



Liu Wei 刘玮. *Gongyi yu sili: Yalishidoude shijian*

***zhexue yanjiu* 公益与私利：亚里士多德实践哲学研究**

(Common Good and Private Good: A Study of

***Aristotle's Practical Philosophy)*. Peking University**

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Within the context of conflicts and instability, there emerged in classical Greece a number of city states (*poleis*, plural form of *polis*) and long duration of internecine wars, both civil and between polities. To seek secured protection and orderly life, the ancient Greeks naturally took shelter in the fortified city states. Among the prominent city states strategic alliances were formed, beaconing the modern concepts of politics and diplomacy. Basically the relationship among the allies was for mutual benefits rather than on moral grounds, so that friendship and enmity were reversible and convertible. Under the umbrella of the polis, people vested their well-being as well as that of their close and loved ones and the common interest of the city states that they lived in. As such, the independence of the polis, freedom, self-determination and security of that citadel formed the holistic or rather fundamental concerns of public interest which in turn contributed to the private interest.

Private interest and its public counterparts thus entangled most Greeks' daily life, generating tension and more often conflicts. To the Athenians who had established a major polis, the issues of private good (私利 *sili*) and common good (公益 *gongyi*) witnessed a core concern of political philosophy of their time. The book to be reviewed, *Gongyi yu Sili*, written in simplified Chinese characters, sets out to investigate how Aristotle looks at the forementioned crucial issues and how he resolves the agenda. In fact, Aristotle was not the only person who attempts to deal with the contention between

private and common good. Among ancient Greek thinkers, many have either asserted to deploy rhetoric or legislation to resolve the tension between private good and common good in order to formulate a democratic community for a good life. Rhetoric essentially works to exercise persuasion as a technology in public addresses whereas legislation forms the enforcement basis of a political community. Persuasion and enforcement thus generally become interchangeable words for the actual application of rhetoric and legislation.

To comprise these two domains, Liu's book consists of two parts. Part I (Chapters One to Four) illustrates the backdrop of Aristotle's thinking and Part II (Chapters Five to Ten) addresses Aristotle's resolutions to the conflicts between the public good and private good, good meaning essentially a good life.

The book's background narrative starts with Gorgias of Leontini's (483-375 BC) pre-Socratic pedagogy of rhetoric. Its impact is felt during the Peloponnesian Wars (431-404 BC), with Pericles (c. 495-429 BC) and Alcibiades (450-404 BC) as spiritual protégés to carry out the political practicum of rhetoric. Yet the two generals did not match up entirely to Gorgias's original intention of exercising rhetoric to realize citizens' common good. Then came Plato (c. 428-348 BC) to rebuke the lavish and dishonest rhetoric which when manipulated would have ruined Athens' political arena. Plato continues to pinpoint the limitations of rhetoric in his *The Republic* and condemns rhetorical devices as pseudo-technology. Here it would have been better if Liu somehow had elaborated on or explained earlier his meaning of technology rather than later in the book, namely that it is something not only derived from people's natural gift of endowment or habits, to compose or organize speech at will, but also to proceed investigation according to definite paths (110). Such an important word that governs Gorgias and Plato's arguments would preferably have been defined early at the beginning chapter. It would have been even illuminating though not necessary to cite in a footnote or a passing statement Foucault's use of the term being indebted to the ancient Greeks. Foucault's technology grants that individuals can effect certain operations on their own bodies, minds, souls, and lifestyle, so as to attain a certain quality of life or state of happiness. The ancient Greeks' cultural legacy is obvious, and this kind of relevant sideline would certainly make the book more comprehensive in terms of the longevity of such ideas.

Part II begins with chapters five and six, two significant chapters to assert the stand of Aristotle manifesting his divergence and convergence with his predecessors. Gorgias' devotion to the art and technology of persuasion, emphasizing the effectiveness of

rhetoric on human affection and pathos presents a strong thesis of the time. On the other hand, Plato asserts the importance of rationality and not emotionality; hence justice at the expense of individual's emotions. Justice is at the heart of legislation that confines a polis within manageable bounds. For that matter, Plato promotes the idea of a philosopher-king while banishing poets from his Republic. Basically, Liu echoes with other critics that Plato's view is pessimistic because none of the components of men is truly happy in the polis with the depressing rationality that probably will sacrifice individual's desires. Liu points out that Plato's discussion of psyche is too mechanical by dividing it into three strata, i.e., the rational, affectional/pathetic, and the concupiscent (106). But his appraisal claiming that Aristotle's is more practical and balanced has not been substantiated enough to be self-evident. Nevertheless, in demonstrating Plato's rectification of the "corrupted" city-state politics, Liu implies that Plato actually presents an antithesis to Gorgias's thesis. Both philosophers, however, intend to make life in the city-state a good and happy one.

Gorgias may be naïve in the views of Plato, yet Aristotle doesn't find the former ineffective though insufficient. Else, Aristotle does not concur to his teacher Plato's conviction to make legislation the ultimate solution to the dilemma between common good and private good. He realizes the internal limitations of enforcing legislation. City-state politics based simply on law enforcement will become dangerous to families. Accommodation for the individuals will help the polis to gain and stick to humanity. At the same time, Aristotle conceives that common good should not indulge citizens to maximize their private interests without restraints. In fact, what Plato and Aristotle seek after is the highest good (*eudaimonia*), often translated as happiness. But Plato and Aristotle use drastically different approaches. The latter sees the importance of Nature and things natural. Thereby, Aristotle modifies Gorgias and rectifies the stringency of Plato, with a moral fiber in his assertion of persuasion, helping people to attain correct thinking toward the most appropriate emotional direction. He does see the necessity of politics to build a city of beauty (*kallipolis*) as Plato would have liked to construct. For that cause, he applies dialectics to deal with the issues trailing down by Gorgias and other rhetoricians as well as Plato and the legalists. Simply put, targeting on Gorgias' thesis and Plato's antithesis, Aristotle comes up with a synthesis containing proper modifications and balanced precepts. Like in the note on "technology," Liu at length provides a clear notion of what dialectics is when he later points out the generality of rhetoric and dialectic that differ from other technologies or sciences (110-111). Such an explanatory note on dialectics should be placed earlier, best at the first time when the keyword appears. This would reduce unnecessary puzzling over the nature of the crucial terms. Anyways, Liu explicates the function of dialectics is to induce to the first

principle of science. However, Aristotle never clearly explains how dialectics can attain that goal (75). Ironically, one of the findings of Liu in Aristotle is that the philosopher did not give an exemplary demonstration of how dialectics can derive the first principle of science.

Though without showing the procedure of dialectal synthesis, the author further analyzes the shortcomings or rather the limited application of Aristotle's assumption, that is, the ideal function of rhetoric depends on the moral fiber or the virtue of the rhetoricians and not on rhetoric itself. This is where Aristotle perceives the powerlessness of rhetoric. On the other hand, ethical persuasion also has its limitation and that is why legislation must come into play. For that, Aristotle is more thorough than Plato in reconciling the public and private good, or rather a unison of the two to resolve their conflicting tension. Politics and legislation are to be engaged to guarantee a good city state life. Building on Plato's overarching justice, Aristotle refines justice to contribute to a political community that involves legitimate justice and special justice, the latter of which includes distributive justice, corrective justice and exchangeable justice forming general justice and is named by Aristotle as the "complete virtue" (147). It is complete because its meaning includes its relationship with other people making the laws of a polis stipulating the values of the city state and are recognized as virtues. This is the context wherein Aristotle claims that man is a political animal. Though he does not discuss or critique Plato's notion of philosopher-king, he details the nature of virtue, particularly in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. One of the captions as cited and translated by Liu in highlighting the practice of ethical politics by the wise and the virtuous is the recognition that "surpassing virtue changes men into gods, the disposition opposed to Bestiality will clearly be some quality more than human" (*Nic. Eth.* 7.1.2).

Of more general interest among the analyses and explications in the book, or rather common interest not only to philosopher but humanist readers in general, is the discussion that man is not only a political animal but also a family animal (101). Gorgias as well as Plato have shown that man indeed is socially oriented and tends to be gregarious in seeking a good life. But only in Aristotle do we see a balanced life in that there is the need for public life as well as private life and man tends to seek for understanding, desires and affection (107). Hence, annihilation of families to build up a city state is disastrous for which Aristotle indirectly rebukes his predecessors including Plato.

Though the English subtitle of the book bears the label "Aristotle's Practical Philosophy," little is provided to demonstrate how those "practical" aspects work. What

is given in the discussion are rather the principles and the general bearings of Aristotle's concepts. In fact, a major portion of them are disputing or adjudicating previous philosophers' opinions, in particular, modifications of Plato's assertions.

Despite this claim and its restrictive application, overall, this book provides a good general introduction to Aristotle's views on politics, ethics, rhetoric, law and other topics (*topoi*), focusing on the interplay between common good and private good. Consolidating much information on the benign circle of rhetoric and legislation in ancient Greece, Liu has explained aspects of these fields dynamically and with a good sense of judgment. All in all, despite the rather dry narrative, a book written in Chinese that encapsulates contentions of ancient Greece is rare and is commendable.

Minor errors, typos and deficiencies are randomly noted as follows: 1. 阴性的灵魂 (*psyche*, 15); though the Greek original is quoted with an explanatory footnote to indicate the gender of the word but that is not sufficient. Will subsequent application of the term 灵魂 be consistently feminine in gender or is this interchangeable with a masculine version of it? Does this *psyche* share the same hermeneutic nuance with the English word "soul" which is more likely to be understood when translated into the Chinese term 灵魂? Such lexical complexity should be discussed or further cautioned in the footnote. 2. First appearance of proper names are generally followed by their Greek original after the Chinese transliteration in the book. However, they are rarely affixed with life dates. It will help readers to conceptualize and historicize major events, characters and works if their dates are given. 3. For Chinese readers who do not read classical Greek, quoting the Greek original after the Chinese translation will not help. It is suggested that for crucial terms, aside from the Greek original, an English translation can be given, at least placing it in the footnote since English is a common foreign language among educated readers. The Harvard University Loeb Classical Library texts could easily be used for this purpose. 4. The bibliographical format of the reference section should be reorganized. Primary sources and secondary literature can be separated while journal articles and book chapters need to be properly configured. 5. Granted that the book has no index, it would help readers tremendously to have a glossary of technical terms with which they can refer to and refresh their memory of unfamiliar expressions throughout the book.



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