

The War in Ukraine and a Real Evil



Howard Wettstein is currently Professor of Philosophy at UC Riverside. Previously he has held positions at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Minnesota, Morris and visiting positions at Stanford University and the University of Iowa. His main research areas are the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of language. He is the editor of “Midwest Studies in Philosophy” since 1974. His latest book is *The Significance of Religious Experience* (Oxford UP, 2012). Earlier he published two volumes in the philosophy of language, *The Magic Prism* (Oxford UP, 2004) and *Has Semantics Rested On a Mistake?* (Stanford UP 1991).

Andrew Schumann: What is your position on the war in Ukraine and how interesting is this topic for the humanities in America, including US philosophers?

Howard Wettstein: Not sure about the humanities or US philosophers, but like so many here and around the world, I am appalled – I don’t even have the words – by Putin. Real evil. I recently taught a film/philosophy course, and because it’s the first topic of the day, we started with “war.” We watched “The Deer Hunter” and other times I have shown Malick’s “Thin Red Line.” But what’s going on now, the wanton murder and rape, the lies, the profound evil, is more than astounding. Words don’t do it.

Andrew Schumann: Some prominent philosophers have denounced Western support for Ukraine’s struggle against the Russian aggression, such as Noam Chomsky and Jürgen Habermas. How can this be explained? To what extent do Western philosophers condemn Western support for Ukraine against Russia en masse?

Howard Wettstein: I’m not familiar with these comments; I will look them up now. But I assume it’s about American imperialism. I am no fan of Pax Americana – from the time of Vietnam, through Iraq and Afghanistan, but this seems to me very different. I am a supporter of Ukraine’s efforts and the world’s support for the Ukraine.

Andrew Schumann: In the book edited by me *Logic in Central and Eastern Europe: History, Science, and Discourse* (University Press of America, 2012), the authors have shown that in addition to the Vienna Circle and the Lvov-Warsaw School, there were many other schools of logic and analytical philosophy in Central and Eastern Europe, which received important scientific results, but were completely unknown to English-speaking philosophers. How can one explain the lack of interest in the history of philosophy of Central and Eastern Europe among American philosophers? Meanwhile, even the history of Chinese, Arabic and Indian philosophy is already well represented in American universities.

Howard Wettstein: My first job was in Minnesota, in a small town of 3500 people. My wife and I moved there from Manhattan. I didn’t know where Minnesota was! I mean what states were on its borders. But it’s a beautiful and important part of the country. I confess to being not aware of really

significant and important parts of the world and the important work going on in those places. Such is life. It's up to all of us to remedy those oversights and to attend to our failures.

Andrew Schumann: Can the global political crisis caused by the war in Ukraine change the situation in relation to Eastern Europe and influence the interest in its philosophy?

Howard Wettstein: Certainly. It has already, at least in my case and that of some colleagues. And I'll do my best to spread the word.