

OPINION

from *Silvia Georgieva Georgieva*,

Associate Professor, PhD, from South-West University "Neofit Rilski"
on the dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Author: *Martin Smith*

Topic: **Security in Uncertainty: The Value of Stoic Ethics of Virtue**

Supervisor: *Associate Professor, Doctor of Sciences Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva*

1. The Dissertation

The dissertation, "Security in Uncertainty: The Value of Stoic Ethics of Virtue," consists of 210 pages and is structured into an introduction, four separate parts—PROBLEM; TOWARD A SOLUTION; DISCUSSION; CONCLUSION—and includes an APPENDIX, FIGURES, and a GLOSSARY. The bibliography at the end contains over 100 bibliographic entries.

The doctoral candidate, Martin Smith, has met the minimum scientometric requirements for the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor." He has published three papers on the topic of the dissertation, which have been accepted for print and are scheduled for publication in the first quarter of 2025.

2. Structure of the Dissertation and Scientific Contributions

The selection of the topic and the structure of the research work are original and exceptionally interesting. In the introduction, the author presents the starting point of the research, the idea behind the text, the approach, the method, and the sources of the study. It becomes evident that this text offers a conceptual framework distinguished by its innovativeness. The research adopts an eclectic approach to the core problem, examining three philosophical schools: Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Stoicism. To these, Martin Smith adds Heidegger and Arendt to provide a contemporary context. The entire study is expressed in alignment with Stoic principles, supporting the assertion that Stoic virtue offers the greatest utility, especially during periods of moral uncertainty in society.

The eclectic and original nature of the presented text is realized through several distinct dialogues by the author: with Aristotle (the most detailed and in-depth), with Heidegger, Arendt, Desme, Bezmenov, and, of course, the Stoics—Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. The value of Stoic virtues is brought to the forefront, though this dialogue requires further attention as the title of the text raises such an expectation.

The conceptualization of the research and its subsequent exposition reveal a valuable quality of the author's position—a critical perspective on the dialogue between different philosophical concepts, which provides a cohesive center for the entire text. Despite the extensive range of comparative analysis, the doctoral candidate succeeds in highlighting the superiority of the Stoic perspective on good and evil.

The destructive principle is posited as necessary for the continuation of life (p. 18). Recognizing evil is essential for acquiring practical wisdom, thereby fostering self-awareness that aids an authentic approach to morality, with an allusion to Jung's theory of the shadow. The dissertation's thesis argues that moral appeals to an ideal are erroneous, as they fail to account for the dualistic nature of existence.

In place of Aristotle's reason, Smith proposes practical wisdom as the human ergon. On p. 28, it is asserted that practical wisdom reconciles the destructive principle with the overarching creative goal of life's continuation. Contrary to Aristotle's perception of evil as deprivation, the text defends the idea that both good and evil possess their own substance.

One of the author's "dialogues" is simultaneously with Aristotle, Machiavelli, and the Stoics. Tracing Aristotle's eudaimonia and Machiavelli's approach to virtue as a political tool rather than a moral character in itself, the author combines aspects from each viewpoint: Aristotelian reason, Stoic indifference, and Machiavellian realism, proposing a more sustainable and adaptive ethics of virtue that preserves the subject amidst society's moral decline.

I fully support the ideas expressed in the conclusion for future research, particularly the intention to include comparisons with Eastern philosophies, which, according to the author, also emphasize the cultivation of internal virtues. The idea for future studies on the influence of historical practices on the subject's psychological well-being and moral decision-making, as well as potential examples from corporate and medical practices, is also original. This would reinforce the principles of Stoicism

with empirical data. Not least, the dissertation's proposal to explore these ideas concerning artificial intelligence and the moral dilemmas it increasingly presents is particularly timely.

The first aspect that stands out is the erudition the author has accumulated on the topic of his dissertation. From this, the ability to take a unique analytical path based on excellent knowledge and corresponding interpretations of an extensive comparative material and to develop a personal, well-argued interpretative key becomes evident.

The doctoral candidate examines the outlined issues from multiple perspectives and boldly offers personal views in his reasoned "dialogues" with various philosophical perspectives from different eras. This demonstrates that Martin Smith possesses both the maturity of philosophical thought and the admirable courage of a researcher in his pursuit of balance and argumentation of his proposed research theses and hypotheses.

The dissertation text is well-structured, semantically and logically dense, with a coherent analysis and a sequence of layering new, innovative interpretations onto previous ones.

3. Conclusion and Proposal

Considering the demonstrated qualities of the doctoral candidate for an in-depth engagement with complex research problems and methodologies for interpreting some of the most fundamental philosophical issues, the ability to provide a personal perspective, the contributions achieved in the development of the topic, and the substance of the text, I confidently propose to the esteemed Academic Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Martin Smith.

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