

# ASSESSMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Rosen Lutskanov, PhD

Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge,  
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

of the materials submitted for participation in the competition for the occupation of the academic position of 'Associate Professor' at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.3 Philosophy (non-classical philosophical logic)

In the competition for 'Associate Professor' announced in the State Gazette, iss. 31 of 12.04.2019 and on the website of the University of Plovdiv, for the needs of the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, Valentin Asparuhov participates as a sole candidate.

## 1. General presentation of the received materials

The set of materials presented by Valentin Asparuhov in paper and electronic form is in accordance with the Rules for development of the academic staff of the University of Plovdiv and includes documents that truthfully and comprehensively represent his research and teaching activities. A total of 14 scientific works have been submitted, of which two monographs: "Russell, Philosophical Logic, and the Problem of Logical Form" (2018), and "Syntheses, Apperception, Unity" (2019).

## 2. Short biography of the applicant

In the period 2001-2004 Valentin Asparuhov was a PhD student in Philosophical Logic at the University of Veliko Turnovo "St. Cyril and Methodius". Subsequently, he was a part-time assistant at the University of Veliko Turnovo (2002-2003) and at the University of Plovdiv (2003-2006). From 2006 until now he is assistant at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Plovdiv. He teaches courses in a wide range of philosophical disciplines: formal logic, philosophical logic, history of philosophy, epistemology and ontology. Since 2004 he is a member of the Institute for Critical Social Studies. He has participated in the organization of a large number of national and international forums and is the originator and editor-in-chief of the "Kairos" online journal.

## 3. General assessment of the activities of the applicant

My assessment shall be focused on the monograph "Syntheses, apperception, unity" (2019), because in my opinion it attests to the greatest extent the contributing moments in Valentin Asparuhov's research. I shall start with a principled, though not particularly significant in the present

context, disagreement. The return to the beginnings of analytic philosophy and the reassessment of what its “forefathers” did is motivated by Asparuhov's understanding that the history of analytic philosophy from the second half of the twentieth century is an “inexorable testimony” of failure (p. 17). In my view, it is difficult to characterize as a failure the virtually complete and unconditional dominance of analytic philosophy in today's philosophical scene. Moreover, we must be aware of why we criticize analytic philosophy: whether it is because analytic philosophers practice analysis without explaining it (according to Dobrin Spasov – p. 26), or because there is inevitably a “tangling” between the subject and method when analytic philosophers try to analyze their own method (according to Todor Petkov – p. 37). It is one thing to claim that something has not been done at all, quite another - that it has not been done properly.

The main task of the monograph is to demonstrate that “Kant is proving to be the real intellectual provocation” targeted by Russell and his philosophical logic (p. 13). Asparuhov analyzes Russell's “unexplained transcendental motives” behind what he sees as a hidden “transcendental vault” (p. 18). The systematic search for transcendental motives proceeds from the assumption that these are not simply “remnants of Russell's idealistic legacy” but are “traceable in [logical] data” (p. 19). From the point of view of history of philosophy, Asparuhov offers us to see the search for the grounding of logic by authors like Russell and Husserl as the completion of the classical foundational projects, developed from Descartes to Kant (pp. 17-18). In a sense, it could be said that what Stefan Popov does in his study of the relationship between Kant and Wittgenstein in the book “Wittgenstein: an analytic of the mystical” (see p. 32) was done by Asparuhov, in undoubtedly original way, in his study of the relationship between Kant and Russell. This analogy is not unfounded, as it can seem at first glance, because the text shows convincingly that “Russell came very close, several years before Wittgenstein, to the specific idealism of the *Tractatus*” (p. 168).

The core of the text is structured around the triad of logical form-logical intuition-logical experience, respectively, around the thesis that acquaintance with logical form is “a pre-condition for the ability to connect the constituents of a complex” (p. 33). Most interesting to me is the treatment of logical intuition as “the primary ingredient of logical experience” (p. 19). Given that “intuition” is the standard English translation of the German term *Anschauung*, and also that the two are equated (see p. 124) in the context of the understanding that “synthesis is not based on experience, it has an a priori origin based on intuition” (p. 150), it seems strange that the author avoids talking about “logical *Anschauung*”, rendered as an additional, non-sensory type of intuition, which has a priori forms, other than time and space (for example those provide us with intuitions about ordering and succession) and allows for “immediate perception” (seeing) of abstract truths (p. 150, 152-153).

This is also the only question I would like to ask: is there a difference between logical intuition and logical *Anschauung* and what it exactly consists in?

The second array of problems discussed in the text is related to the idea of “extended transcendental analysis”, which shifts the focus from the transcendental unity of apperception to the transcendental unity of the apperceptor (p. 44). In the course of this shift, we are presented with “transcendentalism without an autonomous transcendental subject”, which is mainly interested in “how the subject is constituted, who in fact is just ostensibly constitutive” (p. 66), or even better, how “the subject and the object are mutually constituted” (p. 116).

As a result, the transcendental subject, understood as a simple point whose existence is guaranteed by the synthetic unity of apperception, is replaced by a willing subject, “devoid of perceptual and conceptual activity” (p. 57), but still “able to withdraw attention, and in doing so to anticipate pre-given structures” (p. 114). The figure of the “willing subject”, in my opinion, remains not fully clarified in the text. It would be useful if it is filled with more content by explaining exactly how it is constituted in the practical interaction between subject and object and what explanatory functions are assigned to it.

I would like to conclude by briefly summarizing and commenting on three historical and philosophical aspects of the text that, in my opinion, require additional work (1) the thesis that it was not from Russell but from the Manifesto of the Vienna Circle that the a priori synthesis came under attack (p. 63). In my opinion, there is a need for some refinement: the so-called “Viennese orthodoxy” is largely shaped by the ideas of Russell, which were well-known to its authors in the second half of the 1920s – the idea that the truths of mathematics have an analytical character (one of the basic dogmas of logical empiricism) is drawn precisely from the logicism of Frege (probably mainly through Carnap) and Russell (probably mainly through Hahn); 2. Concerning British idealism. Although some key points of influence were isolated in the text (see pp. 82, 84), I believe that more substantial historical and philosophical work is required to clarify the connection between Russell's philosophy (and the supposedly new or even “revolutionary” elements in it), and the “new (British) idealism (and realism)” of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; in this regard, I recommend Omar Nasim's book “Bertrand Russell and the Edwardian Philosophers: Constructing the World” (2008); 3. Concerning the division between formal and philosophical logic (see the first interlude in Chapter Three, p. 135 *passim*). The text presents the “British” understanding of this split from the mid-twentieth century, beginning with Russell and reaching a mature expression in Strawson (p. 137). According to him, the task of philosophical logic is to provide “what is missing” in formal logic, e.g. the demarcation of the basic concepts of logic. Seen from the other side of the ocean, the distinction looks a lot dif-

ferent (and that is the dominant viewpoint today). The term “philosophical logic” is gaining ground worldwide since the creation of the “Journal of Philosophical Logic”, which seeks to liberalize the limited understanding of logic, propounded for example by Church and Quine. It (not without some justification) equates logic to first-order predicate logic and thus excludes the consideration of philosophically motivated formalisms such as modal logic (they are the logics that form the subject matter of what is nowadays called “philosophical logic”). In addition, I find it difficult to defend the thesis that the basic concepts of formal logic require in addition some form of “philosophical logic” - it is true that Russell did not find a formal definition of “logical constant” (for this purpose he limited himself to plain lists), but such definitions were discovered later. Permutation invariance, for example, is not a generally accepted solution, but still it is defensible and of a purely formal nature.

#### **4. Assessment of the applicant's personal contributions**

The monograph “Syntheses, apperception, unity” is a mature expression of many years of work in the field of philosophical logic and contains indisputable contributions and original ideas that deepen our understanding of Russell's role in the development of philosophy in the twentieth century, as well as its genetic links with its intellectual context.

#### **5. Personal impressions**

Valentin Asparuhov is a well-known name in the Bulgarian logic community. In my personal opinion he stands out with his extremely precise way of stating claims and undeniably excellent knowledge of key texts and authors in the field in which he works.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The documents and materials presented by Valentin Asparuhov meet the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the implementation of the aforementioned law and the corresponding Regulations of the University of Plovdiv. The applicant submitted a sufficient number of scientific papers, published after his PhD defense. The works of Asparuhov have original scientific content and applicable character. Some of them are directly related to his teaching. His scientific and teaching qualifications are at an excellent level.

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works presented in the procedure, analyzing their importance and their scientific contributions, I find it justifiable to give my positive assessment and to recommend to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report proposal to the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the selection of Valentin Asparuhov at the aca-

demic position of “Associate Professor” in professional field 2.3 (non-classical and philosophical logic).

16.09 2019 г.

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(Assoc. Prof. Rosen Lutskanov, PhD)