

REVIEW

By Professor Ivan Katsarski, DSc,

Of the dissertation of Assoc. Professor Stoyan Andreas Stavru, PhD, on the topic "Moral Dimensions of Property in an Ecological Context (Towards the Grounding of a 'Proprietary' Ecology)", submitted for the awarding of the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences in Higher Education 2. Human Sciences. Professional Field 2.3. Philosophy, Scientific Specialty Ethics

The length of the dissertation is 318 pages. It consists of three parts: Introduction, a main Presentation in six chapters, and a Conclusion. Submitted, in addition, are a general Framework of the study, a List of Literature, a List of Tables and Figures, and a List of Abbreviations.

The dissertation consists in a detailed study of the ethical aspects of so-called "proprietary ecology". According to Assoc. Prof. Stavru, this term designates a scientific field that covers the application of various theories and models of ownership to ecological problems. Here, the emphasis is on the ethical aspects of this application.

The scientific achievements of Assoc. Prof. Stavru may be summed up as follows:

First, the choice of topic and problem field merits a high assessment, as they are extremely topical and even touch on burning issues.

Secondly, the author has presented a very detailed picture of the problems engendered by the contemporary ecological crisis. The six chapters of the work approach concrete aspects of the problems related to landscape, microorganisms, plants and animals, genes, the Earth as an ecological system, Cosmos and cosmic life. The emphases are placed on the moral significance of "non-human life" and "non-human nature".

Thirdly, the author has analyzed various theories – classical and modern – of property, as well as their possible and actual application to the ecological problem area. In this connection, the work studies various kinds and forms of property: four kinds are analyzed in particularly fine detail: private, public, defensive and integrative. While the first two are familiar to the reader, the discussion on the third and the fourth is strongly driven by ecological ethics. Also

thoroughly analyzed (and likewise motivated by ecological ethics) is the distinction between corporal, sovereign and intellectual property as related to living organisms.

Fourthly, as a follow-up of the comparison between ecological ethics and the various aspects of property, the author has grounded the concept of "proprietary ecology". The term traces the field of possible applications of the models and instruments of property seen as means for protecting ecological values. Thus, property, from being an antagonist (in principle) of ecology, turns into its ally.

Fifthly, the dissertation is markedly interdisciplinary. Assoc. Prof. Stavru's literary informedness is exceptionally large. In the dissertation, he cites and uses an impressive range of sources in Bulgarian, Russian and English. The texts used are from various fields: philosophy and ethics, biology and ecology, law. In the last mentioned, the source material covers theoretical but also concrete legal regulations (conventions, laws, decrees, etc.). An indication of the wide scope of analysis is the fact that the author has not overlooked mythological and religious texts relevant to ecological ethics.

Sixth, the study has a distinct practical-applied aspect. Together with providing general theoretical discussions, the author has analyzed Bulgarian legislation relevant to ecological ethics. Thus, Assoc. Prof. Stavru has overviewed the achievements and problems in that legislation and indisputably made a contribution to developing and perfecting it.

Seven, in more than a few instances, Assoc. Prof. Stavru is critical, and quite justifiably so, of the theoretical definitions, legal mechanisms, and specific decisions relevant to ecology. For instance, Stavru opposes Scruton with respect to "the fact that beauty is not merely a spontaneously arising agreement localized along the lines of good neighborly relations but is also a public good, a common resource that is not only of national but also of European significance and hence imposes a more serious intervention on the part of public authorities as regards restrictions on private property (p. 75-76). Distancing himself from the outlook of Latour and other authors who view Earth as a political subject, Stavru writes, "[P]luralist property regimes are a considerably more pragmatic and effective alternative for Gaia, who demands cooperation or 'threatens' war" (p. 111). He does not spare criticism of whole branches of legislation:

"The overview of legislation relevant to the possibilities for manipulating the genome of living organisms, including the human genome, leads to the conclusion as to the existence of

scattered and uncoordinated laws (...) lacking a clearly formulated foundation of principles. (...). Lacking is an integral system of legislation on the human genome as a kind of genetic resource, such as would comport limitations on its use (...) (p. 180).

I accept Assoc. Prof. Stavru's self-assessment that the contributions of the dissertation are situated mainly under the category of "enriching existing knowledge". The dissertation is a first-of-its-kind comprehensive monographic study on ecological ethics, and hence fills an important empty niche in our philosophical-ethical literature and culture.

S. Stavru is an established researcher and author within the Bulgarian scholarly communities of philosophers and legal experts. A particular indication of this is the list of his cited works: the reference as to the minimal national requirements for the scientific degree of "Doctor of Sciences" lists 19 citations in Bulgarian scientific literature.

In reviewing the dissertation, I would like to propose a main recommendation to Assoc. Prof. Stavru in view of his future work in this problem field. I would suggest a stronger critical element in his work. This is what I am referring to.

Not rarely, in the literature devoted to the anthropocentric aspect of ecological ethics and law, authors are inclined to set in opposition a kind of anthropomorphism (the concept of Gaia and Cassandra, the postulation of the rights of nature and of various living creatures). I believe this blurring of the boundary between subject and object leads not to enhancement but to relativism of the regulations on environmental protection. In order for these to be effective, it is enough to abide by moral principles such as the inherent value of every life and a refusal to cause suffering to any living creature. The dissertation contains some hints at this, but rather timid ones, and not distinct enough.

The critical element could be strengthened in one other respect: the legal regulation ought to be assessed not only in terms of the content of legal norms but, even more importantly, in respect to the effectiveness of their enforcement. This aspect is basically missing in the dissertation, although it is important enough.

Finally, "proprietary ecology" is also connected with the problem of social justice: who pays the price of the destruction of nature, and the price of its protection? Both pollution and environmental protection policies tend to rather increase social inequality.

I have a recommendation regarding the structure of the dissertation in view of its eventual publication. Not inconsiderably, the conclusion does not correspond to what one would expect of such a component (a generalization, synthesis and inferences). It largely has the form of a separate chapter that introduces new materials, literature, etc.

Assoc. Prof. Stavru meets the minimal national requirements for the scientific degree of "Doctor of Sciences".

His self-assessment of the contributions contained in the dissertation is exact and proper.

He has a good reputation among the scientific community. I personally have no joint publications with him.

Conclusion: Based on the evaluation presented above, I recommend with strong conviction that the members of the scientific jury vote to award to Assoc. Professor Stoyan Andreas Stavru, PhD, the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences in Higher Education 2. Humane Sciences, Professional Field 2.3. Philosophy, scientific specialty Ethics.

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