REVIEW

of Anastasia Kopylova’s PhD thesis ‘W. Ockham’s conception of supposition and signification’

In the last several decades analytic philosophy underwent one more serious transformation which sometimes is called the ‘historical turn’ and which manifests itself in constantly growing volume of historico-philosophical research. One of the notable trends of that transformation is the revival of interest among analytic philosophers in the medieval scholastic philosophical and logical tradition. Anastacia Kopylova’s PhD thesis concerns an intensively debated topic related with logical and philosophical ideas of William Ockham, the fourteenth-century English philosopher.

The author of the PhD thesis under consideration demonstrates in her work professional research skills; she successfully combines the method of theoretical reconstruction with a strict textological analysis of Ockham’s texts. She has studied a huge stock of scientific literature on her theme in Latin, English, French and, naturally, Russian. Her conclusions are carefully weighed and corroborated. And she develops a new approach to interpreting Ockham’s conception of supposition and signification.

I read the draft version of Anastasia Kopylova’s PhD thesis four months ago and then I advanced several critical observations which were taken into account by the author and the according corrections and additions were made in the final version. That’s why now I would like to express two small remarks which should be taken as a recommendation for further research rather than a criticism.

Firstly, the author critically examines two contemporary approaches to interpreting Ockham’s conception of supposition. One approach which is rather widely accepted treats supposition as a kind of reference. The second approach developed by Dutilh Novaes analyses supposition as a formal procedure for generating propositional meanings. Being critical to both mentioned approaches, the author proposes a new one which, if I correctly understand it, is something middle
between them. On the one hand, following Dutilh Novaes, the author considers supposition in the context of a whole statement, focusing on its role in determination of truth conditions of different kinds of statement (tensed, modal, with imaginary object terms). On the other hand, if we take into account that in modern logic truth conditions of statements are defined, in Tarskian classical manner, in terms of reference and satisfaction, it means that the author regards supposition as something analogous to reference. In my view, it would be interesting and useful, first, to compare these two “mechanisms” of determining truth conditions of statements and, second, to clearly formulate advantages of the author’s new solution over the two mentioned approaches.

Secondly, I suppose that contemporary historians of logics and philosophy use the method of historical (or theoretical) reconstruction in their research not only because it allows them to state ideas and conceptions of the previous thinkers with more precision and accurateness (in spite of all accusations in anachronism), but also because in such presentation those ideas are of deep interest for researchers who work nowadays in the areas of logics, philosophy of language, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, etc. The author of the PhD thesis, in my view, takes for granted that Ockham’s conception of supposition and signification is quite actual and it can be fruitful for contemporary logicians and philosophers of language; however, I think, it should be explicitly stated in what respects that conception is of significance to today’s philosophy.

Despite my remarks, I am sure that Anastasia Kopylova’s PhD thesis answers to the requirements and standards which are established for kandidatskaya dissertation at National Research University Higher School of Economics, and so the Degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences should be conferred upon its author.

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