

War and the Environment: Ecological, Ethical, and Anthropological Dimensions

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Abstract

H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, organised the round table "War and the Environment: Ecological, Ethical and Anthropological Dimensions", exploring the environmental impacts of the war from interdisciplinary perspectives. The discussion covered direct and indirect environmental damage, including the destruction of ecosystems and habitats, depletion of natural resources, and climate change, as well as anthropological transformations caused by war. It also included ethical, philosophical, and artistic reflections on these issues, the moral and ecological dimensions of war, and rethinking ecocide as an existential catastrophe. However, the environment is not only a 'silent victim' of war but also a witness to tragic events that leave a unique imprint on the landscape of our memory.

Keywords

Russian war against Ukraine (Russo-Ukrainian war); existential war; environment; ecocide; value of life; identity; post-war reconstruction

Abstrakt

Institut filozofie H. Skovorody při Národní akademii věd Ukrajiny uspořádal kulatý stůl na téma „Válka a životní prostředí: ekologické, etické a antropologické dimenze“, který se zabýval dopady války na životní prostředí z interdisciplinárního hlediska. Diskuse se týkala přímých i nepřímých škod na životním prostředí, včetně ničení ekosystémů a přírodních stanovišť, vyčerpávání přírodních zdrojů a změny klimatu, jakož i antropologických proměn způsobených válkou. Zahrnovala také etické, filozofické a umělecké úvahy o těchto otázkách, morální a ekologické dimenze války a přehodnocení ekocidy jako existenční katastrofy. Životní prostředí však není pouze „tichou obětí“ války, ale také svědkem tragických událostí, které zanechávají jedinečnou stopu v krajině naší paměti.

Klíčová slova

Ruská válka proti Ukrajině (rusko-ukrajinská válka); existenční válka; životní prostředí; ekocida; hodnota života; identita; poválečná obnova

The Roundtable "War and the Environment: Ecological, Ethical and Anthropological Dimensions" (28 March 2025, Kyiv, Ukraine), moderated by Anatoliy Yermolenko (Corresponding Member of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine and Director of the H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy) and Tetiana Gardashuk (Doctor Hab. in Philosophy and Head of the Department of Logic and Methodology of Science), brought together philosophers, natural scientists, and other humanities experts (War and the Environment, 2025) It provided a valuable opportunity for a broad dialogue to address environmental and ethical challenges during wartime.

The starting point for the discussion was the definition of Russia's aggression against Ukraine as an existential war that aims to destroy Ukraine's home, land, natural, and cultural environment, "our oikos". This is a challenge to the normative order in the world, which enables the existence of "the world as a community", or *Mitwelt* (K. Meyer-Abich). For Ukrainians, this war is about freedom and sovereignty, for "our existence on our land" (**Anatoliy Yermolenko**).

The introduction of increasingly powerful conventional and unconventional weapons throughout the 20th century, and especially in the 21st century, has significantly heightened the environment's role during combat operations and threatened "ecologically dependent vital functions" (P. Sloterdijk). Nature and the environment are no longer 'silent victims' of the war but its very target. Ecocide and urbicide are integral components of modern hybrid wars with genocidal consequences. As military power grows, negative environmental impacts increase, and the environment itself becomes a weapon if a weapon is anything that weakens the party it is used against. Ukrainian society faces a dual challenge: preserving nature and actively preventing further environmental degradation wherever possible, here and now; developing a post-war reconstruction plan that treats restoring nature and the environment as equally important as rebuilding economic potential and social infrastructure, instead of prioritizing the economy over ecology (**Tetiana Gardashuk**).

The impacts of military operations on the geological environment, subsoil, and infrastructure of the mining industry were discussed, emphasizing the assessment methodology for losses during the war and prospects for post-war restoration. Since Russia has nothing to offer the world except raw materials, the capture of new deposits on the territory of Ukraine is one of the motives for the war, aiming to make as many countries as possible dependent on its raw materials. This can also be seen as a harm to the EU, considering Ukraine as an important economic and technological partner for Europe in the future. Therefore, this war has geopolitical implications and aims to undermine Ukraine's statehood as a partner of the West (**Olena Remezova**).

The full-scale Russian war against Ukraine has revealed the fragility of our country's urban water supply system, especially in frontline cities. Limited access to drinking water has become a survival challenge for the population. Due to the destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP), approximately one million people lost access to fresh water. Underground water is a strategic resource and the sole protected water source that should serve as an alternative to the centralized use of surface water as drinking water. This should become a key factor in Ukraine's water and environmental security, considering climate change and accumulated military and other human impacts (**Ruslan Havryliuk**).

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war is a direct threat to global environmental sustainability. According to a report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) published in 2024, Russia earns approximately 700 million euros per day from the export of oil, gas, and related products. Almost half of this amount is allocated to financing the war against Ukraine. Thus, global reliance on fossil fuels not only hinders positive ecological change but also contributes to wars. Russian aggression was enabled by the exploitation of natural resources and the world's reliance on them. Growing demand for fossil fuels fosters conflicts, and as long as this dependence continues, the risks will escalate. Humans cannot instantly give up fossil fuels, but they should embrace the idea of "reasonable self-restriction". Coexistence in "the world as a community", or *Mitwelt*, is not a choice, but a necessity. A choice of values is what humans face today (**Oksana Hutsalenko**).

Unfortunately, nature has never occupied a central place in the hierarchy of values. Human values are rooted in people's experiences of communication, not only with each other but also with the world, nature, and non-human beings. Human relationships with nature should recognise the intrinsic value of life in all its forms. Russia's war against Ukraine disregards the value of life and can be characterised as ecocide (**Oksana Kisselyova**).

Larysa Karachevtseva redefined the concept of ecocide from an ethical and existential perspective and developed the ecophenomenological importance of the thesis on the ecocidal destruction of human life. Ecophenomenology is a branch of environmental philosophy that uses the phenomenological method to study environmental problems. The ecocidal disaster in Ukraine underscored the link between the environment and collective history and identity, as ecocide is an assault on the environment, where shared historical and cultural values are cultivated. The Russian aggressor's logic is clear: without an environment as a common home, there is no nation or culture. Therefore, ecocide should be understood as an act of destroying identity.

Natalia Boichenko highlighted the difficulties of valuing human life during the war. Most philosophical and ethical perspectives consider human life to be the highest value. According to Kant, no amount of money or other goods can match the value of human life. This standard is also recognized in international law and various humanitarian documents, such as the General Principles of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions, etc. However, during war, military medics determine the priority of assisting wounds according to a medical triage protocol. Philosophical ideas about the value of life highlight the complexity of ethical decisions medics face when performing the medical triage process. The key to decision-making regarding the value of human life in extreme situations may involve finding a reasonable balance between moral responsibility and the realities of war. **Kateryna Karpenko** discussed the nexus between a devastating effect on the natural environment, changes in social structures, and the redistribution of gender roles in wartime. Women face many challenges during the war. Addressing the issues at the intersection of war, the environment, and women's emancipatory practices requires a comprehensive approach. Ukraine should prioritize policies that simultaneously focus on environmental safety, women's rights and inclusion, and societal sustainability.

Influencing the process of choosing ideas that could become values is the main role of the ethics of care, especially during wartime (**Olga Gomilko**). War underscores the importance of the ethic of care in all areas of life and brings it into practice as a core value. However, the ethics of care is a relatively new and underdeveloped concept, which explains the lack of clear definitions. It was mostly developed through feminist and ecological thought, which in some ways restricts its thematic and methodological universality. This situation presents a theoretical vulnerability but also allows the ethics of care to function as a useful framework for analysing everyday life. During war and challenging times, caring plays a healing role. Caring for life in all its forms must become a moral and practical response to the destructive impacts of war.

Explosions during hostilities kill plants and animals, and destroy microscopic organisms that support soil structure and fertility (**Natalia Biriuk**). People often overlook and pay little attention to this invisible but essential part of life. The actor-network methodology emphasizes studying humans and non-humans in detail, focusing on relationships between humans and their environment at different scales, including interactions among humans, non-humans, and the land they inhabit. For example, Ukrainian artist Kateryna Aliynyk uses optics that surpass human vision to highlight the lives marginalised by anthropocentric suffering logic during wartime.

War changes the environment where new experiences are created, and perception is also altered (**Yulia Vatsyk**). The ruined landscapes and their elements start to serve as archives of shared experience, especially in the form of memories of loss, death, and resistance. Nature in this landscape is not a neutral background. It gains cultural significance when humans interpret and internalize the experience of relationships with these landscapes as meaningful. Nature in wartime becomes an archive that encompasses ecological, cultural, and bodily aspects of traumatic experience. Nature,

which suffers alongside people, does not fade into the background of history but becomes its silent witness, archive, and co-participant in the experience.

Svitlana Balinchenko talked about resistance and survival during the war, referring to M. Foucault's idea of biopolitics. During war, individual and collective resilience depend on the subjective perception of life-and-death situations inherent in war and, at the same time, on rational protocols and decision-making procedures in contexts that anticipate a potential threat to a person's life. There is a lack of research on M. Foucault's bioethics within Ukrainian philosophy, especially concerning martial governmentality at the crossroads of bio- and necropolitics in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war is often called the war of technologies. Technology is a tool that humanity uses to manipulate the world, modify the environment, create new environments, and exert control over them (**Bohdan Adamenko**). This suggests that the technological aspect is inherent in all wars. However, the technological sophistication of war is not limited to the number of technologies used in warfare or their complexity. The technological aspect of war does not lie in the distance between the warring sides. It is about how deeply we can penetrate the enemy's environment to safeguard the boundaries of our environment, the boundaries of our world. During the war, Russia is intentionally targeting civilian infrastructure, exemplifying its systemic weakness. Ukraine must seek asymmetrical strategies, targeting enemy military positions. If we adopt the morals and ethics of Russian aggressors, we are unlikely to win this war.

The thoughts and ideas shared by the Round Table participants broadened the overall understanding of the environmental impacts of war and emphasised many urgent issues facing Ukrainian society. These ideas will be further developed in upcoming research and scientific communication. Participants expressed their support for holding regular roundtable discussions on the topic of "War and the Environment".

Reference:

- War and the Environment: Ecological, Ethical and Anthropological Dimensions (Yermolenko, A. (moderator), Gardashuk, T. (moderator), Remezova, O., Havryliuk, R., Hutsalenko, O., Kisselyova, O., Karachevtseva, L., Boichenko, N., Karpenko, K., Gomilko, O., Biriuk, N., Vatsyk, Yu., Balinchenko, S., Adamenko, B.). 2025. *Philosophical Thought*, 3, 7–73. <https://doi.org/10.15407/fd2025.03.007> (In Ukr.)

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