

## STATEMENT

by Professor Ivan Atanasov Mladenov Dr. Sc. (2.1. Philology, Institute of Literature, BAS)

about the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 2.1. Philology (Classical Languages), Faculty of BF, Department of Mediterranean and Oriental Studies with candidate Georgi Ivanov Gotchev with the work **The Freedom from the Shadows. Justice and Education in Plato's Dialogues.**

What will we be free from if we leave the cave of shadows? Or, more precisely, do justice and education offer salvation according to Plato? And some further clarification: how does Plato seek freedom and justice through his dialogues? These general thought-questions emerge at the beginning of the book by Asst. Dr. Georgi Gotchev *Justice and Education in Plato's Dialogues*, submitted for the academic position of Associate Professor. From the very first sentences, the author profusely fills them with sub-questions and ramifications, without setting the direction of the answers and without presupposing ideas or speculating on texts that speak differently. Georgi Gotchev is guided by at least two plot threads as he develops his theme. One is the story of the dialogue he analyses, the other is the narrative of the participants. His own voice does not suggest, does not even interpret, but clarifies to himself what is present and what is missing in the dialogues, without intruding, as if retouching what the characters say in order to highlight the scenes they shape; to color Plato's "dramaturgy", taking care that the composition is faithful to the idea from the set design. Thus, the narrative is guided both "earthly", by the events, but also "heavenly", by historical and mythical references. And the overall composition envelops the reader with the mood most typical of antiquity - serenity. Serenity (*Heiterkeit*), used by Thomas Mann as overall characterization of the ancient world, is the feeling that dominates this book, making it engaging as a novel, whereby even the most complex tresses radiate light and, more precisely, enlightenment. This is its outermost *modus operandi*, in which the others are immersed, each attempting to illuminate it as "the soul of a Sphere, [which] is again a sphere, and this sphere, like the sphere of the universe, moves about itself" (p. 378). This quotation is from the chapter "The Wandering Cause," where Plato, usually perceived as dichotomous, more clearly states a triadic view: "The soul of the world is not made of a monolithic block-as a sculptor carves a statue by removing parts of the stone-but is an alloy cast from three materials, the Self ( $\tau\acute{o}$  αὐτό), the Other ( $\tau\acute{o}$  ἕτερον), and a third which serves as a solder between the two, being itself an alloy between the Self and the Other" (p. 377-78). These words of Timaeus mark the implicit processuality in the development from the

early to the late dialogues-their "dramaturgicality" decreases at the expense of an increase in the "level of speaking" and philosophical content.

In the most academically presented part, the preface, G. Gochev argues the compositional distribution of the chapters of the book. Here he sets his main theme that of justice, developed in the middle of the book: in the third and in the final, eighth chapter. Gotchev calls the analyses in these chapters "two studies on Plato's understanding of justice" (p. 8), where, in fact, we are dealing with two different perspectives on the problem in Plato himself. The third chapter is entitled 'The State' and the eighth 'Laws'. Already here, in the introduction, Gotchev warns of the unexpected result of the study. It will turn out that, for Plato, justice is not just a virtue as a trait of character, but "a situation of relation between human beings, short-term, when we do an action in pursuit of some good, but also long-term, when we live with others in a certain way" (pp. 8-9). This dynamism, which is fashionable today, is still searching for an adequate conceptual system for its analysis. And in the chapters cited, Gotchev demonstrates that Plato himself offers a view and perspectives for revealing it. Moreover, he presents models for analyzing phenomena as they develop, in action. In chapter three, for example, the captives, in the person of a prisoner "extracted in the sun" from the cave, are static, confused, unaccustomed to daylight, unskilled, unlearned to life; the captive who would return to free the others in the cave would likely be chained by them again and doomed to doubts about the truth of what he sees here and outside. In chapter eight, "Laws," and more specifically in the last sentence, Plato is already thinking about "how to colonize the cave and how to make it a home." But these are not two opposing points of view, insofar as the path Plato takes from one to the other, summarized by Georgi Gotchev as "Axiomatics, drama, mimesis!" is not missed. Yet another trichotomy, in which the path as connecting element is the third. Moreover, the path is traversed by Socrates, of whom Gotchev finds a precise definition: 'Socrates is the dramatic personification of what Plato understood as reason' (p. 159). Thus, the world becomes "axiomatcs, drama, reason," a totality achieved in the categories of triadic thinking. That Socrates is the connection personified is also shown through the characterization of his speech in relation to the characters of the dialogues: 'While Protagoras seems firmly connected to the world, Socrates seems to be like on a ship that does not stop rocking' (p. 217). In this swaying-searching, Socrates/reason finds the connections between things in order to assert that the universe is ideal, self-sufficient, and created by the Demiurge, whereas man only resembles it. In this cosmogonic view of the universe there is room for something contingent, which is the sine qua non of modern evolutionist theory. It is a necessity, which is even considered by the name "τύχη" (chance), involved also in the construction of man's character.

The reflection on the structure of the universe and the character of man continues with an analysis of the interaction brought about by chance and new bonding: 'The introduction of turmoil into a system is, in this sense, as much a negative event in a first moment as it is a positive one if it is used as a catalyst for tension between the elements of a composite whole and an opportunity for them to bond in a new way' (p. 392). So, we have a universe/character of man consisting of contingency invading a system of reason and necessity. I propose to conclude this epistemological analysis by mentioning the view of the origin of the universe according to the founder of semiotics, Charles Peirce (1839 - 1914). According to him, three elements are active in this process: first "tychism," according to which contingency or spontaneity is a real agent; next, "synechism" is duration, co-existence; and "agapism"- the love or empathy that glues the first two together. The rational derivation of these three components is self-evident, but another, by implication, can be found as well; it is the non-explicit binding role of Eros (agapism) which in turn is the immediate occasion for the emergence of the dialogue "Pyrrhus".

I did not set out to find examples of triadic thinking in Plato, but they appear so frequently in Georgi Gotchev's book that, for me, they have become one of its most important contributions. There is a crystal-clear example in Gotchev's mention of the Tenth Book of the State, which describes the three modes of being of anything, and how they relate to thinking itself (p. 254). Clearly, these observations will not reverse the notion of Plato as an originally dichotomous philosopher, but at least for me it would be a perfectly legitimate assumption that triadic thinking originated with him. As well as other philosophical problems that we usually point to later authors for, for example, the problem of universals and particulars. Teaching Theaetetus, Socrates advises him, "...and as thou hast succeeded in binding many of them into one kind, try in like manner to name all knowledge in one phrase" (p. 240). Or, the conjecture of conceptualism: 'Thinking, according to Plato, is a transition from the opinion of the particular to the truth of the general' (p. 254). It seems to me that the author of the work, Georgi Gotchev, is not far from a similar understanding. He points out that when explaining the knowledge of abstract ideas and general concepts of things, Plato speaks of "knowledge in process or through a faculty which is called *διάνοια* as thinking which starts from certain hypotheses about the existence of things which it assumes to be true without, however, proving them" (p. 256). The very posing of the question, "Do the senses think, or are they a sort of instrument for reacting to changes in the external environment?"(p. 252) testifies to the same thing. I will just list the more important contemporary philosophical problems that begin with Plato's dialogues: the binarity of thinking, relation, algebra as logic, memory, relativism, even "the thing-in-itself," semiotics, unlimited semiosis, conceptualism, sign and meaning.

In connection with semiotics, I should mention a failed "Excursus on Plato's Semiotics" (262-272), which, thank God, changes almost nothing in the book. In this excerpt, Georgi Gotchev compares Plato's thinking with that of Charles Peirce. The comparison fails for a trivial reason, it is not a view that is being analyzed, but a quotation, and a quotation given through someone else's citation. As is almost always the case, the first citer needed a particular perspective, so he cited incompletely, and Gotchev further translated inaccurately. Just for comparison, the paragraph from Peirce is about half a page and every sentence is important to the definition, whereas the quote in Gotchev, via the foreign citation, is 4-5 lines. The correct inference from the quote is that there is no such thing as an end of the sign chain, despite the existence of the term "final" interpreter, on the contrary, Peirce established the theory of "unlimited semiosis" - sign-formation, which, after all, is nothing but another name of thinking, it does not end and it does not begin. But there is no way of knowing this from the next quotation, which is chosen even more ominously, from Peirce's review of his friend Victoria Lady Welby's book, where the philosopher "paternally" likens his definition of interpreter to Lady Welby's definition of the term "significs" that she coined. Incidentally, the beginning of the Excursus with a quotation from Ferdinand de Saussure is also inaccurate because of the same, unstoppable error of quoting his view of signification but omitting the fact that it is only about its manifestations in the ideal system of language, without reference to external reality. And if from this passage the reader will not find out much about Plato's contribution to semiotics, he should simply pay attention to the other parts, where he may find surprising insights in this area. In Peirce's unfortunate first quotation, we encounter the term "ground", it is the first thing that comes to mind when we see something before we are sure exactly what is before our eyes, as I said, mistranslated. Instead, on p. 260 we read the following reflection by Gotchev on Theaetetus: "Our operational memory creates a copy of reality that we consult when what we see and hear is still unclear and incomprehensible to us. Operational memory allows us to have a small, understood model of reality that we turn to when a situation is not self-evident and self-explanatory". Here is the perfect explanation of the "mysterious", as scholars put it, thesis of "ground" in Peirce, derived from Plato which also appears in scholasticism, most vividly in Meister Eckhardt, then in John Duns Scotus.

The place and genre of this text does not require me to list its contributions point by point, so I will use the tasks that Georgi Gotchev himself sets in his preface - they are fulfilled with much more than intended. This is a work for which for a long time I could not find even a genre definition close in meaning. This incredibly complex book: aporetic, encyclopedic, rhizomatic, would fall apart without the author's ability to clarify, distinguish and hierarchize.

He is aware of this when, in the introduction, he justifies his choice of these dialogues rather than others, and why he does not analyse Plato's philosophy in its entirety, believing that his views are developed and completed in the area of each dialogue, after which they can be opened up to new arguments: 'So I do not see Plato's philosophy as a system, but as a *philosophical game played* with certain rules' (p. 25). It was only towards the middle of the work, in the section *Liberation from the Cave*, that its genre began to become clear to me, which further surprised me. Very few works are representative in this canon; this is a "scholarly biography" of Plato. Authors writing in this genre must combine an uncompromising knowledge of the scholarly field from which their characters come with a subtle sensitivity to the influences of their lives. I am reminded of the American Joseph Brent, who wrote a brilliant biography of Charles Peirce that became a scholarly bestseller. And of Roy Monk's huge biographical volume on Wittgenstein, which reads in one breath. These authors are called historians of ideas or intellectual historians. I am extremely pleased to welcome such a Bulgarian intellectual in the person of Chief assistant, Dr. Georgi Gotchev.

I convincingly recommend the Honorable Scientific Jury to award the academic position of Associate Professor to Chief Asst. Dr. Georgi Gotchev!

Sofia, 08.10. 2023.

