

Irena Dvořáková: Henry David Thoreau and His View of Slavery
BA Thesis – Supervisor’s Report

The thesis examines Thoreau’s opinions of slavery in expressed in his essays and books, chiefly in *Slavery in Massachusetts*, *A Plea for Captain John Brown*, *Civil Disobedience*, *Life Without a Principle* and *Walden*, in two important contexts: of the contemporary abolitionist movement and the twentieth-century movements of civil disobedience, including the Czech dissident movement, represented by Václav Havel. Especially the second perspective (developed in Chapter 4) is important and revealing, and would definitely deserve further research.

The thesis is focused on political and philosophical aspects of Thoreau’s thought and does not particularly deal with the literary qualities of Thoreau’s works. Although this issue was not raised during the supervision, it would be interesting to analyse how Thoreau’s imagery, rhetoric and aphoristic qualities of his writings, especially of *Walden*, contribute to the communication of his political and social criticism.

I am happy to state that in the process of supervision Irena made all efforts to improve her drafts according to my suggestions and comments. My questions for the defence therefore concern only those aspects, which either could not be adequately developed in the range of the BA thesis or were not sufficiently discussed in it.

1. Thoreau was definitely influenced by Emerson, as it is explained in the sections of the thesis dealing with abolitionism and civil disobedience. What I miss in the thesis is a wider reflection of the differences between Thoreau’s and Emerson’s concepts of society and politics. Which of these differences are the most important ones?
2. Although the thesis discusses Thoreau in the context of the U.S. abolitionist movement, it does not treat systematically the differences and resemblances between Thoreau’s opinions and those typical of the diverse streams of the abolitionist movement discussed in Chapter 1. Could you elaborate on this aspect?
3. The inclusion of *Walden* and *Life without a Principle* in your discussion implies that Thoreau had a wider notion of “slavery” than that referring to the ownership and forced labour of African Americans, and to their political, social and economic degradation. Would you attempt to further contextualize and elaborate Thoreau’s notion of slavery in moral, economic and ecological terms?

In spite of its shortcomings Irena’s work can be said to meet the standards of BA theses established at our department. In view of her hard and conscientious work and timely and efficient responses to my critical comments I propose to grade her thesis “**výborně**” or “**velmi dobře**”, depending on the quality of the defence.

29 August 2013

prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc.