

## POSITION

on the dissertation “**Objective Study of Morality and Contemporary Ethics**” for awarding a Doctor of Philosophical Sciences degree in the scientific area 2.3 Philosophy

to **Emilia Vasil Marinova**, PhD, Associate Professor in the Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge at BAS

by Assoc. Prof. Valentina Georgieva Kaneva, PhD,  
Faculty of Philosophy of the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia

The dissertation of Emilia Marinova submitted for a public defense is dedicated to moral psychology as a scientific field and to the research methods relevant to the object of investigation – morality in its personal and social dimensions, as well as the moral development. The study seeks to answer the question about the value of scientific knowledge obtained in this area of psychological research and its methodology for ethics today. According to the author it questions a little discussed and insufficiently studied topic: “the connection between the objective studies of morality and the recent tendencies and processes in ethics” (p. 9). In this way is determined the main goal of the study (p. 13). The third chapter of the dissertation analyzes the connection between the objective studies of morality and applied ethics as well as a development ethics closely engaged with the questions of moral education.

The total length of the dissertation is 258 pages. In the introductory part of the study the basic concepts are clarified as well as the reasons for the accepted distinctions – as regards the term “objective studies of morality”, the understanding of the term “experiment” in psychology, etc.

The first chapter of the dissertation traces the formation of the research area of moral psychology and deals with the methods of research developed by the famous researchers and schools in the field. The basic trends in psychology are presented which enable the intensive research on the questions of morality and moral development. Emilia Marinova describes four basic approaches – structural-cognitive, social-cognitive, activity, and psycho-dynamic approach - distinctive in their basic ideas, methodology and conceptual basis. The most important and best-known objective studies of morality are briefly presented. As significant contribution of the study I consider the

limitations outlined in the application of an experimental method in the study of morality and moral behavior as well as some limitations related to the formal-psychological analysis of the moral development.

The second chapter is focused on the ethical framework of the objective studies of morality, and particularly in studies on children and youths. The specific ethical requirements in conducting of these studies are well clarified and the ethics of the researcher, sensibility and communication skills needed are suggested through concrete examples that illustrate the importance of the precautionary principle, the principle of not harming, and the principle of beneficence for all these studies have a potential to foster the personal growth and development. More extensively are discussed the ethical cases and the moral dilemmas in the studies of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg with regard to opportunities that they provide for ethical education and ethical training too.

After the comprehensive analysis of the development of moral psychology in different countries, the third chapter pays attention to the psychological and sociological objective studies of morality carried out in Bulgaria as well as to the research in the field of applied ethics that have been conducted since the 1960s and 1970s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Targeted at ethical problems in concrete areas of practical life these studies often analyze particular situations and cases and discuss resolution of conflicts, moral dilemmas that concern choices as well as decision-making processes. Here the great number of Bulgarian studies in the field of bioethics, business ethics, etc. are cited. The challenges for the academic education and for the professional education aimed at ethical competency are considered and the need for educational policies targeted at its acquisition is emphasized. The level of the public debate on ethical issues is directly connected to a culture of growth – personal and social.

The fourth chapter addresses the connection between morality and the social psyche in an attempt to outline the complexity of morality and moral behavior against the concrete moral phenomena that are analyzed in the psychological studies aimed at objective results. I must say that the reference to the “social psyche” remains elusive for me although in this chapter the role of cultural and social context for the personal development and moral behavior is examined. The author states that “no certain proof has been found that there are sustainable accretions in development and coordination that can guarantee moral autonomy” (p. 212) and this outcome of the objectives

studies of morality is connected to the view of a moral subject as “an open project” and to the complex issues that concern identity questions. From the other side, Emilia Marinova outlines some limitations of the objective studies of morality exactly in the search of predictability and persistence in the moral behavior in relation to the social security or control issues. It seems to me that this trend tends to neglect an assumption for freedom of the subject in the core of ethics and to interpret morality merely as a structure of obedience. The considerations in the last part of the dissertation on the question why the ethical problems of society cannot be solved by social-psychological means are of great importance.

The study of Emilia Marinova raises questions that in my opinion concern first of all the role of philosophical ethics and the ethical theories - with their basic assumptions about morality and their basic concepts - in constructing and conducting objective psychological studies of morality. My question here is whether and to what extent these studies reflect on the question how different definitions of morality and different concepts used determine the concrete studies and their results. For example, it is well-known that Kohlberg thinks about the moral behavior as guided by principles.

The arguments concerning the conceptual incommensurability or incommensurability related to the different levels of research, and mainly between the empirical and the normative levels of the studies, seems to be very important too. Such arguments could be relevant to the use of the very concept of moral autonomy that has a central role in the study.

As regards the conclusion drawn from the objective studies of morality on the moral character I would be interested in the author’s position on how this conclusion might be related to the recent attempts to revive a virtue ethics as focused on moral character and on virtues as conscious dispositions to think and act in a certain constant way. They also raise questions on the moral reasoning, moral development, and moral education too.

The dissertation has clear structure relevant to the tasks of the study. The described contributions – theoretical and applied - are correctly formulated. The author’s summary is about 30 pages and represents properly the content of the text. There are 11 cited publications on the theme of dissertation (1 monograph and 10 articles). A declaration for authenticity of the dissertation is also included.

The documents submitted confirm that the state requirements for awarding a Doctor of Philosophical Sciences degree are satisfied. These requirements are fulfilled in the previous procedures too. The dissertation of Emilia Marinova is published by Faber publishing house in 2019 as required in the Regulations of BAS.

The research work of Associate Professor Emilia Marinova is closely linked to the questions of moral psychology in their theoretical and practical dimensions as evident in the dissertation and in her earlier studies on the moral behavior and moral development in the works of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. The dissertation makes a major contribution as it outlines the specific methodology of “the objective study of morality” - its potential but also its limitations that concern the means of the investigation but also the interpretative models applied to moral phenomena. The study is significant in pointing out the importance of the objective studies of morality in the field of applied ethics and for an ethics of development today. As member of the scientific jury I will vote for awarding of a Doctor of Philosophical Sciences degree in the scientific area 2.3 Philosophy to Emilia Vasil Marinova.

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Valentina Kaneva

14.09.2019