

REVIEW

**by PhD Dimitar Milchev Vatsov,
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of the materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the academic position of **Associate Professor**
at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”
in Area of Higher Education 2. Humanities,
Professional Field 2.3 Philosophy (Logic – Non-Classical Philosophical Logic)

The only candidate in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy in the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, announced in *State Gazette*, no. 31 of 12 April 2019 and on the Plovdiv University website, is Valentin Stefanov Asparuhov, Senior Assistant at the same Department.

The set of materials submitted in hard copy by the only candidate, Valentin Asparuhov, is in compliance with Plovdiv University’s Regulations on Academic Staff Development and fully corresponds to the scientometric requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor.

The candidate in the competition has submitted a total of fourteen scientific works, including two monographs, one study, and eleven papers published in authoritative, and recognized by the National Centre for Information and Documentation, Bulgarian journals (out of which two papers in impact journals).

Valentin Asparuhov’s scientific works have received 16 citations, all of them substantive and specifying his contribution. He has participated in three national scientific and headed one such project.

The scientific contributions in the materials submitted for the competition, formulated by the candidate, are completely correct. Their list is relatively short, as he has indicated only the general innovative features and achievements of his research project, without listing a series of micro-discoveries presented in his works.

In addition to being a researcher, Valentin Asparuhov is an established lecturer at the Department of Philosophy at Plovdiv University, where he teaches the basic courses in Philosophical Logic, Ontology, and Epistemology, all of which are in the field of his research and hence of the scientific works submitted for the competition. He also teaches a series of courses for non-specialists in various programmes at Plovdiv University. He is the author of an electronic textbook and co-author of two other teaching aids for Plovdiv University. He is co-author of two Bachelor's and three Master's programmes at Plovdiv University, and an active member of the Institute for Critical Social Studies (ICSS) where he has initiated or participated in a number of seminars, studies, and other initiatives. Valentin Asparuhov has experience as a part-time lecturer at other universities as well – at the University of Veliko Tarnovo and at Sofia University. His entire academic track record, ever since he was a student and doctoral candidate at the University of Veliko Tarnovo, shows the stable and systematic development of a serious scholar and philosopher with a wide but clearly defined sphere of research interests and competencies. It is precisely the wide scope as well as the stability of his competencies that guarantees the high quality of his teaching activity, too. All this is complemented by excellent personal impressions from our meetings at conferences and other scientific and administrative forums: Valentin Asparuhov is a most respectable and responsible person and scholar who, however, is also capable of undertaking bold thought experiments.

I do not have joint publications and am not in conflict of interest with the candidate.

All of the above – as well as the scientometric record submitted as part of the documents for the competition – is entirely sufficient to show that Valentin Asparuhov not only meets, but significantly exceeds all formal requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor. That is why I will now proceed with a substantive analysis of his publications, and above all of his two monographs which have “sublated”, in “mature” form, the main theses and ideas presented in his papers.

The monographs *Russell: Philosophical Logic and the Problem of Logical Form* (Sofia: 2018, 154 pp.; in Bulgarian) and *Syntheses, Apperceptions, Unities* (Sofia: 2019, 217 pp.; in Bulgarian) clearly outline Asparuhov's overall philosophical and research project.¹ This project has one particular focus: philosophical logic as a disciplinary field located in-between and formed by the intersection points of logic and ontology. These intersection points, in turn, are understood through the problem of logical form: undoubtedly, logical forms guarantee deducibility in formal logics, although the philosophical question of their ontological status remains open. Actually, this is a question which ought to be broken down into two questions: What is the ontological genesis of the different logical forms, and what are the pictures of the world which, once formalized, are projected by the latter?

¹ Henceforth, I cite the two monographs as Asparuhov 2018 and Asparuhov 2019.

Valentin Asparuhov addresses the problem field described above through two different but mutually complementary approaches. One is the historico-philosophical approach seeking to reconstruct the oeuvre of Bertrand Russell as one of the emblematic figures in the analytic tradition, discoverer of the problem of logical form, and adept (albeit a diffident one) of the disciplinary differentiation of philosophical logic in his early works. Asparuhov offers us a series of subtle genealogical reconstructions of the contexts of emergence of (but also of retreat from) the ideas of logical form and philosophical logic in the scattered, years-long, and subjected to numerous conceptual transformations, oeuvre of Russell – reconstructions which, furthermore, show Russell’s philosophical development less as a chaotic movement than as fluctuations logically following from his attempts to solve difficult philosophical problems. Actually, the first monograph, *Russell: Philosophical Logic and the Problem of Logical Form*, adheres more precisely to the historico-philosophical type of study and reconstructs in detail – from *The Principles of Mathematics* to *The 1913 Manuscript* as well as in the elaborations on the subject after the latter – the crystallization of the problem and concept of logical form: from the discussion of the “indefinables” to the problem of the “sense of relations” to the emergence of the question of the “form of complexes”, and hence, of “logical form”. Asparuhov carefully shows us how Russell, encountering difficulties in defining the logical form of complexes, increasingly moved away from his initial Platonist concept of form as an essence that can be grasped in immediate intuition – a peculiar kind of “acquaintance” or “logical intuition” – and towards a concept of form in the transcendentalist sense, as a condition of possibility of the variation of the constituents in a complex. And although according to Nicholas Griffin, Russell’s famous interpreter with whom Asparuhov is almost constantly in dialogue, Russell has omitted to show that “the substitution of each of the constituents in a complex could be controlled by the form itself, and thereby distances himself from the possibility of applying the theory of types in the field of philosophical logic” (Asparuhov 2018, p. 93), the Bulgarian author nevertheless shows that, even though Russell himself may not have realized it, logical form plays the role of a condition of possibility for his ontology (ibid., p. 94), and that through logical form, especially distinctly in the notes to his unfinished 1912 paper “What is Logic?”, he had already “sought to distinguish true, false, and nonsensical propositions” (ibid., p. 95). In other words, it is not Russell who was influenced by Wittgenstein in the 1912–1913 period, as the hegemonic interpretations claim, but rather vice versa: although after Wittgenstein’s critiques Russell decided not to publish his 1912 paper and his 1913 manuscript, according to Asparuhov precisely Russell is not only the discoverer of the problem of logical form but also the initiator of the dual distinction which characterizes propositions: that they can be true/false (due to their correspondence with the facts) and meaningful/meaningless (due to their accordance with the transcendental framework – with the logical form). Of course, this dual distinction is a basic

construction of the *Tractatus* and it has become known precisely through Wittgenstein, but Asparuhov shows that, in some implicit form, it is already present in Russell. It is those important distinctions, but also many other similar more detailed distinctions that are not mentioned in the contributions formulated by Asparuhov, that I had in mind when I said that the list of contributions can and should be extended.

One cannot but note that, in writing a history of analytic philosophy through the prism of Russell's oeuvre, Asparuhov also writes, entirely honestly and correctly, a history of Bulgarian analytic philosophy, especially on the points on which the latter takes up topics and problems from Russell and in which it influences Russell's own reception in Bulgaria: Asparuhov carefully traces the debate and the positions in it on the character and sense of relations in Dobrin Spasov, Nedyalko Merdzhanov and Deyan Deyanov (Asparuhov 2018, pp. 65–76), as well as the indirect debate between Spasov and Deyanov on the status of philosophical logic (Asparuhov 2019, pp. 132–158). In general, Asparuhov is meticulously respectful towards all types of sources and the forms of their influence on his work: he not only constantly notes his agreements (but also his disagreements) with the international authorities on Russell and on the problems of philosophical logic (Nicholas Griffin, Peter Hylton, Peter Frederick Strawson, Hilary Putnam, A. J. Ayer, W. V. Quine, etc.) but also notes the ideas and intuitions shared orally with him at the ICSS seminars (above all by Deyan Deyanov, Todor Petkov, and Martina Mineva, which whom he collaborates most closely).

But historico-philosophical reconstructions, however detailed and valuable they may be in their own right, are not Valentin Asparuhov's only stake. Through them he attempts to help answer a more radical question: Is it possible, and how is it possible, to differentiate philosophical logic as an autonomous disciplinary field? And if it is possible, then exactly what are the properly philosophical objects through which we can characterize this field: What exactly are logical forms? Only if we answer those questions will we be able to argue that "philosophical logic ... **is an ontology of logical objects**, and not merely a branch of philosophy or logic" (Asparuhov 2018, p. 12). Actually, emancipating philosophical logic by extracting it from its state of adolescence seems to be also an existential stake for Asparuhov. An impossible stake, I would say in advance, since I support a position in the vein of the later Wittgenstein, as will become clear in a short while.

To do this, however, Asparuhov needs a second approach that builds on his historico-philosophical reconstructions. In the spirit of the small Bulgarian tradition initiated by Kolyo Koev and Deyan Deyanov, he calls this second approach "thinking through" a given author, which, however, does not blindly agree with the author's theses; it may even be directed "against" the author's theses in order to distinguish the "unthought" by the author – that which the author indeed didn't manage to think or even that which the author in question couldn't possibly have thought in the

given conditions. I would call this approach that builds upon historico-philosophical investigations **direct problematization** – in it what is more valuable than what “Plato has said” on a given problem is the search for a better solution to the problem itself, that is to say, the search for the truth.

Asparuhov constantly does such problematizations, although his second monograph, *Syntheses, Apperceptions, Unities* – perhaps because it builds on the pedantic historico-philosophical work in his first book – ventures to do so much more clearly and radically. Asparuhov insists that although Russell’s own ontology, on which his philosophical logic is based, is articulated insufficiently explicitly and even contradictorily, careful analysis can still discover in Russell’s works a “transcendental vault that ... bears the weight of the philosophical-logical construction” (Asparuhov 2019, p. 18). In fact, Asparuhov to some extent continues Russell’s thoughts, in some instances even against the author’s will, in order to show how the problems raised following the discovery of logical objects and logical forms in particular can be solved in a transcendentalist mode, considering that logical Platonism – as Russell himself admits – has turned out to be insufficient for their solution.

Still, Asparuhov shows that transcendentalism is not merely imported from the outside and imposed on Russell’s thought – certain transcendental traces are already present there, even if they are not clearly articulated: such an expanded transcendental understanding of formal analysis is implied by “the following linguistic figures: ‘can occur’, ‘can be made’, ‘must occur as’, ‘all ways in which an entity can occur in a complex’, etc.” (Asparuhov 2019, p. 44). All these phrases indicate the idea about the variation of possibilities within a necessary framework – that of logical form. They have as if already preconceived Wittgenstein’s thesis from the *Tractatus* that “The possibility of its occurring in states of affairs is the form of an object” (ibid.). That is to say, Russell, even if he does not use phrases such as a priori and does not directly define form as a framework of the possible, nevertheless already implicitly thinks of logical form precisely as an a priori framework – a condition of possibility for the variation of the constituents of a given complex and of its transformation into other complexes which, however, have the same form. This experimental reading, for which Asparuhov gives sufficient textual grounds – mostly from Russell’s unpublished manuscripts of 1912–1913, but also from earlier works – and which powerfully transcendentalizes Russell in order to see him as a precursor of the *Tractatus*, is undoubtedly an extremely interesting and provocative contribution.

In Asparuhov’s work, this reading plays the role also of an attempt to ground philosophical logic in general. It assumes that logical forms **indeed** play the role of conditions of possibility for logical experience, that is to say, that they exist as some sort of autonomous objects. Of course, the difficulties in articulating them, established by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, are taken into account – the thesis is repeated that they can only be shown without being articulated: philosophical logic in this

sense again remains without a “clear relief” but now this is justified – “because it deals with the zone of the implicit, ... because its interest is directed at things that cannot be articulated” (Asparuhov 2018, p. 12). That is to say, philosophical logic is an ontology which, however, seems to be inevitably doomed to be vague – because of the specificity of its objects which are innately indefinable (Asparuhov 2019, p. 64). As for the objects themselves – as for logical forms – Asparuhov assumes, while making many comparisons with Kant in his second book, that they are not functions of some pure transcendental subject (in this sense, philosophical logic is transcendental, but it is not classically transcendental because pure apperception has been cut out²), but rather a product of “logical imagination” in the sense of Russell which the author interprets more loosely as “productive imagination” in the sense in which Heidegger reworks Kant. Besides this, logical forms – which means logical propositions as well – are at once a priori and a posteriori, according to Asparuhov: they are a posteriori because we acquaint ourselves with them the way we acquaint ourselves with facts; but they are also a priori because by virtue of our de facto acquaintance with them we are compelled to recognize them as true. That is to say, our acquaintance with them is an accidental circumstance, but in them “there ought to be something that transcends the particular case, chance, and spontaneity (ibid., p. 127). Furthermore, “One may argue that the propositions of logic are a priori synthetic, such as are the propositions of mathematics [in Kant] insofar as they are based on intuition and are projections in a pre-mathematical space and time where the intuitions about order and following are shown” (ibid., p. 152).

On these points Asparuhov comes very close to the philosophical logic understood by Deyan Deyanov in Bulgaria as non-classical transcendentalism. This, by the way, is properly declared in many places in Asparuhov’s text; Deyanov’s Afterword to Asparuhov’s second book also thoroughly explicates the dialogue between the two authors. Without going into the details where one can notice not only points on which Asparuhov follows Deyanov but also attempts at distancing himself somewhat from the latter, I want to express my critical amazement at a common-place in the projects of both the teacher and the student. Namely, that, although it is expressly indicated several times by Asparuhov, sufficient attention is not paid to **Wittgenstein’s refusal to accept the use of a term such as “philosophical logic” as meaningful**. This refusal is not whimsical – in the early Wittgenstein it is related to the conclusion that the logical form (even if such exists, as Wittgenstein still hoped until the end of the 1920s or the beginning of the 1930s) cannot be articulated clearly – hence, neither will philosophical logic as articulation of logical form offer us meaningful propositions that can be articulated clearly. But the situation becomes even more perplexing when the **later Witt-**

² It turns out to be “non-classical transcendental logic” in a sense close to the one in which Deyan Deyanov uses this phrase.

Wittgenstein applies Occam's razor to logical forms themselves – after the mid-1930s logical forms, according to Wittgenstein, not only cannot be articulated, they simply do not exist, they do not even “show themselves”. The later Wittgenstein – as, by the way, ordinary language philosophy more generally – eliminates the very idealization of logical form. This happens thanks to two arguments elaborated precisely by Russell and Wittgenstein: 1. that the form of a complex is never a constituent of this complex (Russell) or that the function of an argument can never be its own argument (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 3.333), which means that logical forms, which are invariant (i.e. tautological) by presumption, can never be articulated – because every articulation of a logical form constructs a meta-language that does not coincide with the referred-to object-language; 2. and because even when we perform a meta-linguistic generalization and formalization, this generalization reduces the “sense of relations” (Russell) or the sense of propositions (Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*), that is to say, every logical form is a reductively imposed (not “own”³) logical type of particular phenomenal practices.

If we take those two arguments radically – which is precisely what the later Wittgenstein did – then we must apply Occam's razor and admit that logical forms in some proper – pure – sense **simply do not exist**. The logical forms formulated by one or other logical system are nothing other than simplified symbolic records of some routine – habitual – behaviour. Such records, however, are always done *ex post*, on the basis of identification of family resemblances between different habits and, moreover, they are strongly reductive – because they reduce the resemblances to equivalence. Grammatical observations in the later Wittgenstein attempt to be an imperative regarding minimal reduction of generalizations – yet even they are not pure, that is to say, they are not deprived *a priori* of reductive force. What is more, only *ex post* – and now this is **ex post raised to the second degree** – only after a given rule (logical form, invariant) is formulated, only then it can play the role of a command to repeat a behaviour in future, too. And here, I would say elliptically, there is absolutely no *a priori* synthesis – there are accidental, wholly *a posteriori* eliminations/reductions of the phenomenal variety which, in the best case, can begin to play the role of a practical *a priori*, that is to say, of an impure and more or less unstable materially specific form of/command for a repeated behaviour.

If that is true, then some seriously differentiated philosophical logic is not possible. If there is a meaningful way to talk about and to practice philosophical logic, it is in two aspects: 1. As regards the genesis of some concrete logical forms formulated in one or other formal paradigm, to conduct a genealogy – to monitor exactly what are the phenomenal practices of which those forms are a generalization, and at the cost of exactly what reductions those phenomenal practices have been gener-

³ Here I invert Deyanov's terms – from the point of view of ordinary language philosophy, every type is secondarily (meta-linguistically) and reductively imposed, i.e. there is no own type. Every typologizing operation is secondary and reductive.

alized. And 2. as regards the effects produced by the logical paradigms and their formalizations, to conduct systematic deconstruction of their logical utopias, that is to say, to monitor what are the simplified worlds that are often projected by the mutually incommensurable formalizations, and which, if we follow them word for word, it will turn out that we actually have to live in.

As you see, I am expressing my disagreement with the differentiation of philosophical logic as an autonomous field – rather, philosophical logic should be replaced by systematic genealogies and deconstructions of the logical systems. This means that I am disputing Valentin Asparuhov's main intention – moreover, regarding a fundamental problem. Such a dispute, however, cannot be resolved in a review. In fact, here it is only marked, and should be unfolded and, possibly, resolved in the future. I hope, however, that the dispute has been marked in a sufficiently respectful way. For Valentin Asparuhov's works are extremely professional and, without being afraid to engage in disputes, definitely appreciate more, and even facilitate, the search for a common truth.

CONCLUSION

Valentin Asparuhov's academic works, submitted for the competition for the position of Associate Professor, are devoted to an extremely important philosophical problem that has not been resolved unambiguously to date: Can philosophical logic be differentiated as an autonomous scientific and problem field? This problem is raised clearly by the author, who presents an original position on it, demonstrating remarkable professional competencies: historico-philosophical as well as analytic ones. Asparuhov, furthermore, demonstrates enviable skills and activity in his work with students at Plovdiv University as well as a capacity to undertake various significant administrative and public activities. In light of the above, I give a **categorical positive assessment** and recommend to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of History and Philosophy for the appointment of Valentin Stefanov Asparuhov to the academic position of Associate Professor at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" in Professional Field 2.3 Philosophy.

Sofia

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Reviewer:

(Prof. PhD Dimitar Vatsov)