

Review
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Professional field of study 2.3 Philosophy (History of Philosophy)
for
awarding the academic degree of *Doctor habilis*
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to the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva

The dissertation titled *To(wards) the concepts τὸ δίκαιον and ἡ δικαιοσύνη in the practical philosophy of Aristotle* written by Assoc. Prof. Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva meets all formal and content requirements for participation in a procedure for awarding the academic degree of *Doctor habilis*. The dissertation contains 338 pages, a bibliography of 445 titles in seven languages and 20 internet sources, such as the original editions of Aristotle’s texts and the most frequently used translations in other languages; the Bulgarian translations of Aristotle; other cited and used sources in alphabetical order. The abstract of 80 pages provides 12 publications of the author on the chapters of the study and the papers referring to the themes of the dissertation presented by Assoc. Prof. Dimka Gocheva at different scholarly forums between 2007 – 2019. The abstract reflects accurately the essentials of the dissertation, which is structured as follows: Introduction; Chapter One, divided in three Parts, 18 sub-parts; Chapter Two, divided in three Parts, 15 sub-parts; Chapter Three, divided in three Parts, 13 sub-parts, among which stands out the translation of Book Five of the *NE* (p. 242-283) and a commentary to the translation. The Conclusion (p. 293-312) conveys the impression, at least to me, of a “mini” dissertation since it states categorically and concisely upfront Aristotle’s most significant theses (concerning *phronesis*); “the applied actualizations of Aristotle’s practical philosophy in the philosophy of the Modern times and in the contemporary thinking” (p. 307) concluding with the answer provided by Aristotle to one of the most important questions even today: “Why should man be virtuous and just?”

The study, as the author points out in the Conclusion (p. 293-299), is a result of a 15-year profound academic interest and succeeds in an “interdisciplinary tracing of the history of

maturing of several ideas, culminating in his (Aristotle's) practical philosophy". Indeed, the study possesses a number of merits, some of which are clearly stated in the 6 contributions, listed in the abstract (p. 76), namely: 1) It demonstrates the unbreakable bond of the humanitarian knowledge of antiquity and analyzes the birth and the growth of the ideas of the just and justice according to Herodotus, Thucydides, Sophocles, and Plato. 2) It proves convincingly the way in which Aristotle rethinks and conceptualizes the ideas, inherited from his four predecessors *via* the modal triad *dunamis-energeia-entelecheia*, in which two of the concepts are Aristotle's personal linguistic and conceptual innovations. 3) It demonstrates the immanent ties between the ethical, political, and the constitutionally-historical concepts of Aristotle, which form his practical philosophy. 4) It justifies the basic function of the anthropology for the practical philosophy by pointing out the indisputable importance of the concept of the soul as *entelecheia* of the body, and the immortality, but also the impersonality of *nous*. 5) It uses effectively the method of mapping in two parts of the dissertation – to mark and analyze the antilogies in *The History of the Peloponnesian War* and to differentiate the places in Plato's *Republic*, where the just and justice are ontologically and modally rethought. 6) It offers a translation of Book Five of the *NE* with the parallel Greek text with strict adherence to the terminological and conceptual precision to the forms (*eide*) of the just and justice.

The first contribution is evident since the study enriches a number of connected and yet comparatively independent disciplinary fields, such as history of philosophy, history of ethics and law, historical and cultural anthropology, history of political studies, classical philology, philosophy of language. In as much as the central theme encompasses two concepts, analyzed hermeneutically in their development from antiquity until contemporary theories of justice, I would guess, the study surpasses the required and achieved coherency of the interdisciplinary approach, and although the author does not state it explicitly, it can be referred to a broader sphere's horizon, known as history of ideas or *Begriff Geschichte*. Another merit of the study, in my view, is the lively language, the peculiar narrative quality demonstrated by the author, which shows a trust in the life-affirming philosophy of Aristotle, a mastery over literary forms and even a predisposition towards everyday parlance which refreshes the expected dry academic subject: the writing reads captivatingly, which is rare. It is essential that the style be preserved, especially if the dissertation is published as a book – except for the places where it is more personally emotional. It guarantees that the work will reach a broader audience. Another merit is the

confidence with which the author, possessing rich erudition and knowledge on the vast scholarly literature on the topic, distinguishes her own original interpretation compared to the reviewed thoughts and stances. In fact, the originality brought to the front and argued successively, is the required and to an extent sufficient condition for the positive evaluation of the work as a whole. Overall, the merit of the study is mostly in the author's predilection towards the *actuality* of Aristotle's heritage proven as early as the choice of the topic of the dissertation and the special attention paid to Book Five of the *NE*. The contemporary relevant studies specifically confirm that the variety of meanings of Aristotle's concepts *dikaion* and *dikaiosune* in Book Five are the fundament of our modern understanding of justice and so it is "important to understand their exact meaning". Dimka Gocheva's dissertation definitively contributes to the advancement in this mutual task in the contemporary philosophy.

Briefly and in sequence the following should be pointed out as valuable research inclinations and achieved results: the distinctive idea behind the study based on three thematic circles: the retrospective one; Aristotle's reconsideration of the acquired from previous authors *via* original concepts (the *Aufheben* of the philosophizing of Herodotus, Thucydides, Sophocles, and Plato on the just and justice in the *NE*, the *Politics*, and the *Athenian Constitution*); the third thematic circle which subtly differentiates between the subjective and the general side of the concepts just and justice, making possible their tracing in both ethics and in political philosophy. Especially significant is the introduction of the facet *anthropology* and overall the whole part 2 of Chapter 3 since it is the way to trace the actual beginning of Aristotle's ethics and the theme can be connected to the "natural law", "the measure of nature", as Cicero calls it. Aristotle's justice is not directly derived from the Good, as it is according to Plato, although a certain proportional connection with it is left, but is always *innate* in human nature – with or without the divine commandment from beyond (*themis*), with or without the mythical models, with or without the historical narratives, with or without the different kinds of normative demands, confirming the notion that man is the measure of all things. This statement of the sophists occasionally interpreted one-sidedly as relativism (and before that found in Thucydides) is conceived by Dimka Gocheva as humanism: in her view it "should be understood as interest in human being and human nature in general" (p. 80). Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his famous study on Machiavelli understands humanism in the same way. Another merit, in my view, when it comes to observations on Sophocles and *Antigone*, is the reference both of the tragedy and of Herodotus'

History to the “common worldviews” (p.94-97). “The worldviews”, the author’s wording of this notion, point right away to the *eide* and the modalities of the philosophical thinking (the only thing left is for the author to elaborate a little more on the term “*perfect Attic tragedy*”). In pointing out the places in Plato concerning justice, a specific approach is chosen. The acute attention to the dramaturgy and the literary form of the dialogue (p. 120) prove once again Dimka Gocheva’s ability to select and defend a different point of view compared to most studies (p.131-132). The pages, devoted to the question “Where should we look for the political thinking of Aristotle” are of undisputable philosophical interest. This question is traced from the *Politics* and the *Athenian Constitution*, up until the *NE*, even though the latter is usually absent from most histories of political thinking. The analysis of the thinking on democracy in Plato and Aristotle, containing a lot of references to the contemporary, ignites a special interest. In my view, a significant philosophical depth is reached with the thoughts in the first part of the Commentary of the translation (p. 284-286), which refer to the historical interpretation and destiny of the fundamental concepts of potentiality and actuality, possibility and actualization (*dunamis-energeia*) since I believe that the foundations of every philosophical ontology are contained precisely in those entirely opposite approaches of Plato and Aristotle.

The following remarks apply to disputable points, in my view, or points that need further review and clarification, namely: 1) It would be advisable when listing and commenting on Aristotle’s translations in Bulgarian to add Dr. Vladimir Marinov’s translation (the first five books of the *NE*, included in the Electronic Forum of Prof. Bogdan Bogdanov, the website of NBU). Furthermore, comparing concepts from Book Five (for example, *analogical referring* compared to *mathematical proportion*; *commensurable* compared to *equal*; *equal in merit* to *assessment of value*; *perfect virtue but not absolute* to *not entirely*, etc.) directly affects the understanding of the radically new Aristotelian thesis regarding justice as measurement, a measure aiming at the mean. 2) Aristotle’s apparent impact on Leibnitz with the “live monad” (p. 237) should be elaborated, moreover Leibnitz himself refers to Plato as his source in *Discours de métaphysique, XX*. Probably the echo of Aristotle’s vitalism, which was well underscored by the author, could be traced in Bergson, too, keeping the valuable observation on Leibnitz’s revitalized understanding of *entelecheia*.

The following *suggestions* correspond solely to Aristotle’s understanding of justice as personal inclination that is the more perfected (*teleia* – *NE*, 1129 b), the more it serves not only in relation

to itself, but also in relation to the other (*pros heteron*), a “mutually related” good. Therefore, what is pointed out here refers to a possible future *expansion* on the theme which, also in the spirit of Aristotle, the author could choose and make her decisions-actions. Because, if theoretical philosophy aims at conclusions, which are as general as possible, then practical philosophy’s conclusions are decisions themselves lead by reason, but also by individual and situational preferences. And so: 1) It would be advisable to also review Aristotle’s specific concept *epieikeia* (mainly in the *Rhetoric*, 14, 1137 b), the *proper*, the *corresponding*, and thus the *just* in a particular case and for a particular person, which Pierre Judet de la Combe and Barbara Cassin describe as the “mild rule” for the “corrective” justice when the law, which is too impersonal, requires the interference from the judge or the accuser. This is the way in which Aristotle leaves the heritage of the flexible “reasoning” (the alleviating circumstances as additional justice) and the understanding that unlike the law, justice is not connected to compulsion; “a better person is disposed to be just without compulsion”: the ethics of the just gets further away from politics and makes it seem independent – a virtue intrinsic to the one free in spirit. 2) When it comes to the theme in the part *Anthropology as correlated to ethics* (once again, very well developed), possibly a starting point from the place in Book IX of the *Republic* (588c-d) referring to “the demonstrative justice” and the word picture of the soul with the wild and the domesticated beasts would enrich the understanding of the transition from Plato to Aristotle in connection to “the human”, human nature. 3) In the Part dedicated to the pre-Socratic ontologization of Dike, Heraclitus could be present, moreover, Dimka Gocheva is well aware of Heraclitus’ philosophizing; 4. The theme about justice and the just in Aristotle would be enriched by placing another accent on friendship (*philia*), which in Book VIII of *NE* Aristotle claims is placed “higher” than justice, because the injustices to the relatives are bigger than the injustices towards the rest of the citizens.

At the end, I pose a question: Within the delineated sphere of contemporary thinking (namely, Heidegger, Gadamer, Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre, etc. mentioned in the dissertation) how does Assoc. Prof. Gocheva see the common features and, more importantly, the tasks of the “neo-Aristotelianism” today, if the claim is true from the published in the beginning of the century volume *Quelle philosophie pour le XXIe siecle?*, that this will be the *Organon* of the new century – meaning, that it’s time for us to rethink logically-categorically “there are several senses in which a thing is said to *be* (transl. by W. D. Ross), (or The term *being* is used in various

senses, transl. by Hugh Tredennick) ...” (*Met.*, 1003b)? According to Diogenes Laërtius Aristotle composed laws concerning everything, including his own school and did not miss anything concerning *discovery*, judgement or usage. Does justice continue to be a goal (*telos*) today or does practical philosophy, by omitting its positioning as a fundamentally intrinsic virtue, turn it solely in a tool devoid of any relation to an unified justice (Plato), or of the theoretical truth or the particular truth (*honesty*) in life? According to the historical development of the *concepts*, the question would be the following: if with Aristotle *phronesis* (“the practical reason”) starts to oppose *sophia* (“pure reason”), because the beginning of the practical activities is not contemplative, but is “in the actor as his decision” (*Met.*, 1025b24), whereas today, in the human world exposed to chances, *the practical inclination (hexis)* is not accompanied by “a true rule for what is *good or bad* for man” (*NE*, VI, 5, 1140b5), then what “principle” in human nature will come to oppose *phronesis* itself? It is probably not by chance that a neo-Aristotelian like Philippa Foot, one of the founders of contemporary virtue ethics (who deserves more attention in the study of Aristotle’s actual relevance), insists on the revitalizing the anthropologically-ethical view of Natural Goodness.

In conclusion, Assoc. Prof. Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva’s dissertation is a proof of her scholarly qualities, research potential, and consistency in her interests towards the classical philosophy, which makes the expectation of further contributions grounded. For this reason, I recommend that the competent scholarly jury award Assoc. Prof. Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva the academic degree *Doctor habilis* in the professional field of study, which entirely corresponds to the research profile developed over time– Philosophy (Ethics – History of ethics).

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