

REVIEW

of the Dissertation for awarding the academic title of “Doctor of Sciences” (Dr. Habil.),
professional area 2.3. Philosophy (Ethics – History of Ethics),

*To(wards) the Concepts τὸ δίκαιον and ἡ δικαιοσύνη in the Practical Philosophy of
Aristotle*

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The proposed dissertation work *To(wards) the Concepts Just and Justice in the Practical Philosophy of Aristotle* studies the key concepts in the works by Aristotle connected with the topic, as well as a number of essential earlier Greek sources. The study (with a total volume of 338 printed pages, including bibliography with 445 references) reflects numerous earlier research interests and work of Associate Professor Gocheva, expanding earlier findings and results, and placing them in a common conceptual framework outlined by three “thematizations” (and goals): (1) “Retrospective” reading of Aristotle’s heritage with eyes turned to earlier understandings of just and justice (in Herodotus, Thucydides, Sophocles and Plato); (2) Tracing Aristotle’s re-thinking, criticising and building over earlier philosophical and literary thinking on the theme, including by elaborating own conceptual apparatus; (3) Analysis of the differences in the meanings of the leading concepts of just and justice as indicating community relations or individual virtue accordingly.

The framework and structure of the study thus outlined attributes an indisputably interdisciplinary character to it, which is due to the author’s extremely good knowledge of the specificities of ancient Greek culture, religion, political history and literature. Precisely such a contextualisation through the comprehensive meaning and topical influence of ancient Greek antiquity makes it possible to propose a more precise and dialogical reading also of Aristotle’s position on the topic and to analyse successfully the causes, influences and phenomena that had formed it. From the perspective of classical studies, I accept as completely substantiated the adducing of evidence belonging to different literary – including poetic – genres, in view of the still insufficiently firmly established inter-genre differences during the historical period

studied, and – more importantly – in view of the possibility works belonging to different genres to exercise a similar influence on the *polis* community at a time of very intensified oral and public presentation of everything that had been written, thus also shaping both the individual and the collective understanding of just and justice.

The introductory part surveys the interpreters' positions on the issues chosen. Such a survey is even more needed in the concrete case in view of the reception of Aristotle in different spheres of the humanitarian studies. And here the author has indicated convincingly that the study of the philosopher precisely from the perspective chosen by her is still a field in which it is worth continuing research. References to and comments on research paradigms (including in Bulgarian humanities) are made throughout the text, which is also substantiated in view of the diversity of the original sources presented, compared and commented upon.

I would like to focus a little more attention precisely on the retrospective interpretations in the proposed dissertation work, because I accept that thematisation as one of the most valuable contributions in the study. The actual approach chosen to link texts from different times and belonging to different genres sometimes also reveals neglected links in ancient Greek literature, which are indisputably significant for the more accurate understanding of essential aspects of ancient thinking and its evolution.

Part One of Chapter One presents and analyses concrete stories connected with the theme of just and justice in Herodotus. The first impression is of the appropriate choice of significant passages from *The Histories*, as well as of more marginal themes. However, as an aggregate, they prove that Herodotus can also be read with a view to practical philosophy that is to evolve as a discipline. The “suprahuman” character of justice that is of such importance to the historian is considered, as well as the possible human involvement in attaining it. This seems to mark at this stage one of the principal “optimistic” and definitely topical theses of the study: on justice and just as being possible. Here, and further on throughout the entire text the author “retells” and often cites extensively (in full or partially also in the original) excerpts from the primary sources, which provides an opportunity to interpret the texts in depth.

In Part Two of Chapter One, devoted to Thucydides, it seems particularly important to me that he is interpreted through the thesis of his links to the sophists, or – more precisely – through the convincing presentation of his sophist techniques and structuring of the extensively studied speeches making up the entire *History of the Peloponnesian War*. The attention to the antithetic character of the speeches delivered by different participants in the events described

also leads to the conclusion on the peculiar pessimism of the text, which D. Gocheva attributes also to the (in)justice theme. The approach thus chosen to read Thucydides through the sophist construction of the speeches (and through the influence upon him of concrete sophist theses, notably the one about man as measure of all things) logically leads to a kind of “apology” of sophistry, within the framework of which it is possible to dispute or at least to render more precise certain rigid positions of researchers (clichés) vis-à-vis the representatives of the sophist movement. Naturally, the introductory methodological passages in Thucydides are also examined, placing the emphasis on the maximalist objective: quest for the truth, and its realistic dimension, attaining accuracy in the presentation. The principal characters in Thucydides’ work are presented with frequent parallels, or – more correctly – oppositions to Herodotus. Again, a cliché is destroyed here: of the leading positive role of Pericles, Nicias being cited as the most positive character, serving as a pretext also for thoughts on the justice to oneself as initial aspect of justice as virtue of the individual.

Part Three of Chapter One is devoted to analysis through the prism of the main theme of *Antigone* by Sophocles. Here, too, the reading of the motifs in the tragedy that are most closely linked to the theme of just and justice is by presenting parallels with other texts, and especially with Herodotus’ *Histories* and certain theonomic motifs in it, found in Sophocles as well.

Chapter Two dealing with the transition from Plato to Aristotle emphasises first and foremost the understanding of justice as the most important virtue, both according to the two thinkers and in terms of its personal dimension. Here it is necessary to cite also the original parallels between Plato and John Rawls, for whom the personal moment is absent to a certain extent, but otherwise the similarity with Plato is great, whereby the author has also indicated a peculiar lack of superposition over Plato’s understanding of justice.

Using the mapping method that is successfully applied elsewhere in the work as well, and here – to the relevant passages from *The Republic*, the emphasis is placed also on the deliberately different use of “just” already in Plato (both of that substantivised form and of other forms of the adjective, as well as of the adverb from the same root) and of “justice” – thus confirming the already expressed thesis that the former was related to the general *polis* system, and the latter, as was pointed out – to the individual virtue of the person. Among the conclusions reached in the part devoted basically to *The Republic* I would highlight the following: justice as “actual personal justice” and as “culmination of virtue” is possible with long efforts and education; the entire dialogue reveals “dialectical movement of the quest for

justice for the sake of the just and quest for the just for the sake of justice” (p. 134), without giving prevalence of the one on account of the other; neither failure to attain, nor the attaining of justice revoke the judgement over the soul after death. I would also like to draw attention to the partial revising of the views on Plato’s attitude to the East: it is pointed out that Plato discovered there what Europeans wished to see and were able to see.

Part Three of Chapter Two refers basically to the just being dependent on the type of political system, according to both Plato and Aristotle. The theme of state systems and their classifications is extensively interpreted, but the reading proposed by D. Gocheva is through the prism of narrower issues, the emphasis being placed more on the circumstances and reasons that prevented the attaining of just community order. Here, too, current observations are made on the form, style and context of the commented works and passages, insofar as they determine the content as well: e.g., Plato’s psychological approach in presenting the ethics-dominated political theory is noted (being even qualified by the author as “psychoanalytical” in the biographical sketches of the rulers leading to the decline of one form of state rule or another). *The Statesman* is examined at the end of the pages devoted to the differences in the state systems in Plato, whereby the author launches the conclusion – convincingly, and at the same time bravely, in my opinion – that Plato has attained a kind of “apology of authoritarianism” in that late dialogue (p. 166).

Further on, the study focuses already on Aristotle, having first completed the parallel with Plato on the topic of state systems. Here, too, as in all parts of the dissertation, the relevant sources are examined, taking into account in the concrete case also the possibility of seeking the authentic Aristotelian claims on the issue in his works on ethics, insofar as “ethics is the real philosophical-theoretical foundation of political thought” (p. 167), but nevertheless the principal material analysed belongs to *Politics* and that choice by the author is also well substantiated and testifies to careful selection of the passages analysed more closely, which is visible throughout the text. Aristotle’s attitude to Plato is also discussed, the author defending the thesis that Aristotle was not only critic of Plato, but that he continued his work. It is demonstrated that Aristotle actually accepted everything that he could accept from the previous “political theory” and he also built on it. Here it is worth noting also the return to Herodotus and Thucydides and their observations on different forms of state systems, which – as is emphasised – are both historical and philosophical. The text outlines the principal points on which Aristotle has a certain contribution (even innovative to a certain extent, although D. Gocheva tends to avoid that qualification), e.g., in presenting the concept of the division of

powers. The comparison with Plato highlights as a contribution of Aristotle his conviction that state systems aspired towards their self-preservation, interpreted as an expression of Aristotle's teleologism; a key moment for the understanding of Aristotle is seen also in the subordination of his political views to the first philosophy, which determines also the importance of the contemplations on the forms (εἶδη) of the different state systems.

I would like to focus attention on the contribution of the study presented in Chapter Three of the brief treatise *Athenian Constitution*, undeservedly ignored as source for interpreting Aristotle's political philosophy, as indicated by D. Gocheva as well. Precisely owing to its concise nature, it offers an extremely good perspective to the possible gradual approaching the just (seen here as attained in Athens, thus emphasising Aristotle's Athenocentrism that brought him closer to Herodotus and Sophocles, distancing him accordingly from Thucydides and Plato in that respect.

Part Two of Chapter Three is devoted to Aristotle's anthropology as the foundation of ethics, in connection with the most important virtue – justice – a research commitment that again fills certain gaps in the study of Aristotle. These specialised observations on the body, soul and immortal *nous*, as well as on the modal triad (δύναμις-ἐνέργεια-ἐντελέχεια), are placed – as is convincingly demonstrated to be characteristic of Aristotle himself – in a cosmological frame, whereby the return to Plato whose cosmology Aristotle accepted partially was inevitable. I would cite among the conclusions in that part of the dissertation the emphasis on Aristotle's interest not so much on concrete cognitive and psychological phenomena, but rather on the “omnipresence of life and the soul,” the link with justice being substantiated at least through accepting virtues to be activities of the soul.

The last part of Chapter Three proposes the author's own translation (presented in parallel with the original text) with notes and comments on Book Epsilon of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is also a contribution to the interdisciplinary character of the dissertation and confirms the adopted approach of close reading of the sources. The translation is precise – and inspired – which can be said of the entire text. In spite of the popular disputing of the research character of translation, here that annex is fully justified, and to a certain extent it performs the role of first conclusion, insofar as it again provides and interpretation (“immanent, as well as historical” – p. 284) of the key concepts justice and just, and of their ontological character. The motifs cited for undertaking the translation comprise also the issue of terminology that is of specific importance with respect to Aristotle, being also dynamic in a peculiar way within the framework of the philosopher's reception in Bulgarian, whereby the thesis proposed by D.

Gocheva of the impossibility to introduce uniformity of the concepts of Plato and Aristotle has philosophic significance as well. I would single out the author's rendering of ἕξις as "predisposition" among her particularly successful translation choices.

Virtue as predisposition is also discussed in the actual concluding part of the dissertation, summarising some of the intermediate conclusions and also adding new comments and links, e.g., between justice and "judiciousness" (φρόνησις). There is also a return here to certain models of reception of Aristotle with a view to the central theme, referring also to important research by Bulgarian scholars in recent years, also interdisciplinary. The chosen "retrospective" approach in the work is again substantiated in detail. As was pointed out, this constitutes one of the serious contributions of the study, which can exercise an interdisciplinary influence on our understanding of ancient Greek thought paradigms, and on a narrower scale it has a potential to update also the interpretation of Aristotle, successfully accomplished in this study also through modern philosophical paradigms.

Certain technical and stylistic comments and recommendations can be addressed to the text of the study. For example: maybe in the Contents "Chapter" and "Part" should be used in reverse order; in some places the text sounds rather emotional and figurative, but maybe this is imposed by the relevance and significance of the theme; due to the fact that large parts of the text have been published autonomously earlier, certain repetitions are observed (e.g., in presenting the context of some works analysed), which can be avoided; additional uniformity can also be introduced, e.g., to refer either to Book Epsilon or Book Five of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; the Bulgarian version of the title could comprise the Greek concepts as well.

In spite of these and some other similar comments, and on the grounds of the arguments presented above, and on the basis of the Author's Summary with the cited contributions, the remaining publications and documents submitted, it is my conviction that the dissertation work proposed by Associate Professor Dr Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva has the characteristics and qualities of a dissertation for acquiring the academic degree of "Doctor of Sciences" (Dr. Habil.) in professional area 2.3. Philosophy (Ethics – History of Ethics).

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