

# OPINION

by **Prof. Dr. Simeon Ignatov Vassilev**

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on the dissertation of Leonie Overbeek,

PhD student at the Department of Logic, Ethics, Aesthetics, Faculty of Philosophy,  
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

on the theme: Ethical Foundations of Man–Nature Interaction

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the professional  
field 2.3. Philosophy /Philosophy with English/

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Nikolay Mihaylov

## 1. Topic Relevance and Significance of the Dissertation

In her dissertation, Leonie Overbeek addresses the complex issues of environmental philosophy. She argues for environmental ethics and respect as the only logical value to apply. In this sense, the topic of the dissertation is extremely relevant, especially in our time, where the relationship with nature is crucial for the future of humanity.

The main thesis that the dissertation defends is the ethical interaction of man with nature and the need for change in man's behaviour and attitude towards nature. The starting points for the author's reasoning are mainly the concepts of Jacques Derrida and Hans Jonas, which are analyzed in a detailed and objective manner. The formulation of the hypotheses that are subjected to analysis testifies to a very good research culture of the dissertator.

## 2. Structure and content of the dissertation

The structure of the dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendices. The volume is sufficient for a dissertation. The abstract accurately reproduces the content of the doctoral dissertation. Interesting author's theses on the ethical interaction of humans with nature and on pro-environmental behaviour based on values and ethics are presented.

The dissertation has a rich bibliographic resource, which gives reason to assume that the doctoral student is sufficiently informed in the subject area. The abstract to the dissertation has been developed in a manner that meets the requirements and presents the dissertation fully.

Chapter One discusses the "unbridled sovereignty" of humans over all who share the biosphere. The thesis of respect as a fundamental value on which responsibility for life is based is put forward. The author articulates respect as an attitude that does not accept the loss of life and resources, as

an outlook not only on the present but on the future, and for which responsibility must be held. The ethics of responsibility, global efforts on climate change, and the values of non-environmental behavior, i.e., human attempts to reconcile ethical systems with the interaction between humans and nature, are discussed in detail. In this chapter, the dissertation problematizes sovereignty, responsibility, and survival, and makes the generalization of human dominance over nature. "Humans think they are above nature, that they are Sovereigns of nature and often have no idea what nature entails" is one of the dissertation's main claims.

Chapter Two analyses the ethical principles and theories (normative ethics, meta-ethics and applied ethics) that are conceptualized from a philosophical perspective and justifies the approach to environmental ethics as part of applied ethics. In this chapter, the terminological and conceptual resources of environmental ethics are provided and the definitions of scholars such as Rolston, Routley, Dorrel, Attfield, and others are discussed. The dissertation also proposes a broadening of the definitional term - "environmental ethics should not only refer to duties, values, and concern for the natural world and actions that support it but should be about an ethics in which the value of all things in themselves is considered integral to their existence." Hans Jonas's environmental ethics, Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism (Beast and Sovereign), the dozens of corporate definitions of social responsibility, epistemic responsibility theory, and responsibility as a philosophical issue in general are critically examined. The analyses of the etymology of the various definitions of responsibility and of the ethical aspects of human-animal interactions make a very good impression.

In this chapter, the dissertation arrives at a summary of anthropocentric values, which "are based on the special status awarded to humanity."

Chapter Three discusses the need for a new ethical basis for human-nature interactions. According to the author, ethical actions towards nature on the part of humans should be examined in terms of factory farming, life and death, ethical nutrition, etc.

### 3. Publications on the topic

Leonie Overbeek's scientific publications on the topic of her dissertation are a good representation of her publication activity.

### 4. Scientific contributions

An important contribution of this dissertation is the skillful analysis of ecological ethics and the ethical basis for human-nature interaction. I find the dissertation's thesis on pro-environmental behaviour based on values and ethics to be proven. I also find Leonie Overbeek's research on the ethics of respect, which is in fact a responsibility towards life, a contribution to scientific knowledge. This dissertation is not just a theoretical construct, it is charged with a strong emotional charge and has enormous practical significance. I fully share Leonie Overbeek's conclusion about 'the need to act and think responsibly about what we consume, what we buy, what we use'. I also share her scholarly response to the 'responsibility imperative', and her peculiarly academic call for

the wise use of the sovereign power of man. I accept the contributions articulated by the author and believe that they are the result of her independent work and creative process with the research supervisor.

5. Recommendations to the PhD student on the dissertation topic.

My main recommendation to the doctoral candidate is to continue her research on this vital issue for the future of humanity, and also to analyse in detail the contemporary philosophical understanding of the ethical foundations of human-nature interaction. It also leads to the media. As media theorist Neil Postman says, media ecology tries to discover what roles the media impose on us, how the media structure what we see, why the media make us feel and act the way we do. In this sense, the ecological philosophy and issues outlined in this thesis are also relevant to media ecology.

6. Conclusion

The presented doctoral dissertation is an original scientific study that shows systematic theoretical knowledge and original reasoning combined with proven theses.

The dissertation, abstract and publications presented by the PhD student Leonie Overbeek warrant a positive evaluation and a finding that they meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Regulations for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education and Science.

Based on all that has been said so far, I will vote positively and confidently recommend the esteemed jury to award to Leonie Overbeek the degree of Doctor of Education and Research in the professional field 2.3. Philosophy /Philosophy with teaching in English/.

Sofia

08.02.2024

Signature:

Prof. Dr. Simeon Vassilev