

**PhD thesis, supervisor's report:**

**Milan Soutor - *The Theory of Descriptions: Bertrand Russell's Road Towards Ontological Austerity***

Milan Soutor started his studies of philosophy at our department some 15 years ago. He attended some of my courses from the very start of his studies, and he soon proved to be a diligent and enthusiastic person with original insights and notable ambition to get at the heart of matters. His initial interest in topics from analytic epistemology and metaphysics brought him already during his pregraduate studies to systematic treatment of seminal figures of classical analytical tradition, including B. Russell. It was Russell to whom Milan's Bc thesis was devoted (under supervision of doc. Vojtěch Kolman), and after digression to issues concerning philosophical behaviorism in his master thesis (again under supervision of doc. Kolman), Milan returned back to Russell in his PhD project. Once again, doc. Kolman was assigned as Milan's initial supervisor; for personal reasons, however, Milan moved after the first year and went through the rest of his PhD studies under my supervision.

Milan Soutor's principal objective in his PhD thesis is to defend the canonical and recently contested interpretation due to W.V.O Quine, that it was not until the Theory of Descriptions, as presented for the first time in Russell's paper „On Denoting“ (1905), that Russell was able to dodge certain unwelcome (viz. „Meinongian“ as Milan calls them) ontological commitments. In order to attain that objective, Milan undertakes an extended, detailed and extremely meticulous attempt at presenting the relevant doctrines of Russell's of the pre-1905 period, which enables him to establish that during that period, Russell indeed remained committed to a sort of strong realist („Meinongian“) views concerning the scope of ontological domain. As a matter of fact, it is this attempt that the bulk of the present PhD thesis is devoted to. Yet in the final part Milan Soutor makes the last step needed to fulfil his declared project: he provides a competent account of the Theory of Descriptions of 1905 and shows how this new tool finally enables Russell to dispose of much of what he was uncomfortable with up to that time.

As I see it, it is the parts devoted to the exposition of Russell's pre-1905 views where the present PhD thesis turns out most valuable. In these parts, Milan Soutor gets engaged in numerous extremely difficult and controversial interpretative issues concerning what has been commonly known as Russell's „logicism“ and he is able to present various refined and original insights worthy of consideration in contemporary Russell studies and logical semantics. As for detailed discussion of particular contested issues, I leave it to the distinguished and highly competent opponents of the present PhD thesis. By my lights, Milan Soutor has presented a high-quality essay in which he clearly exhibited his competence and skill in the given field of historical and philosophical enquiry. Therefore I unhesitatingly recommend the present PhD thesis of his for defense.

Prague, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Jan Palkoska