

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Nevena Asparuhova Panova, PhD, Department of Classical Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia (habilitation in the field 2.1.), member of the Academic jury in the competition for the position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Classical languages), announced in State Gazette, issue 50 / 09.06.2023 and with a candidate **Georgi Ivanov Gochev**, PhD, Chief Assistant Professor at New Bulgarian University, Mediterranean and Eastern Studies Department.

As shown by the candidate's self-assessment and the other documents presented for the purposes of the competition, Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. G. Gochev meets all the requirements of the relevant Bulgarian legislation in the academic sphere and the regulations of NBU for holding the position of "Associate Professor".

G. Gochev's monograph "Freedom from the Shadows. Justice and Education in Plato's Dialogues", Sofia: NBU, 2023, ISBN 978-619-233-24206, with a total volume of 475 pages, is an interdisciplinary study and undoubtedly has the qualities of a habilitation work with a serious contribution to modern Platonism. This is a study that has been worked on for a long time, meticulously, but also inspired. The book also shows an improvement over the manuscript that I know as its reviewer before the Publishing Board of NBU (2022).

The work is dedicated to separate genre-formal and thematic general specifics, or key cores, in Plato's dialogical philosophy, according to the evidence of eight works from different periods (in the order of their analysis: "Phaedo", "Charmides", "The State", "Protagoras", "Theaetetus", "Symposium", "Timaeus", "Laws"). Gochev convincingly defends the narrowing of Plato's corpus to these dialogues already in the preface entitled "They look like us", defining it as inevitable. Their arrangement is not accidental, and I would add that this is how this study is set to a kind of finale, which begins with the dialogue recreating the last conversations of

Socrates and ends with the last work of Plato himself. As for the subjectivity in the selection of specific dialogues, which the candidate himself mentions, it seems important to me – and not unrelated to the requirements of the competition – that this choice is conditioned by his work “as a translator of Plato, of a teacher and a person engaged in public life” (p. 24). This is precisely what Plato’s dialogues teach us: philosophy does not aim at the expression of isolated statements, but a complete *modus vivendi*, which presupposes a good personal education, and aims to educate the members of the community in justice.

Education (educating) and justice as leading themes are linked not only formally, but quite reasonably, as shown already on the opening pages (e.g. with strong statements such as the following: “[I]njustice is above all a specific kind of ignorance”, p. 29), and in the specific analyses, which, however, do not remain focused on these two concepts, but affect, again more than once, a number of others, among which time can stand out, both in a human existential and in a metaphysical perspective, freedom – even a title goal, Cosmos, truth...

Of course, we cannot leave out the concept of dialogue – both as a daily practice and as an approach to dialectics as a significant method of Socratic-Platonic philosophizing, and as a genre definition for Plato’s works. The study examines current (again, starting from the introductory section and moving through the individual chapters – here I would like to point out, for example, one such semantic return to the verb “to enter into dialogue”, διαλέγομαι, in the sub-chapter on sophistic and philosophical conversation types among the analysis of “Protagoras”, p. 126 sqq.) virtually all debates, both in classical philology and philosophy, about the (literary) form chosen by Plato. Both some more specialized sub-questions surrounding the textology and chronology of the dialogues are touched upon, as well as the “big question” of the credibility of the image of Socrates in the dialogues and the authorship of the statements made and the role of Plato himself in their formulation.

This problematic, also developed with a hermeneutic breadth, allows from a careful, gradual, and step-by-step look into the original text and its form to move to an equally smooth, at first cautious, but categorical in the intermediate generalizations comment on the individual philosophical questions considered by the characters in the respective dialogues.

This approach is only one of the aspects of the influence exerted on the author by our common teacher Prof. Bogdan Bogdanov. I point out this influence, because one of the contributions of the work is also a kind of dialoguing with a number of Plato researchers and with their view of Plato’s legacy, in which separate positions and starting points for debate are also framed in the

Bulgarian humanitarian studies (actually mostly connected with the oral and written work of B. Bogdanov, through which we understand a lot about the importance of the oral and the written in the environment of Socrates, Plato and the other “characters” of G. Gochev’s book).

And just as Plato approaches, describing the overall situation of the dialogic meeting, so G. Gochev often pauses, either as an announced digression or as a more implicit inclusion of phenomena or realities from ancient Greek culture and literature, which at first glance are indirectly related to the topic of the study, in order to place each philosophical statement made, as well as the conclusions from his analysis in the necessary context. Just two examples – the pages on the practice of *ephebeia* among the youth (pp. 100 – 103) or of feasting (σύμποςιον, pp. 300 – 304).

If we turn to the more purely substantive contributions of “Freedom from the Shadows”, we must point to the chosen unifying cave metamyth from “The State”, which the author identifies (rightly) as Plato’s most famous passage. Thus, we have a metaphor/allegory, but a highly philosophical one, to connect the individual chapters, but this connection cannot (again reasonably) be fully sustained, since each dialogic context implies a different dynamic of the conversation and its emphases. Therefore, another merit of the work is the parallels and distinctions (with references to other dialogues besides the selected eight) that are made between the “definitions” and on key concepts and themes in the various works – as one of many possible examples, I point to the comment on the notion of the (divine) Cosmos, and hence on the human state described in “Laws” and the differences to “The State” (pp. 431 – 434). From here, one can refer – thematically – to some conclusions about the widely attributed characterization of the Platonic state as totalitarian, with the totalitarian element being reduced precisely to the situation of the prisoners in the cave (p. 193). And if we return to the comparison between “The State” and “Laws”, here one could point out the generalization that leaves the study, that in “Laws” a way is not so much to leave the cave as to reform it.

Having spoken of Plato’s mythopoetics and metaphors, Plato’s frequent recourse to such metaphors, which for us have become almost the beginnings of a specific philosophical terminology, makes it possible, and even advisable, for the researcher of Plato’s “metaspeleology” also to speak through metaphors, as happens in Gochev’s book (even at the level of subtitles of individual sections), and this opens it up to a wider audience, without violating its academic seriousness and correctness.

In terms of recommendations, I would only mention the following. In view of the dialogical statement of the author himself, certain reservations could be expressed to some interpretations (and the dialogue on them could be prolonged). For example, I personally have some disagreements with the proposed commentary on the theories of Edelstein and Szlezák concerning the essence of Plato's (written) dialogue (p. 47 – 50). Moreover, for an academic study, a more explicit segmentation of the content (pp. 5-6) would be useful in order to follow its structure at a glance (and to see at first sight that in the "Phaedo" section there is a type of second introduction on the dialogical form, or that along with "Theaetetus" is to be read also about Plato as a semiotician in direct relation to the theme of imitation). On the other hand, influenced by the literary-philosophical character of Plato's texts themselves, G. Gochev probably does not want to "give away" what follows in the individual chapters on the official pages of the book.

Moreover, this book is long awaited, and the observations expressed in it have been long thought out, as already indicated, including dialogically, not only in academic solitude, but as a Platonic dialogue it remains open-ended and could be continued – both as an individual contribution, and in a community form, and even in a fictional dialogue with the ancients, because they "look like us", if we rely on the title of the preface.

In addition, the overall layout of the release leaves a very good impression.

Beside the habilitation monograph "Freedom from the Shadows", G. Gochev applies with two articles in English, published in refereed and indexed periodicals, as well as with 14 articles (including introductions to his translations from ancient Greek), published in non-refereed, but peer-reviewed or scientific edited journals and collective volumes published after his appointment as Chief Assistant at NBU (2009). Most of the diverse publications from this group are not related to the topic of the habilitation study, but on the other hand, they stay in connection with realized not only translations, but also project and seminar activities, and reflect the interdisciplinary attitude of the candidate to share his research hypotheses and theses with a wider humanitarian audience.

However, I would like to mention also the two monographs and one article included in the candidate's list of scientific publications from an earlier period, which are by their structure collected, because through them the development of the research approach of Dr. Gochev, which always includes a careful look at the original, especially ancient Greek, sources, their philological analysis, but also placing them in a broad reception context, which leads the author

to refer to or to special attention, even at times at first glance somewhat boldly, towards modern and often current cultural phenomena. Exactly such a focus on topics, at first glance quite far from Antiquity, but nevertheless developed with at least implicit supports precisely in it, can be found in Dr. Gochev's articles on the Bulgarian pop-folk music style *chalga* as a way of life and on its poetics (2017), or else about propaganda language and language regulation immediately after September 9, 1944 (2018).

12 citations are indicated in monographs or collective volumes with scholarly review, and a significant part of them are related to (new) translations of ancient Greek authors, of which the candidate is a (co)translator. In the face of Dr. Gochev, we observe the happy coincidence between a researcher and a translator. Therefore, despite the ongoing disputes about the status of the translations, in this case, being accompanied by commentaries – extensive and both specialized and accessible to a wider audience inclined to be attracted to the understanding of ancient culture, they undoubtedly have a high academic value as well.

The candidate reports his participation in two successful educational and artistic projects – “Medea” (2019) and “One Bulgarian Woman” (2021), both – of an interdisciplinary nature, implemented with representatives (teachers and students) from the Theater Department and with external participants. Especially with the first of them, which I know better, the role of Dr. Gochev is also connected with the attraction of both students and representatives of minority groups, with whom various project activities were carried out, aiming to explain through different codes the ancient myth at the heart of Euripides' tragedy. For the purposes of this project, G. Gochev offers a new translation of “Medea”, and the performances of the play become significant cultural events.

Currently, Chief Assistant Dr. Gochev teaches the courses: Latin Language (Law Department), Ancient Greek Culture, Ancient Literature (New Bulgarian Studies Department), Dialogue (Theatre Department). I have no direct observations of his teaching work, but I am convinced that also as a teacher, G. Gochev shows responsibility as well as inspiration in presenting classical languages and culture to a diverse audience, as the results of the student surveys show.

As the attestation card demonstrates, as well as the other materials for the competition, Dr. Gochev, currently acting dean of the Faculty for Basic Education (FBO), has an active public and administrative activity, both in the name of the development of the NBU, and of the model, connecting the education to the justice, defended in his habilitation monograph.

My personal impressions of the candidate's professional development are entirely positive, I know his initiative, along with his disciplined devotion to classical languages since his student years at Sofia University. Even then, G. Gochev tried dialogically, and based on the acquired knowledge, to ask questions and find answers about the values handed down to us from Antiquity.

Conclusion: Because of the already outlined contributions to Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Georgi Ivanov Gochev, and considering his overall research, publication, project, administrative and public activity, as well as his professional and personal positive qualities, I share the opinion that the candidacy of Dr. Gochev in the announced competition for "Associate Professor" in classical languages in professional field 2.1. Philology for the needs of the New Bulgarian University is convincing and I will vote FOR his election.

Sofia, 23.10.2023

Signature:

Digitally signed by Nevena Panova
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(Assoc. Prof. Nevena Panova)