

## REVIEW

for the defense of a dissertation entitled: "Personal Predictors of Experienced  
Well-Being"

for the degree of Doctor of Science

in the professional field 3.2 Psychology (general psychology - general and age  
psychology) of

Prof. Dr. Margarita Angelova Stefanova-Bakracheva

Author: Prof. Ludmil Georgiev, DSc

The dissertation presented for defense is devoted to a psychological problem as challenging as it is research-oriented and as permanent as it is significant for every person's life. I confess to having reviewed over 120 dissertations and habilitation competitions over the years, which gives me reason to say without exaggeration, "I review, therefore I exist!" but it has been a long, long time since I have come across a dissertation that makes a legitimate claim to the degree of Doctor of Science. If I note the fact that recently the big PhDs are somehow out of the university "fashion", one very important circumstance immediately appears before our eyes, which speaks enough by itself. It is the fact that Margarita Bakracheva has in fact made her scientific growth - she is a professor and a sufficiently well-known and authoritative author, but from the point of view of her academic integrity, this does not seem to be enough, which is why she has decided that it is time to apply for the degree of Doctor of Science. And this speaks of an uncompromisingly positive university identity, which deserves only admiration, all the more so because the desire is firmly backed by this truly unique dissertation. Yes, perhaps such a summative assessment comes a bit prematurely, but I think it is absolutely adequate to the efforts made by the author.

Of course, at first glance, the text is situated within the peculiar boundaries of general and age psychology, and the psychology of health, but

perhaps my damaged thinking sees behind this obviousness and that undoubtedly logical and reasonable comprehensiveness of existential problematics. To paraphrase Viktor Frankl, who said that "all psychotherapy is essentially existential psychotherapy," it seems indisputable that essentially all psychological problematics are also existential problematics. I believe that this message, although not explicitly stated but implied as a suggestion, is one of the fundamental contributions of the thesis, for which I congratulate Prof. Margarita Bakracheva.

Structurally, the work is presented through an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, references and appendices, spread over 309 standard pages, which include 135 figures and 160 tables. An impressive 452 literature sources are used, of which 29 in Bulgarian and 423 in English, all relevant to the issues under study. In other words, by this formal indicator the dissertation meets the established requirements for this type of work. And not only - both the text and the documentation attached by the candidate comply with the scientific-metric requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its Implementation, which is an important condition for reviewing both dissertations and habilitation competitions.

It would certainly not be an exaggeration to say that the dissertation uses an original approach in the exposition of her work - initially a general description of the dissertation is presented, and in the introduction, besides the observations on the topicality of the issues, the main emphases of this theoretical-empirical research are outlined. It is about the theoretical emphasis of the research, namely the use of the central term "experienced well-being" and "well-being", a term that, according to the author, encompasses optimal personal functioning and self-regulation, whose components set in a pure form the content of mental well-being, while social well-being does not occupy a central place in the author's research strategy, which is understandable, since

relationships with others and the environment are sufficiently represented in the components of mental well-being.

In the introduction, moreover, prof. Bakracheva also shares the situation in which she is conducting the research - the period of the Covid 19 pandemic, another ongoing crisis caused by the war between Russia and Ukraine, and the natural disasters that occurred during this time. These in themselves are truly dramatic existential crises that present themselves as a unique research challenge for psychologists around the world, and the author has managed to trace their impact in the Bulgarian cultural context, making the text highly significant not only as a theoretical-empirical study, but also with invaluable practical horizons for the work of Bulgarian psychologists in general, and why not for psychotherapists as well.

In the first chapter, the author shares her original theoretical model to delineate not only the parameters of psychological and experienced well-being, but also of empirical research itself. I will spare myself the interpretation of the other components in this model, as they will probably find their place in other reviews and contributions, dwelling, for obvious reasons, on mindfulness and also on the meaning of life and the search for meaning. It is true that Mindfulness does not have an exact translation into English, but the idea of mindfulness is directly related not so much to Eastern, but more precisely and specifically to Buddhist and Zen Buddhist psychological models, and its inclusion in the dissertation obviously fills me with ill-concealed satisfaction. For the fundamental Buddhist and Zen Buddhist emphasis on mindfulness is not only present in their general theoretical psychological context, but is also essentially the basis of meditation as the practical method of these theoretical teachings. As for the underlying existential function of the problem of the meaning of life and the search for meaning, their empirical conceptualization is indeed very problematic, but then Prof. Bakracheva has shared enough studies

that unambiguously show their direct correspondence with the problem of psychic and experienced well-being.

The second chapter presents the design of the study - object, subject, aim, 5 objectives and 5 hypotheses of the study. Also impressive is the volume of research methods, a detailed description of which I will spare, as it will exceed the required volume for a statement, but I will say categorically that they are relevant to the tasks and hypotheses of the study. Moreover, their choice speaks volumes about the very rich psychological and research culture of prof. Bakracheva.

The third chapter is devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained from the empirical study. Here, the vast array of specific relationships between components of psychological and experienced well-being are precisely presented. It is extremely important to bear in mind that the applied holistic approach to the study of well-being is not only of heuristic scientific value, but the dynamic model for measuring and maintaining well-being formulated on its basis has its undeniable practical significance, through which, as I mentioned at the beginning, Bulgarian psychologists and therapists can find a solid basis for their interventions in people's lives with a view to improving its quality, i.e. the experience of mental well-being. And last but not least in terms of significance - the idea of learning, which in my understanding is again a reference to Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, although not declared in the dissertation, outlines a very possible perspective for Bulgarian psychology, namely the integration of those millennial Asian psychological theories and practices, which is particularly characteristic of American, and in a sense also European psychology in the second half of the twentieth century, and as far as psychoanalysis is concerned, that is, Peter Fonagy and Anthony Bateman's concept of mentalization, also for the first decades of the twenty-first century.

One of the important requirements in reviewing dissertations and habilitation competitions is the sharing of a match or disagreement between the

author's and the reviewer's position on contributions. In this case, I can say that such a match exists - Prof. Bakracheva has formulated quite adequately her undisputed contributions, but at the same time in a sufficiently sparing of praise manner, which again speaks for her own qualities. I have been a reviewer of dissertations and competitions in which the authors were deprived of a similar quality to Prof. Bakracheva's accuracy and made contributions that seemed to be a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Psychology. I repeat - this case is quite different.

The other important requirement is the required remarks to the author, either of a thesis or of a participant in a habilitation competition. In this case, I can quite frankly say that I have no remarks, but I do have a recommendation, not so much as a wish, if, of course, the author accepts it. I am talking about the possible prospect, in a mandatory for me publication of the dissertation as a monographic work, to emphasize the fundamental significance of existential experiences in relation to psychological issues in general, and also the contours of a future interaction between our Bulgarian psychology and the mentioned Asian psychological theoretical models and psychological practices. Of course, this is only a personal wish and in no way binds the freedom of choice of prof. Bakracheva in this future book.

In conclusion, considering the undeniable general, psychological and research culture of prof. Margarita Angelova Stefanova-Bakracheva, the overall contribution of her dissertation "Personality Predictors of Experienced Well-being", her scientific, teaching and creative authority, I take the liberty to recommend to the members of the deeply respected jury to grant her the desired degree of Doctor of Science in the professional field 3.2 Psychology (General Psychology - General and Age Psychology). I believe that this will be an adequate assessment of her research, teaching and creative activity.

19.10.2023

Sofia

Reviewer:

(Prof. Ludmil Georgiev, D Sc)