

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Valeri Zlatanov Lichev, PhD, IFS - BAS

of Leonie Overbeek's dissertation:

Ethical Foundations of Man–Nature Interaction

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor"
in professional field "philosophy"

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Leonie Overbeek was enrolled in 2018 in the Doctoral Program in English at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. He has a long professional experience and versatile theoretical training in various fields of humanitarian knowledge and exact sciences, as well as an impressive teaching experience.

CONTENT MOMENTS OF THE DISSERTATION

The work is well structured. It is written in clear and readable language. It consists of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The main topic of the research is the ethical aspects of the protection of the natural environment. Despite numerous discussions, environmental issues have not yet taken their rightful place in the everyday orientations of social action. One of the reasons for this is the lack of clearly defined and ethically argued environmental values. This deficit affects the effectiveness of environmental actions and explains all possible resistances against them at the individual and institutional level.

L. Overbeek presents some theoretical ideas that can serve to justify future environmental ethics. First of all, humanity must part with the view of its privileged position as a sovereign who has unlimited rights to exploit the inexhaustible natural

resources. Only under this condition would it become possible to establish a new type of relationship with the representatives of the plant and animal kingdom.

Environmental values need ethical reflection to be theoretically grounded. In this connection, L. Overbeek cites the views of H. Jonas, who pleads for a new type of ethics of responsibility. A central place in it is given to fear, but not of death as in Heidegger, but of the disappearance of all life. Only if people give up their careless attitude towards nature can they become concerned for future generations and responsible for the preservation of the planet's biological diversity.

In the second chapter, L. Overbeek makes a brief review of the main ethical theories: 1) normative ethics; 2) applied ethics; 3) metaethics. The latter examines the foundations of the remaining theories. Normative ethics formulate rules, norms and standards of human behavior. Environmental ethics can be classified as normative if its representatives observe the same principles in their work.

However, if each situation is unique, then generalized moral judgments or decisions become inapplicable. Each case must be considered individually. Then ethical decisions become relative and situational, and ecological ethics has to be classified among utilitarian theories.

The development of the moral foundations of the ecological paradigm began in the 1970s. L. Overbeek focused on the five directions in which the development of ecological philosophy unfolded. At the same time, she emphasizes not only the need for theoretical research, but also the practical application of their results. Only under this condition can we hope for the success of activities aimed at protecting the natural environment. There is no insurmountable gulf between man and animals. Empathy and a responsible attitude can bridge it.

To reveal the possibility of overcoming anthropocentric limitations, Overbeek refers to J. Derrida's views on the Beast and the Sovereign. These are two inseparable aspects of the human being. With his innate sense of language and irony, Derrida seems to mark the distance that separates them, to ultimately reveal their indivisible unity. Humanity's quest for sovereignty produces anthropocentric values, which, however, are not absolute. Therefore, the mankind cannot see itself as a system of individuals and relationships detached from the natural world.

In the third chapter, L. Overbeek carries out a synthesis of the main principles on which the future ecological ethics must be built. Underlying values should never be utilitarian. Among them, a special place is assigned to respect, because from it grows the responsible attitude towards every single representative of the animal or plant kingdom.

In his conclusion, Overbeek dwells again on the need for an ethical overcoming of anthropocentric values. From the position of the sovereign, humanity must begin to defend the rights of speechless animals instead of dismissing them as absurd. There are no insurmountable obstacles to the equal value treatment of humans, plants and animals. When the relationship between them is balanced, each of their representatives can be seen as a subject and not just as an object.

The respect from which ecologically oriented responsibility grows is manifested through speech. Negative connotations should be avoided, as they express the speaking subject's haughty attitude towards beings she/he consider inferior.

As M. Heidegger notes, man or Dasein is able to reveal the truth thanks to language. Hence, dismissive, disqualifying language testifies not only to a lack of respect, but also to the inability of the speaking subject to reveal the specific value of each of the representatives of the animal and plant world. The conclusion that L. Overbeek makes at the end of his work is that we must respect the uniqueness of each natural creation, which is a value in itself.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

L. Overbeek 's dissertation is dedicated to a problem that is particularly pressing these days, the solution of which requires, on the one hand, complex and multifaceted, interdisciplinary research, and, on the other hand, concrete practical actions at various levels: political (national and supranational), civil , individual, etc.

Overbeek sets herself a task far beyond the requirements of a dissertation, but one that is entirely in keeping with her spirit; I would also say - with her powers and abilities. She could – as is often the practice – limit herself to a comparative analysis of the views of Derrida and Jonas, but instead chooses to explore the possibilities of building a global

environmental ethic, arguing skillfully not only her theoretical ideas but also the possibility of their practical application.

Although the points of contribution are not sufficiently clearly formulated, I believe that L. Overbeek's dissertation work fully meets the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in philosophy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering L. Overbeek's pursuit of theoretical developments, I would make the following recommendations regarding her future scientific career.

1) The connection between ethical values and the ecological approach can be sought in the social philosophy of J. Heindrichs and his followers.

2) Since the theoretical justification of ecological ethics requires a complex approach, I would recommend L. Overbeek to pay attention to the ecological views of the German sculptor Joseph Beuys, as well as to his concept of social sculpture.

3) Regarding the specific combination of plant species, the disruption of which can affect the reproduction of bee and other populations, I would recommend L. Overbeek to contact the environmentalist Toma Belev, from whom I have heard an analysis of similar examples.

CRITICAL NOTES

The dissertation is presented in a precise scientific style, although the goals, tasks, problems and methods used are not clearly defined enough. I don't think that forcing a text into some predetermined mold of an exposition can make it more scholarly. Rather, I want to highlight some key points in J. Derrida's philosophical views that have a direct bearing on the ideas developed by L. Overbeek .

The hypothesis that man's attitude to external objects is linguistically structured was first formulated by the French scientist Emile Benveniste. As a linguist, however, he did not have opportunities for its verification. Therefore, it received citizenship thanks to the psychoanalytic theory of J. Lacan – one of the four musketeers of French structuralism.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the limitations of the structuralist paradigm became clear. Not only binary oppositions, but also "grand narratives" are subjected to criticism. Post-structuralists find the erasure of the uniqueness of existence in the linguistically grounded constructions of their predecessors. Even Hegel notes that language contains only the general. In such a case, the question arises as to how it is possible to express through language the specific features of individual existence.

One possible answer is given by the poet Francis Ponge. According to the French surrealist, we can preserve the uniqueness of wordless beings or objects if we give them the opportunity to sign themselves. According to E. Benveniste language is a genuine symbolic system, as it rests on contractual relations. If wordless objects or beings could sign themselves, they would attest to the individuality of their existence. In such a case, we will be able to enter into contractual, that is to say, symbolic or communicative, i.e. linguistic, relations with them.

Ponge developed his nominalist ideas for the first time in the enigmatic prose poem "L'Appareil du téléphone", published in 1936, which was extremely misinterpreted by the semiotician Michael Riffater. In the early 1960s, the poet became the doyen of the post-structuralist movement. J. Derrida owes a large part of his ideas about the written language, the signature and linguistically declared uniqueness to the views of his older friend. They can be found in his article "Le langage (Le Monde au téléphone)", as well as in his correspondence with F. Ponge.

The main problem that concerns Derrida is related to the possibility of talking about things without directly naming them. So he resorts to a kind of language that Richard Rorty calls idiosyncratic. It is to Derrida's language that the misunderstanding of his texts is largely due.

I believe that J. Derrida's nominalist-oriented ideas are partially accounted for in L. Overbeek's work. This takes place in the finale on the occasion of the responsibility with which each representative of the human race must treat the members of the animal or vegetable kingdom.

In connection with the linguistic justification of ecological values, I would suggest L. Overbeek to connect respect and responsibility with the pattern of personal pronouns. P. Ricoeur and Ts. Todorov resort to it in order to avoid the substantialization of moral

virtues, J. Heindrichs – to highlight the specificity of the value subsystem of society, and Norbert Elias – to overcome metaphysical layers on sociological concepts.

In such a case, the respect for oneself (self-respect) would correspond to the first person, from which respect for every other natural entity grows; on the second – the responsibility, and on the third ("they" or the future generations) – the global ecological values by analogy with the importance of cultural artifacts in the Ts. Todorov's theory. It would also be good to take into account the value dimensions of concern, distinguishing it from care in M. Heidegger's philosophy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite some omissions, which are completely understandable given the large-scale design of the proposed project, I believe that L. Overbeek has clearly and accurately outlined the basic principles and postulates of future environmental ethics. The views of a number of contemporary authors were used, which were heuristically applied to the research field. The analyzes are clear and precise, and the style is distinguished by high erudition, precision and argumentation in the formulation of unconventional theses and conclusions.

L. Overbeek has three publications, with which he fully meets the national requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor". Taking into account the innovative nature of her dissertation "Ethical Foundations of Man–Nature Interaction", I express my firm conviction that she should be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor" and I recommend the other members of the Scientific Jury to vote in the same way.

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Sofia

Signature:

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