

Review of the PhD Dissertation  
*Happiness and Emotion. Affect Theory as a Lens on Aristotelian Eudaimonia*

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According to article 71, paragraph 1 of the *Rulebook for the requirements and the order in the acquisition of scholarly degrees and academic positions in the University of Sofia Saint Kliment Ohridski* the chair of the scholarly committee has the duty to introduce the PhD-candidate during the procedure of the public defense with some biographical data.

Mr. Yuliy Sashkov Yuliev has studied in the Second English Language Gymnasium Thomas Jefferson in Sofia in the period 2010-2015. From 2015 to 2019 he has continued his education in the American University in Blagoevgrad, where his major has been Philosophy and society (as individually designed bachelor program) and the minor – Political sciences and international relations. He has additional qualification in Psychology. He has obtained bachelor's degree in 2019 with *Magna cum laude* in the AUB. He has additional qualification in finances, banking and insurance (Ministry of education, 2021.)

His master's degree is in Philosophy, it is obtained in the Master's program in Philosophy taught in English in the Faculty of Philosophy in the University of Sofia (2019-2021). His master's thesis is entitled *Aristotle, Confucius, and Bulgarian Democracy: Is Bulgaria a Proper Democracy?*

In the period 2021-2024 he has been doctoral student in the Doctoral program in Philosophy taught in English in the Faculty of Philosophy in the University of Sofia.

He has received many awards and scholarships. To mention some of them: from the Sasakawa program (2023); 2021: *Internet vs. Democracy Fellowship*, DCN Global (Armenia); 2017: *International Visitor Leadership Fellowship*, US Department of State (USA); 2015-2019: *America For Bulgaria Foundation Distinguished Scholarship за бакалаври*; 2015: The award of the gymnasium Thomas Jefferson; 2014: *Benjamin Franklin's Summer Institute Fellowship*, US Department of State (USA).

Currently Mr. Yuliev is teaching ethics, philosophy and business ethics in the AUB and (curiously enough) he is business manager of the PFC Botev in Plovdiv.

Parameters of the dissertation and technical description: 241 pages (in the printed version at my disposal), written in English. The dissertation is structured in the

following order: Introduction; four chapters, divided into subchapters; general conclusion; bibliography (84 titles).

The most important claims in the contents of the dissertation,  
summarized and commented in brief

The dissertation is devoted to the evergreen philosophical and existential question, moving almost every human being according to Aristotle: how should one live in order to be happy? What is happiness? Or, what is *eudaimonia*? Is it possible to be attained and if the answer to this question is positive, what are the need conditions and the recommended rules, which promise to lead to this *telos*?

Needless to say, the main text on focus all over the doctoral thesis is the *Nicomachean ethics* and its medieval, modern and brand-new interpretations in the writings of philosophers, historians of philosophy and ethics, psychologists and social thinkers. And here a question might be raised: why the *Eudemian ethics* is totally excluded? It could be mentioned at least once somewhere.

**In the Introduction** the main intentions of the colleague are sketched: the work seeks to explore the intersection of the rational approach and the integration of emotion, proposing that a comprehensive examination can restore the significance of emotion and affect within the framework of Aristotelian *eudaimonia* (p. 5 – all the references are to the pages of the printed text of the thesis).

The central focus in this blended perspective is the acknowledgement that the quest for happiness is not solely a theoretical mental activity but rather a physical and emotional encounter (p. 5-6).

To every academic writing might be raised the question: *So what?* The colleague finds the contribution of his theoretical endeavor in the following: *Looking at Aristotle's idea of eudaimonia through the lens of affect theory can help people, communities and society as a whole* (p. 6). The debates about the tension between life satisfaction accounts and affect-based accounts are outlined in the introduction and the ambition to accommodate them is declared.

*The affect theory* is in the title of the doctoral thesis as the preferred interpretative strategy for the understanding of *eudaimonia*. Here is an important statement of the author, which clarifies the dominating interpretative paradigm, chosen by him:

*Affect theory, rooted in the works of theorists such as Silvan Tomkins and Brian Massumi, explores the role of emotions, feelings, and affective experiences as foundational elements of human*

*behavior and social interaction. Tomkins emphasized the primacy of affect in shaping human motivation and cognition, arguing that affect precedes and drives rational thought. Massumi further developed these ideas by highlighting the non-conscious and pre-linguistic nature of affect, which operates independently of cognitive processes. At its core, affect theory challenges the traditional dichotomy between reason and emotion by illustrating their interdependence. Emotions are not only reactive states but active forces that influence perception, behavior, and ethical decision-making. I will argue that this perspective aligns with Aristotle's view of eudaimonia, where reason and emotion jointly contribute to human flourishing. (p. 7)*

In the first chapter, entitled *Eudaimonia, Virtue, and Ethics* main ancient philosophical views on happiness are sketched. It is good that not only Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, but also the letter(s) of Epicurus are discussed. After that the author describes the great Greek lineage on *eudaimonia*. The kernel in this chapter is an in-depth inquiry into Aristotle's theory of *eudaimonia* in *Nicomachean Ethics*. The colleague stresses that following Plato, Aristotle declares the existence of two types of happiness: the practical (discussed in books I and II) and the contemplative (in Book X, ch. 6-8).

Here I would like to mention that especially appealing are the sentences in the text, in which the author sincerely confesses his own personal and existential drives for writing on this topic, e. g.: *One of the primary motivations I have for wanting to dig deeper into the true nature of happiness is that, as Aristotle emphasizes in the NE, our inherent inclination towards happiness forms the basis for a virtuous and fulfilling existence (p. 26).*

In this chapter also the colleague is occupied with the extremely difficult problem of the (im)possible *definition of eudaimonia*, and noting the insufficiencies of earlier attempts he examines the relevance of the views of Epicurus, known from the *Letter to Menoecus* (p.30-38).

The most important subchapter here is the one, devoted to the in-depth inquiry of the *NE*: not only the famous function arguments, but also the even more famous distinction between the active and the contemplative life. Here I would share, that the comparison between the lives of the politicians, the politically active people, the private citizens and the philosophers (on p. 56 and the following) sounds a little bit naïve and utopian.

Next comes consideration of the *value theory*, exposed in the frame of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and chosen modern interpretators: Onora O'Neill and Nicholas Tampio. The main features of Utilitarianism are sketched. Comparing the deontological, the utilitarian and the Aristotelian approach, Mr. Yuliev clarifies here his understanding of what *values* are, what *virtues* are, and relentlessly refutes the cultural relativism, outlining that the doctrine of the mean only *seems* to promote a form of relativism by situational judgement, whereas it is decidedly objectivist in nature (p. 96). The colleague

emphasizes that according to Aristotle “*virtues exhibit a certain degree of consistency and universality, surpassing cultural limitations*” (p. 72). He praises the ancient thinker:

*Aristotle’s approach integrates both personal character formation and the communal values that provide the framework for moral flourishing. Virtues, in this sense, are not only personal traits but a deeply embedded in a societal context, reflecting shared ideals and guiding collective ethical practices* (p. 66).

Next comes the development of the ideas of Aristotle in the famous commentary of Thomas Aquinas on the *NE* and especially on the theologically conceived concept of the human happiness, which according to the *Doctor angelicus* has two main forms – *felicitas* and *beatitudo*. Mr. Yuliev summarizes: *Acquinas added beatitude, a state of ultimate, supernatural union with the divine achieved through God’s grace, to Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia... He combined Aristotelian virtues with theological virtues to create comprehensive ethical system that stressed the need for divine grace for true happiness, extending the Aristotelian vision to include the Christian eschatological perspective* (p. 96-97).

**In the second chapter** newer (virtue ethicists) interpretations of Aristotle are discussed. The juxtaposition between the intellectualist perspective vs. the blended perspective is well outlined. Here we see something which is quite Aristotelian in the method of exposure. The approach of Mr. Yuliev is *a quest for the mean* between some extremities: in pairs, as in the famous Pythagorean pairs (which according to Aristotle are pairs not of contrarities, but of mutually dependent co-elements) are discussed the interpretations: first of Thomas Nagel and Nancy Sherman; then Antonio Damasio and Jonathan Haidt.

The third subchapter of this part of the dissertation is dedicated to one of the most influential contemporary Aristotelian scholars: Martha Nussbaum and her approach known as the *Capabilities approach*. Mr. Yuliev praises her interpretative scheme and her *theory of emotions* because of their relevance and applicability to the challenges of the contemporary world: *social fairness, emotional intelligence, and institutional accountability... empathy, and imagination in moral reasoning and ethical development, while her method emphasizes structural and political necessities for human flourishing* (p. 132-133)

Concerning this subchapter I will express my most essential criticism and disagreement. This subchapter is too much preoccupied with the interpretations of Martha Nussbaum and neglects entirely the genuine roots of her views. The interpretations of the respected American colleague are deeply rooted in the texts of Aristotle, but this is not mentioned in the dissertation.

First, Aristotle has *his own theory of emotions* and it is exposed at length in the second book of the treatise *Rhetoric*. *Logos, ethos, pathos* – these three are needed for a meaningful and impressive speech. In the second book of the *Rhetoric* *πάθος* means sometimes ‘emotion’, at other places – ‘affect’. Indispensable are the clarifications concerning anger, indignation, tenderness, love, hatred, friendship, fear, shame, benevolence, pity and

compassion, magnanimity and infuriation, envy and jealousy. Aristotle at length discusses also the types of human characters, the peculiarities of the dominating passions, inclinations, predispositions and emotions in the different periods and stages of the human life. For some of these he correctly might be criticized from a contemporary and humanistic point of view, especially for some traces of ageism. Nevertheless, all these pages in the *Rhetoric* deserve to be mentioned at least with a few sentences, because otherwise the contemporary scholars, who have gained world-wide fame *seem (without actually being) great*, whereas as a humble medieval commentator has written: *All of us are dwarfs, perched on the shoulders of giants*.

The same applies for the *Capabilities approach*. 'Capability' is the newest version of δύναμις in the singular, δυνάμεις in the plural. A term-owner of rich thesaurus of meanings, designating one of the three modal categories, with paramount strength all over the Aristotelian treatises. In the *Metaphysics* it is usually translated as 'possibility', 'potency', 'might', rarely as 'probability' and 'faculty'. In the *De anima*, the *NE*, the *Rhetoric* it is more often a term for the individual inborn capacities, gifts, talents, faculties. What Martha Nussbaum proposes *seems original novelty*, only because in the older translations in English δύναμις and δυνάμεις were translated following the Latin tradition as 'faculty' and respectively 'faculties' of the body and of the soul, moreover not only of the *human* body and soul, but of absolutely everything existing, which has organic body.

In short, what is seen on p. 113-114 as "*The Ten Central Capabilities according to Nussbaum*", is a compilation of pure Aristotelian statements: the first four of them are exposed in the *De anima*; the next three -- in the *NE*; capability number 8 is the kernel of the teleological biological treatises; capabilities 9 and 10 are discussed in *NE*, the *Politics* and in the *On the Heavens* (which is totally neglected nowadays and because of that no one is aware of the fact that Aristotle is the father of the environmental philosophy).

**The third chapter** is decisive for the overall concept and the ambitions of the dissertation: it discusses in detail the affect theory, which is the core of the thesis, it is in the very title of the text and is advocated as suitable lens for the understanding of the Aristotelian ethics. According to the colleague, the affect theory is important, because:

1. It challenges the primacy of reason and cognition that has dominated much of Western philosophy;
2. It sheds light on the role of pleasure and enjoyment;
3. Because of its exploration of the non-representational and pre-linguistic realms of experience (p. 133-134).

It is something relatively new, gaining traction in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the fundamental concept here is: we feel *before* rationalizing that we are feeling something (p. 135). Mr. Yuliev presents convincingly the ideas of Silvan Tomkins (who is influenced by Sigmund Freud) and Brian Massumi (who follows mainly Baruch

Spinoza, Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze). Mr. Yuliev points out the necessity to distinguish between *Affective science* and *affective theory*... p. 136

It is good that not only here, but in other places of the text as well Mr. Yuliev mentions what are the objections to a certain point of view, included as an instrument in his research. On that topic he quotes Ruth Leys's disagreement and critique.

On p. 151 the analytical results from the discussion in this third chapter, entitled *Affect Theory*, are summarized:

*"The different branches of affect theory can be summarized as "theories of timing" or "the self-running ahead of itself". Affect occurs in the "in-between-ness" of being able to act and be acted upon" The impulsive reactions and the constant mood or force of existing variations before recognizing the cause are all subjects of the affect. Affect is characterized by impulsivity and "outbursts of feeling". Both branches of affect theory - the psychoanalytic tradition and the one based on Spinoza's work - culminating with Tomkins and Massumi, respectively, build their arguments by focusing on purely physical bodily experiences. As Massumi suggests, affect has an "irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature".*

*To summarize, the fundamental difference between affect and emotion is the presence or absence of awareness. A specific bodily intensity may occur without the person realizing it. This definition will be considered as experiencing affect. This notion of an "energetic stream" is another common characteristic of affect between Tomkins and Massumi."*

In the next subchapter on focus is the theoretical background of affect theory and the conceptions of affect theorists on the notion of happiness, Laura Sizer and Daniel Haybron. After that this theory is tested in its effects when applied to Aristotle and Aquinas. With a sense of satisfaction Mr. Yuliev concludes: *my goal was to question the binary distinction between mind and body, reason and emotion, and propose a more comprehensive framework for understanding the integration of inner and outer realities in the notion of eudaimonia* (p. 168). Indeed, he has succeeded to achieve this.

And one more quotation, which sounds as a definition of happiness according to the colleague: *Genuine eudaimonia is a synergy of affective attunement and rational virtue* (p. 178).

The affect theory is also examined in the optics of Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach (again!).

The next chapter, which is the final one, is an interdisciplinary, or if a joke might be allowed, another-disciplinary. It is devoted to the contemporary psychological views on *eudaimonia* in the frame of the theory of constructed emotion, the appraisal theories, the emotional state theory and the self-determination theory. Especially interesting here is the discussion on the three pillars of the SDT: autonomy, competence, relatedness.

The dissertation ends with a sketch of future possible research and empirical expansion and with a final summary and conclusions.

At the very end the reader of the text may confirm and agree with the self-evaluation of the author:

*“This work has the potential to be applied in various fields, including psychology, sociology, and education, by integrating ancient philosophical wisdom with modern psychological and sociological perspectives. Psychology can utilize a comprehensive comprehension of the significance of emotions in well-being to guide therapeutic methods and interventions that aim to enhance mental health and personal development. This research in sociology can provide insight into the cultural and social factors that affect our emotional experiences and how they affect the well-being of the community. By introducing a comprehensive perspective of eudaimonia into education, it is possible to design curricula and instructional approaches that foster the growth of both cognitive and emotional faculties. This approach empowers students with the necessary skills to lead satisfying and purposeful lives”. (p. 227-228)*

The autoreferential summary correctly describes and the main content of the dissertation.

The contributions are well and correctly formulated at the end of the autoreferential summary.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation and related to it:

Yuliev, Yuliy. “Thora Ilin Bayer and Donald Phillip Verene”, *Philosophical Ideas: A Historical Study* (Ibidem, 2021), *Sofia Philosophical Review*, vol. XIV, no. 1, 2021. pp. 7-11

Yuliev, Yuliy. „Political Extremism and Its Implications: An Inquiry into Violence, Struggle, and Self-Sacrifice“. *Философски алтернативи*, брой 3, 2024 г., стр. 115-122.  
<https://doi.org/10.58945/GOLI1741>

Yuliev, Yuliy. “Hunger & Fasting: What is the Cognitive Trifecta”. Academia.edu, self-published, 2024.  
[https://www.academia.edu/127959913/Hunger\\_and\\_Fasting\\_What\\_is\\_the\\_Cognitive\\_Trifecta](https://www.academia.edu/127959913/Hunger_and_Fasting_What_is_the_Cognitive_Trifecta)

Yuliev, Yuliy. “Aristotle, Benjamin Constant, and Bulgarian Democracy.” Списание “Философия”, (предстои публикация, 2025

### Concluding assessment

The dissertation of the colleague Yuliy Yuliev is impressive, serious and voluminous text, aiming at the interpretation of a great philosophical ethical theory in a way, which

proves that it is not an antiquarian item in the museum of the history of ideas. On the contrary, it convinces the reader that the multifaceted Aristotelian *eudaimonia* is relevant, applicable, heuristic and even necessary today. Overcoming old dilemmas and bringing to the fore new, newer and newest approaches, Mr. Yuliev points out dimensions for the utilization of the ancient thinking for the development and the advancement of contemporary psychological, sociological and educational theorizing. Especially in the last fourth chapter the literature, discussed by the colleague, is published in the last decade of the previous century and in the recent years of the new millennium. The references to the Reports of the UNDP show his deepest concerns about the conditions and the problems in the human situation in a global scale. Alas, both in the past and currently in many countries all over the world the human situation is unhuman.

At the same time as an old-fashioned scholar from the old school I could recommend for a future expansion of the work: if the colleague wishes to continue this research in the same direction, to include in the scope of his analyses other Aristotelian concepts as well, to contextualize his future studies with the attraction of other texts from the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, especially the discussion of the emotions in the *Rhetoric*.

I declare that the submitted text is fulfilling completely the requirements and the expectations for a serious doctoral thesis and the colleague Yuliy Yuliev deserves the scholarly and educational degree *Doctor* to be conferred to him.

Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva, Assoc. Prof., doctor scientiarum humanarum  
27<sup>th</sup> of May 2025