

REVIEW

of a dissertation thesis
for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"
in Professional Field 2.3. Philosophy
on topic

ONTOLOGY OF CONSULTATIVE REASONABLENESS

to the PhD student in the Ontology program
at the University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Daniel Alexandrov Ivanov

with supervisor **Prof. Dr. Veselin Hristov Dafov**

by **Prof. Dr. Daniela Vasileva Sotirova**,

a member of the Scientific Jury,

in accordance with the decision of the Faculty Council
of the Faculty of Philosophy dated 11.04.2023, protocol No. 9

About the PhD student and the procedure

On April 24, 2023, the esteemed Scientific Jury has appointed me to prepare this review. I have received the dissertation, the abstract and 6 other documents in connection with this engagement.

I do not know the author of the dissertation. It is clear from the documentation that Daniel Alexandrov¹ is a doctoral student in philosophy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" since 2019. Even as a master's degree, he has worked out topics such as subjectivity, counselling and internet identities. He spent one semester as an Erasmus+ student at a university in Madrid. D. Alexandrov is a moderator, a member of initiative committees and a participant in academic events, all related to the title of the work presented. He taught philosophy to children and schoolchildren. In the abstract of the PhD thesis he even included two separate paragraphs - «Organization of academic events» and «Teaching activity».

It can be seen that the doctoral student has been developing his interest and has "entered" practice on the topic of the dissertation for years and consistently. I positively appreciate such a case of applied-practical engagement of philosophical work and long-term commitment to the researched field.

On the importance of the subject

Here I will put forward such arguments:

¹ Alexandrov is the last name used by the PhD student in most publications, which I will stick to in the review.

First, in the modern social and behavioural sciences there is a methodological need for traditional philosophical concepts such as ontology. The latter, for example, is used *when making sense of expert feedback during the creation and development of teams* - virtual, in long-term projects, with heterogeneous participants from owners, customers, institutions and citizens, when looking for an answer to the general question of *how to improve the ontology development*. It is also discussed what is a *communicative ontology* of the organization. In general, the idea of *modelling the world* nowadays has various concretizations and the interest in philosophical interpretations of the ontological is intensified in different scientific fields.

Secondly, after the 70s of the 20th century philosophical counselling, also called *philosophical practice or clinical philosophy*, is imposed with its organizational forms such as "philosophy house" or "café", especially in countries like the Netherlands and the USA, causing both approval and suspicion due to the lack of certified expertise of the practitioners². Everyone, whether child or adult, has essential needs to connect with others, explore changes in the self, and understand human emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses. D. Aleksandrov's doctoral thesis is a study of the limits of philosophical counselling, aimed at the ontological difference between psychological and philosophical and defining the latter.

Thirdly, the supervisor of the doctoral student Prof. Veselin Dafov continued what was started by Prof. Alexander Andonov, by creating a program and training in "Philosophy for Children" at Sofia University. I am left with the impression that Daniel Alexandrov is a prominent figure in its initiatives³. The topic and the text of the reviewed dissertation are results of what was done under this program. The PhD student has summarized his own experience in specific philosophical counselling, of which there is a growing social need in conditions of a digital and isolationist environment. The social need for new ideas and intriguing work in the field of philosophy for children is obvious when the latter are in front of monitors before they can speak.

Dissertation structuring and content

The dissertation is 291 pages long. More than 200 titles in Bulgarian, English and German are cited in the bibliography on the last 10 pages. The doctoral student knows very well

² They are related to conflicting assessments of philosophical counselling, for example, regarding the practice of L. Marinoff from Canada (Marinoff, L., 1999. *Plato not Prozac*, New York: Harper Collins), about which E. Cohen writes in an article (2004) cited by the PhD student.

³ I found information about this activity at: <https://webstage.bg/filosofiya-i-psihologiya/6509-svetat-si-e-na-myastoto-ptichkite-peyat-roditelite-obichat-detsata-si-prof-d-r-veselin-dafov-i-filosofiya-na-krizata.html>.

the world and Bulgarian philosophical literature related to the topic. Indeed, there are publications by Bulgarian fellow philosophers and psychologists on counselling that have not been mentioned, being not directly related to the ontic and ontological or else being prepared outside the Alma Mater.

The author correctly refers to the legal directives (regulations) in Bulgaria and the European Union related to counselling in childhood and in a digital environment.

The work is arranged in *six chapters*. I will allow myself to comment on them in reverse order. The last sixth chapter is actually the "Conclusion", the fifth is "Appendices (interviews and presentations)", and the fourth chapter has a memorable title - "Project Insights". As is usual for dissertations, three chapters follow, and these are essentially the subject matter in the title of the text.

Third chapter is about *reality of counselling and subjectivity care*. It presents the idea of consulting and "the engagement of consultative reasonableness as projectable care".⁴ This part is the most voluminous and "colourful" - it begins with the paragraph "Sartre and his student", continues with paragraphs on consultative care, consultative medicine and psychology, philosophical and psychological counselling, philosophy for children, and ends with digital competence. The impression of a patchwork of fragments in the desire for comprehensiveness in describing the counselling panorama is unavoidable.

The second chapter, "*Ontology of counselling rationality*", I have taken as the main one in this philosophical work. It has a volume of 77 pages (from 99 to 176pp.) The title is a repetition of the title of the entire dissertation, which is partly problematic, although this is more of a formal than a substantive remark. In this historical-philosophical part, Alexandro starts from Socrates and Alcibiades and reaches Kant and Maria von Herbert. Another literal coincidence - of the so-titled chapter with paragraph No 4 in it - gives the impression of incompleteness. Among all the total of more than 10 paragraphs in this "key" chapter, I single out the following paragraphs as valuable hits with original ideas in the multidirectional disclosure of an ontology of consultative rationality in different perspectives: "The care of self" (pp.115-122), "The care of the soul" (pp. 123-130), "The consultative idea in education" (pp.151-163).

We come to the first chapter „*Counselling Practices*“, consisting of 10 paragraphs. In it, the author distinguished available, diverse and procedural practices - he distinguishes between them according to the availability and reality of the problems and content. Here, there

⁴ P.4 of the Abstract.

is a separate subsection for *the ontological commitment* of the research. In the paragraph "*Consulting practices as presence (existence)*" a detailed terminological analysis of the word «consulting» in different languages, research disciplines and types of expertise is proposed. I argue that this *focus on meaning* and contextuality is in the spirit of classical humanities and academic standards for well-done philosophical inquiry.

The author comes to the «recognition» and taking the research responsibility to erase some differences in the use of the term «consulting». According to Aleksandrov, "... self-distinction in the reality of counselling would remove precisely such ambiguity, even though what makes the difference will not be the results that have become available in the practices, but the very actions of the practicing consultant... If "consulting" sounds professional and specialized, it is. ..'advising' would be close in meaning to everyday use: parental advice, friendly advice, advice from a stranger."⁵ The philosophical character and specifically the focus on ontology justify and require such an interpretation. Consulting as *expertise* and *service* with a market *price* and even *the dialogue* that seems inevitable in philosophical consulting are not used as key concepts in this thesis. It is clear that the text on counselling practices is intended and written as an "invitation to collaborative thinking."⁶

In general, the structure of the dissertation is circumstantial and analytical. In some places, it is too detailed with descriptions of quoted interviews and childish philosophical judgments, which is very entertaining, but also quite difficult to understand as a whole. Undoubtedly, the text presents in full and to some extent consistently the ideas and the author's experience on a specific and beloved field, intriguing for the reader as well.

Scientific contributions in the dissertation work

The doctoral student has described 14 contributions called *scientific (academic)*, specifying that *contribution moments* are contained in 5 of them. Despite the tautological expression, I accept Daniel Alexandrov's self-assessment as credible.

I draw attention to *the second contribution*⁷ with a request to the PhD student to interpret it during the defence. I am guided, first of all, by the understanding that adhering to the conceptual understanding of philosophical counselling as a practice is a condition for the latter

⁵ Pp. 26-27 from the Dissertation.

⁶ P. 11 from the Dissertation.

⁷ On pp. 274-275 of the Dissertation: "As an ontological study, specifically from the standpoint of subject ontology, the dissertation develops and reveals the consultative reasonableness, the idea of consulting and the consultative reality in view of the commitment of subjectivity. *Consultative subjectivity holds in unity its becoming and its own projecting as an actual care*».

not to be understood and desired only as some "*wellness form*". Furthermore, being a consultant today is increasingly appealing to people with different levels of expectation, training, professions (vocations) and general culture, so consultative rationality (reasonableness) should be highlighted and explained.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation

D. Aleksandrov has *six publications*⁸ - one article, and the rest are papers at scientific conferences, proceedings and texts in collective monographs, all of them in Bulgarian. The minimum required points by groups of indicators for Professional field 2.3. Philosophy is 30 points in group G. The five texts of the doctoral student are in Bulgarian academic publications with peer review and they appear in the National Centre for Information and Documentation list, thus he receives 50 points.

In terms of number, but also in terms of variety of publication appearances in periodicals and in Internet forums, the PhD student exceeds the requirements for a doctoral thesis defence. I would recommend him to publish his future philosophical texts in English as well.

Questions for the PhD student

While reading the dissertation, I often asked myself the question: will this be a philosophy of counselling, or is counselling understood as philosophizing? It would be interesting if Alexandrov shared his interpretation. (I'm inclined to think his account is more of the latter). What is reasonableness and rationality being another more general question that came up while reading this work. What is sharing, dialogue, the other's autonomy and intervention? How to describe the client type of relationship in counselling and can we ignore them? These issues would be an intriguing continuation in the research of Daniel Alexandrov.

Notes and recommendations

The terminology could certainly be clarified in case the PhD student continues to work on this issue. For example, there is clutter in the language with all due respect to academic and complex philosophical discourse, a phrase such as "the search for the consultative idea in the projection of types of care towards human subjectivity"⁹ needs editing.

⁸ In the attached table of compliance with the minimum requirements, 5 publications are included, one of which is in print, and the general bibliography to the dissertation begins with 10 of his publications (one of which is co-authored), radio broadcasts and other public appearances are also cited.

⁹ P.6 of the Abstract.

My following note is more of a linguistic and technical one - compared to the usual, the arrangement of Arabic and Roman numbering in the abstract, where the paragraphs are indicated with Roman numerals, is confusing.¹⁰

I think that academic rigor requires specifying when, where, and who (in kindergarten No, at school, during recess, at a children's birthday party, during a lesson in...) the interpreted children's sentences were spoken. I am not commenting here on the responsibility to inform parents and the limits of ethical publicity, but on research rigor in the direction of collecting data for a dissertation work.¹¹

Methodological materials and instructions are proposed or listed as part of the main chapters, including syllabus for exams in programs related to the subject. In some places in the dissertation, such a "mosaic" of the exposition creates the impression of collected texts "in bulk", which I am not sure if it is a drawback of a doctoral dissertation on such a topic. In most cases, entertaining notes from a "philosophy for/with children" class are relevant, but sometimes too illustrative and not generalised.

I use the public review as an occasion to comment on a certain academic guild closure by departments and universities and the lack of interest in similar problematics developed by fellow philosophers, psychologists, cultural anthropologists, etc. outside the relevant institution. For our small country, ignorance of publications and initiatives on the subject in our country when referring to the global English-language publication array is unjustified. The author is far from the only one who does not show interest and knowledge of Bulgarian research and innovations on his subject outside the faculty of Sofia University.¹²

General impressions

The abstract offers an adequate summary of the main theses of the study. It has a total volume of 58 pages, of which 43 pages are the text itself, accompanied by the bibliography and the doctoral student's autobiography.

My overall impressions about the dissertation are entirely positive. I will reinforce the conclusion by saying that the text offers stimulating ideas and meaningful examples, useful for any attempt to practice counselling - be it philosophical or psychotherapeutic, and they multiply in our country as well.

¹⁰ Pp. 6-42 of the Abstract.

¹¹ "The above is part of a philosophical discussion with which we explore the topic of "Space" together with 4-5 year olds" is not quite a precise reference today.

¹² For example, the *"Existential Sharing"* program in University of Veliko Tarnovo (<https://www.uni-vt.bg/bul/spec/>; papers written by Bakracheva, M., (2018), Journal Ethical Studies, No. 3, vol. 2, etc.

The dissertation is interesting and useful for the academic teaching of philosophy, ethics, applied ethics and other subjects in social sciences and humanities. Of course, it is also important for secondary school philosophy teachers, as well as for interdisciplinary research between pedagogy, cultural anthropology and philosophy.

In conclusion,

I will emphasize that the dissertation presented contains theoretical and applied ideas that are up-to-date and very useful for understanding the nature of counselling. My evaluation of the doctoral thesis, the abstract and the published articles of the M.Sc. Daniel Alexandrov, is positive. His work has the necessary completeness and originality, academic and practical significance of a dissertation for the scientific degree "doctor" in Bulgaria.

I recommend the awarding of the educational and scientific degree of doctor to Mr. Daniel Alexandrov.

8/06/2023

/Prof. Dr. Daniela Sotirova/