

REVIEW
OF A CONTEST FOR ASS. PROF. UNDER SCIENTIFIC
SCHIFFER 2.3 – PHILOSOPHY
FOR THE NEEDS OF SECTION "SOCIAL THEORIES, STRATEGIES AND
FORECASTS", ANNOUNCED BY THE INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY AND
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Reviewer: prof. PhD Vasil Prodanov

One candidate participates in the announced contest for associate professor, – chief assistant, PhD Blagovesta Nikolova. She started and subsequently carried out her scientific activities in the “Social theories, strategies and forecasts” section of the IPhS and its predecessors at the Institute of Philosophic Sciences at BAS, which explains why predominant in her biography are not the pedagogic but the scientific activities. She has published one scientific monograph in English in the well-known American publishing house Wiley. Along with that, she has published 15 articles and studies in magazines and collections. Five of them are in journals with a high impact factor, in English, four are in other referenced and indexed editions, and six are in non-refereed journals and collections.

Leading among the works with which Blagovesta Nikolova participates in the competition is her monograph, in which the subject of analysis is focused on the relationship between market and morality in research and innovation. It is directly related to the ethical framework set by the European Commission, which funds such research. That is why the title of the monograph is given by the acronym RRI (Responsible Research and Innovation), as it is a concept formulated through six main characteristics and actively used by the European Commission, which bases its relevant requirements for funded research and innovation projects on it. The book is obviously the result of Blagovesta Nikolova's two years of experience and work at the Laboratory for Ethical Governance of Information Technologies in Belgium. There she had the opportunity to share ideas and receive notes on it from colleagues at the university where the laboratory is located, and this was a factor in improving the quality of her research. It examines in detail the emergence and development of RRI, while critically assessing the arguments put forward in its defense.

In her book, Blagovesta Nikolova introduces this problem within the framework of a much less studied topic in Bulgarian scientific literature, namely the relationship between the ethics of research and innovation, on the one hand, and market and democracy, on the other. The central thesis she formulates is that the ethical and normative systems that are proposed to

science and innovation, in practice are most often imposed by the markets, by the logic of the functioning of the markets.

In this situation, the ethical behavior of scientists and creators of new technologies is embedded in the powerful system of neoliberal capitalism, operating in the global markets in the name of profit. Hence the direction of Blagovesta Nikolova's research, relates to the idea that when examining the responsibility of scientists and innovators, the logic of the market system, on the one hand, and normative resistance through the behavior of scientists, on the other, must be taken into account. It seeks the answer to this question, placing it in a much broader context of analyzing the functioning of unrestricted market capitalism, commodifying everything, subordinating it to the logic of profit. It is no coincidence that the title of the book contains the concept of responsibility, which is fundamental for the modern researcher and innovator, as it is associated with new technologies that can be fatal to the lives of millions of people. This is most evident in biotechnological research and innovation in the areas of cloning, eugenics, synthetic organisms, etc. How moral is this? How to normatively assess the behavior of scientists involved in this? What is the relationship between the regulatory requirements of the market, law, morality? Technologies, as she notes, are not value-neutral, because each technology is created with a specific purpose in order to achieve certain things through it, it is a means to them and in this sense it is inevitably normatively burdened. Thus, she pays special attention to the study of the contradictions between market and morality in the creation of new technologies. To this end, she analyzes the concepts that are important in this context - governance, market, coordination, participation, responsibility, openness, network. In this context, she shows the importance of ethical regulation of the behavior of the researcher and innovator, both in terms of the motives of their work and its results. It is here that she tries to analyze the real situation and show the main problems in this area today. She shows that legal regulation is still missing or is very imperfect, and ethical regulation is therefore particularly important at this stage. At the same time, it is essential that it sets some limits on the behavior of researchers and innovators, without hindering their research activities. The merit of the book is that it examines in detail the ethical normative framework set for research and innovation by the European Commission and finds many pitfalls related to its realization in a totally marketized society suffering from a crisis of liberal democracy and fragmentation of conflicting communities with differing views on normative issues. She considers at multiple times how ethics is lost in the "Bermuda Triangle of Market Mechanisms". The problem is compounded by the lack of a common vision of where societies are going and should go. The book analyzes in great detail the various aspects and problem

situations in connection with the adequate responsibility of researchers and innovators. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the critical analysis of the idea of technology and research neutrality.

The ambitious goal of the book is to find common ground between market and ethics, marketing and the responsibility of scientists, to show that ethics can function within a competitive market, that optimal interaction between ethics and economics is possible. The responsibility of research and innovation is sought in the direction of development related to social needs and values. In this context, the right position is to rely on a critical attitude towards this society, in which the responsibility for research and innovation is ultimately subject to the norms of the almighty market. Seeking to counteract the dangerous directions of the development of market logic and economic determinism, perceived as a binding law for all, Blagovesta Nikolova demonstrates knowledge of modern economic theories, while addressing the larger problems of philosophy of history related to the Enlightenment idea of science and technology as an instrument of progress towards a better, higher state of humanity. The foundation of the ethical justification of research and innovation is the idea of progress, which leads us to a better world. It is this positive macro-idea that opposes the ethical dangers and negative consequences of market-oriented research and innovation, subject to the logic of profit.

Markets, as the author rightly points out, demonstrate a growing inability to use the high productivity of technology in the direction of some common idea, shared by all, of common welfare. In this situation, what we should strive for, according to her, is a constant and open ethical dialogue about the responsibility of researchers and innovators. A clear statement of the critical discourse in the analysis of the relationship between the market and the responsibility of researchers and innovators. This presupposes democracy and the active participation of many people. Its basic premise is that through regulatory constraints by states and the moral responsibility of researchers, efforts must be made to limit the risks and dangers of research and innovation in the name of progress as the embodiment of a future common good. This, of course, is not easy at all, because, as Blagovesta Nikolova notes, "the culture of capitalism" "shrinks the space of ethics." She carefully examines and refutes the many versions of the idea of the possibility for providing a "space of ethics" offered by authors and various institutions - from Hayek's theses to the new public management. Her main achievement is the in-depth philosophical analysis of the problem of research and innovation ethics in the face of seemingly omnipotent market capitalism, the discussion of the many

problems and open issues in the relationship between market and ethics when it comes to research and innovation.

One of Blagovesta Nikolova's articles " Putting critique to work: Ethics in EU Security Research", published in English in the magazine "Security Dialogue", is also dedicated to ethical issues. In it, she critically analyzes the use of applied ethics in EU security research. Her starting position is that every idea of security is related to certain values and in this sense ethics is not seen as something external to these studies, but as embedded in the way in which security is understood and practically generated. That is why ethics is seen as setting normative limits for these studies, which is especially important when it comes to technologies, the consequences of which are often difficult to predict unambiguously. In particular, applied ethics makes it possible to reflect on the main characteristics of these studies, and their critical evaluation. In general, it sets a certain coordinate system of European Commission's assessments, funding security-related projects.

The second main direction of Blagovesta Nikolova's research activity is forecasting, which is connected with the beginning of her scientific activity as a doctoral student on the topic "Transformation of forecasting in knowledge-based societies". Ten publications analyzing various aspects of this problem are devoted to forecasting. They examine both more general and specific problems related to different forms of forecasting. Among the more general ones is the analysis of the problem of the prognostic functions of social sciences, which she links to the basic characteristics and role of these sciences in comparison with the potential in this respect of natural sciences. She analyzes the many obstacles and problematic situations with forecasting in this area. Furthermore, she draws special attention to the fact that these sciences study complex open systems in which small incidents sometimes have large consequences, that their predictions are probabilistic and reflective, which suggests that each social forecast motivates people for certain actions, which in turn affects the development trend, leading to self-confirming forecasts or the failure of forecasts.

Another of her articles tries to summarize the trends in forecasting of a specific social science as economics. It focuses on forecasting scientific and technological progress in economics, time horizons of economic forecasts, their alternatives, global modeling, computer models of such forecasts, the role of goal setting in them, their use as a management tool, the role of strategic planning. On this basis, she summarizes the problems identified and the challenges faced by economic forecasting. She continues the theme of this article in another very interesting study of the relationship between forecasting and the market mechanism, the trend of turning forecasting into an object of market supply, and changes in the functions of

forecasting in the process of generating capital in the financial sector. Her article on the relationship between science fiction and forecasting directs us to the understanding of a very modern tendency at the moment for large companies to attract writers of science fiction in forecasting. Two of her articles are devoted to the most actively used form of forecasting today, namely foresight - they analyze the main characteristics of participatory and normative foresight.

An important advantage of Blagovesta Nikolova as a researcher is the breadth of her interests, which extend in the direction of many social sciences and at the same time the analysis of current, specific problems associated with a series of interesting articles - several articles on migration, migrant crisis, border control and the forecasting of these processes; three applied studies on the Covid-19 pandemic crisis - on crisis management, EU transport policy and business communications on the pandemic, respectively, and on the border constraints it has led to; an article on the challenges faced by modern international space law.

What is characteristic of all her works is heuristics, analyticity, the ability to master new problem fields in all social sciences, the ability to make not only general philosophical and theoretical analyses, but also to deal with specific applied problems. In all her works, a clear highlight is the relevance of the studied topic to the issues of the day. In her works the simple reproduction of problems and facts is relatively limited in comparison with the ones often found in scientific publications, at the expense of her own analysis and comprehension of the problems. Her monograph examines specific practices of the European Commission in relation to research and technology, but she manages to analyze them both on a theoretical and applied level. Her activities not only fully meet the national requirements for an associate professor, but quantitatively, in terms of points, she has about twice as many as required. She has presented 26 citations of her works, all of which are in foreign editions in English. Five of her articles have been published in indexed and referenced journals in world-renowned databases.

I have known Blagovesta Nikolova since 2010, when she became a doctoral student at the then Institute of Philosophical Research. I was her research supervisor and I participated in the examination commissions for her admission as a doctoral student, the various exams, as well as in the jury for her defense.

What impressed me and my colleagues from the very beginning was her ability to make sense of and analyze various problems, rather than predominantly reproducing ready-made ones. Of all the 20 PhD students I have had, she is among the 4-5 with the most outstanding qualities in this regard. She demonstrates the ability to master new directions, disciplines,

problems. She is characterized by independence and scientific activity, thanks to which soon after defending her dissertation she went on a two-year postdoctoral fellowship in the Laboratory for Ethical Governance of Information Technologies at the University of Namur, Belgium. Thus, she gained additional interdisciplinary specialization - from political science as a bachelor's degree, through philosophy and forecasting as a doctoral student, to the problems of ethical research in her specialization.

I have followed the intellectual development of Blagovesta Nikolova from her first steps in science, as well as her growth after that. She is one of my former doctoral students, whose growth and success I am proud of. Therefore, I strongly believe that she should be awarded the scientific position of associate professor in the professional field 2.3. "Philosophy", for the needs of the "Social theories, strategies and forecasts" section.

21.04.2021

Prof. Ph.D. Vassil Prodanov

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "В. Проdanов" (V. Prodanov) in Cyrillic script.