

OPINION

for the dissertation "Philosophical Irony: A Metaphilosophical Study" by Evangelos Kalfopoulos,
scientific supervisor Prof. Alexander Gungov
by Assoc. prof. Ina Dimitrova

The dissertation with which Evangelos Kalfopoulos applies for the educational and scientific degree "doctor of philosophy" in the professional field 2.3 "Philosophy" comprises 241 computer pages including the bibliography. It consists of an introduction, four chapters and contributions. The focus of the analysis is philosophical irony, thought of as metaphilosophy, and examined historically, from its first philosophical uses to its most recent in the postmodernist paradigm. As the author points out (p. 7), the problems addressed through this concept are still relevant today: the problem of reason, the problem of philosophical system, the limits of human knowledge, the constitution of the subject, the relation between power and truth and, finally, the conception of what is to be a human. It is stressed that irony is seen as a way of doing philosophy, not just as a manifestation of the art of living, as it has often been conceptualized, thus actually underestimating its role in theorizing (p. 8). Methodologically, the study applies the genealogical approach as defined by Michel Foucault (11 p.).

The genealogy proposed by Kalfopoulos aims to show irony as a force - and a subversive force at that - operating within the dominant philosophical system, i.e. a force that always opposes and undermines the "canonization" in the respective system (p. 15). Put differently, the study offers us a particularly interesting tracing of the "trickster" role of irony, and of its effects.

The first chapter "Socratic Irony" sets the stage for the genealogical study by considering two perspectives, diachronic and synchronic (47 p.). The second chapter is devoted to modern irony and, following the "trickster" logic, again reveals it as a "force in opposition with the modern mechanical naturalistic philosophy of Descartes and the Enlightenment period that was systematized in philosophy by Kant". The third chapter presents the third phase of the genealogy - postmodernism - which begins with Nietzsche and goes to Derrida and Rorty. It is pointed out that Nietzsche himself did not use the concept, but his anti-foundationalism can be considered an ironic trait (16 p.). The fourth chapter is devoted to the conclusions of the study. There are several

central themes here, among which stands out the question of progress in philosophy, defined as "a genuine metaphilosophical problem raised above all by the analytic tradition" (Summary 48 p.). Regarding this problem, the ironist should argue that this is a pseudo-problem and the best we are capable of is creating new descriptions, new vocabularies, as Rorty says. Another important issue is the practical use of irony - in the philosophy of psychiatry and mental health - namely irony as the art of living, as a life form. Thinking irony through such practical lens is particularly interesting insofar as what is ultimately at stake here is, as the author says, the relation between language and subjectivity and the possibilities for language to "reorganise" subjectivity, to rearrange the narratives that constitute and shape it and to resolve the sedimented tensions within and between them. More generally, however, these are the relations between subjectivity, power, truth, and knowledge - the central stakes of psychiatry as a discipline and an institution. This line of thought could also be extended to the Foucauldian understanding of the subject - as a product of power, but also as a source of resistance, and a resistance that is rooted not in the autonomous, rational, free-floating capacity for critique, but rather is live, embodied, practiced, happens in the experimentation with forms of life that we can try out and then discard.

Along these lines is, for me, the main contribution of the study - what I called above, irony as the trickster within large systems, whether philosophical, psychiatric, ideological, etc. Throughout the text irony is framed and imagined primarily through the figures of undermining, subversion - i.e. in an anti-foundationalist way, through "becoming nothing", "emptying of meaning" (134 p.), "dead silence, "silence", etc. It seems to me that one can continue in this direction and further connect the irony to the anti-foundationalist perspective in the ontology of politics (the distinction politics vs. the political (politics/the political; la politique/le politique; Politik/das Politische)), that is associated with Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger, and so-called "decisionist" approaches. This could perhaps be seen as another application of the concept of irony alongside the philosophy of psychiatry.

Finally, a brief question, drawn from a comment by Rorty in "Contingency, Irony, Solidarity", in which he acknowledges that the ironist doubts the possibility of a "final vocabulary" and creates new vocabularies, but sometimes these can cause suffering, because it is cruel to tell someone

that what they cherish is worth nothing and will be obliterated in the new vocabulary. If so, what are we to do when irony causes such suffering? How can we both be ironic and affirm solidarity? It seems to me that Rorty himself does not answer this question in the book, but it is a very important one when, for example, we want to change social attitudes, to replace one mainstream narrative with another which we may believe is more progressive and “good” but which is still a narrative that hurts. So my question is – how we deal with the pain that irony could cause.

Undoubtedly, a defining characteristic of both the theoretical reconstruction and, more generally, of Evangelos Kalfopoulos' research style itself is the good organization and the utmost clarity and lucidity with which complex theories, concepts, mutual influences, and relationships are presented and applied. This makes the text both accessible and indicative of maturity and independence. My conclusion, therefore, is that the study demonstrates a capacity for precise analytical work, for effective application and heuristic dialogue with relevant theoretical traditions, and for critical reflection, including self-reflection. The dissertation demonstrates the undeniable research potential of the doctoral student. Therefore, without hesitation I recommend giving the educational and scientific degree “doctor of philosophy” to Evangelos Kalfopoulos.

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Assist. Prof. Ina Dimitrova