

**Opponent's Report on Ms. Hana Slováčková's diploma thesis "The Disappointment of the Western Intellectual in the Twentieth-Century (in Saul Bellow's novels *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and *Herzog*)"**

Ms. Hana Slováčková aims to explore two novels of Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet and Herzog) using the philosophical lenses of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1915-80). The 103 page text contains a "preface", an "introduction", three main parts, a "conclusion", a "resume" and a section titled "literature".

At the outset I shall for limitations of space and time point out errors of syntax and style in about the first half of the thesis only:

- p. 5: 'St. Augustin' should be 'St. Augustine' (this occurs frequently elsewhere also in the thesis)
- p. 7 'the erasing the distinction' needs 'of' after 'erasing'
- p. 10 'organ' should be 'organs'
- p. 11 'mind' should be 'a mind'
- p. 11 'who perfect' should be 'who is perfect'
- p. 13 (2x) 'finate' should be 'finite'
- p. 15 'individual to do' not 'individual do'
- p. 15 'a fierce' not 'fierce'
- p. 16 'a work' not 'work'
- p. 16 'would' not 'or would'
- p. 25 'a spiritual vacuum' not 'spiritual vacuum'
- p. 26 'self-reflection' not 'self-refection'
- p. 31 'with the aim' not 'with to the aim'
- p. 32 'that drives' not 'that is drives'
- p. 32 'an individual's' not 'individual's'
- p. 34 'indulge in' not 'indulge into'
- p. 42 'provide it' not 'provide to it'
- p. 45 note 59 'ridiculous It was' an error; check the textual original (perhaps a period is required after 'ridiculous')
- p. 46 'by' not 'the by'

So, the prose is far from spotless and could have used some more proofing prior to the final submission.

Never the less, Hana has produced a stimulating and interesting account of her two Bellow novels. Her take on Nietzsche's conception of will-to-power on page 16 is, however, reductive and therefore partly erroneous, but otherwise her arguments are generally quite sound. Nietzschean will-to-power is *not* the will-to-dominate, per se, but rather for Gilles Deleuze (1925-95) "the capacity to be affected" (hence the desire too to continue 'to be affected'), for Pierre Klossowski "the supreme impulse", and for many

other interpreters "energy". For Nietzsche himself on at least one occasion? "[T]he will to power is the primitive form of affect, that all other affects are only developments of it". See also Karl Jaspers's first-rate study Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity (linguistic original 1936, trans. 1965, Johns Hopkins 1997) pp. 295-318ff. for additional elucidation of this quite difficult concept.

The chief strength of the thesis is its ambition but therein also lies its greatest weakness, for it attempts so much that at times it can seem a bit unwieldy. Hana's conclusion is by far the best part of the thesis, and this examiner wishes that perhaps the work had opened with it as an introduction to frame her discussions of the novels. Particularly thoughtful is her remark:

Sammler and Herzog are turned off by the outcome from releasing the self from the former submission but, at the same time, they realize that what they observe might be just an early stage of human consciousness. In this sense, Sartre's theoretical humanism might come true one day. At the moment, mankind continues to live in self-deception and is guilty of inauthenticity, according to Sartre's philosophy (p. 92).

If this is so I would ask the candidate how does she see these novels as offering a way out of the impasse of the contemporary world; or if she does not see a way out, what other perceptions or feelings do these novels offer of this critique of an 'inauthentic' world for authentic-openings toward genuineness or authenticity?

Also, the candidate could have used St. Augustine to smash Nietzsche, Sartre, and Bellow or vice versa (etc.) for a more inter-implicated critique; or one could show how they push each other past each other. In addition, there is St. Augustine's renowned remark from Confessions, "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet", that could perhaps have been interestingly incorporated into the thesis, but is not.

**Recommended grade: velmi dobrá —**

*Erik S. Roraback*

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*Praha, 18. V 10.*