

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. habil. Tzotcho Hristov Boiadjiev, University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski", scientific direction "history of philosophy" on scientific works for participation in a competition for the academic position of associate professor, in professional direction 2.1. Philology (Classical Languages), Faculty of Arts, Department of Mediterranean and Eastern Studies, announced in SG no. 50/09.06.2023 with candidate Dr. Georgi Gochev.

To participate in the competition after the expiration of the legal term, one candidate - Dr. Georgi Gochev - submitted documents that meet the requirements of the RSARB. In relation to the submitted application, I would like to say the following. I have always been convinced of one thing - that a generation is about to establish itself in Bulgarian humanitarian studies, surpassing its predecessors in at least two respects. First, by his professional training, acquired not as a result of

some individual and enthusiastic "heroism", but through the systematic implementation of a productive educational strategy.

Thus, young researchers enter the field of their own science armed with the necessary tools, which they have in advance, and are not forced to work it out en passant. This spares them the fruitless methodological bickering and frees up space for a meaningful study of the respective scientific problem. The second favorable circumstance is the possibility of unbiased research, without ideological pressure and without the need to outwit overt and covert censorship.

In addition to the existence of the constitutive freedom of scientific knowledge, this allows avoiding the mandatory "labeling" of the studied phenomenon and focusing on its essence in previous times. The new generation of researchers carries out their research in a global scientific context, according to established world standards and without suffering from the difficulty of accessing the necessary information.

As often happens, however, the advantages also hide certain dangers. On the one hand, there is

the risk of fetishizing the tool at the expense of the content, which entails the hermetization of the scientific product, its closure in the narrow circle of those who master the tools in question, and the minimization of its social and existential effect. On the other hand, the overabundance of information makes it difficult to assess its real value, to separate the really productive ideas from the fashionable ones, whose "shelf life" is often too short.

For the modern humanitarian researcher, it is therefore of particular importance to be able to make the most of these advantages and skillfully avoid the temptations necessarily connected with them. This requires not only erudition, but also a sense of balance, and one in which the balance enriches and does not harm one side or the other. It is from this point of view that the participation of Dr. Georgi Gochev in this competition seems most appropriate to me. Our attention can be focused on the monograph "Freedom from the Shadows", which was a habilitation work and to the highest degree illustrates the merits of the candidate.

First of all, as such, I would point out the audacity in the choice of the subject. Plato is undoubtedly one of the most discussed philosophers for more than two millennia, and therefore the claim to say something new requires special courage. Dr. Gochev has shown such courage, and this deserves admiration, because whoever does not dare to implement his big projects at a young age, will not implement them in later times, when caution and routine prevail over the enthusiasm of discovery. Georgi Gochev has taken the risk of confrontation with a powerful tradition and, in my opinion, emerges from this confrontation with dignity. In the monograph we find a Plato who cannot be recognized by any of our known images of the ancient thinker. This Plato is dynamic, constantly eluding us, swirling in some kind of crazy dance and defined rather apophatically, not as he is, but as he is not - "neither a doctrinaire nor a neurotic". Indeed, the author knows very well that there can be no definition by negation, but he finds that when he tries in spite of everything to grasp it positively,

the Athenian appears in such fullness that it seems as if everything can be said about it.

Faced with this paradox, Gochev shows an equally important quality for the researcher - patience. Aware of the comprehensiveness of his "subject", Dr. Gochev sets out to explore it step by step, focusing in detail on several dialogues, selected in view of the main concepts of Platonic philosophy thematized in them: soul, time, beauty, reason, justice, virtue, law, knowledge, love. By patiently unraveling their meaning, he weaves the web of Platonic philosophy. The text of the book is a magnificent example of that "reading with pencil in hand" that Etienne Gilson advocated.

The great merit of the research is the preservation of the balance, avoiding the extremes of abstract speculation and mindless "mapping". Analysis oscillates between specific description and generalizing hypotheses, which ensures fidelity to the text under discussion and constant openness to statements for clarification, criticism, and correction. In this regard, Gochev proved to be a good student of Professor Bogdan Bogdanov, who did not hesitate to express extraordinary

theses, but most often with some concession and indication of alternative possibilities. Thus, the intellectual intrigue is preserved until the end and the reader remains waiting for the next of the "small discoveries", which are the substance of a scientific study. Following this approach, Dr. Gochev has written a lively and intriguing book of high (including purely literary) value, in which the reader is assigned the role not of a consumer admiring an extremely pleasant work of art, but of a worthy interlocutor, collaborator of the author.

In joint reading, however, it is natural to have doubts about the theses of the partner and even disagreements with them. In our case, the minimization of the metaphysical impulse in Plato's work at the expense of emphasizing the playful character, the literary nature of Plato's philosophizing seems problematic to me. Yes, Plato is playing, but it is a game of values, a *Glasperlenspiel*, which means that it has for the Athenian philosopher a completely serious existential meaning. Indeed, Dr. Gochev has the intelligence, the scholarship, and the sensitivity to avoid turning the ancient thinker into a vain

postmodernist professor from a provincial French university, but it would be advisable - in my opinion - to pay attention to the fact that Plato sees his occupation as an engagement in the gigantic battle for being, that the cognitive, moral, social, educational, etc. problems are considered by him to be solvable precisely at the ontological level, that the philosophical eros is a skilled hunter, and the skilled hunter is the one who catches the hunted game, not the one who endlessly runs after it, that the copious negotiation of the first principle culminates in a synthetic cognitive act that nevertheless achieves its object, though not in the same way as other objects of knowledge are achieved. I assume and hope that this aspect of Plato's work will find a place in the examination of the "systematic" dialogues of the mature period of the philosopher - "Sophist", "Parmenides", "Philebus" and "Politicus", which together with "Timaeus" express the immanent systematic potential of Platonic philosophy, unfolded in one of the most powerful traditions of European philosophizing. I really cannot be dissuaded that the grand systematics of Proclus or Ficino would

not have been possible if this possibility had not been set - at least as a regulation - in Plato's teaching. I will allow myself to recall that Platonic philosophy is a philosophy of restoration, of the restoration of the world precisely as a perfect sculpture, as a cosmos after precisely its playful degradation by the sophists. And concepts such as order, number, measure, middle, etc., which are encountered literally at every step. are an indicator of the ancient philosopher's efforts to propose a systematic model functioning equally well in the universe, science, morality, society and art.

It is natural to have reservations in connection with Dr. Gochev's assessment of the Tübingen thesis. Indeed, he is not among its staunch deniers, and is even inclined to acknowledge the credit of the Tubingenians for the Platonic studies, but he still prefers to leave this interpretation without further serious attention. Of course, the discussion here would be too extensive, but for now I would only note the following - There is a banal circumstance that the critics of Tübingenian interpretation for some reason overlook. These are Aristotle's testimonies about

the existence of some "unwritten teachings" taught in the Academy and not completely matching what was written in the dialogues. However problematic he is as a historical witness, Plato's student was in the school long enough to know what went on there. On the other hand, if dialogic is an essential stylistic feature of Plato's philosophizing, it is to a greater extent related not to the written, but to the spoken word. In fact, I must admit that at the very beginning I too had doubts about the Tübingen thesis and understood its validity and productivity only after an intensive epistolary exchange with Professor Krämer and Professor Gaiser. In which - I also admit this - my monistic reading reinforces the idea of a system, understood, however, as a dialectical play of the first one with itself in its otherness.

Anyway, Georgi Gochev's monograph is not only a smart and thorough reading of Plato, but also an exquisite literary work. The author not only offers a convincing interpretation of a text that is not easy to understand, but in an infinitely sympathetic way he shares his hesitations and doubts. It is extremely rare that I have come across

a scientific study with such delicately presented self-irony, which not only does not lighten the content, but also opens the door to further research, ensuring that it will be approached without preconceptions and ready-made schemes in advance.

The approach, in which the writing is not frozen in a strictly historical narrative, but actuality, which means the general human significance of the discussed problems, is also worthy of admiration. Of course, the author did not succumb to the "charm of the subject" of his study, so as to see as authoritative the decisions of "his" philosopher. But he reminds us of certain opportunities, for example, in the field of education or in that of statehood, to give a deeper and non-trivial meaning to our ideas and actions.

Finally, something "off the record". Georgi Gochev established himself as a translator of Plato's dialogues. I have to point out this fact, because I consider it unfounded and unfair to exclude the translation activity from the academic nomenclature. When translating a scientific text, the transfer of words from one language to another

implies a serious study not only of the specific content, but also of the worldview setting within which this content will unfold. That is why I suggest that Dr. Georgi Gochev be credited the very high-quality translations he made, for some of which, by the way, he deservedly received a national humanitarian award. And to encourage him to continue his work.

On the basis of what has been said, I strongly support Georgi Gochev's candidacy and call on the respected members of the scientific jury to do the same.

23.10.2023

Reviewer:

Professor Tzotcho Boiadjiev