

Review

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Regarding: competition for Associate professor in professional field 2.3. Philosophy (Philosophy of Politics) at the Department "Social theories, strategies and forecasts", IPS-BAS

Assistant Professor Dr. Blagovesta Nikolova is the only participant in the competition. The documents for the competition that will be the subject of this review include 16 publications, one of which is monograph and 15 articles (8 in national publications and 7 abroad). The information on quantitative indicators fully meet the national requirements for assuming the position of "Associate Professor". There is no evidence of plagiarism in the materials submitted for the competition.

The publications and the CV of the candidate demonstrate academic activity of high quality: authorship of research, active international cooperation and international visibility through a two-year specialization in Belgium, participation in projects, expert work, as well as participation in international forums, summer schools and seminars. The visibility and integration of the candidate in the international scientific community is unequivocally attested by the numerous citations: 26 in prominent international journals. In the national scientific space, a corresponding recognition for the achievements of Blagovesta Nikolova is evidenced by the award for a young scientist in the field of humanities and social sciences "Pythagoras" for 2017, participation in four collective national projects and participation in national forums.

The research of Blagovesta Nikolova could be situated in two broad fields, which have their overlapping zones. The first is focused on various aspects and problems of modern forecasting; the second explores and analyzes the need for and the forms of "ethical surveillance" both in the global processes of scientific and technical innovation and at a specific, procedural, level – the EU research funding. The expert activity of the candidate is predominantly dedicated to the "ethical screening" of projects, submitted in the framework of Horizon 2020 (39 projects have been reviewed in the period 2016 - 2020). This rich practical experience of an insider is unequivocal advantage when she studies the possibilities as well as the dangers lurking behind the allegedly neutral and balanced administrative parlance of the EU documentation. This is clearly seen in the monograph "The RRI Challenge: Responsibilization in a State of Tension with Market Regulation" from 2019.

The research on modern forecasting of Blagovesta Nikolova offers a number of interesting and important contributions - the potential of science fiction with regard to forecasting practices as a tool for opening new spaces for reflection on key concepts and phenomena; the wild card events - low-probability events with high impact - have been studied as an anticipatory strategy to compensate for a lack of experience, ignorance or lack of knowledge in a given field, but also as a technique for "temporal adaptation" to the high speed of social change in modern societies (see also Author's reference); the mobilization of the protagonist "Youth" in its connection to the governance of the future; the forms and consequences of the marketization of forecasting. The analyzes are conducted professionally and skillfully identify the double effects of the discussed practices and thus have an undoubted value as a social critique. Thus they serve to deepen the field's self-reflexivity and the awareness of the double effects of its own tools. The contributions indicated by the author in the documents are indisputable. Certainly, here I cannot offer an exhaustive list and discussion of all her findings and interesting ideas.

Until the end of the review I will dwell in more detail on the monograph. It is dedicated to the risks and side effects of innovation-oriented science and technology development in their relation to society. The broad scheme in which the analysis is situated is the following: on the one hand we face the scientific and technical processes of innovation, which carry risks and has harmful and undesirable effects for the society. Today it is guided exclusively by economic or market rationality, which is solely profit-oriented. It is coupled with the general market logic that has conquered modern "market societies", in which we observe economization of social relations that previously remained outside this type of logic. Additionally, the market logic is stabilized by the ideology of scientific progress, which affirms the neutrality of the scientific method and technology.

On the other side of the binary is the „societal adequacy“ or relevance of the innovations, „ethics“, „moral philosophy“, responsibility and responsiveness to the innovation process. This "good protagonist" in the clash must somehow succeed in directing the technological development towards the "right impacts". Blagovesta Nikolova argues, respectively, that the powers of „bad protagonist“ – the marketized science and innovation - narrows the space left to the good one, namely the conceptual space for ethical reflection. This leads to “democratic deficits” and overall societal inadequacy “whose consequences could destabilize, harm or damage individual lives and organizational structures” (xviii). In short, economic expediency turns "ethics" into nothing more than a footnote, metaphorically speaking, and creates (195) an „ethics vacuum“. This gloomy human condition in which we find ourselves today calls for efforts „to reinvent a sphere of reverence and inviolability without relying on the notion of the sacred“ (195).

In the context of this problematic situation, the book focuses on one attempt at a responsive effort, namely the conceptual field of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI). It is conceptualized as another attempt at "ethical supervision" of science and technology and its role in the European institutional context as a source of social criticism and a space for ethical reflection is thoroughly analyzed. Especially important contribution in the analysis of Blagovesta Nikolova is the elaboration of the idea that although RRI has its potential, it must stay aware of the fact that it also had fallen prey to the economic logic and gets subtly appropriated by it. An extremely sophisticated analysis of the five main "keys" is offered - public engagement, open access, gender, ethics and science education - and the sixth, for which space should be opened, namely "governance". Undoubtedly, the quality of this analysis is very high and we see a professionally conducted critical discussion of the ambiguity of basic procedures and principles of the EU.

As a final point in this review, I would like to say that I do not have critical comments per se. What I would like to dwell on re a few points that may deserve further attention and probably discussion. I start this conversation not with the intention to criticize the study, but rather to demonstrate how deeply it goes in posing important questions in a provocative and fruitful manner. These are characteristics unique to a high-quality research.

1. I am well aware that the EU documentation itself does not specify a concrete area of innovation, but for the more general, conceptual part of the analysis, I think it would be productive to specify an area of science, technology and innovation which is predominantly kept in the focus, especially if the main issue is the „societal adequacy“ and the "right impacts". Many of the examples are from the biotechnological field, but in the text as a whole very general way of referring to science, technology, innovation dominates. However, it seems to me that the possible risks and problems arising from the marketization of science and innovation are different for the diverse areas. This is important with regard to the problem how should we conceive these right impacts and societal adequacy. There are areas of innovation, for example, and they have been quite hot topic recently, which generate moral dilemmas that go beyond "society" as composed by human beings and their relations. These

innovations push the boundaries of the questions so skillfully posed in the book to the nonhumans and their moral status, and confront us with the question of whether and how to include them in the scope of our moral obligations to them (objects in the environment, the robots we create, AI, viruses, etc.).

2. The second point of discussion is the use of "ethics", "moral philosophy", "ethical reflection" in the book. In my opinion, the image of this "good protagonist" relies mostly on our intuitive ideas what it should be. Attempts to define it mention cultivating vigilance, alertness and healthy anxiety (47 p.) and "truth-telling". But "ethics" or "moral philosophy" are not monolithic narratives or conceptions. They are set of diverse theories and they often give us completely different prescriptions on how to act, what is good and valuable and when and how to be vigilant, alert and anxious. What is more, when we are faced with their diverse recommendations often the effect is completely losing of sight the confidence that there is only one truth to tell. In this sense, consequentialism for example, which is somehow very hastily rejected in the text as an accomplice of market logic, is also a family of many different theories. Some of them may seem cruel in their implications, but there are others that are extremely demanding in terms of individual actions and choices. They mobilize the "calculative" rationality of balancing benefits and harms, but exactly in the name of cultivating "health anxiety" and of promoting our duty of fundamental personal commitment to counteract evil, injustice, etc.

3. My next comment is on whether the problem of the harmful effects of science, technology and innovation should be seen only as ensuing from their coupling with market rationality? Or the problem is more general and consists in the fact they are easily coupled with various other forms of power and oppression? A classic example is the alliance of science with state interests and especially with its military interests (researchers, for example, speak explicitly of "Cold War science" because it was to a great extent determined by political priorities). In general, the study somehow misses the question of the state and its role in the governance of science and innovation. It has long been, for example, a major source of funding and this type of science and innovation management also has its risks and harmful effects. In this light, is this really the problem: "the tendency of market societies to commoditize everything and realize profit, even at the expense of vulnerable groups" due to the "normative match between science and the market" (79 p.)? The match between science and state has always had similarly grim consequences for the vulnerable populations.

4. My last comment is on the critique of the democratization of science, i.e. the inclusion of external perspectives, which Blagovesta Nikolova convincingly demonstrates that hide a number of dangers (both in the book and in the article "The rise and promise of participatory foresight"). This is undoubtedly the case, but what else we can do to resist the scientific monopoly on knowledge ("the claim that knowledge is exhausted with scientific knowledge," as Nikolova puts it)? How to include in medicine, for example, patients' first-person accounts and narratives which turn out to be so crucial - both for the identity and the activism of the patients themselves and for the medical practice and practitioners themselves? In addition, it seems to me that exactly the democratization has historically given birth to the regulations, the declarations defending the vulnerable, the countless guidelines in research ethics, assisted reproduction, and so on. I think that it is the fundamental doubt in and contestation of science as an institution with total jurisdiction over its own affairs that gave birth to legal restrictions based on ethical considerations. That is why I am inclined to assume that if we weigh the benefits and harms of democratization, it is very likely that for many areas - at least those related to medicine and biotechnology - the benefits will outweigh the harms.

I know Blagovesta Nikolova from the period when we were both affiliated at Department "Social theories, strategies and forecasts" (formerly „Social philosophy“) of IPS-BAS. Although she was still a PhD student at that time, it was more than obvious that she is a talented, bright and dedicated young researcher as well as an extremely cooperative and responsive colleague who could be relied on.

Conclusion: Undoubtedly the high quality of the scientific and expert activity of Blagovesta Nikolova gives me every reason to strongly recommend her election and appointment as Associate Professor at IPS-BAS.

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Sofia

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