R E V I E W
By
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Philosophy and Ethics Section, Department of Political Economy, UNWE, Sofia,
Member of Scientific Jury: Faculty of Philosophy Council, Protocol 12/04.07.2023;
Order of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" RD 38-414/14.07.2023
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:
Philosophy via Distance Learning: Theories and Educational Strategies
*Author: **Vincenzo Filetti*** – doctoral student in Philosophy (taught in English), Faculty of
Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

I was appointed as a reviewer of the current PhD dissertation at the first meeting of the Scientific Jury. I received the following materials in English related to the defense in my e-mail: dissertation, abstract, curriculum vitae, list of publications related to the dissertation, copies of three publications, as well as an abstract in Bulgarian. The mentioned documents are reflected in the review that I have prepared, following the usual criteria for evaluating of a doctoral dissertation. Scientific supervisor of the doctoral student Vincenzo Filetti is Prof. Daniela Sotirova, Ph.D.

1. *Brief data on the author*

Vincenzo Filetti is from Italy, where he has graduated in Pedagogy and started working as a Philosophy teacher (1992). He has received a master's degree in International Business from Central Connecticut State University, USA, and then has worked in this country (1999-2003) dealing with personnel selection and multicultural training, while doing research and analysis related to various financial, psychological and managerial problems. He has also worked in the field of international finance in a multi-ethnic professional environment in Ireland (2005-07). After returning to Italy, he has worked as a business specialist and freelance consultant while teaching Philosophy, History, and Psychology in secondary schools and participating in various creative courses, cultural events and performances. He has settled in Sicily (2016) as a certified teacher of Philosophy and History in Syracuse, and together with that he has organized conferences and presentations related to the history of Philosophy and Literature in various institutions - bookstores, cultural associations, etc.

V. Filetti has emphasized his special interest in the topic of the historical heritage and the impact of the Second World War on the local community - especially as a search for psychological and pedagogical possibilities for its application in school as a mechanism for creating emotional intelligence. The information seems superfluous but it is probably too important, since he has decided to present it in detail in his CV, which is otherwise short, in an unconventional (for today) form, and lacking in some basic data.

2. General idea and formal criteria for the dissertation

The dissertation is in English, contains 212 electronic pages, and has the following structure: introduction (7 p.), four chapters (172 p. in total), conclusion (7 p.), appendix (9 p.), and bibliography (14 p.). The cited literature contains 296 (by my count) titles in English, Italian, and French. Footnotes are 357. The specified volume, structure, and number of referenced sources satisfy the formal minimum criteria for a doctoral dissertation. However, following the text is made difficult by the mismatch and confusion between the actual electronic pages (212) and the numbered pages of the dissertation, which are 169. There is also considerable discrepancy in the pagination of the Table of Contents, which is at the beginning of the dissertation. Negligence has been shown in the unification of the style of the sources in the bibliography; mistakes have been made when writing the names of some authors, which confuses the alphabetical order of the list.

The Abstract in English has a volume of 57 pages, and in Bulgarian - 63 pages, where some important topics and problems from the scientific work are commented on, but the content of the dissertation is not symmetrically presented, which confuses the reader. It includes the main contributions of the dissertation, as well as a conclusion and bibliography (13 p.). I think that here the duplication of the bibliography from the dissertation is unnecessary and makes the abstract even more difficult.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation is a formal criterion for the overall evaluation, which the author has fulfilled – he has sent a list and copies of them. He has indicated one publication in *Sofia Philosophical Review* (2021) – "The Man Threw on the Net: a Multidimensional Individual", as well as one that is about to be published there – "Co-participation of students in knowledge building", and there is still no clarity about the third publication.

3. Dissertation topic

The topic is important, relevant, and suitable for a doctoral dissertation. It poses burning questions to the teaching of Philosophy in today's radically changed and ever-changing environment of digital space and communication, while also taking into account the limitations coming from the covid pandemic that has hit us. In this context, solutions to problems related to teaching not only Philosophy, but also other disciplines, as well as teaching in general, are sought.

The topic is discussed in many directions, which allows the opinions of a large number of researchers and practicing educators to be explored. V. Filetti himself also sets such a task - to present and systematize the opinions of various authors on the subject. These efforts benefit the entire teaching community and at the same time enable the doctoral student to reveal his potential - intellectual, research, and philosophical.

4. Methodology of the dissertation

The author understandably devotes a special place to the methods and methodologies related to the teaching of Philosophy, presenting different models of philosophizing. This is indeed a basic and typical philosophical question. On the other hand, the Problem of Method is important for any scientific work and especially for a philosophical dissertation. Therefore, my expectations are that the author finds a special place for this problem in his research, presenting and justifying the methods he uses.

5. Content and structure of the dissertation

The content matches the title. It is structured traditionally for a dissertation, namely: introduction, four chapters, and conclusions. The structure is logically grounded and adequately presents the expected content to explain the topic.

The Introduction presents the changes in the modern global and radically changed information environment represented by the term "infosphere", which includes both cyberspace and classical media. The meaning of e-learning is sought precisely in this context, because all institutions are already introducing online forms of work, education, and training. On the other hand, according to the author, "the clash of technological power and pedagogical weakness" gives rise to many problems that are yet to be solved. The same problems apply to Philosophy. In front of it, as in front of any Philosophy, is the challenge to make sense of the new realities, and at the same time - to deal with a number of problems related to the teaching of this discipline

in the drastically changed environment, where everything is mediated by media serving as "prostheses" to overcome physical distance."

The first chapter is entitled "Teaching Philosophy: Philosophical and Pedagogical Aspects" and introduces basic historical and conceptual definitions of the subject. The "cognitive dichotomy between pedagogy and didactics" is analyzed, as well as its peculiarities in the digital environment. Some interesting models for teaching Philosophy in different cultural environments are also discussed here, namely: Italian, Anglo-American, French, and Spanish.

The second chapter - "Teaching Philosophy on the Web" - discusses some theoretical-epistemological issues. The author uses the analogy of *translation* to define communication in the digital lesson and distance learning, as well as how the "live meeting" is no longer taken for granted, but even more - it implies a continuous "rediscovery of the connection". In this situation, the Digital Philosophy stands out, characterized by its own originality - both in ideas and in its development. The construction of the new reality here is carried out by the computer, which becomes a real "philosophical machine".

The third chapter - "A New Educational Paradigm" - expands the aspects of hermeneutics, referring to Hans Gadamer, Umberto Eco, Paul Watzlawick, as well as other authors who try to rethink human identity in the virtual world, which is increasingly dynamic and changing. And all digital tools are seen as "prosthetics" that are "extensions of human skills".

The fourth chapter - "Digital Education: the Role of Teachers and Students" - analyzes precisely the digital tools. Concepts are offered that are important to contemporary modernity and rethink the understanding of *technique*. At the same time, all of the above carries a huge risk of banalizing the technologies in distance learning. In this connection, the Theory of Connectivism is presented, according to which today knowledge cannot be disseminated without the joint use of digital tools, which are, on the one hand, "environment" and, on the other, "improvement of human abilities". It also emphasizes the notion of the web as a "new and expanded potentially infinite relational dynamic," as well as special technologies for the relationships between people and the world; of the transformation of the text into a "hypertext" which is subject to "navigation - multi-linear and multi-sequential movement, interactive and polyphonic"; of the digital learning environment; of the communication environment that creates a "new otherness".

The conclusion logically ends the dissertation and makes some generalizations.

6. Contributions of the dissertation

In the Abstract (p. 44), the author has indicated a self-assessment of the contributions, having systematized *five points of contribution,* which are reduced to the indication of concepts to which he has paid special attention or interpreted in his own way. He has clarified these concepts rather than stating them as his original ideas. I agree with highlighting the concepts as central and very important, but I think that the contribution nature of the dissertation is still not well-grounded and defended.

In addition to the positive self-evaluation, I will point out other positives of the scientific work:

1) Extremely current and challenging topic;

2) Orientation emphasized to the practice;

3) It is of interest to philosophers, teachers, and a wide range of people;

4) Not only formulates the problems on the subject, but also looks for solutions;

5) Attempt to modernize, adapt, and reformulate philosophical concepts;

6) Skillful handling and analysis of both theoretical concepts and own experience.

The achievements show the author's capabilities as a philosophical analyst.

7. Weaknesses and recommendations

Perhaps due to the importance of the topic, I notice a certain dispersal of the author's research interest in too many directions, which creates a sense of a certain haphazardness in places. I will not repeat the critical remarks and weaknesses made so far. They are easily removable and the author will easily fix them if he is willing. I see no serious weaknesses in the dissertation that would prevent it from being defended. I recommend:

1) To eliminate technical discrepancies in the pages of the text of the dissertation and in the Table of Contents;

2) To standardize the style of describing the bibliography, to comply with the requirements;

3) To devote more space to the methodological issues in the analysis.

8. Questions to the PhD candidate

The dissertation raises reflections and questions that are important not only for the teaching of Philosophy, but for teaching in general. I will ask three of them to give the author an opportunity to more clearly justify his position.

1) *Is Philosophy really failing to adapt to the pace of the rapidly changing virtual reality or is it just an appearance?*
2) *Which of the contemporary "digital tools" does the author find work best as "philosophical tools"?*
3) *Does today's changed communication change the essential characteristics of man as well?*

9. Conclusion

My overall assessment of the dissertation is positive. The author has gone deeply into the problems of the subject and has familiarized himself with a large body of literature on it, while at the same time showing a desire for his own interpretation and solutions. His interest in the subject also unfolds in scientific publications that he has prepared.

I vote to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction 2.3. Philosophy (Philosophy taught in English) to Vincenzo Filetti.

28.09.2023   Signature: ....

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