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Re: Habilitace Dr. Evy Kalivodové

Prof. PhDr. Anna Housková, CSc.
Ústav románských studií
Filozofická fakulta
Univerzita Karlova
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Dear Professor Housková, dear Colleagues,

Thank you for the invitation to evaluate Dr. Kalivodová's work. Let me say first that I am more than impressed. Roger Griffin's book is an extremely ambitious, very dense intervention in our understandings of both modernism and fascism, and more broadly in our understanding of European modernity. Griffin positions himself in a conversation about fascism and long-believed anti-modern—and anti-modernist—impulses. He argues that fascism is a form of modernism. More broadly his work speaks to what has arguably been the single most important debate in European intellectual history, dating from the early postwar years and continuing to the present-day: namely, can we draw a line from Enlightenment to Auschwitz? This was the question Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer began to grapple with in California as they first learned of the Holocaust. It has been the central, ever-haunting question for Hannah Arendt, for Michel Foucault, for Zygmunt Bauman, for Leonidas Donskis. The relationship between modernity and post-modernity—and today, between post-modernity and a potentially encroaching neo-totalitarianism facilitated by “post-truth”—can only be understood through a return to the question about whether modernity has meant Enlightenment and liberation or whether it meant barbarism and terror.

I realize that this was a long and difficult project, and that Dr. Kalivodová must have chosen to several years ago. From today's perspective (and I am writing from the United States as we approach the end of the first year of Donald Trump's presidency, which has seen—among other revolting spectacles—thousands of armed white supremacists beat up students on the campus of University of Virginia), the decision to translate this book seems almost eerily prescient. I do not know that Dr. Kalivodová intended—or even desired—the project to be so timely and to have so much contemporary relevance. Alas, it is timely and all too relevant.

The translation project itself is incredibly ambitious: Griffin's prose is very dense, very wordy, very sophisticated, the range of vocabulary is vast, and furthermore he's drawing largely from French and German sources, adding additional layers to the translation. I am not a native Czech speaker (and while I have occasionally translated *from* Czech into English, I would never attempt to translate *into* Czech), so my qualifications to judge the Czech translation are limited. I can say that Dr. Kalivodová's translation seems to me to read just as clearly as (and at moments still more clearly than) the original—which is a tremendous accomplishment given that Griffin's prose is not always reader-friendly even in the original English. Some of her Czech terms seem still better than the original: "humanitní sebepytování" strikes me as superior to "reflexive humanities," for example, which is painfully vague in English, and "celistvější obraz" is a better formulation of what Griffin means than his own "bigger picture." In general, I very much appreciate her translation style, which refrains from exploiting the potential in Czech to combine shorter English sentences into longer and more complex Czech sentences and thereby make the prose sound fancier and more academic. This translation is obviously meant to be read and understood by Czech readers coming from a very wide range of fields in all the humanities and social sciences, and not only by specialists in literary modernism.

Translation is by its nature an act of cultural mediation—and an act of faith that some kind of understanding of the Other, of others, is possible. The Ukrainian translator, Jurko Prochasko, has spoken in interviews about his philosophy of translation: in some sense all communication is translation. Translation is an encounter with the Other, in the spirit of Emmanuel Levinas's *face-to-face*, which is arguably needed today more urgently than ever. No Google Translate application will ever be able to capture the nuances of human expressions the way that human beings—provided they are careful, knowledgeable, and sensitive—can.

Dr. Kalivodová's commentary published at the end of the book is an excellent description and analysis of Griffin's project. In fact, she arguably explains his main points more concisely and directly than Griffin himself. Personally I found her distinction between the Czech *moderna* and modernism in Griffin's understanding very useful. She grasps very well Griffin's extremely ambitious intentions: his ambition to intervene in an already densely-populated conversation about modernism with a new thesis; his ambition to reconceptualize modernism to go beyond its strictly and artistic forms and embrace its anthropological and social dimensions; and his ambition (while avoiding a return to the *status quo ante*) to go beyond postmodernist cultural turn critiques which, on grounds of epistemological impossibility, refuse to make positive claims or attempt a "big picture." Dr. Kalivodová's commentary together with the translation also effectively creates a new or at least revised "dictionary" of concepts and categories to discuss modernism, modernity, totalitarianism: modernismus v. moderna v. modernita, temporalizace/zčasování, předvoj/avangarda, metapříběh, zpětné spojení dopředu, and so forth.

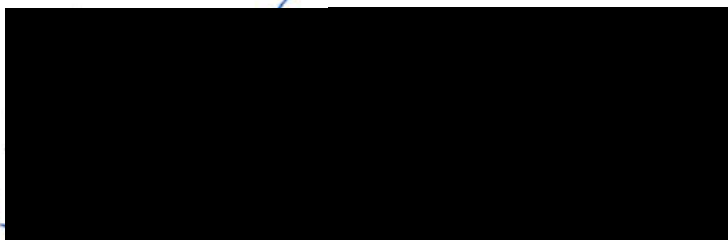
Dr. Kalivodová's commentary reveals as well her sensitivity to the fact that Griffin's project is not only analytical, but also normative: in the 20th century, philosophical and aesthetic crises were inextricably bound up with political and ideological ones, and the results were chilling. Moreover, she rightly understands Griffin's desire to make the reader see that the modernism's energy "není mrtvá," that "neměla by být jen dějinným faktem, ale odkazem pro současnost." This is true today more than ever. For perhaps "overdetermined" (as Freud would say) reasons, liberalism proved fatally fragile a century ago. Arguably, it is proving just as fragile in the present moment—on both sides of the

Atlantic. This is a moment when a close dialogue between the United States and Europe (perhaps especially that part of Europe that experienced totalitarianism for the longest time) is especially essential. I've been doing all I can to encourage my students to learn foreign languages, to go abroad, to explore the fears and anxieties of difficult countries and different societies.

I have spent a lot of time working with translators, and doing some translation myself, and I have rarely encountered anyone as careful and devoted to the art of translation as Dr. Kalivodová. Czech readers, as well as Roger Griffin himself, should be grateful for what she has done for them, and her fellow scholars should be grateful to have her as a colleague and interlocutor.

Podle mého názoru tato práce je výborná; doporučuji práci Dr. Evy Kalivodové k dalšímu habilitačnímu řízení. Jestli budete mít další otázky, prosím Vás, klidně napište.

S úctou,



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