

## REVIEWER'S OPINION

**for Martin Akanaefu's doctoral thesis on the topic "The Dialectical Unfolding of Spirit in Hegel: A Fallibilist Account of Knowledge"**  
**for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Philosophy", (PhD),**  
**Professional field 2.3. Philosophy**  
**by professor Tatyana Petrova Batuleva-Kancheva, DSc, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences**

### 1. Basis for preparation of the review

I participate in the composition of the Scientific Jury according to the Order ПД 38-277/03.06.2024 issued by the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" Prof. PhD Georgi Valchev and I am the author of this review according to the Decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury.

### 2. Information about the candidate

Martin Akanaefu holds two bachelor's degrees: in philosophy (1998-2002) and in theology (2003-2007). He graduated from Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles (2015-2017) with an MA in Philosophy and California Coast University, Santa Ana (2016-2018) with an MA in Psychology. In the period 2020-2024, he is a doctoral student at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". He has extensive work experience as a university lecturer, deputy director, and secondary school teacher (2014-2024). He is a member of the following professional associations: National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS); Psi Chi Honor Society; Delta Epsilon Tau National Honor Society; and Tau Golden Key International Honor Society. The future Ph.D.'s impressive resume also includes a Delta Epsilon Tau Honor Award, as well as triple Summa Cum Laude honors in philosophy, theology, and psychology. The documents submitted by the applicant correspond to the requirements of the National Center for Information and Documentation and the Regulations of the Administrative Procedures of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

### 3. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

Martin Akanaefu undertakes a significant challenge: on the one hand, to justify the dialectical unfolding of knowledge, the becoming of consciousness and self-awareness, and on the other, the dialectical self-development of Spirit in the light of epistemic fallibilism, in which justification is always incomplete and open-ended.

In terms of content, the dissertation consists of five chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. The text is spread over 215 pages and includes 8 pages of rich and actively used literature.

**Chapter One** serves as an excellently structured **introduction**. Even here, the qualities

of the proposed work are evident: goal, subject, research tasks, scope and significance of the research, as well as introduction of the concepts and method. The purpose of the study is: "to determine the place and role of the fallibilist account in the dialectical evolution of the Spirit, paying particular attention to the epistemic justification based on a specific interpretation that can be called *"Hegel's dialectical fallibilism"*". The author's main methodology is the dialectical method. Martin Akanaefu binds to a rich arsenal of research tasks: Are there elements of skepticism in the process of the dialectical development of knowledge? Can we say, that Hegel's dialectical speculative philosophical system is a fallibilist interpretation of knowledge? Questions to which the dissertation gives an argumentative answer in his presentation, the leading one of which is that there is reason to assume that Hegel's dialectical speculative philosophical system possesses elements of fallibilism. The author undertakes to substantiate the thesis that Hegel's dialectical method can be interpreted as a fallibilist account of justification. He introduces his thesis by looking for argument in Hegel's distinction between certainty (being sure of what is here and now) and truth; in the role of the internal contradiction of what consciousness experiences in the various stages of the dialectical movement. Here, quite rightly, the author also includes a historical overview of the origin, roots, and evolution of fallibilism, emphasizing the specificity in the readings of Peirce, Kuhn, Popper, and Quine.

**Chapter 2. The Dialectical Evolution of Spirit in the Hegelian System** aims to explicate *the internal contradiction* that marks each stage of the evolution of Spirit leading to a higher actualization. The very nature of the dialectical method offers both a circular proof and an element of infinite progression and incompleteness of the proof. This testifies that the principle of fallibility cannot be completely excluded. Hegel's dialectic shows that uncertainty manifests itself at various stages in the movement of absolute Spirit: sense perception, sensation, passive and active reasoning, and mental states cannot serve as an infallible basis for knowledge. By tracing the dialectical path of absolute Spirit, Martin Akanaefu discovers moments that convincingly prove the existence of a fallibilist interpretation of knowledge.

**Chapter 3. Fallibilism in Hegel's dialectic of skepticism**, convincingly analyzes the analogy *between Hegel's dialectical skepticism and fallibilism*. The author emphasizes that skepticism is intrinsic to the dialectical process because it is necessary to trace the path of the Spirit: eg, having already risen to a higher stage, looking back, consciousness finds that what was previously experienced is not the truth of this experience; or, the contradiction between the master's efforts to achieve independence, lead to his inevitable dependence on the slave.

At the same time, Martin Akanaefu convincingly argues *the difference between dialectical skepticism and traditional skepticism*. In contrast to the fatalism inherent in classical skepticism, dialectical skepticism is distinguished by its constructiveness. It carries within itself a positive rather than an abstract negation. One of the main features of fallibilism that

dialectical skepticism possesses is the maintenance of the thesis that knowledge or truth is incomplete, open, and always in need of further justification. Akanaefu's conclusion is that the skepticism inherent in the dialectical movement, as the starting point of the need to seek something beyond oneself, is essentially fallibilism.

**Chapter 4. Hegel's speculative philosophy and fallibilism.** In addition to the indeterminacy of truth and knowledge, the doctoral student also finds signs of fallibilism in Hegel's speculative process, to whom the fourth chapter is dedicated. In Hegel's speculative conception, built on *circular triadic movement*, opposites are grasped in their *unity*: this implies mutual dependence, so that none of the elements can be valid without its opposite. In Hegel's dialectic the affirmative thesis brings out its antithesis to find completion in the synthesis, which continues the movement by sublimating the unity into a new, higher concept, which is posited as a thesis for further sublimation.

The doctoral student also finds traces of fallibilism in *Hegel's categories*: dynamic and transforming, they mark the spiral path to the Absolute. Akanaefu illustrates the fallibilist model of categories of thought by the identity of pure being (thesis) and nothingness as emptiness (non-being).

At the end of this chapter, a *comparative analysis of Hegel's speculative philosophy and critical philosophies* as two different approaches to understanding the possibility of security is offered. The analysis reaffirms the possibility of a fallibilist reading of Hegel's philosophy, agreeing with Stace's thesis that Cartesian self-evident truths are one-sided and misleading. Unlike critical philosophies, which elevate certainty on a pedestal and set an insurmountable line between truth and error, the categories of speculative philosophy are *alive and dynamic*. For Hegel, pure being and nothingness meet in becoming. Another feature of the fallibilism embedded in the Hegelian system is that *the imagination* is not a deceptive force dangerous to reason: through it, reason reaches its apotheosis in the aesthetic act. It frees the mind from the shackles of understanding

**Chapter 5. Hegel's dialectical fallibilism and epistemic justification.** In the final chapter, the marks of fallibilism in Hegel's dialectic are sought in the challenge to the fundamentalist view of traditional logical truths as self-evident or self-proving truths (the principles of identity, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle). The conclusion is justified that without a dialectical movement between thinking and reality, without the identity of opposites, truth is abstract, incomplete, and one-sided. No less isolated and misleading are the mathematical and geometrical truths, which are also not protected from uncertainty: due to the impossibility of including the dialectical movement, they lead to a bad infinity and a bad reality. Both the laws of nature and several mathematical and logical truths are based on both obviousness and some assumption and even uncertainty. The self-development of

consciousness and the becoming of the subjective spirit take place *according to the principles of Hegel's unconventional logic*.

#### **4. Contributions of the dissertation research**

The three contributions modestly mentioned by the author are beyond doubt. Besides, others can be added to them.

1. The thesis of the presence of fallibilism in the Hegelian dialectical movement is substantiated.

2. The dissertation work has an *innovative character* because it fills a certain void in the interpretations of Hegel's dialectical evolution of the Spirit. The hypothesis that Hegel's speculative philosophy and dialectical skepticism involve principles of fallibilism is convincingly and competently defended. The thesis about the specificity of dialectical skepticism is explained and reasoned: it, on the one hand, it carries elements of fallibilism; and, on the other hand, is radically different from traditional skepticism.

3. A dialectical movement of Spirit involves its development into soul, consciousness, mind, objective Spirit, and absolute Spirit. But the very indeterminacy also implies progress and accumulation of knowledge and self-development of the spirit. Contradictions are removed and synthesized, but in such a way that none of them is true by itself, but only true together.

4. In-depth comparative analysis between critical philosophies and speculative philosophy (based on their claims of epistemic justification, infallibility, fundamentalism, interpretation of mechanical laws, logical principles, and metamathematical truths) is proposed. Martin Akanaefu is an excellent connoisseur not only of Hegel but also of his leading English-language interpreters. In addition, he builds his interpretation, and skillfully dialogues with them. Hegel's dialectical and speculative system has several advantages over critical philosophies such as those of Descartes or Kant.

5. There is a pronounced authorial presence. The dissertation expresses his position and distinguishes himself from a thinker like Hegel regarding Kierkegaard's thesis that there are also absolute opposites and not only contradictions.

6. A special nuance of the work presented by Mr. Akanaefu is that in his substantive analysis of one of the most complex philosophical systems, the influence of the Neo-Thomist school can be detected, as well as a preference for continental philosophy. This makes his reading particularly original and multidirectional.

## **5. Notes and Recommendations**

The text of the second chapter (which is descriptive) is unreasonably long compared to the other chapters (where the author's analysis is focused). My recommendation is that the work be published in Bulgarian and in English. Contributions are correctly worded. The abstract objectively reflects the content of the dissertation. The dissertation student has participated in some international conferences, he has 3 articles on the topic of the dissertation. They are relevant to the researched issues and dedicated respectively to skepticism in Hegelian dialectics, the dialectical triad of the categories of being, non-being, and becoming in Hegelian philosophy, and the challenges through multiculturalism, identity, and recognition in the context of Hegelian dialectics.

## **6. Conclusion**

Taking into account the merits of the work "The Dialectical Unfolding of Spirit in Hegel: A Fallibilist Account of Knowledge" , I will confidently vote for Martin Akanaefu to be awarded the educational and scientific degree **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**, and I call on the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to support this decision.

30.08.2024

Professor Tatyana Batuleva, DSc