

## Intellectual and Ethical Virtues in the Situation of War



*Abstract:* The interview given by Vojko Strahovnik, Department Chair and Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Research Fellow in Philosophy at the Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana. The impact of his work ranges from insights into the nature of normativity (the role of moral principles in the formation of moral judgments, the authority of the normative domain, epistemic agency, and epistemic virtuousness) to considerations related to practical dimensions of our lives (e.g., the role of guilt and moral shame in reconciliation processes, the importance of intellectual and ethical virtues in dialogue and education, global justice, animal ethics). His recent outreach activities include being a visiting lecturer (2017) and a Templeton and Fulbright research scholar (2016; 2022) at the University of Arizona, Department of Philosophy. The central question that incites him most is the structure and phenomenology of normativity. Webpage: <http://vojkostrahovnik.idh.si/papers/>.

*Keywords:* ethics, war, Ukraine, particularism, generalism.

*Andrew Schumann:* What is the role of moral principles in the formation of moral judgments? Is it possible to formalize moral judgments by means of some logic?

*Vojko Strahovnik:* I think moral judgment is more related to moral vision or moral sensitivity than ethical principles. This is not to say that the latter do not have some sort of regulative role or the role of enabling us to structure our moral outlook. In this sense, I lean towards moral particularism. At the heart of the debate between moral particularism and moral generalism lies the question of the acceptability of a principled approach to morality, including the question of whether universal, exceptionless moral principles govern morality. As Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge usefully put it recently, despite a diverse range of views under the label “particularism”, what they have in common is a negative attitude towards moral principles. Still, most forms of particularism nonetheless allow for a particular role that moral generalities nevertheless play in the structure of the proposed moral theory. There is a variety of views that occupy the region between strict moral generalism and radical particularism. All these accounts strive to incorporate some important aspects of morality that the debate on particularism pointed out, most noteworthy holistic nature of reasons and the seemingly ineliminable problem of exceptions to universal moral rules. In several of my papers, I have defended a version of moral pluralism that combines elements of a principled approach to morality and particularism.

*Andrew Schumann:* What is animal ethics? How much do people need animal ethics? What for?

*Vojko Strahovnik:* One way to delineate animal ethics is to define it as a domain of practical ethics that deals predominantly with the moral status of nonhuman animals and the ethics of our practices that include them. It harbours numerous topics as well as various approaches. The central question itself is, of course, very old. Perhaps most striking is what some (Cora Diamond, Stanley Cavell etc.), including me, have described as the difficulty of the animal question. Animal question is at the

heart of animal ethics and pertains primarily to the question of the moral status of nonhuman animals. For me, the moral vision that brings us close to an answer to this question is that what establishes the relationship between us, humans, and nonhuman animals is a sense of vulnerability and mortality, which we share with them as beings with living, vulnerable bodies. Yet still, the difficulty of animal questions related to the aspect that this question seems to defy attempts to articulate and pose it in its full significance. In answering the animal question, we should not reduce our answers to just a single morally important or decisive relationship. There is a plurality of morally relevant relationships, and each has its meaning inside a particular form of life. And the most tenacious aspect of the difficulty of the animal question is the perplexity and even perplexity and even anxiety that can arise due to the gap between philosophy (or our rational, detached judgment about the moral status of animals, the relevance of their pain and suffering, etc. ) and our actual practices. In this sense, animal ethics is important, even for understanding ourselves, but it often lacks an apt bite in relation to changing our behaviour.

*Andrew Schumann:* What is your position on the war in Ukraine and how interesting is this topic for the Slovenian philosophers?

*Vojko Strahovnik:* I have no doubts that Russian aggression in Ukraine calls for the strongest moral condemnation, and the sanctions that were imposed are fully justified given the mentioned moral status of Putin's actions that prompted them. The whole situation, and in particular the people's suffering, saddens me the utmost. Many intellectuals in Slovenia have raised similar concerns. Some of them emphasized the importance of bringing the whole situation back behind the diplomatic table and prioritising the quest for peace. In this sense, they expressed important reservations regarding sending arms support to Ukraine and fuelling the war machine. But what is perhaps missing from this picture is a clear wrongness of Russia's acts in the first place. And given that a Ten-Day War or Slovenian War of Independence in 1991 bears some likenesses to what is going on in Ukraine, the whole context for evaluating the current war in Ukraine, together with the reminiscence of our past gets further complicated.

*Andrew Schumann:* Are intellectual and ethical virtues possible in dialogue in the context of information warfare, for example, in the situation of information warfare around Ukraine?

*Vojko Strahovnik:* In particular, intellectual or epistemic virtues are important. It is clear that both sides in the conflict extensively use propaganda and similar tools to put forward their preferred version of the story. On the other hand, in the context of the covid-pandemic many (fairly reliable and reputable) news outlets are being snubbed, and a plethora of conspiracy theories and delusive ideas are replacing them. And in such circumstances, epistemic virtues are even more important than ever. So, the question is, how can we establish (public) spaces and spheres that would enable us to develop and cultivate them?