

OPINION

by Associate Professor Dr. Darin Voinov Tenev, Plovdiv University
regarding the Associate Professor habilitation procedure at Plovdiv University
in Area of Higher Education 2.3. Philosophy (Logic)
announced in *Darzhaven vestnik*, No. 31/ April 12, 2019

Valentin Stefanov Asparuhov is the only candidate in the Associate Professor habilitation procedure in Area of Higher Education 2.3. Philosophy (Logic – Non-classical Transcendental Logic) announced by Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” in *Darzhaven vestnik*, No. 31/ April 12, 2019. The candidate has submitted for the procedure 14 scholarly publications, two of which are monographs, one is a study and eleven are articles. His submitted publications and his scholarly and educational academic work meet the legal requirements for the position of Associate Professor at Plovdiv University.

Valentin Stefanov Asparuhov teaches philosophy at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. He has prepared more than ten lecture courses part of which before he arrived at his tenure position at this university. He has supervised the Bachelor’s theses of two of his students who graduated successfully. He has participated in different projects including the “Everyday Life Meets Theory” Project at Plovdiv University of which he was the head. He has participated in the organization of eleven conferences and scientific forums three of which were international. He is the creator and Editor in Chief of the *Kairos* journal for philosophy. More recently he designed a *Philosophy and Literature* MA program and it is one of the most significant projects in Bulgaria in the last years engaging three departments and opening up new possibilities for interdisciplinary investigations not only before the students but also before the professors.

Even just on the basis of the above I can state that the candidate meets all the formal requirements for the habilitation procedure. However, if one looks closer at Valentin Asparuhov’s CV one will not fail to see that in terms of contents his activity demonstrates not only dedication but also an impressive potential for philosophical innovation which he successfully developed throughout his career.

I will first turn to his teaching activity. It combines three elements that are but rarely combined not only in Bulgaria but also on an international scale given the dominant philosophical conjuncture. On the one hand, the lectures and the seminars he has prepared have an obvious focus on logical problematic and if I had to categorize the candidate on the basis of the existing philosophical disciplines I would undoubtedly define him as a ‘logician’. On the other hand, however, unlike many logicians (but not unlike Bertrand Russell who is in the center of his interest) Asparuhov has prepared and taught also various courses on History of Philosophy. The fact of teaching courses on pure Logic and simultaneously courses on History of Philosophy by itself makes possible the mutual reflection of the two disciplines. It is highly probable that because of the encounter and the traversing of the two new perspectives appear that allow the opening of philosophy to other fields of knowledge. In this sense, the fact that Asparuhov has taught many a course before non-philosophers (before students in Sociology, Economics, Marketing, Pedagogy, etc.) seems to be far from contingent; it rather shows the natural corollary of the attempt to do logic and history of philosophy together. The MA program mentioned earlier, as the most recent teaching activity of the candidate confirms the interdisciplinary direction of his work. There he teaches and has prepared courses indicating the way in which logic, ontology, epistemology and so on are open for a dialogue with literary

history and literary theory, with critical theory and sociology. I believe that fruitfulness of this dialogue in Asparuhov's lecture courses is based on the combination of logic, history of philosophy and interdisciplinary use of the humanities. These are three elements one will hardly see combined in the contemporary higher education.

As interesting and thought provoking Asparuhov's teaching is, his scholarly work deserves more attention. The candidate's contributions that he himself has included in the documents for the procedure are adequately formulated, well-grounded and real. What I would like to stress however is the innovative character of his research and the promise it carries. It is expressed in the most developed and clear form in the second monograph he has submitted titled *Syntheses, Apperceptions, Unities. Notes in the Margins of the Philosophical Logic*. The monograph collects in a revised form most of the articles that were published before it came out and provides them with a powerful conceptual framework which is the result of a longstanding effort. One can say that the book offers a study of Bertrand Russell and the shadow of Kant behind him despite his decisive attempt to do away with the Kantian transcendental heritage. To put it this way however would be misleading and incorrect as it would reduce Asparuhov's research to history of philosophy and as I already noted it is more than that. What Asparuhov actually does when he discusses the historico-philosophical problem about the relationship between Kant and Russell is to outline questions that are logical in nature but in a way that redefines the boundaries of the logical and discloses the manner in which these questions are still before us and are not simply something from the past. For me the most important move Asparuhov makes is to reconstruct Russell's discovery of a transcendental problematic that remained nonetheless non-reflected in Russell's work, a problematic that testifies to this day for the transcendental trace in Russell not despite but as a result of his criticism against Kant. This presupposes a non-Kantian, non-classical transcendentalism. Its crucial characteristic is the singular subject who is rather different from the active, constitutive subject of Kant, a subject who, on the contrary, is constituted by the storm of life that comes upon him and who is led exclusively by his will to knowledge (and not by the categories of understanding, etc). Such an interpretation of the subject allows Asparuhov to develop an unexpected and yet convincing interpretation on 'logical experience' and 'logical intuition', terms Russell mentioned occasionally but never fully explained. The subject as "an expression of the will of the cognizing agency" (p. 124) lets what befalls him to disclose in an immediate way the logical form before his intuition which means nothing less than that the origin of the a priori syntheses should be seen as belonging not to understanding but to intuition. (p. 150) On the basis of the logical intuition defined in this way logical experience extracts its logical data.

Needless to say, this is but a very rough sketch of the fundamental motif underlying all the texts submitted for the habilitation procedure. One should point to at least three things closely associated with this motif. First, this motif leads Asparuhov to radically rethink well known distinctions (such as the one between objective and proposition, or the one between denotation and designation, or the one between subsisting and existence) and from this perspective to shed new light on Russell's prominent discussions with Meinong, Wittgenstein and others.

Secondly, even from the rough sketch I offered above it should have become clear that the transcendental is here related to a praxeological point that is absent in Kant but in the reading of Russell Asparuhov develops, it makes possible the non-classical conception of the transcendental. In a brilliant way Asparuhov offers an archeology of the praxeological turn by tracing its association with the possibility for a non-classical transcendentalism.

Finally, I would like to point out Valentin Asparuhov's research style in the development of the motif. I have in mind in particular the way Asparuhov reads and uses Russell's biography. All the submitted texts pay attention to Russell's biography and take into account both concrete

facts from his life and the gradual movement of Russell's thought through manuscripts, unfinished projects and rejected ideas. In the context of the conceptual framework at work in Asparuhov's philosophy, all this is a sign not for love for the anecdotal or curiosity for the unpublished heritage of a celebrity but for the way in which Russell biographically provides an example for the work of logical intuition and for the manner in which logical experience makes possible the extraction of logical data. In other words, Russell turns out to be the first example for the singular subject of the will to knowledge that Asparuhov infers from what Russell himself has said in manuscripts and texts under study. This however necessitates a rejection of the more traditional ways to compose an article or a book on logic and on history of philosophy. It entails not a reconstruction of a systematic theory but a meticulous tracing of all the vacillations, digressions, and the ways in which the storm of life enters the order of thought. In a different context such a style of research can be related to non-classical intentional analysis but here the very dedication to the subject requires a dismissal of phenomenological methods.

It is in relation to this revealing of the philosophical layer of the biographical that I would like to point to the fact that the texts of Asparuhov in their turn are intentionally indicating his own context. In a twofold manner. On the one hand, the context is indicated with the use of notes on biographical facts from Asparuhov's life, the substitution of Russell's examples with examples from our present day and so on. On the other, the context is indicated through the active discussion with other Bulgarian thinkers. One should mention here in the first place Deyan Deyanov, Todor Petkov and Martina Mineva with whom Asparuhov is working in the same paradigm. Yet no lesser role is played by the work of Stefan Popov, Dimitar Vatsov, Dorbin Spasov and others. Asparuhov comments Russell's discussions discussing in his own right setting an example of what he claims in the way he claims it.

What I called above research style has enormous stakes for the rethinking of even the basic words employed in the logical and the philosophical discourse. For instance, the word 'concept' is seen as inadequate when one has to discuss logical experience and for that reason Asparuhov suggests the introduction of "figures of thought functioning on the basis of praxis" (p. 78), where 'figure' is conceived as multiple and linked to "the dynamics of the ground" (p. 79). Logical data serves as an example of what a figure is. I believe that 'figure' has a great philosophical potential and I would have liked if this part was better developed. (In Bulgaria Boyan Manchev has already laid the ground for a philosophical figurology that is not without semblance to Asparuhov's argument; what is more, there is already an ongoing debate on figurology, including Chriss Enchev, myself and others to which debate Asparuhov could have contributed in a more direct way.) I was asking myself as I was reading the submitted texts what is the place of the 'figure' itself, is it a figure or a concept and what will follow from each of these options? What is the relationship between imagination and figure, between scheme and figure, between image and figure? (Let me say in parenthesis that the pages on imagination are among the most important in the monograph and yet they make the reader wonder why the difference in the understanding of imagination in the first two editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not taken into account.) I was asking myself also which of the used words should be read as figures and which as concepts? Thus, for example, when Asparuhov discusses the 'transcendental trace' in Russell, he does not make clear in what way he understands 'trace' and if the 'trace' is also a figure. The same can be said about the will. The will plays an important part in Asparuhov's general project as it allows him to redefine the subject taking part in the transcendental but there is no independent discussion of the will. Is 'will' a figure in these texts and if so what will follow for the overall argument?

All these questions do not aim at criticizing Asparuhov's work; on the contrary, they indicate the promise its innovative character carries. A promise for new discussions and new discoveries.

In conclusion I want to say on the basis of the above that I believe that the scholarly and teaching activity of Valentin Stefanov Asparuhov is of a very high academic level and meets all the requirements for a habilitation. I will vote in his favor in the Habilitation jury.

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Sept. 12, 2019
Sofia