

REVIEW

On the dissertation thesis

“Happiness and Emotion. Affect Theory as a Lens on Aristotelian Eudaimonia”

by *Yuliy Sashkov Yuliev*,

a full-time doctoral student at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 2.3. Philosophy (Philosophy in English)

Reviewer:

Nonka Bogomilova,

Professor, Doctor of Philosophical Sciences

1. Education, research and teaching experience of Yuliy Yuliev:

The educational preparation of doctoral student Yuliy Yuliev is directly related to the professional field in which he is applying for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor": he graduated from a humanitarian high school with studies in English; he received a bachelor's degree at the American University in Bulgaria (2015-2019) with a defended bachelor's thesis on moral issues; Master of Philosophy in the period 2019-2021 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (program in English) with a defended master's thesis "Aristotle, Confucius and Bulgarian Democracy. Is Bulgaria a True Democracy?". His educational preparation, culminating in the topic of the doctoral dissertation, shows a pronounced theoretical interest in ethical issues in the ancient and modern philosophical tradition, combined with research and cultural engagement with contemporary processes in society and human existence.

This educationally formed connection between philosophical tradition and modernity, between abstract and applied levels of human knowledge (Yuliev has additional qualification in "Finance, Banking and Insurance") is also manifested at the level of "professional appearances and positions held". He is currently a “Lecturer in Business Ethics, Ethics and Philosophy” at the American University in Bulgaria, while also engaged in managerial and administrative positions in the field of entrepreneurship and international relations. Among his active academic appearances, embodying the cause of applied philosophy, are: two publications in Bulgarian philosophical journals *Philosophical Alternatives* and *Sofia Philosophical Review*, as well as one in print in the magazine *Philosophy*; the organization of 6 conferences, mainly related to business and leadership issues; participation as a guest lecturer in several conferences.

The level and public response of Yuliy. Yuliev's creative works are evidenced by the awards he received: 2023: One-year doctoral scholarship under the "Sasakawa" program; 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 for Bachelors; 2014: Benjamin Franklin's Summer Institute Fellowship, US Department of State (USA).

2. Scope, structure and thematic fields of the dissertation work:

The dissertation "Happiness and Emotion. Affect Theory as a Lens on Aristotelian Eudaimonia" has a volume of 241 pages and a structure including an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The **bibliography** includes 104 sources, most of them in English, as well as Internet resources. The **introduction** touches on the significance of the issue, configures the object and subject of the study, formulates the research thesis, as well as the goals and objectives of the work.

The **first chapter** places the concept of *eudaimonia* in a historical and philosophical context, and in particular emphasizes the interpretations of ancient philosophical authorities (Socrates, Plato and Aristotle) on happiness and virtue, through the prism of which cultural and moral relativism is criticized. The **second chapter** places Aristotle's ethical views against the background of modern interpretations - the intellectualist perspective and the holistic approach; the role of neuroscience and moral psychology; the understanding of the relationship between reason, emotions and virtue in Martha Nussbaum and others. **Chapter three** analyzes the views of Sylvan Tomkins, Brian Massumi and other authors working on the theory of affects in the context of understanding happiness and moral action. **Chapter four** interprets the "emotional state theory" and the "self-determination theory" from the perspective of their understanding of happiness and emotions. In this research horizon, the relationship between affective states and *eudaimonia* is analyzed, placing this classical Aristotelian understanding of the highest good in the context of innovations in psychological science. The **conclusion** offers conclusions and generalizations and advocates the thesis for a holistic approach to happiness, in which the emotional level should be included.

3. Creative achievements of the work:

3.1. The dissertation develops not just a current topic, but a topic and problem that have a solid and enduring presence in the history of ideas in the broad sphere of the humanities and social sciences: the problem of happiness - what it consists of and how it is achieved.

3.2. Although Yuliy Yuliev formulates his creative task primarily in a historical-philosophical context (p.5), his undertaking assumes a more solid scale - a creative re/construction of the concept of "happiness", which has meaning and significance not only for the history of ideas, but also for the ethical regulations of human society and existence; for the active existence of values, embodied in virtues.

3.3. In the implementation of this creative task, the doctoral student shows knowledge of the ancient philosophical ideas on the issue, and makes an attempt to harmonize, enrich and modernize it with the new achievements of modern psychology - a synthesis, connecting ideas from different cultural times and disciplinary fields, aimed at the issues of today.

3.4. The author of the dissertation successfully uses various cognitive and value tools related to the conceptual "rehabilitation" of emotions in order to breathe modern vitality into the ancient philosophical tradition, to format it in the "aggregate" state of an active and effective regulation for the comprehension and achievement of a happy and fulfilling life by modern man.

3.5. In this way, he not only incorporates the ancient intellectual heritage (and in particular Aristotle's understanding of *eudaimonia*, of the highest good) into the configuration of a contemporary anthropological project, but also preserves and insists on the ancient vision of the "applied" humanistic mission, of the now forgotten cause of philosophy - to help man achieve *eudaimonia*, to live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

3.6. The highlighting and emphasis in the dissertation of Aristotle's ideas about the moral dominant, immersed in a social context (p. 66), about reason and virtues as an organic part of the path to *eudaimonia* (p. 67), to the achievement of happiness, the author creatively conceptualizes as a cognitive and value alternative to the intellectual projects of Kant's deontology, of utilitarianism, consumerism, hedonism (Mill, Bentham, Epicurus), of cultural relativism (72-81).

3.7. The contextual analysis (through comparison with the ideas of Socrates, Plato, Thomas Aquinas) of Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* and, in particular, of the ideas developed in the "*Nicomachean Ethics*" places the study on an intellectual and value foundation, without

"fundamentalizing" it: the author "tempers" and "animates" the reason and virtues, philosophically emphasized in it through psychological concepts and tools (emotions, affects), in order to bind all human modes and essential forces in the concept of "happiness"; to bring it down from the heights of philosophical existence (pp. 55-58) to the everyday human life in the broadest sense.

3.8. In solving this complex creative task, Yuliy Yuliev undertakes a conceptual rehabilitation of the role of the emotional principle for the virtuous life through: a) a nuanced presentation of Aristotle's understanding, spreading out the presence of the emotional component in it; b) knowledge and consideration of relevant contemporary interpretations in this spirit (Sherman's holistic interpretation); c) argumentation through contemporary authors and ideas that overcome the dualism between reason and emotions (Deleuze and Guattari); d) the achievements of cognitive science on the role and influence of emotions and intuitions on moral decisions and choices; e) integration of the ideas of the theory of affects, which reminds of the importance and meaning of preconscious bodily and emotional impulses.

3.9. Along with this peculiar "emotionalization" and "embodiment" of Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, through the ideas of M. Nussbaum, doctoral student Yuliev takes it out of the subjective "mold" (case) and offers it a social, institutional horizon: it turns out that happiness, the highest good, depends not only on individual rational and moral qualities, but also on the social context, on the social conditions for their activation and preservation – another bridge thrown from antiquity to modernity over the abyss of millennia.

3.10. The significance of emotion and affect for the conceptual "identity" of the author's interpretation of happiness as an "achievable life reality" is also emphasized by the fact that the informative fourth chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to these concepts and their theorizations in modern times, in which the author demonstrates good knowledge and analytical skills regarding these theories - on the "emotional state", on "self-determination", etc.

4. Comments and recommendations for future work:

Given the complexity, multi-layered nature and innovative potential of the dissertation, it opens a field for comments and discussions - a fact favorable for the further work of the author. One of the directions in which its conceptual continuity could be optimized is a more solid

argumentation of the intellectual and conceptual connection of Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, dominated by reason and virtues, with the presented psychological theories, dominated by emotions and affects. In places, this connection does not sound convincing enough, and moreover, Yuliev himself correctly presents authors and ideas that do not share his understanding on this issue (pp. 98-102). For this purpose, it would be useful to present more precisely the different meanings that Aristotle, on the one hand, and Sherman, Nussbaum and the theorists of affect put into fundamental concepts such as: man, knowledge, reason, pleasure/satisfaction, feelings, emotions, affects, soul, body, virtues. In this regard, not only “*Nicomachean Ethics*”, but also “*Poetics*” and “*Rhetoric*” could be quite useful.

Some other, discussed and shared by the author, discursive, insufficiently convincingly presented theses could also be referred to, including, for example, the criticism of cultural relativism, the opposing theory of M. Nussbaum on the ten capabilities, etc., implying imperative universalism for a certain cultural image of man.

Although the study is modern, based on new psychological theories, insufficiently developed in our country, collegial correctness requires that the creative efforts of Bulgarian authors (philosophers and psychologists) related to this issue (reason and emotions; emotions and happiness; reason, emotions and virtues, etc.) be briefly presented.

Conclusion: The dissertation work of Yuliy Yuliev “Happiness and Emotion. Affect Theory as a Lens on Aristotelian Eudaimonia” represents a bold creative undertaking, which has undertaken the re/construction of the concept of “happiness” on the solid foundation of Aristotle’s understanding of the highest good, of *eudaimonia*, by upgrading it, “humanizing” it and enlivening it in the spirit of new psychological theories that give due consideration to emotions and affects. The abstract reflects the structure, content and main ideas of the dissertation. The presented contributions reflect the achievements of the dissertation.

Based on the above, I will vote without hesitation for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the professional field 2.3. Philosophy (Philosophy in English) to be awarded to Yuliy Sashkov Yuliev.

(Prof., Dsc Nonka Bogomilova)

May 30, 2025