

REVIEW

by Prof. Stilian Yotov Yotov, DSc,

regarding a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor according to Professional Field 2.3. Philosophy (History of philosophy. New philosophy – XIX century) for the needs of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski"

Information about the contest. In the announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" [SU] (in SG No. 48/ 28.06.2022) competition for the academic position of Associate Professor of philosophy (History of philosophy. New philosophy - XIX century) – code of the professional direction 2.3., scientific field 2. (humanities) – only one candidate is participating – Dr. Dimitar Dimitrov Bozhkov, currently Chief Assistant (Associate Professor) in the Faculty of Philosophy of the SU.

Candidate data. Dr. Bozhkov meets the requirements stipulated by the Law and the Regulations of the SU for holding academic positions, namely: (a) he holds the educational and scientific degree "doctor" since 2012, (b) since 2013 he has held the academic position "Chief Assistant" (Assistant Professor), and (c) participates in the competition with the required number of publications, including a published monographic work.

The candidate was admitted to the competition for Associate Professor (Dozent) because of complete and impeccable documentation, from which – and on the basis of my own impressions – I can make the following summaries and assessments.

Description of scientific works and activities.

First, the list of publications testifies to the regularity of the candidate's contributions to science, to participation in meaningful discussions, to purposeful and varied engagements with operational criticism. In the competition, Dr. Bozhkov submitted for evaluation 12 scientific works (one of which is a revised version of his doctoral dissertation), published in renowned publishing houses; all in Bulgarian.

Second, in the last 9 years, Dr. Dimitar Bozhkov has been the leader of four and a participant in five more research projects, approved and implemented at the university, city and national level. The highlights in them are related both to his teaching activity and to current problems of urban planning and social integration. The results of these projects are of proven

importance for the professional realization of the candidate, for his integration into the activity of the department and for his engagement with the problems of historical memory and the traumas of the recent past.

Third, Dr. Bozhkov's publications are complex and integrative in nature. They combine philosophy and sociology, aesthetics and theology, while – more or less overtly – they are also bound up with problems for political action. Moreover, the revised dissertation, which is not subject to the present review, sets a specific context for his research projects with a more general idea of a critical philosophy of history. Part of them realized the candidate's interests in the field of microhistory, thanks to which little-known research and approaches became elements of the scientific discussion in our country. In both cases, there is an attitude of unencumbered by dogmatic frameworks to search for new topics, attempts at a productive synthesis in the critical rethinking of traditions, exhibitions winning the hearts of a wider audience and awakening disputes among the specialized.

Fourth, in his publications, Dimitar Bozhkov demonstrates an enviable erudition and competences to research topics in the field of cultural history and philosophy of history. In them stand out skills for detailed analyses, accessible presentation of observations and conclusions, good defense with justifications that combine arguments and narratives. Bozhkov's style is recognizable, I would say, inviting interlocutors and opponents to a conversation with the help of new topics and unexpected combinations of ideas for reflection on them.

All this unequivocally testifies to the candidate's scientific potential and prospects for further development.

Scientific contributions. A reference to the citation of Dr. Dimitar Bozhkov's publications, attached to the competition materials, gives, I would say, only a partial idea of the response from them; but they are referenced in several basic scientific fields.

The monograph *Marxism in Messianism* (2022), proposed by the candidate to the attention of the scientific jury, fully confirms the self-assessment of its contributing moments. In my own judgment, I will summarize them without being able to do so in a systematic way. The nature of the presentation is somewhat amorphous, so that individual parts and overlapping ones flow into one another. Just as they mix messianic with mystical, apocalyptic and aesthetic

motifs, which makes it difficult for even the well-intentioned reader. Furthermore, I will venture to point out initial known hesitations, accompanied by explanations of why these hesitations do not lead to a revision of my overall positive attitude, and underline my recognition of the presence of undisputed achievements in the work under review.

Bozhkov's research represents an intellectual as well as an ideological provocation. The title itself dispels fears of a trite juxtaposition of the two topics "Marxism" and "Messianism" and clears up hasty assumptions about messianism in Marxism. For this reason, I would not criticize the book's lack of a panorama of the state of Marxism in Europe after the First World War. It is not needed. However, in this place I will not save that Bozhkov's study projects conceptual results in times when they could not have happened. Moreover, precision benefits both the historian of philosophy and the philosopher of history. The themes of the "young Marx" and even of the "young Hegel" do not have the importance attributed to them before the relevant publications appeared in 1931-22. Which, in turn, further emphasizes the influence of "History and Class Consciousness" of Lukács from 1923 on the current and, with all possible reservations, unorthodox understanding of Marxism (because Gramsci's remained then completely unknown). A similar retroactive influence has also been attributed to Karl Löwith based on his post-war books, without taking into account his actual work in Marburg – together with Heidegger and Gadamer, trying to find a continuation of the line of ideational development after Hegel and Marx, reaching Nietzsche, Weber and J. Burckhardt.

On the other hand, Bozhkov has chosen an approach of reconstruction, which saves him from starting from some unfathomable variety. Stylizing two approaches in tension with each other – with reference to K. Schmitt (1922) and K. Löwith (1949) – he overcomes the established tradition of celebrating secular thinking about history. At the same time, it avoids the need to trace some third alternative, longing for models of resurrection of past "golden times", of nostalgia for antiquity or for the Renaissance. A constantly open possibility, which we know from the work of Leo Strauss, and subsequently of H. Arendt.

But even if Löwith accepts Heidegger as his "teacher" and habilitates under him, Heidegger himself – whose conceptions of history are taken too as determining the context of the debates – is a contemporary of Schmitt, and for both of them Catholicism has a particularly important meaning. Today we know Heidegger's lectures from the winter semester of 1920/21, devoted to the phenomenology of religion. Interpreters debate whether or not

Heidegger's religiosity is Christian in them. I think Bozhkov is right to ignore this stage of Heidegger's development, especially since the text became publicly available many years later. In addition, for many his reflections (continue to) seem beyond politics, unrelated to any political theology. However, the lectures also raise the more general question of the role of the reception of the Apostle Paul's Epistles in the processing of the post-war crisis. Moreover, not only this. Any unbiased reading of the birth of orthodox Marxism (Y. Stalin, "On the Foundations of Leninism", 1924) can rediscover in theses about the unification of all the forces of imperialism – an archetype of the Antichrist; respectively, in theses about the ever stronger aggravation of the class struggle with the approach of communism – religious figures as for dealing with an existential crisis, as well as to justify a totalizing and terrorizing political project. An equally open-minded reader could also find models of political theology for moral-stoic resistance against communism (Vl. Gradev's studies dedicated to Schmitt and John Paul II). Dr. Bozhkov did not set himself the goal of any general reconstruction of the (tried and possible) role of the figure of the "katechon" in the philosophy of history.

Without being particularly obtrusive, he devotes his research mainly to authors and their works, which we could bring under the denominator of a cultural Zionism. For this reason, in front of us is a pioneering attempt for our national science to think about history through the eyes of people who at the same time do not share both extreme forms of secular philosophy and the established Christian worldview with its long and seemingly indisputable tradition in European culture. An attempt to transfer our gaze, focused on being, to what is missing, to what has not realized its potentials, to try to deal with "meontology".

Before confronting the tangle of mutual influences, even the well-educated scholar runs the risk of being unprepared. My inherent disposition to seek out the source to which a thesis refers when it surprises me even with the fact that it contains moments long known from history, culminates as a mixture of astonishment and question: Could Marcion and Joachim of Fiore be not marginal but key authors for an alternative and noteworthy model of philosophy of history? Alongside the official one we associate with Augustine's authority, and alongside the Gnostic one we also know and sometimes (reluctantly) acknowledge? Do we need to catch up and to what extent? And then well-documented theological disputes in medieval Spain about the relationship between messianism and the parousia (the Second Advent) will strike us as different. In another way, we will also have to read the texts of Jewish authors from the

Enlightenment. No wonder we have to rethink the Messianism-Christology relationship. In the context of these assumptions, I am convinced that Dr. Bozhkov's book transcends the functional framework to be accepted and evaluated only as a habilitation thesis.

At the same time, the book *Marxism in messianism* achieves two more specific tasks. On the one hand, it offers a method of interpretation in which heterogeneous approaches collide. Literary theory, as well as literary practice, has long given in to such a temptation. Here, however, Dr. Bozhkov applies this idea to the field of philosophy of history in the hope that it may awaken an emancipatory potential that has remained hidden in the models by which we navigate the future and manage our lives. In this connection, he also refers to foreign achievements, such as those of Michel Löwy. (The candidate's older book in the competition, attached to the documentation, relies on a method in which heterogeneity does not come so clearly to the fore.) On the other hand, the habilitation thesis puts a new emphasis on the role and meaning of utopias, which in the official Marxism is perceived as an overcome stage of thinking, giving way to the celebration of the ideal of scientific explanation and planning for the future. Thus, in the end, the two traditions - of social utopias and of Jewish messianism – entered into a fruitful relationship with each other. In addition, it is well traced in the chapter “On Some Developments in the Interpretation of the Messianic Idea”.

Before I assess these achievements, I will share some disagreement. The next three chapters undoubtedly play the role of illustration. Nevertheless, in the one dedicated to Thomas Müntzer, Bloch's attitude towards Engels' book on this subject seems to me simplistic. Because both, in the quotations and in the general attitude of Bloch, what Engels wrote seemed to him flat and one-sided in places (Müntzer was not proletarianized enough, he had no military experience like Cromwell...). After all, Bloch was provoked for his research not only by Engels, but also by K. Kautsky and... E. Troeltsch. However, more importantly, according to him, the "Müntzer case" enters the agenda of the current circular: in the course of the French Revolution, of the Spring of Nations, of the revolutionary upheavals after the First World War. It carries a liberating charge, as do the other ideologies to which Bloch recognized – unlike Marx and Engels, and unlike Lukács too – a positive meaning already in the *Spirit of Utopia*. If for official Marxism the Peasants' War is a lesson in how not to make a revolution, for Bloch it is an attempt to capture the utopian meaning of the "absolute human".

Regardless of my remark, Dr. Bozhkov has succeeded in convincingly showing that Bloch's early books offer a revolutionary alternative to Schmitt's counter-revolutionary in spirit political theology, they highlight Joachim von Fiore's alternative world history thinking, a conceptual framework is laid, in which messianism in the Jewish and Christian religions refer to each other. At the same time, Bloch was always critical of Lukács (even while they were in Heidelberg with M. Weber, and then in their irreconcilable quarrel about expressionism). Bloch's understanding of the essence of aesthetic experience—the difference between appearance (Schein) and anticipatory illumination (Vor-Schein)—sets a line of thought that Marxism generally considers as something alien. It may be regretted that there is no allusion to this in the book under discussion. The reason is probably Bloch's unpopularity in Bulgaria. It therefore omits, that *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918 & 1923) was written before the socialist revolutions, that the idealism of Schelling and Kierkegaard plays a more important role in it than the materialism of Marx, and that the final chapter on Marx, Death and Apocalypse centers on the theme of "transmigrational dispersion of souls", preceding and, moreover, conditioning the apocalypse and eschatology. This universal community, with its brotherhood and its fellow salvation, set the true meaning of messianism, pierce the spirit of utopias and reject all teachings that offer elitist and heroic solutions. This is what Bloch envisioned and recognized in Marxism, rejecting – practically throughout his life – its class and party character. Against this background, the productive discussion between G. Scholem, M. Buber, Fr. Rosenzweig, which cannot be evaluated in detail in this review. I believe that Dr. Bozhkov has succeeded in highlighting common themes and key differences to illustrate his foundational thesis of the mutual enrichment of heterogeneous projects. It should not be overlooked that his analyzes of the texts of W. Benjamin represent a development of his achievements up to that point, presented in the dissertation and in the book based on it. Both the thesis of Benjamin's weak messianism in his philosophy of history and the thesis of his anarchist essence, which can be continued decades later with Taubes, seem convincing; but here – supplemented with gnostic moments.

In this way, the ideological stakes of the past explode the idea of a linear unfolding of history, remaining constantly open as projections into the future to help us navigate the present. Along with this, they maintain a sense of solidarity among a moral community, which – like the ecclesiastical – never coincides with the political one and does not turn its back on the

marginalized for the sake of the closer and similar, but supports them specifically. However, does this not turn the revolution into a reform?

Yes, in this general project of making sense of the messianic legacy reconstructed by Dr. Bozhkov, we can rediscover something of the spirit of Marxism as if in a "sublated form". But Marxism has never lost sight of the so-called "organizational question", the "profane" question of collective action, and today's "sublation" it into political programs seeks anchorage in valid charters of basic and human rights. For which messianism does not seem to give an answer. Especially if it is imbued with an anarchist spirit. There is already something problematic about the imaginary community of sufferers; and it is amplified in the imaginary community of hopeful expectants. I believe that utopia has a future not only in the context of messianism. But that is a topic outside the task I have to complete here.

Teaching, lecturing and editorial work. In the field of educational activity, Dimitar Bozhkov enjoys the name of an established and responsive teacher. During the nine years of work at SU as the main assistant, he has accumulated and proven enough experience and routine. His seminars are popular, despite the fact that students attend them in the final phase of their undergraduate degree. Attention is also drawn to the lecture courses that Dr. Bozhkov has conducted, especially those that complement the main disciplines of the curriculum with their provocative themes. It is easy to see that in these he has already tried out in public some of the ideas developed in his habilitation thesis. Therefore, it is no surprise that for the past nine years, Bozhkov has been preferred as the supervisor of six of the successfully defended diploma theses in the Department of History of Philosophy. I have no doubt that the habilitation of Dr. Bozhkov will allow the college to have a sought-after and reliable supervisor of doctoral projects.

Dr. Bozhkov skillfully combines his teaching and organizational activities. In addition, the activities of MES institutions responsible for the preparation of graduates to continue their education at a higher level thanks to philosophy are involved.

Against the background of commitments related to research and teaching activities, Dimitar Bozhkov regularly presents reports at various conferences; only for the period 2014-2020, the documentation testifies to 17 appearances at national and international forums.

What has been stated so far assures me that the habilitation of Dr. Dimitar Bozhkov would contribute both to the development of his abilities and to the development of scientific life and the confirmation of the philosophical and specialty at SU.

Personal impressions. I know Dimitar Bozhkov from his studies at SU, from the defenses of his research for the acquisition of educational and scientific degrees, from participation in conferences and public discussions, from presenting the results of scientific projects, from his competence in translating from a foreign language. Everywhere he gives the impression that dealing with these tasks is given to him with ease. Working together with Dimitar Bozhkov is like working with a friend.

I haven't been a co-author with the associate professor candidate Dr. Dimitar Bozhkov.

Conclusion. The candidate's contributions both to scientific activity and to the affirmation of philosophy in university education and in public life in our country give me reasons to believe that in this case all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, provided for habilitation. As a result of the review of all the pedagogical and research qualities highlighted above, I give my positive opinion and unequivocally think that Ch. assistant professor Dimitar Dimitrov Bozhkov deserves to be elected as an Associate Professor of philosophy (History of philosophy. New philosophy - XIX century) at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Sofia, November 11, 2022

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