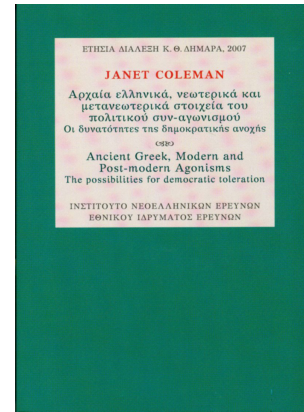




INSTITUTE FOR NEOHELLENIC RESEARCH  
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION



**Janet Coleman,**

**Αρχαία ελληνικά, νεωτερικά και μετανεωτερικά στοιχεία του πολιτικού συναγωνισμού. Οι δυνατότητες της δημοκρατικής ανοχής / Ancient Greek, Modern and Post-Modern Agonisms. The possibilities for democratic toleration.**

Translation: Marios Hatzopoulos.

Annual C. Th. Dimaras Lecture -2007, INR/NHRF, Athens 2008, 136 p.

With this paper, Janet Coleman, a top-ranking historian of political thought in our day, made her own contribution in the dialogue between the Ancients and the Moderns and, indeed, in the field of contemporary intellectual history of Europe. The paper describes the quest for a different approach to the issues of political incorporation and strategies for mobilization of citizens in contemporary society – a society based on subjectivism and value pluralism. Coleman's point of departure and main frame of reference was the political thought of classical Greece – Aristotle in particular – bringing to the forefront the notion of *agonism* as the main structural component of political life in the ancient Greek city. From Coleman's point of view, the ancient Athenians had succeeded in building a sense of common will, positioned above individual bonds of devotion to faith, family, community or profession. Individuals were thus raised to the status of citizens *par excellence* and were consequently involved in fertile antitheses as free men in a free society, antitheses not of an antagonistic but *agonistic* nature, following specific rules with the ultimate goal of benefiting the city. Coleman then thoroughly analyses the theoretical context upon which the notion of toleration is based in modern societies in such a way as to constitute a *sine qua non* condition for any democracy. Contrary to the tradition of classical political thought, modern political theory holds that the individual is a pre-eminently natural entity unshackled from social frameworks and society and custom. In this perspective, toleration is conceived as an ethical idea requiring the formulation of judgements exclusively stemming from individual and not collective rationality, either approving or deploring diverse life practices. Aristotle on the contrary maintained that we disapprove of something when we judge it to be wrong and that this judgement is not a matter of personal choice. This is precisely where the notion of *agonism* comes into play: in other words the perception that through a dialectic procedure the right judgement may be formed to suit the circumstance, and that this will come about if there is already an established ground of common morality. Aristotelian *agonism* does not demand the fabrication of an artificial unanimity grounded on the abstract principle of tolerance in such a way as to make of humans who were formerly solitary and

hostile, beings forming communities, as postulated by modern political thought. In the opinion of Aristotle, the factor that keeps a human society together in the sense of the city, is a mutual feeling of friendship among citizens, the outcome of which is social concord: *homo-noia*, both at the level of ethics as of action.

Through the contrast between classical and modern political thought upon the potential existence of democratic tolerance, in her conclusions Coleman shows the crucial role that may be played by the Aristotelian notion of *homo-noein* in confrontation of the fragmentation of the social fabric in today's societies of late modernity.

Χορηγός της έκδοσης  
**Coca-Cola Τρία Έψιλον**