The Notion ‘Philosophical Publicity’ as an Instrument for Analysis of the History of Modern Philosophical Culture in Bulgaria

Abstract

This study begins with the ascertainment that within the comparatively short history of modern philosophical culture in Bulgaria, there are enough grounds to distinguish several relatively independent periods, each with its specific stages. Each of these periods deserves serious analysis. But the study of the history of modern Bulgarian philosophy has to be based on clear methodological premises. When we explain the phenomena and processes of philosophical life in this country, we proceed from the concept of philosophical culture, understood as a complex system incorporating both elements of ideal nature and of non-ideal character. All factors of socio-cultural nature in the lives of the professional philosophers – activities, institutions of knowledge, body of philosophers, formal and non-formal organizations, forums of philosophers and philosophical press – are specified by the term philosophical publicity. Using this term makes it possible to carry out a phenomenological analysis of the different manifestations of philosophy outside its stratum of intrinsic ideas.

Key words

history of modern Bulgarian philosophy, philosophical culture, philosophical publicity

The beginning of the 21st century has found the Bulgarian philosophers facing a very specific problem. They need an intermediate review of the history of a modern national philosophy. This review is necessary with regard to a better understanding of the current state of this culture and outlining the trends of its future development, as well as with regard to its successful incorporation in the post-totalitarian socio-cultural order. As far as the understanding of the history of modern philosophising in Bulgaria is concerned, the efforts of a few researchers seem to be predominantly concentrated on pre-totalitarian age. The situation is different, however, when it comes to the studies on the development of professional philosophising of the totalitarian period in this country. Such analyses are sporadic; they concern only certain sides of this development and are not aimed at an overall presentation. It’s necessary to filling this gap by offering a multifactor analysis on the previous way of philosophising and by offering a generalised picture of the philosophical life of that age. At the same time, it is the result of an effort to show the genetic bonds and the continuity between the way of philosophising in this country then and now.

The study on modern philosophising in Bulgaria – especially in the totalitarian period, have to be concentrated on a very particular addressee, except the professionals from older generations: the younger representatives of the
philosophical body in Bulgaria, who do not have first-hand information on the occupational life of the academy of the this period, and who, therefore, need a better orientation in this period’s characteristic features. Those people often find it difficult to imagine that such a type of philosophy could really exist, let alone understand the current attitude of certain older colleagues, who are firmly connected with the ways of the near past. The totalitarian heritage has not been definitely overcome yet; moreover, its influence will probably be still felt in the years to come. So far, however, it has not been given profound and comprehensive meaning. To go beyond it, we need to give a clear and unconditional assessment of the essence and historical significance of this specific type of philosophising, both in contemporary Bulgarian and in European philosophy.

Study of the modern Bulgarian philosophy has to be based on clear methodological premises. When we explain the phenomena and processes of philosophical life in this country, we proceed from the concept of *philosophical culture*, understood as a complex system incorporating both elements of *ideal* nature (guiding values; principles and methods of scientific and research work; issues discussed; separate views, overall conceptions or reasoning traditions which predominate in a philosophical community) and of *non-ideal* character (socio-cultural function of philosophy; ways of interaction of philosophers with the political power; educational institutions for philosophers, fulfilment areas for them, as well as forms of their occupational contributions; mode of functioning of bodies of philosophers; types of events in which philosophers are involved; mechanisms of distributing philosophers’ views in society, etc.). The definition also includes *personalities* and *communities* – generators and promoters of philosophical ideas. All factors of socio-cultural nature in the lives of the philosophers are specified by the term *philosophical publicity*. This concept is considered as particularly relevant for performing the function of their common denominator.

The concept of ‘philosophical publicity’ denotates the actual social life of philosophy. The term ‘publicity’ differs in meaning to that used by other authors, such as Jürgen Habermas. We have no particular requirements concerning the presence of a “civil society” or “public opinion” as prerequisites for the adequate contribution of the philosophers. The concept of ‘philosophical publicity’ makes it possible to cover the various aspects of philosophising viewed as the act of particular people performed under specific social circumstances. Through this concept, we concentrate on a number of aspects of philosophy as it exists, which are usually overlooked as irrelevant or accompanying a philosopher’s routine occupational activities. The organisational and institutional dimensions of philosophising, however, form a frame of important conditions which determine, to a high degree, its nature. Disregarding those does not make it possible to take into consideration the influence of extra-philosophical factors of development.

By using the term ‘philosophical publicity’, we direct our attention to those sides of philosophical culture that, on the one hand, are the material prerequisite and the genuine tool for influencing the social life of philosophy and, on the other hand, are the face of philosophy in society. Using this term makes it possible to carry out a phenomenological analysis of the different manifestations of philosophy outside its stratum of intrinsic ideas. In this manner, it becomes possible to generate two particular prerequisites: first, for the self-reflection of professional philosophers on the image which they attribute to philosophy in society; and second, philosophers can thus view themselves through the eyes of side viewers who are not tempted by philosophy.
The core and focus of attention of philosophical publicity are the activities performed by professional philosophers, since they lead to the respective results. As well as the strictly theoretical investigations and, possibly, educational practices, which take up a central position in their activities, contemporary philosophers also exercise a number of accompanying undertakings. Amongst those one looms large: popularising in society of the philosophical views, which is achieved through different means. Another significant side of philosophers’ additional activities is also facilitating the process of reception of ideas that have been generated abroad, by means of translation, observation and editorial work. The analysis of professional philosophers’ activities inevitably comprises giving meaning both to the technology of their work and to their motivation, either intrinsically scholarly or extra-theoretical.

The bases of philosophical publicity are the institutions of knowledge, the educational institutions in the first place, since they play a key role in the formation and reproduction of philosophical culture. Philosophical ideas are popularized in society to a large extent through the institutions of knowledge that are specific to the philosophical culture. Another major task which education in philosophy faces is to provide the reproduction of the bearers of the respective philosophical culture by generating people who are professionally trained for the body of philosophers. These educational institutions are also the traditional centres treasuring and keeping alive the interest in philosophy as an activity, as well as in the results of philosophy.

The third principal element of philosophical publicity is the body of philosophers. The particular attention paid to this professional body is based on the concept that each philosophical culture has its own creators and distributors, who give it life and make it public. Therefore, examining every particular philosophical culture presupposes a particular analysis on the manner in which its bearers interact. This analysis should consider the fact that philosophical culture exists not merely as a sum of the results achieved by individual philosophers, but is, instead, the result of the activities of scholars who are an indelible part of a particular community. Regardless of its scope, the body of philosophers itself defines the parameters and trends in the quests of its representatives, such as the dominant problems, the preferred ideological traditions, the standards and methods of theoretical analyses, the criteria of professionalism, etc. The body of philosophers is part of the work of the separate scholar, both as an invisible factor of discipline and as a stimulus to this work.

1 Results of the research work on modern Bulgarian philosophical culture, named Philosophical XX Century in Bulgaria, were published in two volumes: Philosophical XX Century in Bulgaria, Vol. 1 – Philosophical Publicity, Iztok-Zapad, Sofia, 2008; Philosophical XX Century in Bulgaria, Vol. 2 – Dialogical areas, in Critique & Humanism, vol. 28/1, 2009.


3 The institutions for specialized philosophical education in Bulgaria nowadays are: Philosophical Faculty of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (1972) (former Philosophical-Historical Faculty, 1951); Philosophical Faculty of Veliko Tarnovo University “St. Kiril and Metodij” (1995); Philosophical Faculty of South-Western University “Neofit Rilski” (1995); Philosophical-Historical Faculty of Plovdiv University “Paisij Hilendarski” (2004); Department of Philosophy and Sociology in New Bulgarian University (2004).

The fourth key element of philosophical publicity is the formal and non-formal organizations with which professional philosophers are connected. Such organizations are important in their function of infrastructure that is necessary for the philosophers’ successful activities. The pillars of the first sub-type of organization are the institutions of occupational fulfillment of university lecturers and scholarly researchers. In Bulgaria, they take relatively long to form and only gradually do they develop their individual style. Non-formal unions of Bulgarian philosophers (e.g. societies, clubs, alliances, associations, etc.) have their unique history, too.

The fifth and the sixth elements of philosophical publicity are connected with the means and modes of announcing the results of the philosophers’ professional activities. Those are the forums of philosophers and the philosophical press. A scholar’s participation in theoretical forums determines, to a large extent, both their character of explorers and their position within the occupational community. The forums of philosophers and the philosophical press are significant centres where researchers communicate and establish direct personal contacts that often grow into long-lasting professional partnerships. And finally, forums are major centres where philosophers’ points of views confront and where philosophers can withstand their positions in direct discussion with their opponents. For this reason, any attempt to outline a particular scholar or community presupposes a detailed study of the scholarly forums in which they participate. Forums are analyzed according to certain basic indices: scale, types, thematic profile, initiators, participants, regularity, and organization.

The last, but not least, element of the structure of philosophical publicity is the specialized press as a mechanism of making philosophical ideas popular in society, especially at the time before electronic means of communication came in strong. The network of printed organs for disseminating philosophical ideas has its own nature characterized by its own history of formation and by a constant potential to change. The analysis of such printed matter has to be made in concordance with some basic criteria: statute and medium of existence, structuring, the profile of issues and themes, peculiarities of the team of authors. These form the minimum compulsory set of indices according to which any printed matter is discussed, especially a theoretical publication.

Parallel to outlining the features of the separate elements of philosophical publicity as a relatively independent side of the philosophers’ work, also considers their mutual bonds into larger formations. These relatively complete structures are called patterns of philosophical culture. The patterns are stable, yet equally susceptible to transformations. Uniting the components of publicity into uniform patterns meets the urge to demonstrate their inner logic of development through outlining the tendencies of this development. The target is to reveal the genesis of the pattern of functioning of philosophical publicity under both separate phases of its transformation.

In analysis of phenomena in the Bulgarian philosophic culture I employ the procedure of typification. The aim is to concentrate on their most characteristic features, as well as to relieve the study of the pretention of being exhaustive when presenting the facts of the matter. This also concerns the selection of data and the search for the most characteristic features of the previous types of philosophizing, at the same time holding out prospects to outline the aberrations from the dominant work pattern. On the other hand, typification makes it possible to follow a uniform pattern when studying the various elements of philosophical publicity during the different stages of evolution of philosophical culture of the period discussed.
When analyzing modern philosophical culture in Bulgaria, we have to apply the *genetic* approach with the aim of revealing the dynamics of the processes determining their formation and evolution. Applying the genetic approach helps clarify evolution in terms of the manner in which professional activity was carried out in the period to date, in its continuum. This approach makes it possible to reveal the succession, as well as the relevant differences, in the structure and functioning of philosophical culture in its separate stages in this country. Applying this approach is also an attempt to counteract *ahistoricism* in understanding what philosophizing was like in the modern age. Ahistoricism represents reality as static and equalizes the essence of phenomena which appeared in different socio-cultural contexts.

Within slightly more than a century, since the Liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman domination in 1878, the professional philosophy in this country has gone a long way full of complications and controversy. The relatively frequent and radical transformations of the frame conditions, under which the philosophers in this country have been working, have hindered the outlining of somewhat lasting features and stable traditions of the philosophers’ work during that period. However, within the comparatively short history of modern philosophical culture in Bulgaria, there are enough grounds to distinguish several relatively independent periods, each with its specific stages. Undoubtedly, the totalitarian period, which lasted for almost half a century, deserves major consideration. This period was preceded by the pre-totalitarian age, whose beginning was marked by the foundation of an independent national state and which continued up to the end of the Second World War. The totalitarian period was followed by the post-totalitarian period, which has not come to an end yet. Each of these periods deserves serious analysis. The connection between the totalitarian and the post-totalitarian periods is of a particular importance. The features of the philosophising of the current period cannot be understood without a comparison with the nature of the philosophical activity of the preceding age.

In an outline, there are four major periods in the evolution of Bulgarian philosophical culture from the beginning of totalitarian age onwards. This division

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5 Some of the institutions for specialized philosophical research are: Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge (former Institute of Philosophy, 1945) at the Bulgarian Academy of Science (2010), Institute for Medieval Philosophy and Culture (2000), and Institute for Bulgarian Philosophical Culture (2011).

6 Some of non-formal organizations of professional philosophers in Bulgaria are: Bulgarian Kantian Society (1991); Bulgarian Philosophical Association (1995); Association of Teachers on Philosophy (1995); Association of the University Lecturers on Philosophy in Bulgaria (2002); Bulgarian Ontological Society (2005), Bulgarian Philosophical Society (2012).


8 The electronic philosophic journals in Bulgaria are: Dialogue (2001); Nota bene (2009); Philosophia (2012).


10 My interpretation of this problem can be found in the text “Genesis of the Modern Philosophical Culture in Bulgaria”, in: Philosophical XX Century in Bulgaria, Vol. I – Philosophical publicity.
into periods closely follows the development of the political situation in Bulgaria, inasmuch as philosophy, in its capacity of ideology, directly serves the political course of the communist party and has no rhythm of development of its own. The initial period of the formation of totalitarian philosophical publicity is provisionally called the “Cult Period”, since it coincided with the so called period of the triumph of the “personality cult” in the management of this country. It covers a period of about ten years, from the mid ‘40s to the mid ‘50s of the 20th century. The period of maximum development, yet of initial erosion as well, of this publicity is denominated as the “April Period”. It was the longest and lasted between the late ‘50s and the early ‘80s. It is so called since it began and continued in the spirit of the political course that was formulated at plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party held in April 1956. The transitional period between totalitarian and post-totalitarian philosophical culture spans the decade between the mid ‘80s and the early ‘90s when the democratic changes began, after the initial attempts to “restructure socialism” had failed. The latest period, provisionally called “Post-Totalitarian”, began approximately in mid ‘90s of the 20th century and has continued to date. This period has witnessed a new type of philosophical culture of the post-totalitarian age.

In the end I will make an attempt to put forward an overall assessment of the development of the Bulgarian philosophical culture during the totalitarian period, as well as to outline the problems it faces during the post-totalitarian period. During the totalitarian period an experiment was performed – on in a series of historical experiments made in the “socialist world”, including Bulgaria – in which philosophizing was included within a different cultural form: that of ideology. The experiment was unique not in the mere act of the subordination of philosophy, but in the extraordinary character of the receiving cultural form – politics. Unlike the previous symbioses of philosophy, like with religion, for example, in that case it was a matter of degrading philosophizing to a serving position with regards to a cultural form which was not oriented towards spiritual activities. Serving the current interests of the politically empowered brought utter disgrace to philosophy since it was reduced to apologetics of state political acts. This mode of existence delimited its most characteristic features: unselfish search for truth, breadth of outlook, impartiality of reasoning about reality, diversity of viewpoints, and critical attitude to the world. Philosophizing was carried out under permanent control. The results were “planned”, as if it were a matter of manufacturing an ordinary material product. Under the circumstances, the quality of philosophizing was bound to drop considerably which lead to the creation of numerous routine texts, void of diversity, written by semi-anonymous “philosophical workers”. An author’s contribution lowered, proper creative exploration almost entirely disappeared. Professional qualification, competence and the potential for adequate participation of philosophers in the international debate of ideas rapidly deteriorated.

Despite the extremely unfavourable conditions concerning philosophy in the totalitarian age, it managed to survive. It is precisely the successful preservation of philosophy that is the major contribution of the philosophers of that time, in particular of those personalities who managed to retain the high standards of their professionalism intact. The general level of philosophical analysis was considerably lower than that of the contemporary philosophers who had lived and worked under the favourable social conditions “in the West”; besides, the freedom of philosophers’ thinking was rather limited. Nevertheless, these people performed their major mission: to pass the baton of interest
in theoretical searches to the generations to follow. This was made possible due to the successful performing of some activities which were of particular importance to the survival of philosophizing. To begin with, knowledge of the past of philosophy – world, and particularly European – was transferred. Then, satisfactory competence on topical ideological issues abroad and on the debates carried out there was maintained. Besides, the institutions and “technology” of professional activities, both research and educational, were more or less properly kept up. And last but not least, though mutilated, the core of philosophy – its critical spirit – was transferred. Those were the achievements of the leaders, mostly informal, of the body of philosophers and as such they deserve recognition. Owing to them, Bulgarian philosophical culture was not entirely torn away from the philosophy that evolved “behind the iron curtain” and at the end of the day it was able to re-integrate into the “Western” philosophy.

During the totalitarian period, Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria, managed to amass valuable experience concerning the existence of philosophy under new and so far unfamiliar conditions. This experience needs to be broadened and to become generally known to philosophers in this country and abroad, for this approbates yet another possible, though generally non-productive, mode of philosophizing. In the long run, this experience carries an optimistic message from a past and important „episode” in the long history of European philosophy. The lesson it teaches is that no matter how unfavourable the socio-cultural situation may be, philosophy of the Old Continent has been amazingly viable and adaptive, and its representatives have been able to sustain it, though not in the best of manner. Despite the fact that it has not been made public, resistance of part of philosophers from Eastern Europe, from Bulgaria as well, against the attempts to eliminate freedom and plurality of thought, and against the ambition to abolish philosophy’s critical fervour has been strong enough to ensure philosophy’s reproduction. It is a different matter, though, that in order to rise to actually significant ideological insights, philosophers need to function in a far more benevolent social environment.

For the time being, the adventure of binding philosophy with politics seems to have come to an end. There can hardly be a sensible philosopher who is not fully aware that going in this direction leads to a dead-end. Moreover that most of the philosophers who worked during the totalitarian period have tasted the bitter fruit of that recent experiment. However, it is worth bearing in mind the experience gained after philosophizing was bound with yet another cultural form. The reason is that the temptation to turn philosophy into an instrument in favour of other forms of culture, and why not of politics again, still feels very strong. The lesson we have learned from this “episode” in the history of European philosophy is that the danger of starting again along the road to the instrumentalisation of philosophizing should not be underestimated. In other words, attempts may be made to directly involve philosophizing in serving the political and economic juncture and to reduce it to an apology of power, i.e. it may be re-ideologised. On the other hand, of course, new symbioses of philosophy might arise as well, the results of which may be regrettable. Therefore, constant efforts should be made to retain the relative independence of philosophical speculation and not to allow this to perish as a result of the over-confidence in the infinite capabilities of philosophy to adapt in all possible socio-cultural conditions.

The experience amassed during the totalitarian period has mainly been negative. This, however, does not mean it should be disregarded. To begin with,
we should not forget the praiseworthy resistance, on the part of a number of Bulgarian professional philosophers of that time, against the policy of subordination and abusing of philosophy by the political power. On the other hand, some of the valuable theoretical results obtained at that time can still possibly be utilized. It is worth remembering the significant research work carried out under difficult conditions. To conduct those investigations, it was necessary to overstep the bounds of the officially assigned role of philosophy. Such exceptions, however, can be understood and judged on their merits only against the background of the overall nature of philosophizing at that time. Nowadays, we do not explicitly need particular protection or re-confirmation of really significant achievements of the near past, since no living person can impose a ban on using them, nor can they be treated with disregard. If such valuable heritage exists, it should just be used, especially as an asset in science. It is a different matter, though, that it deserves being presented to those who are not familiar with it.

In the post-totalitarian age, the old philosophical culture has almost completely been demolished and the formation of a successor of a new type has already begun. Comparison of the two types of philosophical culture has revealed that as well as a number of advantages, the new type has also certain deficiencies of its own. Professional philosophers are faced with specific problems, one of the most acute being the arduous financing of some of their professional activities. For example, their participation in international forums in Bulgaria and, above all, abroad has been rendered exceedingly difficult particularly because of the tormenting fundraising process. Insufficient financial resources have been a hindrance to their normal publishing activities, too, i.e. to the publication of their own works or of translated studies. Yet, the successful outcome of the efforts to form a new type of philosophical culture is not guaranteed. A pattern of functioning of the Bulgarian philosophical culture has been inherited from the previous age and a number of frame conditions are still present that facilitate the partial conservation of some of the features of the above pattern. Despite the significant changes, it has not been totally demolished and replaced by a new one. Some of its “technological” and “mental” elements have been preserved, like: institutional infrastructure and normative base for its functioning; patriarchal and feudal spirit reproducing in the inherited but unreformed organization, structures and rules of work; recurring forms of occupational interaction which are not characteristic of “open societies”, e.g. domineering and patronising relations among colleagues; harmful habits, stereotypes and practices in research work, etc. In general, reforms have not been completed and the pattern of national philosophical culture that functions in this country has not been entirely liberated from the totalitarian heritage. This is mostly due to the preservation of principles on the bases of which scientific activities and higher education in Bulgaria have been organized, as well as to the long delay of reforms in these spheres.

Nevertheless, the changes are so profound that the process of normalization has reached a stage when the professional work of Bulgarian philosophers is almost entirely commensurate with the work of their colleagues coming from countries which have not been through a totalitarian rule. The expectations of changing the status quo are mainly associated with the activities of the new generations of philosophers, beginning their work in the last years of the 20th and in the first years of the 21st century. They are a new type of people who have been formed as personalities and professionals almost entirely in the
post-totalitarian period and, therefore, are not committed with the previous period in terms of values, ideas, or emotions. Supported by their older colleagues, the representatives of the new wave in the body of professionals are called upon to finally establish a philosophical culture of Western European type in Bulgaria.

Dobrin Todorov

Pojam ‘filozofska javnost’ kao instrument analize povijesti moderne filozofske kulture u Bugarskoj

Sažetak

Ključne riječi
povijest moderne bugarske filozofije, filozofska kultura, filozofska javnost

Dobrin Todorov

Notion der „philosophischen Öffentlichkeit“ als Instrument zur Analyse der Historie moderner philosophischer Kultur in Bulgarien

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselwörter
Historie der modernen bulgarischen Philosophie, philosophische Kultur, philosophische Öffentlichkeit
Dobrin Todorov

La notion de « publicité philosophique » comme instrument de l’analyse de l’histoire de la culture philosophique moderne en Bulgarie

Résumé
Cette étude commence par la constatation qu’il existe, dans le cadre de la relativement courte histoire de la culture philosophique moderne en Bulgarie, suffisamment de raisons pour distinguer plusieurs périodes relativement séparées, chacune comportant des phases spécifiques. Chaque période mérite ainsi une analyse sérieuse. Mais l’étude de l’histoire de la philosophie bulgare moderne doit être fondée sur des prémisses méthodologiques claires. Lorsque nous expliquons les phénomènes et les processus de la vie philosophique dans ce pays, nous partons du concept de culture philosophique, entendue comme un système complexe incorporant à la fois des éléments de nature idéale et de caractère non-idéal. Tous les facteurs de nature socio-culturelle dans la vie des philosophes professionnels – activités, institutions du savoir, corps des philosophes, organisations formelles et non formelles, forums des philosophes et presse philosophique – sont indiqués par le terme de publicité philosophique. L’emploi de ce terme permet d’effectuer une analyse phénoménologique des différentes manifestations de la philosophie à l’extérieur de son strate d’idées intrinsèques.

Mots-clés
histoire de la philosophie modern bulgare, culture philosophique, publicité philosophique