THE ROLE OF THE CONCEPT OF WORLDVIEW IN THE HUNGARIAN RECEPTION OF FRIEDRICH WILHELM NIETZSCHE BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Doctoral School of Human Sciences

Debrecen, 2015
Aims and the Subject Matter of the Dissertation

The relationship between Nietzsche and the Hungarian philosophical life is fairly illustrated by Béla Lengyel’s note: “The history of the Hungarian reception of Nietzsche is also the history of the Hungarian intellectual life one quarter of a century before the World War”. Certainly this statement cannot be accepted in such a simplistic form, but it does point out that the history of Nietzsche’s influence instructively shows the susceptibility to philosophical problems in Hungary. The reason for this is that the relation towards Nietzsche is not secondary for almost anyone at this time, and this fact created new discourses that moved away from the soil of intellectual life previously debating mostly about national issues. Therefore my thesis aims to investigate the Hungarian reception of Nietzsche before the Second World War.

There is already a book published with a similar aim: Endre Kiss’ *A világnézet kora, Nietzsche abszolútumokat relativizáló hatása a századelőn* which was published in 1982. This book did a similar research and although the accumulated results of scientific literature of Nietzsche and Hungarian philosophy published since then could shape the results of this book instructively, we cannot exceed its achievements on the history of reception in this paper. However the title of the book suggests an interesting guideline: the central role of the concept of worldview. The educated thinkers, enthusiastic young artists and art experts of the era expressed intentions that are linked together with the complex strands of this concept, and this is true particularly in the case of Hungarian reception of Nietzsche. We can encounter the central role of the concept of worldview shortly while reading the texts of the Hungarian reception, as one of the fundamental toposes of Nietzsche’s reception appears in the title of the first book that comprehensively discusses Nietzsche, viz. Nietzsche’s philosophy means the end of an old worldview and the beginning of a new worldview: this book is Jenő Henrik Schmitt’s *Friedrich Nietzsche két világkorszak küszöbén (Értelmezési kísérlet egy új világnézet fényében)*. Recently Tamás Demeter pointed out the central role of worldview in the Hungarian philosophical life, and in contrast with Endre Kiss, he does not interpret the concept on the basis of its relation to politics, but as the main theme of the Hungarian sociological aspirations. This paper, next to Endre Kiss’ and Tamás Demeter’s interpretation of the term, proposes a third framework of interpretation for investigating the role of this concept: it is curious about to what extent the metaphoricity of the semantics of the concept of worldview serves as a catalyst for interpreting Nietzsche in the Hungarian reception of
Nietzsche before the Second World War, and to what extent the semantic changes in the concept reflect the impact of Nietzsche’s thoughts.

Thus, this paper asks the following questions: How did Nietzsche’s influence motivate and shape the ideas about worldview before the Second World War? How did the changes in the meaning of worldview relate to the different Hungarian Nietzsche interpretations? The research if this paper started with the hypothesis that the prominent role of the concept of worldview in the Hungarian philosophical life of the 20th-century owes much to the Hungarian reception of Nietzsche. Although this central position has not fundamentally shifted over the years, noticeable changes started in the judging and semantics of the concept of worldview, which paralleled with some of Nietzsche’s philosophical aspects and with some discourses in the Hungarian Nietzsche literature as well (thus we can rehabilitate Béla Lengyel’s note). Since we include a concept to the core elements of our investigation, at this point we have to take the historical aspects of the concept of worldview into consideration. Therefore we cannot exclude the in-depth and historical analysis of the concept of worldview either (based on both the interpretations before and after Nietzsche). We hope that the historical and systematic study of this concept can lead the scope of this paper beyond the history of philosophy and become genuine philosophical investigation. Because this does not only give us the methodological tools, but sometimes it can give us glimpses to the other side of our philosophical thinking, to the gadamerian sense of prejudices, expectations and to the significance of our historical situatedness.

Therefore this paper follows the semantic changes in the history of the concept of worldview first, since this concept contains the main problems which the thinkers of this time were most concerned about (individualism, crisis, relativism, rationalism, positivism ... etc.), therefore it became a central term in the reception of Nietzsche as well. After outlining the semantic ‘playground’ of the concept, we can have a more stable footing while investigating the changes of the reception of Nietzsche before the Second World War. Our study discusses three thinkers primarily: Jenő Henrik Schmitt, Lajos Fülep and Béla Hamvas, but it also briefly discusses Mihály Babits and Béla Brandenstein, since they also played an important role in Hungarian narrative of reading Nietzsche from the perspective of worldview.

The other aim of this paper is to make it transparent that the role of Nietzsche’s philosophy in the history of the intellectual life of Hungary from the turn of the century to the Second World War is important and instructive in today’s Nietzsche interpretations as well in many aspects. This is certainly not self-evident, since the historical study of the influence of a book seems secondary next to the interpretation of the work itself. Gadamer’s theory is a
refutation to this and also serves as a starting point in this paper: the interpretation of a work is always closely linked to its history of interpretation, even if it is not known by the interpreter. The paper also aims to focus on philosophical problems which could be relevant issues for contemporary philosophy also. This could be the semantic core of the concept of worldview. Thus, the aim of the paper is to understand the reception of Nietzsche in a 'different way'. This of course requires a lot of methodological precautions.

**Methods Applied in the Dissertation**

The starting point of my paper is Gadamer’s thesis, namely that a work appears to the reader as its history of interpretation situated it. Therefore to understand any work, we need to ask questions about its history of interpretations as well, since all the questions believed to be 'objective' (without prejudgments) contains this situatedness. The ‘historically-effected consciousness’ is to reflect on this situatedness, which of course does not mean that the interpreter knows its historically effectedness in full in-depths. That would be an impossible task. The historically-effected consciousness is actually the awareness of the hermeneutic situation. Gadamer connects the concept of situation to the concept of horizon, and this concept has a central role in the methodology of my dissertation, since it shows that we must strive to blend in the horizon of the work we want to interpret, but also to be conscious about our own horizon of expectations. We must not try to discover the 'original truth' of the work, because with this aim we give up on finding the truth that is relevant and understandable for us.

The framework of this study begins with 1898 which is the year when the first Hungarian book was published that summarises Nietzsche’s full life’s work: Jenő Henrik Schmitt’s book *Friedrich Nietzsche két világkorszak küszöbén*. The study ends with the end of the Second World War. However, the paper tries to discuss the period between the two events in the way that does not make necessarily the known historical turning point also into milestones of the reception of Nietzsche. The main organizing element of the paper therefore is not the periodization of cultural history, but the semantic changes observed in the narrative of worldview.

To be able outline the role of the concept of worldview in the Hungarian reception of Nietzsche with duly grounding, the paper first clarifies the issues concerning the semantics of worldview. The term worldview (Weltanschauung) seemingly has a simple and self-
explanatory meaning: „The way we view the world.” Still, if one examines this term carefully, one finds a very complex meaning with multiple components, therefore one realizes that there can be fundamentally different interpretations of the term based on when and in what kind of context does someone uses the term. An important part of this issue that there is a conceptual metaphor in the term Weltanschauung: UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, KNOWING IS SEEING. This implicit sense of the term is significant in various reasons. The meaning of Weltanschauung has an abstract reference which was constructed in the history of German philosophy. This abstract reference (target domain) was expressed by a concrete subject (source domain): „viewing the world”. But it is important to note that this is not a mode of language, not an aesthetic element in building the text. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, our cognitive system is greatly affected by conceptual metaphors hidden in our everyday language. This influence means that metaphors do not only help to understand and describe the abstract ideas, but they can alter these ideas too. In this case, „understanding the world” will acquire some of the attributes of „viewing the world”: constructing a „whole” picture from the details; realising what is „hidden”; different „point-of-views” might change out experience of a subject... etc. It is also important that the attributes relating to the source domain are never present at the same time. Although the abstract ideas are structured and understood based on the semantic structure and the sense of the source domain, the metaphor only uses some aspects of the source domain, ignoring the rest. Therefore one can use a metaphor „in a sense”, and one uses it „in another sense”. This means that it is almost impossible to give an ultimate definition for Weltanschauung because it is based on a metaphor that ignores every attempt of full definition. These considerations are important to understand the change of the role of this term. This paper cannot provide a „valid” definition of Weltanschauung, since this concept can only be defined within its own temporal and intellectual context. Although many different meanings were produced in its history, we still have to recognize these terms as the same concept. Therefore the most efficient way to examine this concept should be similar to Wittgenstein’s family resemblance theory: there is no big common segment between the elements of all the meanings, but we can recognize the typical fragments.

These are findings behind the methodology of this paper. This paper is both a small segment of a big topic: the role of the concept of worldview in the Hungarian reception of Nietzsche before the Second World War; and a broad unfolding of a small issue: the semantics and the semantical changes of the concept of worldview. These two distinct topics are inseparable. The reason for this is that if we choose the concept of worldview as a starting
point of our paper – instead of the well-known adequate starting points of interpretations: individualism, nihilism, relativism, to philosophize with a hammer, the affirmation of life… etc. – we cannot ignore the in-depth analysis of the concept. The semantic components of this concept are never ending and inexhaustible and maybe that is the reason behind the fact that it can constantly be the part of the Hungarian reception of Nietzsche in the way that it can set different interpretational directions, it can be a starting point to show Nietzsche’s pathology, and also can be the methodological base to affirm his philosophy. Therefore it is very tempting to stay at the narrow sources of the topic, and to only discuss the Hungarian texts interpreting Nietzsche, first we need to „move off” from there. We cannot give an analysis on this topic until we are fully aware about the semantic enrichment of the concept of worldview given by its history.

Thus this paper presents three major segments of the reception of Nietzsche in the aspect of worldview: Jenő Henrik Schmitt’s, Lajos Fülep’s and Béla Hamvas’ interpretations of Nietzsche, in a way that it is constantly aware of the semantic analysis previously made on the concept of worldview. In these studies we aim to point out the semantic shifts in the conceptual metaphor, and to show, how these changes influenced the given interpretations of Nietzsche.

**Theses of the Dissertation**

The following theses should be highlighted from the paper:

Worldview is a central concept in the Hungarian reception of Nietzsche: this concept fundamentally determined Nietzsche’s impact before the Second World War. The interpretation based on this concept is difficult since it is „one step” away from almost any of the issues of philosophy of that time; furthermore there are important semantic differences in its usage.

The reason of this semantic diversity is that there is a conceptual metaphor hidden in the concept: UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, KNOWING IS SEEING. Based on George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s theory we can state that this metathoricity made a fundamental impact on the changes happened in the history of the concept.

This brings us the first important finding of this paper, which might be an important fact for the Nietzsche interpreters of our time too: basically we cannot define worldview. If
one choses to try defining it, then one has to pick the conceptual metaphor in it as a starting point of the definition: too see the world, to get a picture of it. It does not matter if we „understand” the texts, if the „fusion of the horizons” happened, if the semantics of the concept of worldview are fundamentally different in the horizons. Since the conceptual metaphor in the concept, UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, KNOWING IS SEEING always uses only one aspect of the source domain, therefore we can use it „in a sense” and „in another sense”.

This was well demonstrated when Heidegger interpreted Kant’s concept of Weltanschauung: this concept is not about viewing the „mundus sensibilis” as Heidegger stated, because for Kant the world is not „given” for the senses. We do not perceive the world instantly as a „picture”, but – based on Kant’s concept of Anschauung – we have to create it ourselves. Therefore because of the metaphorical interference there was an interpretation of the concept „in another sense” even in the birth of the concept that gave Heidegger another direction of the interpretation.

It is necessary to investigate Hegel’s concept of worldview as well, since the early interpretations of Nietzsche were written based on a Hegelian intention, and they contain a concept of worldview that was influenced by Hegel’s philosophy (the need for a new worldview as the progress of the Spirit was important for both Schmitt and Fülep, it is easy to recognize the impact of Hegel in these texts). Later, the disappointment in Hegel’s philosophy caused the rejection of the „system” and also the suspicion towards worldview.

All the different usages of worldview by Hegel have the same element of totality, and the ability of seeing the whole and seeing things together, with the addition of postulates of the known world as a practical guidance for living. Hegel deals both with the personal and the cultural differences connecting it to the subjectivity and historical definiteness of knowledge. It contains the different postulates and knowledges, although Hegel has to consider it as an atheoretical concept, since theory belongs to philosophy.

The further history of the concept has given newer and newer elements to its semantic structure. We can highlight the „being deceivedness” theme in Schopenhauer’s philosophy (to see only shroud metaphor – shroud of Maja), which plays a fundamental role for Schmitt and Hamvas, and we can highlight the necessity of reflection and the concept of lifeworld in Kierkegaard’s philosophy. Then we can face the fact that in the early years, Nietzsche wrote about the „Dionysian” and the philosophical” worldview, then his oeuvre takes a whole new direction from this concept – and even so his perspectivism fundamentally determined the fate of this concept (to have a viewpoint metaphor).
Another important realisation of the paper, that in the concept of worldview there is an oscillation in the semantics between „seeing the whole picture” and „to have a viewpoint” elements, changing the emphasis in the interpretation of worldview over and over again. This movement can be observed in the history of the concept, or even in one of the texts interpreting Nietzsche. (There is another movement, when the „seeing the picture” is interpreted as „seeing the whole picture hidden”, as a „system of lies”, or as world of phenomenon that hides the real world.)

For instance the starting point in Schmitt’s way of thinking is Hegelian when he announces a new worldview based on Nietzsche, which worldview is an interpretation that is obligated to stay with the „seeing the whole picture” framework by the hidden knowledge of gnosis (without the theme of Gnosticism it is impossible to study Schmitt’s concept of worldview), therefore he will be totally immune to the perspectivism of Nietzsche. There is only one truth for Schmitt, a worldview that is toto genere different from any other: it is the religio based on introspection. In Schmitt’s system Nietzsche is a prophet who shows the way towards the gnosis but himself cannot reach it. According to Schmitt, Nietzsche’s aim is stop people thinking about themselves as a finite being. According to Schmitt, Nietzsche wants to destroy this thinking with crushing irony that shows the superb beast. Therefore Schmitt is only follows Nietzsche’s „total doubt” until we get to the introspection.

On the other side of the oscillation there is the Nietzsche interpretation of Babits, that states that Nietzsche’s „everything is the same” philosophy is the reason behind the corrupted worldview which rejects the possibility of the truth („to have a viewpoint”) and it announces that acting is more important than thinking. In the end it led to the cutting and thrusting of worldviews, to the war.

We can observe the oscillation in one oeuvre, for instance in Fülep’s, who had a programme of a new, pure, evangelistic worldview („to see the whole picture”), but he also acquired the aspect of perspectivism that affirms even the „useful mistakes” (to have a viewpoint”). In Fülep’s programme of new worldview perspectivism has a fundamental role. A new worldview is necessary for the rejuvenation of culture – but this worldview is not a worldview of a genius based on Schopenhauer’s aspect: it is not a pure intellectual look. This worldview is an interpretation, a truth that is set by the perspective of a viewpoint. Therefore we can only measure the value of a worldview by its ability to promote culture – and from this perspective, Nietzsche’s philosophy is highly valuable and constructive. This picture of Nietzsche in Fülep’s interpretation brings a really noticeable development: the self-reflective interpretation of Nietzsche, an approach that is aware of its „hermeneutics”. The identification
in this interpretation of Nietzsche therefore gets a new meaning: it does not dissolve in it Nietzsche’s thoughts, because it agrees with him, but because it lets „Nietzsche talk”, it lets the horizons to „fuse”.

The worldview interpretation of Hamvas and Schmitt represents two highly different viewpoints: in Schmitt’s system, worldview lets us discover to universal truth of the world, however for Hamvas it is the tool of an untruthful life, a system of lies. By the impact of Nietzsche’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophy, Hamvas realized that human existence can only be understood through the crisis, we can only reach authentic existence as Hamvas called it through crisis awareness: to be is to be in crisis. Crisis awareness shows that we need to be renewed in a „metaphysical” level, and as long as this did not happen, every turmoil in the world is irrelevant. The concept of worldview represents the power of creating systems, which obscures the essence, deprives us from crisis awareness, since system creation ignores the possibility of vertical immersion, or in other words: the metaphysics. The Schopenhauerian aspect of the Hungarian reception of Nietzsche: obscureness, the shroud of Maja appears in Hamvas’ concept of worldview, that is how it became the system of lies of an untruthful life. According to Hamvas, Nietzsche unveiled this system of lies and showed that the destroying the system is one of the fundamentals of intellectual courage.

Thus this paper aims to draw attention to the hermeneutic peculiarity that a seemingly self-evident concept cannot be „taken at its word”, if there is a conceptual metaphor in it. In fact, the Nietzschean aspect of the metaphorical character of language is revealed here: the presumed philosophical truths in these texts are tied to a metaphor; therefore the study must assess what directions can the semantic elements of the metaphor take the interpretation.

One of the focus points of the monitoring of these semantic changes was the attitude towards Nietzsche’s perspectivism. Schmitt’s, Babits’ and Brandenstein’s concept of worldview were more or less immune to this aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy, there could have been an emphasis on that in Hamvas’ philosophy, because the self’s „autonomy” allows it. Yet perspectivism does not get a central role for Hamvas, which can be explained with his concept of system of lies and with the concept of tradition opposing it. However, in the Nietzsche interpretation of Fülep the need for acquiring perspectivism is transparent, even if it can only be noticed by the fact that he lets „Nietzsche talk”. The reason behind that Lukács criticized Fülep was that he wanted to keep distance from the manifestation of this perspectivism, and this shows to difference of their concept of worldview too.

This paper also investigates the issue that how do these Nietzsche interpreters struggle with the dilemma of the worldview problem, namely what can one do after the destructive
work of the German philosopher. The wish for coping with the horror vacui after the destruction led Schmitt and Fülep to aim for a new set of values replacing the fallen worldviews. They „became Parsifals”, as they went back to the original Christian doctrines, to create a new worldview. Maybe only Hamvas did not went all the way on this road, although the original truth of the Gospel was really important for him too. However, the renewal for him is a personal programme; the realization cannot be converted into a worldview.
List of publications related to the dissertation

Foreign language international book chapter(s) (1)

   In: Interdisciplinary Research in Humanities. Szerk.: Gergely Angyalosi, Ákos Münnich, 
   Gabriella Pusztai, Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra, 75-90, 2013. ISBN: 
   9788055802848

Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (4)

   Gerundium. 6 (1-2), 64-77, 2015. EISSN: 2061-5132.


   Brandenstein Béla. 

List of other publications

Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (2)

   287 p. ISBN: 9789632271989 )


Non scientific journal article(s) (1)


The Candidate's publication data submitted to the IDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

10 September, 2015