Boris Nikolsky - Article On His Interest in Classical Philosophy (Original In Russian)

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This is copy of the English translated version of the original which is in the Russian language magazine "Knife" of an interview with Boris Nikolsky, author the article "Epicurus On Pleasure." Thanks to @nkulinka for reporting this to us!

“We have remained the same people as the ancient Greeks”: *interview with classical philologist Boris Nikolsky on the modernity of ancient tragedy and philosophy*

Boris Nikolsky is a Doctor of Philology and a classical philologist. Boris Mikhailovich's main research interest is ancient Greek playwrights, especially Euripides, whom he has been studying for many years. In addition, his interests include philosophical topics, including Stoic logic and grammar, the problem of pleasure in Epicurus, and, more recently, the critical edition of medieval Armenian translations of Greek philosophers. Timofey Anufriev spoke with Boris Nikolsky about how his scientific career developed, why ancient Greek tragedy is close to modern people, and what are the prospects for classical philology in Russia.

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— How did you end up at the Philological Faculty? What influenced your choice?

— I got into the philological faculty primarily because my parents were philologists. At first, they did not want me to follow in their footsteps, and I myself did not intend to become a philologist. At school, I was more interested in mathematics, and my mindset can hardly be called humanitarian. However, in the ninth grade, I devoted so much time to mathematical studies that I eventually simply got tired of them, and I was drawn in the opposite direction — to philology, which my parents studied. At that time, I read a lot, and this choice seemed natural to me.

At first I enrolled in the Russian Philology department, but I lacked the feeling that I was learning a craft. Much of what we did there I could have done myself: just read books and think about them. There were only two subjects I really liked: Latin and Church Slavonic. So I decided to transfer to the Classics department, where they study dead languages.

I had no special interest in Antiquity itself at that time - at that time I knew almost nothing about ancient culture. I simply liked to study rare and complex, dead languages.

I really enjoyed Ancient Greek. Learning it is an intellectual challenge.

The morphology of the ancient Greek language, which is covered in the first year, at first seems chaotic and confusing, but then the structure of the language begins to emerge through this chaos, you understand that behind this chaos there is a clear structure, but in its historical development. At first, I approached ancient Greek from a linguistic or even mathematical point of view, until some of my teachers showed me the real charm of this language: we began to read authors in whom you could feel the intonation, rhythm, see witty linguistic devices.

But for quite a long time I was more interested in historical linguistics, which was the subject of my first term papers, rather than classical literature. In the end, however, the desire to read texts in Greek overcame everything else. So I began to study classical philology.

— Whom of your teachers can you remember, those you would like to tell us about?

— I studied linguistics under the guidance of the outstanding linguist Sergei Anatolyevich Starostin. He amazed me with the clarity of his thought, which was able to embrace the most complex and diverse material and find a clear structure in it. Then I moved from linguistics to classical philology, because I wanted to work with texts, not with lists of words.

My real acquaintance with the Greek language happened thanks to two teachers, who later became my closest friends - Olga Leonidovna Levinskaya (now Akhunova) and Nikolai Pavlovich Grintser. The first author whose texts we read together was Plato. It can be said that my love for the ancient Greek language arose precisely thanks to reading Plato. Although I am not a fan of his philosophy, reading him in Greek still gives me great pleasure. At the same time, my linguistic interests were quite strong, so at first I studied texts of grammatical content. My diploma was devoted to Greek grammarians, namely the linguistic thought of the Stoics - philosophers who largely created grammatical terminology.

Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to study with Nikolai Alekseevich Fedorov, who taught Latin brilliantly at the Department of Classical Philology at Moscow State University. But later we worked together on Cicero's text.

In addition to my teachers, I was greatly influenced by my senior colleague and friend Grigory Dashevsky. I met him later, when I was already working at the Russian State University for the Humanities. He taught me to read carefully, to see the author's thought in the smallest details of a work. And he showed me that ancient literature is not some special, completely separate elevated world, no, it tells us about ourselves and about our own lives.

— Do you consider yourself to belong to one of the traditions in classical philology, for example, to the Moscow tradition?

— In a sense, I am a member of the school of Yu. A. Shichalin, because he was Olga Levinskaya's teacher. Perhaps, ultimately, my teachers' interest in the subtleties of the meaning of words and particles goes back to him. From them, I also inherited an interest in the logical sequence of narration and text construction. This logic often escapes the attention of students — they spend all their energy on understanding the syntactic connections in a sentence, but do not try to discover what stands above the sentence and between the sentences.

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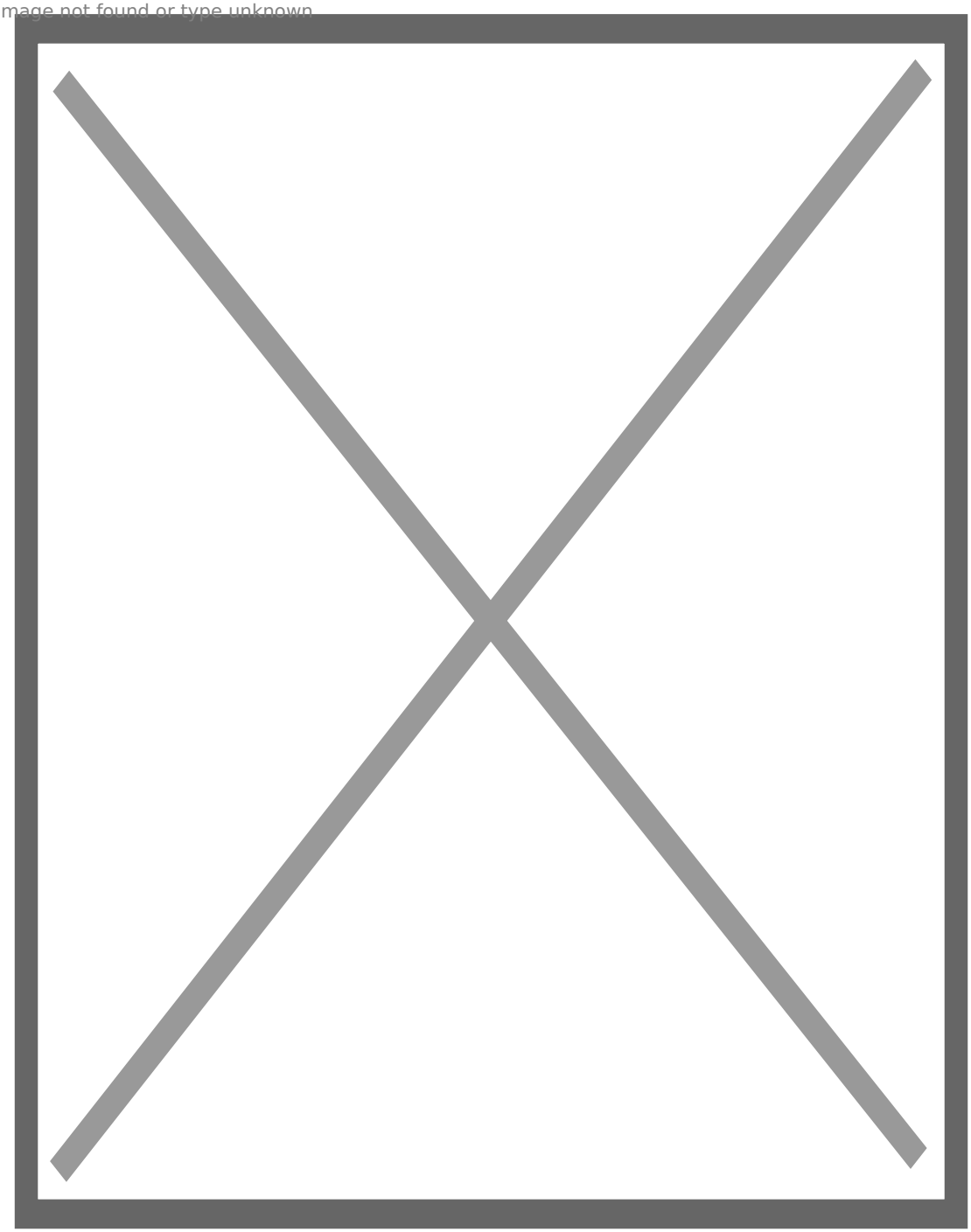

— What interested you in Greek tragedy?

— At first, my perception of Greek tragedy was purely aesthetic. I have always liked dramatic dynamics, tension and relaxation in literature, as well as the architectonics of the whole, when the entire work is built around one main, central point. I began to read Greek tragedy in the original when I became a teacher. The first two works that impressed me most were Aeschylus's Agamemnon and Euripides' Hippolytus. Both of these texts have remarkable dynamics. In Agamemnon, the first part is static and long, permeated with tension from the expectation of disaster, suspense, and then it abruptly changes to an "explosion", the murder of the king. Euripides' Hippolytus also has its own dynamics — the rapid spread of news of Phaedra's illness, similar to the spread of news of Chatsky's madness in Griboyedov's Woe from Wit.

At the same time, I felt that these two texts had a thematic integrity - significant words and images were repeated. But I did not immediately grasp the "point" to which these works were reduced; it remained a mystery to me, and I was fascinated by the attempt to resolve it.

At such moments you feel like a spectator of an ancient Greek theatre, watching a production and trying to make ends meet during the performance.

It was a little easier to "reconcile" them with Agamemnon, since many excellent works have been written about it, but comparatively few good works have been written about Euripides' Hippolytus. So I began to study this text and Euripides in general, and did so for many years. I wanted to understand what the thematic center of this tragedy was. In the end, I think I managed to find it. I set out my understanding of this tragedy in the book Misery and Forgiveness in Euripides.

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— What can a modern person learn from Greek tragedy?

— First of all, almost every tragedy has universal human meanings. After all, we are the same people as the ancient Greeks were, and our culture comes from theirs. We can see this in the example of "Hippolytus". This tragedy contains a sequence of scenes, very similar to each other, in which a character makes a mistake and is blamed for it. But at the same time, in each scene, Euripides emphasizes the motives that push the characters to make mistakes, and these motives - ignorance, emotions and passions - were supposed to make the audience show indulgence towards the characters. In the last scene, which crowns the development of the theme of condemnation or indulgence, Hippolytus forgives his murderer, his own father. The main moral meaning of this tragedy is that people are very weak and easily make mistakes,

and we must always take this into account and treat each other with tolerance. Already in the 5th century BC, such a meaning, very modern and close to us, was extremely relevant.

On the other hand, there is an aspect of tragedy that I discovered much later: when they were staged, they were politically topical. I came to this hypothesis against my will, because as a philologist, not a historian, I was inclined to read the text based only on itself. I wanted to see a work of literature as self-sufficient and autonomous. In the case of Hippolytus, I managed to see in the tragedy a timeless and universal meaning.

But when I began to study other tragedies in detail, it became clear that some works, although they have obvious structural integrity, their meaning does not become clear if you try to extract it from them alone.

In Euripides' Iphigenia in Tauris, the main theme is the transition from barbarism to civilization, and this is expressed in the cessation of family feuds and murders in the Atreid clan. The elimination of feuds and the transition from barbarism to civilization is accomplished through the help and intervention of Athena and Apollo. What universal meaning can lie behind this?

I then decided to look at the events that took place when the tragedy was staged, and discovered that it coincided with the end of the civil war in Argos, thanks to the help of Athens. After that, an alliance treaty was concluded between the cities. The assumption that the tragedy was timed to coincide with these events helps clarify the structure, which otherwise remains unclear. Thus, I came to the conclusion that the mythological plots of some tragedies served as political allegories and referred to specific historical events. Tragedies were not staged to be eternal.

Ultimately, we are faced with two ways of reading tragedy today. Either we can try to extract from tragedy a universal human meaning, which always exists in one form or another, but is not always the focus of the author's intention. Or we can relate tragedies to certain events that are happening now. The possibility of allegorical reading and applying the plot of a tragedy to what is happening around us exists, and a modern director could take advantage of this.

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— There is a famous legend about the Greek tragedians: Aeschylus fought in the Battle of Marathon, Sophocles participated in it as a young standard-bearer, and Euripides was born in the year of this battle. What was the relationship between the "fathers of tragedy", how did their worldviews differ?

— I would combine Aeschylus and Euripides, despite all their differences. Yes, their styles are very different. Aeschylus thinks through every detail, every word. Euripides has many purely rhetorical passages and reasoning, he often changes register, moving from serious to comic. Nevertheless, both strive for semantic, thematic integrity of their works. Both construct their tragedy so that its parts are organic parts of the artistic whole.

Sophocles, in contrast, strives less for semantic integrity. Rather, he starts from some initial idea that enables the creation of dramatic emotions. In Oedipus Rex, such an idea was “ignorance,” and the entire work was built on the emotional development of this idea. His tragedies hold the viewer not with semantic content, but with emotional tension. This is why Sophocles is so beloved today, and loses less in translation.

— According to Aristotle, “Sophocles said that he represented people as they should be, and Euripides as they really are.” What innovation did Euripides bring to the genre of tragedy, in your opinion?

— Euripides was more concerned with depicting the world he lived in. But his difference from Aeschylus and Sophocles concerns not so much the subject matter of the tragedies as their aesthetics and style. This is evident in the behavior of his characters, their speeches and arguments. Even in metrics, he used an extremely free iambic to more accurately reproduce prose living speech.

The rhetoric in his tragedies is very close to the rhetoric of the sophists of his time.

He often builds even the structure of his tragedies on sophistic models, for example, "Helen". In the first half of the play we see deception, which becomes the cause of endless troubles, but in the middle of the play, deception suddenly becomes good and saving. This is undoubtedly a sophistic topos, presenting the same concept from two opposite sides: first, it is an obvious view (deception is bad and unjust), then a paradoxical one (deception is good and just). This is how the sophists, who were contemporaries of Euripides, built their reasoning. So in addition to classical models like Homer, Euripides drew no less inspiration from the living material of his time.

— Euripides is often accused of atheism, pointing to the unsightly images of the gods in his tragedies. Did he really try to dispel the aura of holiness around the Olympians?

— The immorality of the gods can, of course, be used as an atheistic argument. Sometimes the characters in Euripides' tragedies utter phrases like: "If the gods exist, then why do they allow this?" But these phrases come from the mouths of characters who do not understand the real will of the gods.

I am not sure that we can read Euripides' worldview from his texts. They were intended for a wide audience, and the attitude towards the world expressed in them should not have caused doubts among the audience. It is unlikely that Euripides would stage tragedies with atheistic content. Moreover, if we look at some plays, we will see that in them Euripides shows both divine power and the gods' favor towards people. Take, for example, the tragedy "Ion", at the beginning of which we doubt the morality of Apollo, who committed violence against Creusa and, as it seems to everyone, abandoned the child she gave birth to, but then Apollo is acquitted. In "Iphigenia in Tauris" Orestes constantly doubts whether Apollo's will was fair, who first forced him to kill his mother and then sent him to a distant inhospitable country, but then it

turns out that everything happened as it should have been. I don't think an atheist playwright would create such tragedies.

On the other hand, at times Euripides does subject the gods to moral criticism.

In Hippolytus, the main culprit of all that has happened is Aphrodite. True, the goddess's guilt does not become an argument against her existence. On the contrary, Euripides points out to the viewer that she is incredibly strong and impossible to resist. The combination of strength and cruelty that we find in her image is the opposite of the combination of weakness and at the same time humanity that is characteristic of man. Something similar can be seen in Sophocles. For example, the goddess Athena in the prologue of Ajax is just as powerful, but in the same way her cruelty is contrasted with the humanity of Odysseus.

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— In his tragedies, Euripides reproduces religious cults, rituals and legends in detail. Where did he get such great knowledge of this? Could he have deliberately traveled around the country and studied this material or is there nothing unique in this for an educated person of his century?

- Yes, Euripides often connects the events of his tragedies with contemporary cults. But the cults he mentions are usually Attic. They were understandable to the Athenian public.

What seems to me much more interesting is the unexpected knowledge of the localities of the various regions. Barrett pointed this out in his commentary on Hippolytus. This tragedy describes with astonishing precision the details of the locality in which the events of the play unfold, the city of Troezen. Since I have had the opportunity to study this text for many years, I have visited the places described in the tragedy and have seen with my own eyes the veracity of Euripides' description. But Troezen was located not far from Athens, in northern Argolis, and was connected to Athens by special ties. As for distant lands, Euripides did not strive at all to depict them accurately.

— The playwright's closeness to the circle of philosophers suggests his sympathies for democratic circles. Here we can also recall the criticism of tyranny in the person of the Cyclops in the play of the same name. How did Euripides imagine democracy?

— First of all, it is worth understanding what democracy meant to the Athenians. It was established after the overthrow of the dynasty of the Peisistratids and throughout its history it was opposed to tyranny. Tyranny returned several times, for example during the reign of the

"regime of the four hundred" or the "tyranny of the thirty", but such episodes did not last long. It is possible that the cult of Dionysus and the festival of the Great Dionysia, where tragedies were staged, were connected with the idea of democracy. Almost all performances in the theater of Dionysus were supposed to concern democratic freedom and its opposition to tyranny.

Euripides' play "Cyclops" is unique in its genre. It is the only fully preserved satyr drama - almost no similar works have reached us. The satyr drama ended the tetralogy presented by each playwright, it was preceded by three tragedies. Since we know this genre very poorly, it is difficult to say which elements in "Cyclops" are inherent to the genre as a whole.

At least this much can be said about the Cyclops. This play links the dramatic performance with the Dionysian festival - there is a happy ending, the play ends with the victory over the monster thanks to the help of Dionysus and wine. This victory marks the liberation from slavery to the terrible tyrant. The victory over the monster thanks to Dionysus could reflect the democratic idea of the entire Dionysian festival. It is not at all necessary to see in the Cyclops a reflection of some specific political events. This play could reflect the general democratic spirit of the Athenian theater.

As for Euripides' political views, it would be more correct to speak not of any specific views, but rather of his political commitment.

If some of his tragedies are indeed connected with political events, then this means that he participated in the political life of the polis. Moreover, such engagement does not at all imply a specific ideology. The poet could belong to some political circle and express its views and interests, as, for example, in the case of Aeschylus's Oresteia, the production of which was sponsored by Pericles and which obviously reflected the interests of his party. I would associate some of Euripides' tragedies with the political interests of Alcibiades, namely, The Trojan Women and the already mentioned Iphigenia in Tauris. Apparently, Euripides wrote a victory song, the Epinicium, in honor of Alcibiades' victory at the Olympic Games around the same time, so we can assume that he was personally connected with the famous politician.

So, on the one hand, there is a general democratic idea on which the entire political life of Athens in general and the local theater in particular are based, and on the other hand, there are specific political interests. Both have found their place in the plays of Euripides.

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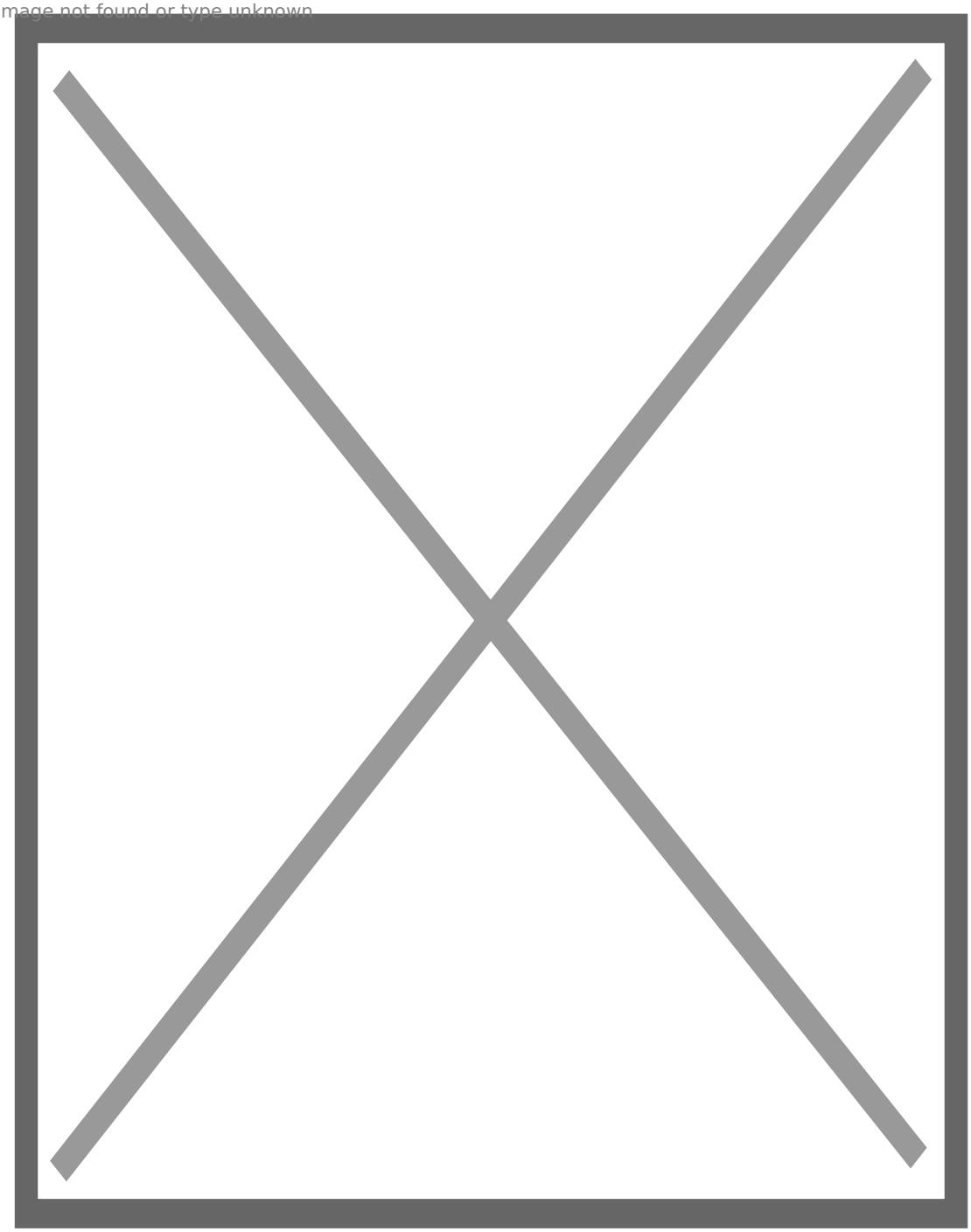

— Euripides is remembered as the last great playwright of Greece. Why did this tradition cease and after his death we no longer encounter authors equal to the Athenian tragedians?

— Unfortunately, we know very little about the tragedies of the fourth century. The reason for this is the peculiarities of the selection of texts, a selection that took place over centuries, but began precisely in this fourth century, when the canon of the great classical tragedians

appeared. This canon included Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, they began to be staged anew, new tragic poets had to emulate them and compete with them. Their fame did not allow later poets to break through the centuries, and only one or, perhaps, two tragedies of the fourth century have survived to this day. They have survived only because they were attributed to classical poets. This is "Res", attributed to Euripides and enjoyed great popularity in Antiquity. And, perhaps, this is "Prometheus Bound", attributed to Aeschylus, although disputes continue about its attribution. Prometheus is a remarkable tragedy, and if it was really written in the 4th century, it means that the level of tragic poetry at that time was still very high.

— You also wrote commentaries on Cicero's treatise "On the Limits of Good and Evil." How did you come to this topic and what did you discover for yourself in the philosophical work of the Roman orator?

— I came to Cicero almost by accident. As I said above, my diploma was devoted to Stoic logic and grammar, and I continued to study this topic further, in graduate school. Just then, N.A. Fedorov was going to publish his translation of Cicero's treatise "On the Limits of Good and Evil" and invited me to comment on this text. As a result, I discovered two philosophical schools, the Stoics and the Epicureans, and I still treat them with great love.

Almost nothing has come down to us from the Stoics themselves, but Cicero expounds the Stoic teaching in his works, proving to be one of the main and earliest sources for the reconstruction of Stoic philosophy. In the dialogue "On the Limits of Good and Evil" he expounds the ideas of other Hellenistic schools.

How accurately and reliably Cicero conveys the teachings of Hellenistic philosophers is a complex, not even historical-philosophical, but philological problem. Philological study of Cicero's treatises made it possible to find out how and for what reasons Cicero distorts the ideas of the Greek schools, to determine what was the "prism" through which he looked at them, and, having removed this "prism", to some extent to see their true meaning.

— From the comments on Cicero's treatise, you came up with an article about different types of pleasure in Epicurus. How adequately did the Roman orator translate his thoughts?

— In the treatise "On the Limits of Good and Evil" Cicero's dependence on academic doxography is obvious. One of the main sources for him, following which he expounded the teachings of the Hellenistic schools, was Antiochus of Ascalon, a philosopher of the Platonic school. In the era preceding Antiochus, the Platonists were skeptics, they denied the possibility of an exact and unambiguous establishment of truth, primarily engaged in discussions with other schools and the refutation of their philosophical systems. An important figure in this skeptical period was Carneades. In order to analyze and criticize the ethical teachings of different philosophical schools, he came up with a way to classify them. His classification was based on the principle of thesis - antithesis - synthesis. Carneades contrasted the teachings of two schools on a particular subject, for example, on the highest good, as a thesis and antithesis. He said, for example, that the Stoics see it only in the soul, and the Epicureans - only

in the body.

Applying the dichotomy of soul and body to these schools distorts our understanding of them.

Of course, both the Stoics and the Epicureans used the concept of the soul, but since they were materialists and monists, the very idea of the soul played a completely different role for them than for the Platonists. Carneades wrote that man is a combination of soul and body, and therefore the highest good must be sought in the combination of the good of the soul and the good of the body. This synthesis of thesis and antithesis was presented by the followers of Carneades as a plausible, most probable judgment, while still refraining from asserting the truth.

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Antiochus of Ascalon, in a sense, makes a revolution within the academic school, becoming a dogmatist, that is, rejecting a skeptical attitude towards the knowledge of truth. But as dogma he affirms all the same judgments that his predecessors expressed as plausible and used in criticizing their opponents. That is, for Carneades, the judgment that the highest good should be seen in the good of the soul and body together is needed only to refute the insufficient teachings of the Stoics and Epicureans, and Antiochus turns this judgment into a dogma. He traces this dogma back to the "ancients", to Plato, his very first academic students, to Aristotle and the Peripatetics, believing that he is restoring their true teaching.

In my article "Pleasure in Epicurus" I suggested that Epicurus's opposition between dynamic and static pleasures, which we find neither in Lucretius nor in Plutarch, has nothing to do with Epicurean teaching. This opposition is quite absurd. It is assumed that for Epicurus the highest form of pleasure was simply the absence of pain - static pleasure. The other type of pleasure, which consisted of movement, or kinetic, he supposedly considered inferior.

At the same time, Cicero does not give a clear definition of kinetic pleasure: in some passages, movement refers to a change in the state of the organism (for example, when we eat or drink), in others - when something affects our organs of perception (say, listening to music). These two types of movement are difficult to connect with each other.

Epicurus did indeed write that the absence of suffering is pleasure, and even the highest pleasure, but he by no means rejected what Cicero called kinetic pleasures.

On the contrary, in some places he even extols them: in his suicide letter he says that when he had terrible pains associated with urolithiasis, memories of meetings and conversations with

friends helped him overcome these pains. If we use Cicero's dichotomy, then such pleasure can be called kinetic, and it turns out to be stronger than the absence of "static pleasure".

These inconsistencies led me to turn to other authors who expound the Epicurean doctrine. As a result, I became convinced that the dichotomy of kinetic and static pleasure is found only in Cicero and in two other texts influenced by the same doxographic tradition: Diogenes Laërtius and Athenaeus.

What did Epicurus really mean when he called the absence of suffering the highest pleasure? He did not separate this state from the process of replenishing a deficiency in the body - he did not separate satiety from food. Epicurus simply wanted to say that the extent of our pleasure from food is determined by our satiety, and not by what exactly we eat. We will receive equal pleasure from ordinary bread and from luxurious dishes.

The limit of pleasure is satiety - this was the teaching of Epicurus. He disputed Plato's thesis, according to which we receive pleasure only in the process of, for example, eating, and therefore, if pleasure is a good, then a person striving for pleasure must constantly provoke hunger in himself.

Epicurus saw that satiety is also a part of pleasure, and that pleasure is not limited to the process of replenishment.

However, academic doxography aimed to contrast the Epicureans with another hedonistic school, the Cyrenaics. And the academics applied here the very same classification principle I mentioned: thesis - antithesis. They attributed to the Cyrenaics, who strove for momentary pleasures, a devotion to kinetic pleasure, and called Epicurus an admirer of static pleasure. In the very opposition of movement and rest, of course, a Platonic dichotomy is revealed, which is not at all characteristic of either the Epicureans or the Cyrenaics. In fact, everything was much simpler. Epicurus did not preach insensitivity, not static pleasure in rest. The main thing he wanted to say is that we can experience the greatest pleasure and the greatest joy from the smallest things, therefore pleasure is available to everyone.

— Ancient philosophy as a way of life is becoming increasingly popular today. In your opinion, what is this connected with and what prospects do you see in it?

— I think this popularity is connected with the specificity of Hellenistic philosophical schools. They allow one to get rid of fears, negative emotions and experiences. Later, this role was taken over by religion, and in our time — by psychology and psychoanalysis. Of the psychologists who turn to ancient philosophical ideas, I am close to Viktor Frankl, who reminds me of the Stoics with his reasoning. He opposed himself to Freud, often on exactly the same grounds on which the Stoics can be opposed to the Epicureans.

As for turning to ancient philosophy today, I can tell you a funny story. A few years ago, someone from the international Epicurean community wrote to me, thanking me for my article on pleasure in Epicurus. They told me that my conclusions were just what they needed, because the members of this community wanted to enjoy, and all the historians of philosophy

constantly explained to them that Epicurus was not for pleasure, but for the absence of all feelings. After my article, modern Epicureans realized that they can still enjoy with a calm soul, while following the precepts of Epicurus.

— How do you see the future of classical philology in Russia?

— It is hard to watch what is happening now. My professional life coincided with the heyday of classical philology in Moscow and in Russia in general, and now I see how its decline is beginning, everything is collapsing. Classical philology is a science that cannot exist in a single, closed country. It is an international science. In the Soviet years, the pre-revolutionary tradition was partially preserved in St. Petersburg, while in Moscow classical philology in the proper sense of the word practically did not exist, precisely because of the lack of any contacts with the world. It was impossible to get the necessary books, not to mention personal communication with scientists, participation in conferences and everything else.

Our science could not exist without live communication with colleagues.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the country gradually began to open up to the world, contacts with Western scholars appeared, the Internet emerged, making articles and books available, and in this atmosphere a new generation of classical philologists grew up. Now I work in France and I can say that the Moscow school of classical philology is not inferior to the French one. For now, it continues to exist, but we do not know how long this political nightmare will last, and there is less and less hope that Russian classical philology will maintain its high level.

— For a long time you headed the department of ancient literature at the Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences, but recently you left. What are you doing now and what are your plans for the future?

— My last project at the Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences was commentary on Aristophanes. If in the case of tragedy the unit in which the author's thought is reflected is the tragedy as a whole, then comedy is constructed in a completely different way. Its integrity is rather external, the author's attention is directed to each specific joke. Comedy has, of course, a single plot, but this does not exclude the significance of each individual joke. This can be compared to a circus performance in which there is a general plot, but at the same time each individual act is important in itself. Aristophanes' comedies are a collection of such acts. Commentary addressed to each joke therefore turns out to be an ideal way of interpreting comedy.

When I left Russia, the first country I visited was Armenia, where I spent six months. I was hired by the Matenadaran, an institute that preserves and studies ancient Armenian manuscripts, and I had to choose a topic in which I could, on the one hand, use my knowledge as a classical philologist, and on the other, study Armenian monuments. Together with my Armenian colleagues, we began publishing medieval Armenian translations of Greek philosophers made in the 5th–8th centuries. There are quite a few of these translations, and they are contained in

many manuscripts, many of which have never been critically published. Our work involves comparing different manuscripts, preparing a critical edition of the Armenian text, and comparing the Armenian text with the Greek original. Quite often, knowledge of the Armenian translation allows us to correct the Greek text. In addition, we also deal with such issues as the principles of translating words and grammatical constructions.

I find this work very interesting. Imagine, I have always worked with an author who has been interpreted and republished many times, and now I am working with completely new and unstudied material. In addition, I like working on many specific individual problems. Each phrase is a task that needs to be solved.

— Have you already learned Armenian?

— I don’t speak modern Armenian, but I have learned to read Grabar, the classical Armenian language, which is different from modern Armenian. In its grammatical structure, it is similar to Greek, but a little simpler. But it is lexically complex, since the words in it are not similar to the vocabulary of European languages and do not evoke any associations. I learn Armenian from ancient translations of Philo of Alexandria. He is a Jewish author who wrote in Greek, and I read him with a parallel text in ancient Armenian.