

OPINION
about a dissertation
for awarding an educational and scientific degree "doctor" on a topic
Philosophical Irony: A Metaphilosophical Study
of Evangelos Kalfopoulos, PhD student in the program
"PHILOSOPHY TAUGHT IN ENGLISH"
at "Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",
with academic supervisor **Prof. Dr. Alexander Gangov**

by **Prof. Dr. Daniela Vasileva Sotirova**, member of the Scientific Jury

The presented dissertation is written in English and it is 241 pages long, of which 226 pages are the text of the doctoral thesis. The dissertation is structured in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The latter is rich and precisely designed (pp. 227 - 241 of the dissertation); it contains sources in English, including – books and articles translated into this language from German, French, Spanish and Polish.

The abstract has a volume of 68 pages and gives a detailed and adequate idea of the doctoral thesis.

The author has chosen a complex and interesting issue for both philosophers and the general educated public. "Irony" is not only a rhetorical term for a figure of speech in which the intentional meaning is opposed to the literal meaning; irony is something recognizable in everyday communication. The dramatic potential of irony is also known from antiquity, as is its ability to pass into satire. It has been said, that the exceptionality of the twentieth century is in irony. This century will also be remembered for Borges' "ironization of the world, making poetry out of irony"¹. But what is *philosophical irony* - that is the question of the dissertation under consideration. The author specifies in the title that he undertakes a metaphilosophical study, which is formulated generally and unpretentiously, and with the clarification in the spirit of the philosophical tradition that this is *an attempt (essay)* as a metaphilosophical study. Having read the text of the thesis and accompanying materials, I confirm that this attempt is successful.

The structure of the text presents the theme and the leading ideas in full and coherently. The dissertation consists of four chapters. The first explores Socratic irony, defending the relevance of the construct of proto-irony, linking Socrates' irony to tragedy as a form of reaction against the sophists.

The second chapter, titled "Irony of the New Age," focuses on the ideas of Schlegel,

¹ Sarbinowski, M. Poezia na ironijata. <https://newspaper.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/3336>.

The second chapter, titled "Irony of the New Age," focuses on the ideas of Schlegel, Hegel, and Kierkegaard. The doctoral student obviously is excellently thoroughly familiar with the varied palette of texts by philosophers, historians of philosophy, and other social thinkers who have sought to explain irony as a rhetorical figure and a form of attitude. The author adheres to the main line in the interpretation of irony, by "deviating in two aspects"; first, it tries to contextualize it, and second, to see it as a way of practicing philosophy, not only as an art of living.

The third chapter is about postmodern irony in interpretations of Anglo-American and European philosophy. Here I would particularly appreciate the quite deserved for me attention given to the ideas of Richard Rorty and his metaphysical account of irony. In his analysis, the doctoral student has succeeded in recreating Rorty's secularist notion of irony as unconvincing, and this, he argues, is due to the American philosopher's inability to connect irony with its original tragic element. In this third chapter, E. Kalfopoulos uses, duly referring to analyzed texts (by K. Thein, etc.), comparisons between *deconstruction and hermeneutics* that show "Derrida's Socratic vein". I find interesting the juxtapositions between irony and metaphor, based on Hegel's and Derrida's ideas. It would be instructive for the PhD student to add something to *the question of the differences and commonalities between irony and metaphor* during the defense procedure.

The final chapter examines the possibilities of metaphilosophical irony. The thesis differs from the standard reading of Socratic irony as a higher, classical and smart form of rationalism. The PhD student instead sees the use of irony as a way of debunking the age of reason that dominated classical Athens. *Structural specifics of ironic thinking and speculative thinking* are indicated in the text. This is how philosophical irony is situated as a grounded methodology for philosophizing. Irony is shown to counter relativism as well as universalist thinking.

The author has pointed out that ironic thinking has changed by presenting the development of ancient philosophy from Socrates to Aristotle's metaphysics through philosophical irony - how in its Socratic version philosophy is distinguished from the Sophists, and Socratic thinking itself reached mainly through Plato and is absorbed by his systematic philosophical "model" (the doctoral student calls it "program"). The methodological opposition of irony and systematic philosophy is further traced in a historical-philosophical perspective. System and fragment are two different forms (approaches) in philosophy, detectable to this day in the "making" and circulation of philosophical knowledge.

The language of the doctoral work is clear and it is written with an understanding of the

complex and colorful "picture" of the ironic in philosophies. The achieved orderliness and internal logic, the thoughtful insight into the different points of view contextually, are marks of serious philosophical research.

I will complement my general positive impressions with the fact that the text contains stimulating ideas for philosophers, psychologists and psychiatrists, as well as for people in the arts who struggle with irony. Reading the dissertation, I asked myself the question of what is the relationship between irony and criticism, to what extent irony distorts the perception of philosophical theses and texts of other persons and from other times. I am concretizing this general rhetorical question for the doctoral student as follows: are there culturally specific, linguistically or regionally characteristic norms of the ironic attitude? I am positive that the metaphilosophical concept of irony has applications in other fields of knowledge and practices dealing with subjectivity cognitively, therapeutically, or for the purpose of self-improvement. The dissertation is interesting for academic teaching - it shows possible intersections between the ironic in philosophizing and in the arts, as well as parallels with irony in interpersonal, business or academic communication.

The doctoral student has *three publications* on the subject of the dissertation, one of which has been accepted for publication in the journal "Philosophical Alternatives". All papers are written in English.

The contributions, four in number, are formulated with complete credibility.

In conclusion, I will emphasize that the presented work contains well-founded philosophical ideas that are useful for the philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of irony, which is important for communication. My assessment of Evangelos Kalfopoulos' (whom I do not know personally) PhD thesis, abstract and published articles is positive. The work presented has the necessary completeness and originality, academic and practical significance of a dissertation for the scientific degree "doctor" in Bulgaria. I would recommend awarding the educational and scientific degree of Doctor to Mr. E. Kalfopoulos.

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/Prof. Dr. Daniela Sotirova/