where he characterized the invisible hand as one of several possibilities of unintentional "motivations that lead to conduct serving the public good although

they don't involve any thought of doing such a thing." According to Smith, rich people "in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity (...) make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, (...) and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species" (7, pp. 184-185). However, in the next paragraph he immediately stated, "when Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition – these last too enjoy their share of all that it produces" (7, p. 185). This means that this concept refers to God's will or God's plan and contains a religious element – the common good arises even without intervention as a natural order arranged by God, and individual personal interests contribute to the common good (8, p. 54). In other words, satisfying the selfish interests of the rich also contributes in a special way to the well-being of the poor and thus benefits the entire society.

The rationality of the "invisible hand" was shared in a similar vein by modern political economy - the common good is the product of activities that are not themselves aimed at the common good (9, p. 315). Economists such as M. Friedman and F. A. von Hayek argued that market mechanisms and individual decision-making are capable of creating economic prosperity and efficient distribution of resources without the need for central planning. Additionally, they believed that the common good is actually a by-product of individual effort and competition. As long as individuals focus on personal interest (satisfying selfish needs), market mechanisms simultaneously create positive conditions for each individual member of society – paternalism is not only unjustifiable, but also ineffective because the market is spontaneous and self-regulating. State intervention regulating the market or enforcing moral norms disrupts this spontaneous process and causes crisis, stagnation, and inefficiency. The normative model of society weakens the role of the state in socio-economic issues and assumes that individuals pursuing their own interests produce public goods and services themselves, thus minimizing the need for intervention.

However, the pursuit of personal interests can stand in contrast to the common good, as G. Hardin demonstrated in the essay *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968). This is the concept of a model situation where individuals with access to public resources act exclusively in their own interests, inevitably leading to the depletion of resources and a deterioration in the quality of life for all. According to Hardin, A. Smith "contributed to a dominant tendency of thought that has ever since interfered with positive action based on rational analysis, namely, the tendency to assume that decisions reached individually will, in fact, be the best decisions for an entire society" (10, p. 1244). The gradual exploitation of common resources (such as forests, ponds, and air) to maximize personal interest leads to the deterioration and ultimately to the destruction of resources. In this equation, this causes a disadvantage for everyone, as everyone's personal interest is reduced. Additionally, this footprint also affects future generations, so it is an ethical problem of the common good par excellence.

Hardin made an apocalyptic claim: "Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons, freedom in a common brings ruin to all" (Ibid). Here the invisible hand truly takes on a religious dimension, this time in the sense of a pious wish. Hardin argued that the "tragedy of the commons" can be applied to all cases where a set of unregulated personal interests does not promote the common good in the use of public resources - including the case of unregulated traffic in a city where there are no signs or traffic lights because, by some invisible logical principle, it is a priori expected that the personal interests of drivers will spontaneously cause the self-regulation of traffic.

In the current discourse on the relationship between personal interest and common good, communitarianism plays an important role as one of the directions of political philosophy that criticizes liberal individualism. This is primarily because it does not take into account the connection of an individual's identity with their social environment and the values that this community represents because personal decisions are large-

ly influenced by cultural norms. Communitarianism represents an ideological opposition to the liberal tradition represented by philosophers, such as J. Rawls and R. Nozick, who emphasized the value of justice and individual rights (both from completely different and incompatible positions). This conflict between communitarianism and liberalism is based on the definition of concepts such as "freedom" and "responsibility."

While liberalism defines freedom as the absence of obstacles or constraints (i.e., negative freedom, see 11), communitarianism defines it as the ability to act in accordance with the values and goals of the community, which leads to the question of how individual rights can be balanced with the requirement of personal responsibility towards society. Ideally, individual choice contributes to the common good, while always taking into account the cultural and ethical context in which these decisions are made. In this regard, M. Sandel criticized liberalism in his work *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* He emphasized that justice is not only about protecting personal interests but also about seeking the common good. In exploring various ethical theories, including utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics, he pointed out that shared values form the basis of moral autonomy (12). In *After Virtue*, A. MacIntyre criticized contemporary moral pluralism, which leads to a division of ethical opinions and a weakening of social solidarity – values and virtues are rooted in historical and cultural traditions, which means that individuals cannot fulfil their moral obligations without taking into account their community and tradition (13).

We will also briefly discuss political theory from the period of classical ancient philosophy. In his work "The Republic," Plato clarified whether achieving personal good is compatible with the common good, or whether they are one and the same. He explicitly problematized this relationship because "the difficulty would disappear if the common good were identical with the private good of each" (14, p. 91). Plato assumed that most people naturally care only about personal interest, and for them "the common good is derived from the private good via calculation" (14, p. 82). However, there are also "team players" who care about the benefit of the community, and they are the ones who should rule because they "prefer the common interest to their private interest and to the objects of their passions" and are able to "discern in each situation what is the noble or right thing to do, do it because it is noble and right and for no ulterior reason" (2, p. 55). In a just community, where everyone does what is most appropriate for them and what corresponds to their abilities and nature, the common good also arises. Harmony between different parts of the community is key to the common good, as everyone contributes by belonging to the individual tasks of the community. Justice appears here as the "art of assigning to each what is good for his soul and as the art of discerning and procuring the common good" (14, p. 91). In a just community, the sum of personal interests equals the common good.

Although Plato's political theory tends to be characterized as idealistic, his proposal for the division of the community is strongly realistic – the view that some people simply would not be good rulers because they prioritize personal interest over the common good is pragmatic, and it would be idealistic to dismiss it with an argument about universal human nature (such as the zoon politikon as a feature of human identity in Aristotle). Moreover, there was a strong belief among the Sophists at that time that "there is an insoluble conflict between the good of the individual and the common good" (14, p. 88). In "The Republic," this idea is supported by Thrasymachus, who explicitly denied the existence of the common good (15, p. 95). Plato's response to this "unresolvable conflict" is his emphasis on the necessity of a just community built upon the principle that justice arises when each individual performs the role for which they are best suited. This notion reflects Plato's metaphysical belief in the harmony of the soul, where justice within the individual is mirrored in the just ordering of society as a whole (16). Plato's starting point for the "unresolvable conflict" was the establishment of a just community. But is it possible? According to Plato, yes, but first it is necessary for the general public to be indoctrinated with the so-called "noble lie"; but even before that,

"it will take a great art of speech to make anyone believe it" (17, p. 126). If the subjects had accepted the Phoenician story as a historical fact or as a revealed truth, the rulers would have been able to enforce a noble political goal and, according to Plato, this would have "the good effect of making the citizens care more for the community and for each other" (17, p. 127). Plato's demand can be classified as the first (and also special) case of paternalism.

Paternalism

The etymology has roots in the Latin pater or patronus and refers to an approach, principle, or policy demonstrating concern and care for those who cannot help themselves. It is reminiscent of a relationship in which a parent cares for their children, but also has supervision and control over them. It is applied either in an effort to do good to those who are subordinate to the state, or in an effort to prevent harm to them, even in the case of self-harm. Examples include laws that prohibit drug use and require the wearing of seat belts while driving. It is characteristic of the weak version that those who are exposed to it at least broadly agree with it. For the strong version, consent is usually irrelevant and is often associated with authoritarianism. A strong version of paternalism is sometimes justified by the fact that intelligence and experience are not evenly distributed in society, so those in positions of authority or rulers know more than anyone else what is best for others (18, p. 99).

Paternalism, as a concept that focuses on interfering in individuals' decision-making in order to protect them from potential harm, can be oriented both towards the personal interest of the individual and towards social benefit, with both variants pursuing different intentions and having different ethical implications.

Self-interest-oriented paternalism assumes that individuals may not have sufficient information or the ability to properly assess what is best for them. This variant of paternalism focuses on protecting the individual from themselves and is often present in legislation in the form of regulations that restrict the choices of individuals in the name of their own protection, such as laws on the mandatory use of seat belts while driving and safety helmets while cycling. These measures raise ethical questions about interference with personal freedom, moral autonomy, and dignity.

On the other hand, paternalism oriented towards social utility is based on the belief that individual decisions can have a negative impact on society as a whole. An example of this paternalistic variant is environmental protection regulations that seek to limit pollution and ensure sustainable development (here we can also include the above-mentioned "tragedy of the commons"). Likewise, in the area of public health, measures that restrict the sale of unhealthy foods or tobacco are considered paternalistic, as their aim is to protect the health of the population and reduce healthcare costs. Building upon these foundations, contemporary forms of paternalism have expanded into digital and technological domains. During the pandemic, the internet emerged as a crucial platform not only for disseminating guidance and essential information (19), but also for enabling individuals to express opinions (20) and emotions (21) publicly on their terms through social media. Moreover, digital paternalism became evident through increased parental controls to protect children from oversharing and harmful online content (22) and through addressing the psychological impacts of technology use on children's self-esteem and critical thinking (23). Similarly, benevolent oversight was extended, for example, to seniors, as emphasized by Tkácová et al. in their research (24). These modern instances illustrate how paternalistic practices evolve to navigate the ethical tensions between safeguarding individuals and respecting their autonomy in an increasingly digital world.

An important critique of paternalism can be found in I. Kant in several respects. According to him, in civil society it is necessary to ensure that the government does not enforce paternalistic measures because this presupposes authoritarianism: "paternalistic government is the greatest conceivable despotism – subjects are like minors who cannot discern what is truly beneficial or harmful to them, so they are forced to behave only passively and can only expect the determination of the way in which they are to be happy

from the judgment and benevolence of the ruler, since he is concerned for their welfare" (25, p. 69). Kant's critique rested on the assumption that if we deny an adult the right of free choice, even though he may make unreasonable choices, then we are treating him as a means to his own good, but not as an end in itself, which contradicts the second formulation of the categorical imperative, "so act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (26, p. 91). Paternalism violates people's rights as rational beings to determine their own goals. Moral autonomy, as a combination of freedom and responsibility, means that an autonomous person must not be subordinated to the will of anyone else (27, p. 14).

Kant also rejected paternalism in the form of merciful lies when he stated that we should not lie even to a person who knocks on our door and is about to murder a person hiding in our house. This is because if we tell him a lie and the murderer happens to meet this person, we are "responsible for all the consequences" because "whoever then tells a lie however good his intentions may be, must answer for the consequences of it" (28, p. 363). Kant did not allow any exception, because a lie "always injures another; if not another individual, yet mankind generally" (28, p. 362). This also applies to any paternalistic merciful lies, because they are "condemned as a wrong even by external laws" (28, p. 362). Paternalism opposes the categorical imperative (as an external law) and denies moral autonomy in the sense of submission to laws that man has established for himself (17, p. 14).

An ambivalent attitude can be seen in J. S. Mill's works. In *On Liberty* he promoted the view that "neither one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it" (29, p. 140), and therefore every individual has the right to decide about their own life as they see fit. Paternalism deprives a man of personal responsibility and of gaining experience from autonomous decisions, which a priori also implies erroneous decisions because "all errors which he is likely to commit against advice and warning, are far outweighed by the evil of allowing others to constrain him to what they deem his good" (29, pp. 140-141). If a third party thinks that the choice is harmful to the individual, they may offer "considerations to aid his judgment, exhortations to strengthen his will"; in any case, it must respect that "he himself is the final judge" (Ibid). Mill was aware that it can be difficult to look at someone who is outwardly making a wrong choice and not hinder their choice. Interfering with moral autonomy is undignified. This extra work by a third party that looks like caring is harmful to the individual because everyone knows best what their needs or desires are, and "he is the person most interested in his own well-being" (Ibid). Personal experience is most important for individual development, which also contributes to the development of society.

However, paternalism is justifiable as long as one wants to sell oneself into slavery because it is a radical choice that inevitably leads to the abdication of freedom, and intervention against such an act is not only justified but also necessary (29, pp. 163-164). It also applies to all cases of protection of freedom from a personal decision, the consequences of which would irrevocably lead to a loss of freedom (1, p. 27). Other exceptions are children, avoiding neglect by parents (30, pp. 78-79), those that are incompetent and irrational, those taken care of (31, p. 230), and "backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage," where Mill defended despotism as a legitimate form of government: a "ruler full of the spirit of improvement is warranted in the use of any expedients that will attain an end, perhaps otherwise unattainable" (29, p. 81). Moreover, Mill also understood paternalism as a form of despotism if the individuals being guided would later recognize that paternalistic intervention protected them and that the authority was right.

Contemporary discourse in political and moral philosophy problematizes the relationship between the protection of individuals and respect for personal freedom and moral autonomy. Supporters of paternalism, such as J. Rawls, A. Sen, and M. Nussbaum, argue that interventions can contribute to levelling inequalities and

ensuring fair conditions for all citizens – social programs to support education and minimum living standards can help vulnerable groups that would otherwise find themselves on the margins of society. Paternalism is a way to empower individuals and allow them to fully develop their potential where there are systematic obstacles that the individual cannot overcome on their own. Critics, such as F. A. von Hayek, A. Rand, and R. Nozick, point out that paternalism leads to the undermining of personal responsibility and the restriction of an individual's freedom to make decisions about their own lives (cf. 32, p. 139). Paternalism often involves interference in private decisions, leading to a loss of motivation and creativity for individuals, as it reduces their ability to learn from their mistakes and take responsibility for the consequences.

Nozick, in his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, took an anti-paternalist position by arguing that anyone "may choose to do to himself anything, unless he has acquired an obligation to some third party not to do or allow it" (33, p. 58). The concept of a minimal state as a night watchman does not allow paternalism because "anyone might come up with the pattern of life you would wish to adopt, since one cannot predict in advance that someone won't" (33, p. 50). In addition, he stressed that "it is in your self-interest to allow another to pursue his conception of his life as he sees it; you may learn from his example" (Ibid). This implies that moral autonomy is not only legitimate, but also has an educational function (34, pp. 8-9 & 11). However, it should be noted that paternalism (e.g., bans on drug use or compulsory contributions to retirement savings) is also exercised for the protection of third parties, and if drug use leads to criminal activity, paternalism is legitimate for the protection of society (35, p. 138). Paternalism not only protects individuals from their own decisions, but also from the wider public by protecting individuals from the harmful decisions of other individuals (variant B paternalism).

"Nudge theory" as a weak version of paternalism

It is clear from the above definitions that the phrase libertarian paternalism evokes an oxymoron. But such a term exists, and it is a doctrine of behavioral economics, which was established by American economists R. Thaler and C. Sunstein.

Table 1 Vaccination

Laissez-faire	voluntary vaccination (individual choice)
Traditional paternalism	compulsory vaccination (regulation)
Libertarian paternalism	voluntary but socially preferred vaccination
Intervention	launch of the vaccination campaign, benefits for vaccinated people
Goal	achieving the highest possible vaccination coverage of the population (+60%)

Table 2 Lockdown

Laissez-faire	no lockdown (individual choice in health protection)
Traditional paternalism	lockdown for all (government regulation)
Libertarian paternalism	lockdown for the unvaccinated
Intervention	imposing an exception to lockdown
Goal	achieving the highest possible vaccination coverage of the population (+60%)

According to the authors, the term seems on the surface to be internally contradictory, but as they explain, the libertarian viewpoint is that each individual should generally retain "freedom of choice," and the paternalistic viewpoint is based on the claim that it is legitimate for certain "architects of choice" to seek to influence and regulate the behaviour of individuals to help them improve the quality of their own lives. Individuals are therefore free to choose between all possible alternatives, but at the same time they are directed by the default choice architecture towards a choice that they themselves are highly likely to consider in hindsight to be better than if they had not been directed from above/outside.

The authors built this doctrine on the observation that many individuals often make incorrect or irrational choices that they probably would not have made if they had been better informed, had more developed cognitive abilities, or had better self-control. Therefore, they later regret the choice. This is a weak version of paternalism because the choice itself is not distorted or blocked. If individuals want to smoke, eat unhealthily, or choose retirement savings that are disadvantageous to them, libertarian paternalism will not prevent them from doing so. Despite this, it is a paternalistic approach because choice architects attempt to track the expected decisions of individuals and, at the same time, want to gently move them in a direction that improves the quality of their lives (according to the judgments and expectations of a higher authority). The authors refer to this as a so-called "nudge" (36, pp. 5-6).

A nudge refers to any aspect of the choice architecture, or intervention, that changes individuals' behaviour in a predictable way without prohibiting any options or significantly manipulating economic incentives. Commands, orders, and prohibitions are not considered to be a nudge. If the state ensures that fruit in stores is placed at eye level, this can be considered a nudge, but if the state prohibits the sale of unhealthy food, then we are not talking about a nudge in that case. The basic premise of nudging is that it must guide individuals to decisions that are better for themselves as well as for society. The role of nudging is to direct an individual towards a certain goal. Seemingly insignificant or minor details can greatly influence people's behaviour and decision-making. According to this doctrine, people need a nudge in situations where they don't know the right response or have nowhere to learn it. The authors emphasize the importance of nudges being transparent, not exceeding personal freedom, and complying with ethical principles. The intention is to create an environment in which people can make informed decisions, while at the same time drawing on insights from behavioral economics about the way people often deviate from rational decision-making.

Paternalistic measures during the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2021, the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic introduced a vaccination support campaign. Several politicians, scientists, artists, publicists, and athletes advocated for vaccination as the only way out of the COVID-19 pandemic. This campaign used notorious slogans, such as the vaccine is the solution, the vaccine is the way out of isolation, the vaccine is a step towards victory over the pandemic, the vaccine is the goal that moves us towards victory, and others.

Table 3 Non-infectivity

Laissez-faire	voluntary vaccination (individual choice)
Traditional paternalism	compulsory vaccination (government regulation)
Libertarian paternalism	voluntary but state-preferred vaccination
Intervention	statement by the Czech government that those vaccinated and who have overcome are infection-free
Goal	achieving the highest possible vaccination coverage of the population (+60%)

The goal was to create the impression that vaccinating as large a proportion of the population as possible was the best solution to combat the disease, as the effect of the vaccine is primarily preventive. Additionally, in the event of infection with the virus, it alleviates symptoms and protects not only the vaccinated, but also indirectly the unvaccinated by creating collective immunity.

The crisis staff pushed through a proposal that public enterprises could only be visited by persons belonging to the VR (vaccinated and recovered) regime instead of the VTR (vaccinated, tested, and recovered) regime under the pretext of public interest in protecting and promoting health - this was intended to apply primarily to the unvaccinated, who were more vulnerable to the disease. This regulation also applied to such unvaccinated individuals whose interest was not personal health protection through vaccination, but whose freedom of movement was nevertheless restricted by government regulation to prevent infection of the general public. Part of the population considered this a repressive and discriminatory measure. Although this was an effort to increase the number of vaccinated by imposing an exemption from the lockdown, the unconditional introduction of compulsory vaccination was also considered.

According to biologist L. Valášek, the Czech government exerted pressure on the unvaccinated by claiming that they were responsible for transmitting the disease, and government politicians and some scientists purposefully spread the information that if someone is vaccinated or has overcome the disease, they are automatically infection-free, "as if they had some kind of protective shell around them." Such a principle, in his view, completely denied logic and negated science. According to him, the government was spreading lies to persuade unvaccinated people to get vaccinated. Paternalism manifested itself in the effort to vaccinate the largest possible proportion of the population, which is a scientifically proven means of protecting the population from infection. According to him, this caused the COVID-19 disease to be largely transmitted by the vaccinated and recovered who believed the government authorities when they said they were infection-free and that transmission of the disease did not affect them. However, in the end, the blame for this was solely on the unvaccinated.

Conclusion

We focused on examining the relationship between personal interest and the demands of the common good in a modern democratic state, paying particular attention to paternalistic measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic (37). This crisis showed how the principles of liberal democracy - especially freedom and moral autonomy - can come into conflict with the need to protect public health and safety. We analyzed cases in which the state interfered with personal freedoms, such as compulsory measures and restrictions on the freedom of movement, opening a broader discussion about the possibilities and limits of paternalism in a democratic society. As part of the theoretical and methodological analysis, we pointed out the current problem of a modern democratic state, which must face balancing individual rights and the common good in a way that respects the values of the democratic system while responding to the needs of modern society, especially during crisis situations. Paternalistic interventions, as we saw during the pandemic, reveal the need for deeper reflection on traditional values such as autonomy, freedom, and the common good.

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize that society is held together neither by the common good nor by an abstract general will, but by politics itself as a process in which different individuals and social groups find practical compromises. The common good is the result of this negotiation, not something objective or timeless that exists independently of politics (38, p. 24). What is important is not agreement on abstract principles, but rather the practical will to seek solutions that are acceptable to the majority within the limits of possibilities. The essence of a modern democratic society is not uniform agreement, but precisely the possibility of diversity, which enables the search for compromises between conflicting interests. "Politics is the art of the possible," the statement attributed to O. von Bismarck, seems to be particularly apt

in times of crisis, new challenges, and states of emergency.

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