

## REVIEW

By

**Valentina Angelova Dramalieva, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor**

Philosophy and Ethics Section, Department of Political Economy, UNWE,  
Member of Scientific Jury: Faculty of Philosophy Council, Protocol 9/11.04.2023;  
Order of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"- RD 187/25.04.2023

*Concerning:*

Dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree **Doctor**  
In professional direction 2.3. Philosophy (Philosophy taught in English)

*On the topic:*

**Philosophical Irony: a Metaphilosophical Study**

*Author: Evangelos Democritus Kalfopoulos* – doctoral student in Philosophy (taught in English), Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

At the first meeting of the scientific jury, I was chosen to prepare a review of the dissertation for a "Doctor". I received in my e-mail the following materials in English, related to the defense: dissertation, dissertation summary, academic CV, list of the author's publications, copies of three publications, as well as dissertation summary in Bulgarian. The documents mentioned are reflected in my review, which is built on the usual criteria for evaluating a doctoral dissertation.

### **1. Brief data on the author**

Evangelos Kalfopoulos is from Greece, currently living in Portugal. His education includes: Lyceum (1993-96) in Drama, Greece; Bachelor's degree (2002) in Classics from the Democritus University of Thrace; Master's degree (2005) in Cognitive Sciences from the National and Kapodistrian Athens University, where he also has a specialization in Basic Cognitive Sciences; postgraduate courses in Special Education (2008-09) at the University of Thessaly and in Philosophy of Psychiatry (2017-18) at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK (not completed); full-time doctoral student (2019) in Philosophy (taught in English) at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Bulgaria, supervised by Prof. Alexander Gungov, Ph.D.; defense pending.

His professional realization (2006-22) is in various cities, Greece, such as: teaching children and adults, municipal counseling, health care management, intercultural training, coordination by an NGO in a refugee camp. In addition to Greek, he speaks English, French and Portuguese.

### **2. General idea and formal criteria for the dissertation**

The dissertation is in English, in an electronic version, and contains 251 p., structured in: Abstract (1 p.); Acknowledgments (1 p.); Introduction (12 p.); three chapters (total of 193 p.);

fourth chapter: Conclusions (13 p.); Principal Contributions (2 p.); Bibliography (14 p.). The cited literature (primary and secondary sources) is described in the same type, and contains about 150 titles in English. Footnotes are 448.

The specified volume, structure and number of referenced sources satisfy the formal minimum criteria for a doctoral dissertation. The page numbers in the table of contents are slightly different from the actual ones in the electronic version, which is probably a technical error. In addition, reading and referencing the dissertation is difficult because the ability to directly access the corresponding page in the text from the table of contents is not enabled.

The dissertation summary in English is with a volume of 60 pages, and in Bulgarian – of 67 pages, repeating verbatim the structure of the dissertation and retelling the individual chapters. Only a list of the author's publications on the topic has been added. I think that such a complete duplication of the elements of the dissertation is unnecessary - especially the entire bibliography (13 p.). But even without it, the dissertation summary is too long, while still missing some technical data about the dissertation that the author could have provided for reference.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation are formal evaluation criterion that the author has fulfilled - he has sent a list and copies. He has cited two realized publications in the *Sofia Philosophical Review* (2021; 2022), as well as a paper (2022) from a conference at Nova University, Lisbon, Portugal, with forthcoming publication.

### ***3. Dissertation topic***

The topic of the dissertation is typically philosophical and very suitable for a doctoral dissertation. It is both traditional and innovative, because it refers to philosophical irony not only as a concept but also as a metaphilosophical idea. In fact, the author is interested in the ways of philosophizing, as well as the reasons that cause them. The clarification of the philosophical concept of irony, coming from Ancient philosophy, is important because of its place in modern theorizing, and also because of its possibilities for analyzing other important objects of philosophical interest, such as: the human mental health, the tragic, the tragedy, the tragic thinking. It is in this context and in this connection that the author is interested in the understanding of philosophical irony in the history of philosophy - from the Socratic irony, through the irony of modernity, to the postmodern irony.

In addition, the topic is interesting and current, and it provides an opportunity to read, interpret and systematize the opinions of various authors on the typically philosophical questions raised.

At the same time, it gives the doctoral student the opportunity to reveal his intellectual, research and philosophical potential.

#### ***4. Methodology of the dissertation***

The problem of method is inevitably present implicitly in the dissertation because it is a fundamental theoretical problem for philosophy, as well as for any science. In this sense, it is among the main metaphilosophical problems to which an answer is sought.

My expectations were that the author would find an explicit place for this problem in relation to his research, presenting and justifying the methods he uses. I believe that this, not coincidentally, is the practice in many dissertations. And that is why it is even more expected in a dissertation with a metaphilosophical focus.

#### ***5. Content and structure of the dissertation***

The content is structured traditionally for a dissertation as: an introduction, three chapters, and a fourth chapter: conclusions. The structure is compact and logically grounded. It adequately presents the expected content of the text and directions of analysis on the stated topic. The content corresponds to the title as well.

The **Introduction** briefly introduces the topic and sets expectations. Even there, the author reveals how his approach, while adhering to the established model for the historical study of irony in philosophy, differs from it. First, that it refers to irony as a metaphilosophy - i.e. "a way of practicing philosophy, not just the art of living" (often a witty way of expressing disbelief; or mockery). Second, that he tries to apply irony to real metaphilosophical problems - related to the human essence, the human reason and psyche, the knowledge, the truth, the progress, the history, the philosophical system.

**The first chapter** is "Socratic Irony" and refers to proto-irony, which connects the Socratic irony with the tragic genre and the myth, as a kind of reaction against the Sophists. The Delphic maxim "Know yourself," shared by Socrates, refers to the knowledge of one's own limitations, and together with the denial of knowledge are seen as a complex irony. Closely related to this understanding of irony, as a way of life, is the intellectualism of Socrates ("No one sins knowingly"). And on the other hand, the emergence of Plato's idealism is presented as a reaction to Socratic irony. Along with this, it is emphasized that the acceptance of Socrates, as the undisputed origin of philosophical irony, is always conditional due to the fact that he can only be judged by his followers Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle and Aristophanes. It is also difficult in Plato's Dialogues to categorically distinguish the views of Plato himself from the views of the

real Socrates - because they are mixed like an amalgam in Socrates, as a character of the Dialogues.

**The second chapter** is entitled "Modern Irony" and presents Schlegel's romantic irony, Hegel's idealistic interpretation, as well as Kierkegaard's understanding. It is interesting how Kierkegaard's idea of existence arose as an objection to Hegel's rationalism and logic. At first, irony was opposed to the new mechanistic and naturalistic philosophy of Descartes and the Enlightenment, as well as Kant. It is often used to attack the dominant rationalism to such an extreme that it turns ignorance into the highest wisdom. Through dialectics, irony is presented as a negative force. At the same time, its role in art and poetry is emphasized, especially in the most philosophical genre - tragedy; and the aesthetic aspect is emphasized. But such characteristics of irony as: paradoxicality, an ambiguous attitude towards the philosophical system, and the need for a historical framework are also highlighted.

**The third chapter** is entitled "Postmodern Irony", and presents some views in Anglo-American and continental philosophy. The beginning of deconstruction can be traced back to Nietzsche, whose name is associated with overcoming metaphysics, and Heidegger is defined as the first philosopher - a non-metaphysician. This specificity further becomes the basis of postmodern thinking, which emphasizes our linguistic conditioning and thus revives philosophical irony. In a similar context, the views of Rorty, Derrida, Menke, Paul de Man are pointed out. Philosophical irony is associated with aesthetic negativism, loss of meaning, lack of progress, deconstruction, hermeneutics, discursiveness, narrative, relativism.

**The fourth chapter** is "Conclusions". It is somewhat unusual for the conclusions in a text to be presented as a separate chapter. Obviously, the author wants to give them greater independence and significance, but they still remain conclusions (a conclusion) of the dissertation, based on analyzes in the three chapters, and actually meet these expectations. It is important that there is an overview of the potential of "metaphilosophical irony on various philosophical problems and areas" (as the author claims in the abstract of the Dissertation Summary) but I still think it is better to leave it as conclusions, without naming it as a fourth chapter, they do not correspond to the other three chapters in this way.

#### ***6. Contributions of the dissertation***

Evangelos Kalfopoulos has conceptualized, highlighted clearly and systematized the scientific contributions of his dissertation. In the Dissertation Summary and in the Dissertation, he has identified four main contributions. This clarity and definiteness of the author make a good

impression, because they show not only his own assessment of what has been achieved but also demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the various opinions, that have developed on the subject, in the long existence of philosophy. I consider his self-assessment to be adequate and accept it without objection. In my opinion, it shows scientific awareness, objectivity, originality and criticality, which are important for any scientific research and especially - for philosophical research.

I will point out other positives of the dissertation that I found:

1. Typically a philosophical topic; both current and challenging;
2. Atypical (authors) reading of established concepts and theoretical models;
3. Formulation and attempt to prove new scientific hypotheses;
4. It deals with the history of philosophy, systematic philosophy, metaphilosophy;
5. Logical and consistent structuring and deployment of content;
6. Expressed own position, categorical conclusions;
7. Clear language and style of presentation;
8. Overview and use of primary and secondary literature on the topic;
9. Interesting not only for professional philosophers but also for a wide audience;
10. Openness to practical orientation: mental health, tragic, etc.

The positives show the possibilities of the author as a philosophical analyst of various problems and imply such expectations for his activities in the future.

### ***7. Weaknesses and recommendations***

I do not notice any serious weaknesses of the thesis. I think that the subject is too big and too philosophical, which in itself creates unmet expectations and claims in any reader - especially in those who are tempted in philosophy. The subject of irony is indeed a serious challenge for all thinking people even today. It is not by chance that many famous philosophers have tackled it in their dissertations, or have devoted deliberate research to it afterwards. I will only make technical recommendations that can improve the handling of the text.

1. To allocate more space to the methodological issues in the analysis.
2. The conclusions in the dissertation should be viewed as such, and not as fourth chapter.
3. To facilitate the technical handling of the text of the Dissertation and the Dissertation Summary in their electronic version.

### ***8. Questions to the PhD candidate***

The dissertation raises many questions, as well as an effort to rethink controversial and uncontroversial philosophical concepts and models, which is a good certificate for a philosophical work. I will ask three of the questions.

1. Which of the conceptions of philosophical irony, referred to in the dissertation, contribute to the greatest extent for shaping the author's view of the metaphilosophical nature of the concept of irony?
2. How does the author explain the distancing from *the reason*, seen in many views of the philosophical irony in the modern and postmodern eras?
3. According to the author, are the differences in the interpretation of philosophical irony in different eras of the development of philosophy accidental, or are they systematically determined?

### ***9. Conclusion***

I positively assess the dissertation as a whole - it has merits and shows the qualities of the author to work independently and purposefully in researching and making sense of the theory, to make his own interpretations, to express categorical positions, to write clearly. Along with this, he has realized publications on the topic of the dissertation, which confirms him in scientific circles.

***I vote to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction 2.3. Philosophy (Philosophy taught in English) to Evangelos Kalfopoulos.***

28.05.2023

Sofia

Signature: .....

(Prof. V. Dramalieva, Ph.D.)