The Main Points of the Doctoral (PhD) Thesis

The Political Thought of Fr. W. Nietzsche

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I. The Main Goal of the Thesis

On the first day of June 1920, two weeks before Max Weber, the renowned German jurist, economist, and sociologist died as a result of Spanish flu, following a discussion with Oswald Spengler, he had said to one of his students: „Today, the honesty of a scientist, and of a philosopher in particular, can be measured by his relation to Nietzsche and Marx. Anyone who does not admit that he could not have carried out the essential part of his own work without the scientific results of that the two men deceives himself and others. The world in which we ourselves exist intellectually – is largely a world shaped by Marx and Nietzsche”.¹ Thus, Marx and Nietzsche has been formed our intellectual universe in 20th century. Notably by pointing out for the economic and psychological factors existing together in history they have created an intellectual environment wherein their succession, in one way or another, but somehow should have put themselves to theirs appropriate place. We believe that in many cases, and many respects, the achievements of both thinkers for the men who live at beginning of the third millennium – for us – it is also inescapable. In our thesis we deal with one of them, the latter, Friedrich Nietzsche. While reviewing his œuvre, we try to thread the beads of his political thought on the string of nihilism and its symptoms: the modern pessimism and the décadence.

Magda Pórtelki, heroine of the “Colours and years”, a novel by Margit Kaffka, as recalling the events of her life at the beginning of the book, make such a remark of herself, that as she has grown old she “practically live her life backwards”. She thinks that the man who lives his or her life sees at the events of his or her walk of life in a different way according to his or her age. As she puts it, this mental trait that is typical of all man, is like when “someone is hiking in the mountains: sometimes just a few steps away, and it will change the landscape in front of her eyes; the location of the valleys and peaks become different to each other. From every resting-place one can see completely different panorama. It happens this way perhaps with the events too. And maybe what I now think the story of my life – it is only an image of my life that is shaped by my current thinking. But then the more it is mine...”² Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that in

relation with Nietzsche's life and œuvre we might have very similar feelings. In fact, the Nietzschean œuvre can be recognized, call our attention in the preface of the Genealogy the author himself, if we read his texts carefully from beginning to end with keeping a certain distance to them, but it can be understood, let us add, if we look back from the end of reading process on it. Only in his late period diagnose Nietzsche the problem, that “disease” which symptoms – the modern pessimism and decadence –, and the circumstances and conditions under which this global problem has been allowed to develop he detects and writes in different forms from the very beginning of the 1870s. After the aetiological research in the middle of 1880s he calls the illness by name: nihilism. For Nietzsche, this is not such a social and political problem that could be solved easily by reforming of the social and political institutions. He realizes, that those Christian moral values and core ideas of the Christian world view that formerly had a central role for the European culture and civilization that are now struggling in the grip of nihilism and for the dispirited, decadent European man, have already been depreciated. Thus understood nihilism is such a condition that affects the moral and metaphysical language which allows us to formulate acquired knowledge about the world, and affects the values on which we base our deeds. For that reason, there needed to review such previously positive concepts as objective, unity, truth, justice, compassion, and so on. If God is dead, and if due to this fact the European man has lost its metaphysical and moral framework on which base he was possible to give sense and purpose to his existence, then how would it be possible to interpret the world, how would he give meaning to his existence again? How will he able to endure this fact at all, and how could he surmount this? For Nietzsche the “event” of nihilism will provide the opportunity for the European people to reconsider the fundamental questions of politics and the social being. Inter alia those that are put hereafter: why human society come into existence, for what purposes, how and on what basis it should be organized, and if the current values are depreciated by what kind of new values has to replace them.

In other words, according to the diagnosis of nihilism that was given by Nietzsche, it is nothing else than the will that turns against life, i. e. the lethal disease. This diagnosis that relates to this “hostility to life” character of nihilism is based on his concept of how should we counterbalance the modern morality and the modern science and that the revaluation of all values will put in their proper place, or adjust these values. Nietzsche heavily criticized morality and tried to replace it with a new reference point: the life that is lived by man, the life-form of man, the existence. Ultimately for Nietzsche this “hostility
to life” character means a kind of inability for solving problems and for facing and managing conflicts, and if it is displayed on a community level, it is closely related to the politics.

In our hypothesis, nihilism is that paradigm along which the jigsaw puzzle pieces of Nietzsche’s political thinking might be put together. Our goal is to discover that in Nietzsche’s view what are those circumstances and conditions under which this overall problem occurred, what are the consequences of this event, and what must be at least equally important, what kind of therapy and antidote prescribes Nietzsche for that malady. Accordingly, we want to point out in our thesis for the values of Nietzsche’s thought as far as the political theory is concerned – and at the same time for the antidemocratic nature of his position. Nietzsche imagines the formation of new social, cultural and political elite, and hopes that through his writings he can help the creation of such a group. Thus his works can be read as a kind of Manifesto, which exhorts the free spirits of Europe for uniting, for throwing away their chains, and for gaining social power. Nietzsche’s philosophers, just like of Marx, have a responsibility not only to interpret the world, but also to change it.3

II. Applied methods

Having written our paper we primarily built our own interpretation not on those countless readings set by others, but we principally based on the ‘writer’s authority’ directly. We suppose that instead of the best commentators one should turn to the writer himself. This is, of course, does not mean that we should not have to know those interpretations, but we live with the option of creating our own. In addition we have followed Nietzsche’s remonstrance, who in his second Untimely Meditation having criticised the claim of objectivity of some old historians wrote the following train of thought.

According to the usual philosophical interpretation of objectivity, it is when one contemplates a thing or an event, with all its causes, its resulting consequences and its implications, and when these consequences project themselves on some kind of pure passivity (on the subject). In Nietzsche’s opinion it is a bad mythology. When a historian

set the requirements for objectivity before him as to comply with, at that very moment he becomes more like a playwright, who would like to put the unity of a plan into things (eine Einheit des Planes in die Dinge), if it is not there, and it exists only in the mind of the writer at most. The historian cannot be a judge, he cannot pass a judgement, least of all on the basis of the position that he was born later.⁴

Therefore, we try to beware of the error the majority of the interpretations have, that is to put the idea of ‘unity of plan’ or ‘lack of that unity’ in Nietzsche’s writings posterior. Otherwise, we may call Nietzsche as ‘extremely peculiar’ in many senses. We do not think this time that he would have, in the same way as “classical authors”, some quasi-metaphysical status, or that he would ‘exceed’ other authors, or that we should turn our face toward him with admiration and not with critical attitude. Nietzsche is peculiar in a different sense. For us the uniqueness of Nietzsche is shown in his late Prefaces that were written to his earlier works in 1886-87. These late Prefaces were not to verify the subject-matter of his previous writings, but these were applied to spell out at a later time his problem; a problem, that was not clear even to him when he was actually writing. When working on the new editions of his earlier works, Nietzsche tried at the same time to make them more accessible to others, and to clarify for himself the problems he had about his own works.

We would like to point out for the fact, that the proper ideas of Nietzsche, and the way he enveloped his ideas, had a meaning and significance not only for his possible serious contemporary audience, or for an audience of serious researchers in any field of the social and political sciences today – he had and he has a much more wider influence. This thesis tries to show it is possible to use his own writings to bring him out of this enclave: it can prove that he is not just a boring classic of the philosophy, or extravagant, thought inspiring, but unreliable maître-penseur. Nonetheless, he is initiator of extremely rigorous, demanding and interesting projects with much contemporary relevance for those people who are interested in many different intellectual topics.

It seems to me as an adequate method to the above written conception the so-called close reading method. The essential characteristic of this method is that it proceeds from the text of the author with the intention to reveal all the elements of content and form which hide in

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the text. Carrying out the analysis aims the author's thoughts, intentions and his expresional forms rather than their influence for readers. Usually the analysis goes in the following order and is based on methodological principles below (sketch of order): first of all we examine the circumstances of the formation; we try to locate it in one of the productive period of the writer, and in the intellectual context of the age; subsequently, the dominant theme of the essay that follows, and the most important is to define the issues and considerations are highlighted; this is followed up by exploring the compositional and structural characteristics of the work; and then comes a detailed analysis of each section of the text, word by word, and even sentence by sentence (with the discussion of features of the content and format together); finally, we record the results of the analysis by putting together the data and statements concerning the text, the summary of the findings and the conclusion is reached.

Undeniable value of applying this method is that it is enforcing the parser/reader indeed to observe each word of the writing thoroughly and to think it over. In this way, one can avoid such a negative practice, that in discussing the meaning of the text one continue a high-flying discourse, whilst even the basic dictionary meaning are left unclear of the writing’s key terms. This method also helps to reveal the relationship between the current writing and the other works of the author, the hapax legomena and the repeating/recurring concepts of the literary terminology too. In addition, it also presents the cultural context (e.g. topoi, archetypes of the text), and tries to decipher these cultural factors, without which one would not get to a complete, nor a well-founded interpretation of the work.

III. The Achievements of the Research

Here we are to summarize the most important findings discovered in the course of our investigation. The Basle-era meant the cultural policy for Nietzsche, together with the artist-metaphysics, which was verified by the art itself. This was transformed into an emancipating philosophy, what Nietzsche called ‘free spiritedness’ later and it led him to his own dialectics. And at the end of the road there is the ‘grand politics’, what brings probably the biggest secret to the surface. Of course, Nietzsche had problems not only with the ancient fundaments of our culture but in a peculiar way he also questioned the modern
supports too. Visibly, through his first period Nietzsche was preoccupied by the permanent conflict between politics and culture. In this respect he put such questions like for what purpose are art and culture; whether the social institutions should implement the objectives of the politics, or rather the culture; what political system is at the service of culture (i.e., the greatness, and breeding of true human beings). Nietzsche believed that to create real human greatness it is necessary to form social relationships along a highly traditional and hierarchic social structure [die Rangordnung]. Nietzsche prompted to his contemporaries that they should struggle for the renaissance of tragic culture, because this enables cultural renewal, and creating a place, the polis, for showing the diversity of human nature. But what is the most important medium displaying the true nature of man, as a matter of fact is not the politics, but the art. Moreover, art is not just allows you to understand *conditio humana* in its deepest sense, but enables people to give meaning to their scary and horrible existence. A society that is based on the most instrumental and utilitarian values as well as defined by power politics in a financial economy-driven age, Nietzsche had to find his contemporary Germany as such a place, will not be able to get to the correct notion of culture. It is important to add that art, which Nietzsche spoke about and what he esteemed very highly, is *communitarian* that was like Greek tragedy, which had congregated people and revealed them the truth of their existence. It can be said, therefore, that the experience, what is provided in such a way by art that will be political. However, it is questionable that Nietzsche’s aestheticism, his opinion that the world is only and exclusively as an aesthetic phenomenon verifiable, we wonder if it can solve adequately the problems what life address people with. In his early writings, parallel with putting a strong emphasis on education and culture, Nietzsche tries to discredit political action as something bad: “Every philosophy that believes the problem of existence to be shelved, or even solved, by a political event, is a sham philosophy. There have been innumerable states founded since the beginning of the world; that is an old story. How should a political innovation manage once and for all to make a contented race of the dwellers on this earth? If anyone believe in his heart that this is possible, he should report himself to our authorities: he really deserves to be Professor of Philosophy in a German university…”

His firm opinion on the relationship of culture and politics what was evolved in the early years of his career remained the same until the end of his conscious life, and it can be easily tracked. This position can be summarised as politics is a tool for setting control over society, breeding of

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great men and the creation of a culture. The young Nietzsche hoped yet the rebirth of tragic myth of the Greeks, and he was ready to sacrifice all the modern politics for ideal of this ancient culture and politics. As Henning Ottmann formulates: “This sounded anciently and only anti-modernly, and here, nevertheless, as the the highest point of modernity, the person was already Prometheus and feuerbachian Siegfried, a self legislator and creator of the culture. At the end of a rationalistic idle modern age Nietzsche wanted back to the myth, in process of an already advanced secularisation he searched the aura of the art which, after the religion, became as the means of the redemption”.\(^6\)

A few years later appeared a change in his attitude of the ‘free spirit’ Nietzsche to the enlightenment and the modernity. Nietzsche went down the path leads straight from enlightenment to nihilism, the way from doubt to despair – in order to emancipate himself – which way, at the end of which there was nothing to lose. “Nietzsche becomes a father of a ‘critical theory’ without origin and he becomes a teacher of an immoralistic morality which still wants to recognize only *sovereign self legislators*”.\(^7\)

His late philosophy hallmarked by such concepts like *the will to power* and *the eternal return of the same* is free from Nietzsche’s one-dimensional enlightening philosophy. The dialectics of modernity leads him to recognise that this modern era what would need for: healing those wounds that were inflicted by reason and the greed for mediatised history, and by those people who lifted themselves above others by exploiting nature and the will to power. “Nietzsche for that - indeed from the highest peak of modernity - has thought back, one can say just as well, thought ahead in that what is not able to offer this modernity from itself.”\(^8\)

We would like to point out that in Nietzsche’s criticism one can see the cause of decadence in the prevailing pessimism in Europe that slopes toward nihilism. The desire of modern pessimism as the desire of non-existence is a nonsense; it is impossible that will wants the not-will, the non-existence. This is a serious disease in Europe, which was caused by the *priests* and by the *Christian faith* and the Jewish-Christian moral tradition. Nietzsche considered that on the whole European continent prevailed at the end of 19\(^\text{th}\) century the so called ‘gregarious animal-men’ who were depraved by Christian religion, demanding full equality of rights that makes nothing else but the complete injustice equal. Indeed, the injustice resides in demanding equal rights. Since the disparity of rights is a

\(^7\) Op. cit. 7-8.
prerequisite for being rights at all. A right is always – privilege. The true free spirits, the philosophers of future, men of the true ‘greatness’ are to rate as the aristocracy, the distinction, the solitude and the autonomy. They become their own masters, and they create themselves, they might become, who they really are. This higher-order or caste has only a real freedom and space of action. However, access to this higher-order is not by privilege of birth, but individual circumstances and capabilities make it possible. Precondition of a new biological and social change is to alter, to reevaluate the prevailing values of the guilty Christian moral in order to confer a new moral system, which ultimately leads to overstepping the man of today.

But when we are talking about Nietzsche’s concept of nihilism, then we have to speak the concept of decadence too. The concept of decadence is already appeared in his Greek State, but the theme is basically in The Birth of Tragedy will be examined. In his early period, it appears as the criticism of Socratism that is the inversion of functions of the intellect and instinct, or as the criticism of culture interpreted as simple decoration. The criticism of Rousseau in his mature period also was a variation of decadence-theme. The declining and descending life, the dissolution and paralysis of will give the keywords, which in the early criticism of culture and in the late works of 1880s equally appear. Henning Ottmann believes that in the last two years of his conscious life Nietzsche widened the meaning of decadence to the extent that even the nihilism was added in. In these two years there were three different meaning of decadence, according to Ottmann. Firstly, Nietzsche seized almost every phenomenon of human culture in his age by these two concepts, therefore Nietzsche gave an amazingly wide circle of meaning to the concept of decadence. One might name Wagner as the “artist of decadence” and Schopenhauer as the “philosopher of decadence” in such a context. Secondly, it should be also mentioned that for Nietzsche behind the concept of decadence related to the culture one can find the concept of decadence associated with nature: “the reduction of the desire to the decline and to the morbid, the tiredness and the will to nothing to physiological causes: decadence as a degeneration”. Thirdly, the as such “biologised” term became a “Wunderwaffe” in the hands of the National Socialists soon against the “degenerated” art, and the Socialists (such as Lukács) is turning back to Nietzsche himself this weapon, and in his person they

anticipate the decadent bourgeois art, aesthetics and the politics of the National Socialists.\textsuperscript{11}

One of Nietzsche’s main reflections on modern politics is that by declining religious authority and by destruction of traditional State, by deterioration of the traditional law and customs and social practices – the relationship between the individual and society needs to be reconstructed. In this process, democracy plays a positive and negative role at the same time. Because having bred the ‘gregarious animal-men’ it provides a basis and an opportunity for making experiments in order to create a new type of human being. To do this it is necessary to constitute a new type of will, namely by shaping new moral and cultural praxis, as well as by the establishment of new social institutions. Therefore modern politics are closely linked to the concept of culture in Nietzsche’s texts. Also his thinking shows, that we need \textit{paideia}, philosophical education, in order to prepare the soil for new types of people by reevaluating of all value. Nietzsche was not a democratic man and nothing was farther from him as the liberal ideas. Going beyond the ethical discourse of good and evil he hailed the power of the stronger, and in defending the unequal distribution of worldly goods he attacked even the rationality.\textsuperscript{12} But perhaps for that reason, deserves the plea the although slightly distorted, but inspiring Nietzsche whose real value for today's thinkers lies in his writings that are challenging the principles of the liberal and democratic ideas. From a Nietzsche who is bent or twisted in egalitarian direction we could not learn anything, what dozens of contemporary contributors have already not formulated. In contrast, the aristocratic radical Nietzsche would be obnoxious to the readers with democratic leaning, and even can stimulate these “feelings”, forcing the partisans of equality to take in stock and to protect its basic principles, which he despises: the care for weak and fallen; the faith in that all human beings are equal as far as their moral value is concerned; and the cause of preservation of and support for democratic institutions. Thus, having clashed with Nietzsche’s onslaught against the equality we gain a renewed spirit, a more articulated, polished ability to defend social equality.

IV. Publications written by the author in the theme of the thesis and participation in conferences

Publications:


Other Publications:


Participation in Conferences:

(17) „Nietzsche politikai „programja” ‘A görög állam’ és a ‘Hat nyilvános előadás’ című munkái alapján”
Rendezvény címe: „Nietzsche – A filozófia átváltozásai” Konferencia „A tragédia születése” megjelenésének 140. évfordulójára
Helyszín: ELTE BTK, Budapest

(16) „Nietzsche és Marx radikaliszmusáról”
Rendezvény címe: „A szabadság felelőssége” Konferencia Dénes Iván Zoltán 65. születésnapja tiszteletére
Helyszín: Central European University, Budapest

(15) „Korai évek kenyere… Bibó István gyermek- és ifjúkorá (1911-1933)”
Rendezvény címe: „Megátalkodott jóhiszeműség” – Bibó István élete és életműve
Helyszín: Sinka István Városi Könyvtár, Berettyóújfalu

(14) „Nietzsche és Marx társadalmi-politikai radikaliszmusának összevetése”
Rendezvény címe: „Mai problémák – régi dilemmák”. Húsz éves a DE BTK Politológia tanszék
Helyszín: Debreceni Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Aula, Debrecen

(13) „A géniuszok, az embert felülmúló emberek és a világ proletárjai — a 19. századi politikai radikalizmus két példájának összevetése (Nietzsche és Marx)”
Helyszín: Debreceni Egyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi és Közgazdaságtudományi Kara. Debrecen

(12) „Nietzsche politikai gondolkodásának megalapozása a 'Homéroszi versengés' és 'A görög állam' című munkáiban”
Rendezvény címe: Debreceni Egyetem, Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar V. Doktorandus Konferencia; Állam- és Alkotmányelmélet Szekció
Helyszín: Debreceni Egyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kara, Debrecen

(11) „Kultúra és politika viszonya Nietzsche korai műveiben”
Rendezvény címe: „Politika az erkölcsi minimum mércéjén” A Debreceni Egyetem Állam és Jogtudományi Kar, Politikaelméleti és Politikatörténeti Tanszékének konferenciája
Helyszín: Debreceni Akadémiai Bizottság Székháza, Debrecen

(10) „Friedrich Nietzsche demokrácia felfogása”
Rendezvény címe: Debreceni Egyetem, Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar III. Doktorandus Konferencia; Alkotmányjogi és Közigazgatási Szekció
Helyszín: Debreceni Akadémiai Bizottság Székháza, Debrecen

(9) „Friedrich Nietzsche ‘die grosse Politik’ fogalmának értelmezési keretei”
Rendezvény címe: Debreceni Egyetem, Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar II. Doktorandus Konferencia; Alkotmányjogi és Közigazgatási Szekció
Helyszín: Debreceni Akadémiai Bizottság Székháza, Debrecen
(8) „A politika akarása - Nietzsche és a politika”
Rendezvény címe: „Európa Nietzsche után” Tudományos konferencia.
Időpont: 2004. június 4-5.
Helyszín: Az Eszterházy Károly Főiskola Bölcsészettudományi Főiskolai Karának Filozófia Tanszéke, Eger

(7) „A szabadság dilemmái”
Rendezvény címe: „A szabadság értelme - az értelem szabadsága” A Bibó István Szellemi Műhely konferenciája a 60 éves Ludassy Mária köszöntésére
Helyszín: Goethe Intézet, Budapest

(6) „Politikai szemantikai elemzések: módszertani előfeltévek és a politikai ellenség nyelvi konstruálásának mechanizmusai”
Helyszín: Debreceni Akadémiaia Bizottság Székháza, Debrecen

(5) „Idősebb Bibó István bölcsseleti és néplélektani munkásságáról”
Rendezvény címe: Debreceni Egyetem Hatvani István Szakkollégiumának I. Házikonferenciája
Helyszín: Debreceni Egyetem, X. előadó, Debrecen

(4) „Nation and Minorities in the 20th Century Hungary and a Perspective for the Future”
Rendezvény címe: III. Conference of International Association for Political Science Students
Helyszín: Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, Aula, Debrecen

(3) „Utak a szabadsághoz – a szabadság fogalmának megközelítési lehetőségeiről”
Rendezvény címe: XXIV. Országos Tudományos Diákköri Konferencia, Társadalomtudományi szekció (különdíj)
Helyszín: Kodolányi János Főiskola, Székesfehérvár

(2) „Polish and Hungarian are Two Good Friends…”

Rendezvény címe: AEGEE Conference „Historical Roots of Prejudices and Stereotypes in Central and Eastern Europe”
Helyszín: Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, Aula, Debrecen

(1) „Fr. W. Nietzsche emlékezete”

Rendezvény címe: BGYTF Nietzsche Emlékbizottságának Nietzsche Emlékestje
Helyszín: Bessenyei György Tanárképző Főiskola Kollégiuma, Nyíregyháza