

Review

dedicated to the thesis for awarding
the educational-scientific degree
"Doctor of Philosophy" to Leonie Overbeek

„Ethical Foundations of Man–Nature Interaction“

by Associate Professor Ph.D. Petar Plamenov

Leonie Overbeck's PhD thesis „*Ethical Foundations of Man–Nature Interaction*“ consists of 169 standard printed pages. The abundant bibliography is well selected according to the thematic scope of the problem and research significance and consists of approximately one hundred book and electronic printed units of books, periodicals and materials (including illustrations and Internet links) in English and Bulgarian, adequately related to the issues of the development. The work is designed according to the required standard with an introduction, clearly stated main goals and tasks.

Compositionally, it is divided into five main chapters with internal subdivisions - the first chapter is soon presented to the problem and the introduction, while the last fifth chapter plays the role of a kind of conclusion, where an attempt is made to summarize and draw conclusions from the intense analysis. The contributions of the work - three in number, are presented correctly and precisely and correspond to the content and spirit of the doctorate.

The dissertation is written in English and shows a very good orientation in the necessary philosophical and general scientific terminology. The style of the exposition is clear, understandable and sustained in an adequately scientific discourse. The address shows through its text that he has carried out a thorough source research and demonstrates a good philosophical culture both in the field of the most important concepts of appropriate attitude to the human-nature interaction and financial orientation in ideas from the views of philosophical observations. I should also note that Leonie Overbeek has also performed the required publication activity and provided the required number of scientific publications related to the thematic scope of the research he is presenting.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that the study of Leonie Overbeek - „Ethical Foundations of Man–Nature Interaction“ is related to the most painful and ambiguous problems of our time, and the topic has a particular relevance. In addition, the main theses of the development are unexpectedly relevantly included in the heated discussions of the problem. On the one hand, Overbeek's interest in the ethical scope of the human-nature relationship is explicable as much as an expression of the global processes of climate change as well as significant attempts to intellectually make sense of the "behavior of irresponsibility", negligence and the crisis of purely capitalist thinking, as well as of some apparent personal commitment.

Overbeek defends the significance of any alternative worldview position that implies a new attitude and through which the axiological assessment of the overall society-world relationship is rethought. Since, according to ethical thought, a person should first of all manifest himself as a being of responsibility, and precisely through this spiritual ability, he determines and guides not only himself, but also the world. Or as Overbeek himself states, which is the big conceptual framework, at the very beginning of his work, that critical time has come that requires us to develop a new one:

"...the ethical system truly necessary to drive change, which is based on respect for life in all its forms, and respect for man's place in nature as part of it, not apart from it." (p 7).

What I like most is precisely this unconditional starting point of thought, around which Leoni builds his overall and basic concept. And it unfolds in the rethinking of the traditional irresponsible attitude towards nature, at the expense of a new understanding that human beings must interact precisely through their responsibility with nature by realizing and recognizing the natural value of life and the responsibility towards the non-human subject who is not just and only source of food and shelter, is not only an impersonal force, but also full participants in the living organism of the world - biosphere.

The work is a serious study of the problem and a thorough presentation of possible approaches. Argumentative support is quite appropriately sought and found in the theory of Hans Jonas. The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age on the one hand, and on the other hand Jacques Derrida's thesis set out in his essay The Beast and the Sovereign - thus joining the debate on how to construct a new value relation through which to change the worldview and to reach a new form of practical implementation of the interaction with

nature. The first possible path turns out to be the so-called fear heuristic (according to Jonas), and the other is the formation of an expanded understanding of the idea of respect and irrevocable recognition of the right to life, as a fundamental expression of responsibility and human, towards all those who which share the phenomenon of existence.

The necessary change of the ethical attitude towards nature, which should not be thought unilaterally as a primordial resource for the unfolding of human prosperity, but as an available bio-plant-animal and even mineral world-wonder, which has not only its unambiguous ontological grounds and rights, but and should be viewed not hostilely, bossily, or dispassionately, but rather through the care and notion of assistance-cooperation. Only in this way is it possible to build and mark a new concrete harmony of coherence between man and nature, resting on close connectedness and intimacy. That is why Overbeek will present the following strongly highlighted positions as constructive concepts for his argumentation:

*"I will argue that Jacques Derrida puts into our hands a view of how sovereignty can and must see the world and everything in it as wondrous and incredible, a world for us to pity and care for, a world in which we realize that when we put ourselves above the law we may come to the downfall of an atrocity of cruelty and mistreatment of everything around us. I will use the lens of Hans Jonas in *The Imperative of Responsibility*, who calls us as sovereigns, capable of wielding enormous destructive power, to take responsibility for the future of life and foresee all possible negative outcomes of our actions, and only then to act or refrain from acting." (p. 15)*

The ethics of care and respect show the growth of man to a truly different from the traditional consciousness of both nature and self. Because nature serves man and he is originally inscribed in her order, not the other way around. Man cannot impose himself irresponsibly, because in some way he becomes a threat not only to the world, but also to himself.

Contemporary ethical discourse is faced with the extremely ambiguous philosophical task of finding an answer to a very delicate question – if we assume that even animals have rights, what exactly should those rights be and how to justify our natural dominance imposed by the principle of sustenance and sustaining human life. Even more so if we assume as a basic ontological attitude that plants also have rights, then again what exactly are they - isn't, for example, genetic engineering as exploitative and bossy as that towards animals and even more

pronounced?! And is it even possible to interact ethically fully, i.e. as responsibility – care and respect with those beyond or inferior, even immoral subjects (or to assume that plants and animals are moral subjects that are at least not capable accessible to us of expressing their morality, if any); i.e. to build a new relationship on the presumption of communication-sharing-caring, born of the consciousness of moral obligation even to non-human subjects, which is nature in all its forms.

The pathos of the passionately presented discussions on the pages of the work and the main conclusion of Leonie Overbeek's work „Ethical Foundations of Man–Nature Interaction“ is related to the unequivocally affirmative answer that the principled morality of man gives him the opportunity to develop his ethical ability and in the direction of immoral subjects and part of the human meaning and essence are realized through the internally self-imposed obligation of respect and responsibility. The duty of ontological respect and care to the existential wonder of nature is the peculiar topos of the axiological reversal required to be effected by postmodern, consumerist and egocentrically exploitative man, because:

"Respect is the foundational value upon which rests the responsibility of life. Respect is demonstrated in respecting every phenomenon as valuable and appreciating all things, even if they are not considered attractive. Respect is an attitude that does not accept wasted lives and resources. Respect looks not only to the present, but to a future that cannot be seen or predicted, but which we can extrapolate from history, and for which we must be responsible." (p. 72)

However, its formation requires a new tolerance, a rethinking of value, of indifference and the exclusion of the other and the inhuman, since irresponsible exploitation is actually a regression to brutality and an irrational unconscious form of self-destruction. Only in this way the ontological miracle of life has its philosophical awareness, which is reflected in the ethical attitude in which

"human beings must interact ethically with nature" (p. 148)

Thus, from the rediscovery of the ethics of responsibility, care and respect naturally arises a new relationship of interaction between man and nature, in which nothing is overvalued or undervalued, but everything is recognized its own place in the constellation of being, which is also a new consciousness of harmony.

Leonie Overbeek's conclusion that:

“I don't have to like something to respect it. Once I realize that my place in the world is not the most important or the least important, but that all phenomena are important because they all have a role in the world, and I stop making assumptions about them, I can really change my destructive habits through the consumer choices I make.” (p. 169)

In practice, it shows that contemporary ethical discourse is not only awake to the symptoms of the crisis of consumerist carelessness and the dictates of exploitation, but also succeeds in discovering the much-needed prospects of hope that human salvation is once again in the hands of man himself and in his ceaseless moral transformation from a beast in a self-aware being of responsibility and respect, part of the magnificent wonder of existence.

Of course, I would like to ask why Léonie Overbeek does not take advantage of an old philosophical concept like harmony, which in a number of its dimensions, would help him better bring out his theses and highlight the possible perspectives of the ethics of tolerance, the inclusion, responsibility, care and respect, as a form of reasonable coherence based on an understanding of cooperation-relationship, rather than the traditional antithetical positions of the ethos of tension, i.e. of opposition and conflict.

I propose to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to confer to Léonie Overbeek the educational and scientific degree "PhD/Doctor" in professional field 2.3. Philosophy (Philosophy taught in English), as I myself will vote most convincingly for this.

Sofia

24. II. 2024

Sincerely:

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