

## POSUDEK OPONENTA DISERTAČNÍ PRÁCE

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Autorka práce: Mgr. Veronika Krajíčková

Název práce: THE PROBLEM OF THE FIXITY OF TABLES: VIRGINIA WOOLF AS A NON-DUALIST AND PROCESS-ORIENTED THINKER

Oponent disertační práce: Mgr. Martin Kaplický, Ph.D.

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The main aim of Veronika Krajíčková's thesis is to distil a kind of "personal philosophy" from Virginia Woolf's writings, both fictions and essays. Affirmations taken from Woolf's expression from her autobiography that „behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern“, Krajíčková tries to characterize the main features of the "thought pattern" underlying the oeuvre of Virginia Woolf. She endeavours this task by the aid of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism. The choice of Whitehead's philosophy is reasonable because Whitehead's and Woolf's thoughts share some general assumptions such as distrust of sharp subject-object duality; interest in processes underlying the phenomenal world or insisting on continuity between nature and culture. Moreover, Whitehead repeatedly mentions the affinity between philosophy and fine arts – "(...) all productive thought has proceeded either by the poetic insight of artists, or by the imaginative elaboration of schemes of thought capable of utilization as logical premises" (*Process and Reality*, 1978, p. 9).

The connection of Woolf and Whitehead is reasonable, but the comparison of ideas of both thinkers is extremely difficult. It is a comparison of Woolf's "philosophical" conceptions, scattered throughout her writings on the one side and one of the most elaborate and complex philosophical system of twentieth century on the other what make the comparison a difficult task. Woolf's poetic insights are therefore confronted with Whitehead's philosophical terminology operating on different levels of abstraction. Considering Woolf's poetic formulations, it would be easy to miss the differences between Whitehead's notion of "actual occasion" and "society" or attribute some sort of animism to his philosophy. But it would be also easy to simply impose Whitehead's system on Woolf's insights. Krajíčková did not succumb to any of these threats and the result is an excellent thesis in which the thoughts of both authors illuminate each other without merging into one eclectic fusion of thoughts. Nevertheless, I have one question. Krajíčková understandably concentrates on the similarities between Woolf's and Whitehead's thought. Did she find any point in which their thoughts are in conflict?

In my opinion, the basic motif of the thesis is the overcoming of anthropocentric perspective in both Woolf's and Whitehead's thought. Krajíčková develops this motif in four successive steps (chapters). The first step is devoted to subject-object relation, the second step opens the problem of panpsychism, the third step develops process-oriented concept of identity, and the fourth step considers environmental and ecological aspects in the thoughts of both authors. All these themes are not only well chosen but also very carefully and skilfully treated. Nevertheless, there is one point I would like to discuss more in detail. The whole thesis is motivated by the search for Woolf's "personal philosophy" expressed in the figure of "pattern behind the cotton wool". This figure comes from Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past" and the passage containing this figure is repeatedly quoted in the thesis (always in different lengths). The quotations include the statement that "the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art", pp. 24, 161, 232. It is surprising for me that Krajíčková did not develop this idea and did not consider Woolf's and Whitehead's thoughts of the role of art in life. I am aware of the fact that the theme would prolong the text, which is long enough at this moment, but it seems to me as great a theme for final step in comparison of thoughts of both

authors. Moreover, even at this moment Whitehead delineates continuity between wide and close meaning of art, overcoming anthropocentrism even at this field. In *Science and Modern World* Whitehead even states: "Thus 'art' in the general sense which I require is any selection by which the concrete facts are so arranged as to elicit attention to particular values which are realisable by them" (SMW, 1948, 200). In *Adventures of Ideas* art is defined as "truthful beauty" and Whitehead continues that "consciousness itself is the product of art in its lowliest form" (AI, 1967, 271). Would Veronika have any comment on this note?

Veronika's thesis is very well and carefully written, and I could mention innumerable difficult themes and subthemes which are excellently treated. I want to highlight three important moments at the very least. Firstly, I strongly appreciate her careful analysis of panpsychism understood without any trace of animism, which is important for correct understanding of Whitehead's thought (chapter 2). Secondly, Veronika's consideration of identity as "discordant harmony" is excellent and fits perfectly with Whitehead's notion of "contrast under identity" as his categorial condition of becoming of a new actual occasion (PR, 279 – 280). Thirdly, Veronika's treatment of anthropomorphism as the first step in overcoming anthropocentrism (89 – 112) is inspiring and harmonises with Whitehead's method of imaginative generalisation.

Finally, I have to fulfil my role of opponent and mention some problematic places:

1) Author repeatedly writes about bifurcation of nature in the sense of dividing line between human and non-human realm. But Whitehead uses the notion in a different meaning as the sharp division between seemingly "true" scientific entities and seemingly "delusive" sensuous experience. I consider it as confusion of concepts.

2) On page 65 Veronika writes about "Woolf's own realisation that permanence and stability are nothing but an illusion" and conceives it in accordance with Whitehead's philosophy. But the idea of stability as something illusory is completely foreign to Whitehead's philosophy. As he mentioned in *Science and the Modern World*: "There are two principles inherent in the very nature of things, recurring in some particular embodiments whatever field we explore – the spirit of change, and the spirit of conservation. There can be nothing real without both" (SMW, 201).

3) On page 242, when she delineates the relation between the ideas of the Bloomsbury Group and process philosophy Veronika says that "the Post-Impressionist paintings emit an emotion, which Whitehead called "lure for feeling". But in Whitehead's terminology "lure for feeling" is a function of each proposition.

The above-mentioned reservations do not decrease the value of the Ph.D. thesis of Veronika Krajíčková. I consider it as excellent, and I would recommend the author to consider its publishing.

**I recommend the thesis for defence with the result pass.**

Předloženou disertační práci doporučuji k obhajobě a navrhuji ji klasifikovat jako **prospěla**.

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