

**PhD Thesis**

**SUBVERSION IN THE MODERN PHILOSOPHY**

**SUBVERSIVE PHILOSOPHEMES IN THE WORKS OF FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL,  
SØREN KIERKEGAARD, AND FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE**

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## 1. Aims and Topic of Dissertation

Subversion is one of the main attributes of the philosophical tradition from its beginning. It has a dual meaning, because subversion can be a specific form of way of thinking or a practice of the public life. Most of the philosophers prefer the transformation of the ordinary thought as a philosophising process and this method usually lays claim to change the social or religious norms. This innovative facility can be originated at least in the pre-Socratic era. Socrates is a typical instance of the subversive philosopher. He describes himself as a gadfly of the Athenian people, given them by God, to arouse and persuade the noble steed of the state (Plato: *Apology* 30d–31a). The history of philosophy is full of such examples, so I demonstrate the number of the cases in the introduction of the thesis.

There is nothing surprising about stating the philosophy's subversive character; therefore, I choose an other theoretical purpose. In the thesis I set a specific form of subversion apart the traditional meaning of the expression. I define this unique variation of subversive philosophy as an alternate, epistemologically based tendency of the history of philosophy. I discuss the usually asseverated negative connotations of the subversion (e.g. sophism-charge, political ambitions etc.), but the thesis's specific philosophical meaning is accurately separated from the political or the criminal subversion. Furthermore, I make a distinction between the terms "philosophical subversion" and "subversive philosophy". The first one is a proper noetic process which is free from any historic restrain. Contrarily "subversive philosophy" is a name for an alternate historic tendency of philosophy which has some epistemological preconception. Also, subversive philosophy is a specific historic phenomenon.

In the thesis I use the term "philosophical subversion" as a technical term, I define it as a specific noetic process. Since the main philosophers of my thesis appertain different theoretical and terminological traditions, I had to formalise their subversive operations, I had to reduce them to a common denomination. I hypothesize a nuclear form of the philosophical notion in which the pure noetic content and the lingual formulation is in balance. This nuclear form is called to "philosophical morpheme" in the thesis. Philosophical morpheme cannot to reduce any further without the damage of the complex philosopheme. This formulised foundation is the key to understand the proper meaning of the process; philosophical subversion is a method to make a seemingly midjet change in the philosophical morpheme with huge effects. These little changes—in the order of the expressions or in the usage of the

terms—create a radically new thought. In the case studies – chapters of the thesis I give numerous examples for this form of transformation. I distinguish two types of this subversive process. In the first version common notions, truisms and other standard ideas are permuted to new philosophical conception, and in the second one traditional philosophemes are transformed to an idea with different meaning. In the phraseology of the thesis I call the first one to “rotational subversion”, and the second one to “interpreting subversion”. We cannot define it as a real interpretation, because the “interpreting subversion” is a conscious and intentional misinterpretation, or, properly speaking it is a wilful transformation. Many examples can be found to the process of philosophical subversion in every time, from the ancient origin of the philosophy to the modernity.

On the other hand, the “subversive philosophy” is a phenomenon of the history of philosophy, it is a legitim form of philosophical thinking only in one period of the history. A thinker cannot be named subversive philosopher, since he or she uses subversive philosophemes occasionally. The philosopher’s oeuvres are reckoned among the subversive philosophy, if some precondition is in force. First of all, the subversive process cannot be an end in itself, but it has to create proper new ideas and “truths”. For this result philosophers have to own a specific truth-conception in the background that legitimates the epistemological relevance of the transformations. I call this epistemological background “velative truth-conception” in the thesis. It supposes the wimpling and pucker nature of the truth. This conception is not different from the traditional, revelative notion of the truth, but the velative conception does not share the idea that the veils of the ultimate truth can be revealed. According to the subversive epistemology the truth manifest itself in the veiling procedures and transformations. We cannot see what is behind the veils, because this “hinterland” has a phantom nature constructed by the veiling truth; we can seize the authentic truth in the transformations and distortions of the thinking. We should read and interpret these facial forms to recognise the epistemological evidences.

Since a philosophical conception can be called subversive only with these premises, so it is not an ahistorical form of thinking. The real subversive philosophy is a typical modern form of thinking developed in the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most important statements of the thesis is that the preconditions of the subversive philosophy appeared with Kant’s critical turn. Kant’s “noumenon” term and the conception of epistemological limitation enables the philosophers to think the epistemological relevance of subversive transformations. Kant regards the transgressive experiments of sensational recognition as invalid philosophical processes, so philosophers are forced to stop by the surface of the veil, they must eschew to

reveal the ultimate truth, because we cannot recognise it. I show some figurations of the concept of veiling truth, and I separate the Kantian way of thinking from the other premodern and modern forms. Although I consider Kant as the founder of the subversive philosophy, I do not regard him as a proper subversive philosopher because of his systematic ambition. He applied subversive philosophemes to think something radically new very often, and his philosophy has a subversive potential, but his oeuvres create a philosophical paradigm, which is in contradiction with the premises of the subversive philosophy as a historical tendency.

In the thesis I find the proper subversive philosophy in the works of thinkers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Friedrich Schlegel, Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. The subversive philosophy gives an alternative way of thinking in the history of philosophy after Immanuel Kant. It cannot be a mainstream movement, it cannot dominate the history of philosophy, because its essence resides in the transfigurations and excursions. Subversive philosophy has a corrective function: it varies the dominant tendency, but it cannot achieve to rule its era. If the new idea of the subversive thinking was consolidated, it would not be any more a subversive thought in its fixed condition. Subversive philosophy does not own fundamental statements, undoubted truths, or essential notions, but it has epistemological premises. This tendency of thinking rotates and transforms the common notions, fixed thesis, or vulgar ideas, but it gives a platform to the alternates, the peripheral thoughts. If the subversion would be the general process, it would lose its verification. The subversive philosophy is the opposite of the subversive ideology in many ways, namely the ideology applies subversive figurations to change the current order, social and political contributions. In turn the subversive philosophy does not create a new paradigm, but maintains its aporic nature. What is more, subversive philosophers support the actual political order generally.

## **2. Methods Applied**

The dissertation consists of four chapters; in the first one I ground the theoretical and historical foundations of the subversive thinking, the second unit (chapter two to four) contains case-studies with thematically and chronological based contextual background. The first unit (chapter) has two parts; in the first one I consider the subversion purely theoretically and in an ahistorical way, but in the second part I discuss the notions and processes of the subversion in their historical context. The thesis need both the synthetical and the historical

part to demonstrate the true nature of the phenomenon. So, in the first chapter I apply the formalizing analysis and the historical explanation too. In the second unit of the thesis I give examples for the subversive processes and thoughts from the oeuvres of Friedrich Schlegel, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

I choose these three thinkers to demonstrate the attributes of the subversive philosophy, because I think they are the most representative figures of this tendency. All of them can be described as an eminent thinker of the palliation, mediation, and indirectness. According to them the real revealing manifests always itself in the veiling, in certain cases veiling nature appears in the shape of irony, humour, or in the usage of pseudonymising, but in other cases it means misrepresentation or dissimulation. The subversive process always depends on its context, so I avoid writing about the subversion in an abstract way.

I use two types of the technical terms: the general, descriptive terms and the typically transformed expressions. The illustrative concepts of subversion rarely used by the main philosophers of the thesis belong to the first type; the second group of terms contains the often-subverted concepts by the relevant author. The most important descriptive term is the subversion itself obviously; but the “velation” also has a huge impact on the train of thought of the thesis. I emphasise the relevance of veil-metaphors too; I detect the presence of the relative truth-conception by analysing of the figurations of veiling. Regarding the performative aspects of thesis, the “enlightenment-obscurity”-dichotomy (or generally the light-darkness opposition) has a huge significance. In my sight the subversive thinkers were heirs to the enlightenment, but they did not accept the naive faith of lineal progression. According to them something must always be kept in shadow, the rationality cannot shed light on everything. The emphasising of the hiding truth does not mean obscurity; the “subversors” have a clear demystification program. They struggle for the critical and excellent thinking, and they are enemies of the vulgarisation, primitivity, and laziness of thought.

The terms “simplification” and “trivialising” have also important role in the thesis. Truth can be eroded by the simplification, because the relative truth’s validity depends on its complex, ambiguous form. If the truth loses its complexity, it is not truth any more. Subversive philosophers think their duty is to form their ideas as complicated as possible. According to Friedrich Schlegel we must vindicate the validity of truth by more and more paradox phrasing. The “paradox” is also a central term in the thesis, especially in the Schlegel- and Kierkegaard-chapter. The terms “perseveration” and “iteration” should be mentioned in here, because these concepts of the repetitive progression express the approximative attribute of the subversion. In our subversive vocabulary “exception” and

“correctives” are important expressions. Subversion cannot be a norm or a rule, the subversive process’s function is to correct the mainstream thinking, to present a legitim exception. The temporal adequate of these concepts is the “untimeliness”. The Nietzschean term does not mean something ageless and eternal substance, but he uses it as an essential anachronism. The philosophers’ duty is to stand up against their time, and show the hidden problems of their era.

“Reflection” is a significant methodological concept; it gives the eminent way of the interpretation of the relative truth. In the thesis the phrases “sensus communis” and “consensus sapientium” also appears, since subversive thinkers refuse such consensual forms of recognition, and they use them as subjects of the transformation. One of the central conceptions of the culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the idea of “Bildung”. Schlegel and Nietzsche rejected the traditional meaning of the concept, and they regarded it as a rotational notion. Subversive thinking deals with the problem of the origin and philosophical genealogy very often.

I am not committed to any traditional methodology in the thesis, but the applied techniques are similar to the methods of the radical hermeneutics. Although my approach was inspired by the deconstruction. I preferred the parsing of the rarely analysed texts and peripheral studies, or I examined the canonical writings from an unusual perspective. I leaned on the historical notions of Gilles Deleuze. I tended to give examples to “rotational subversion” and “interpreting subversion” too, so I equally examined the transformation of the usual and vulgar thoughts and the subversion of the earlier philosophical ideas.

In the thesis I aim to examine systematically the subversive philosophemes, because the ambiguous and unsystematic philosophy can be understood only with synthetic approach. I wrote the thesis with regard to the philological aspects of the topic. The adequate presentation of the subversion requires morphological analysis and genealogical research too. In the thesis the two methods are synchronised: I analyse the variations of the philosophical morphemes and research the potential origin of the subversion. I tend to find the homologies of the unique subversive thoughts and create a historical taxonomy. I dispose the results to an investigation-narrative, because I think this order can demonstrate the changeableness of the subversion.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Friedrich Schlegel

In the historical introduction I discuss the reasons for why we cannot label the pre-Kantian thinkers as subversive philosophers. Socrates, Nicholas of Cusa, Machiavelli, Pico della Mirandola, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hamann, Mendelssohn, and Kant were the precursors of the subversion, but they were not subversive thinkers. Their terminology and the problems they discussed have an important role in the emergence of subversion. The first real subversive philosopher who I mention is Friedrich Schlegel.

I start the chapter with the periodization of the Schlegel-oeuvres: I make a distinction between the subversive and not-subversive periods. I distinguish the early revolutionary-literary, the transformative philosophical, the philological research-oriented, and the lately transformative rhetoric periods. I focus on his transformative philosophical period (the Jena-Berlin-years), because in this time his subversive processes have epistemological relevance. In addition, I analyse a transformative philosopheme from each period to reveal the difference of their philosophical backgrounds. Through the chapter I emphasize his intellectual relationship with Novalis.

In the first part of the chapter I thematise the problem of the origin and culture in the early works of Schlegel. First of all I examine his writing about the difference between the antic and modern culture titled *On the Study of Greek Poetry*. The Schlegel-reception (and Schlegel himself too) considers it as a failing experiment to grab the essence of the modern literature. In the thesis I argue that this early study is a complex and excellent work, and its failure was a success: it shows the uncharacteristic nature of the modernity. I analyse the two concepts of “Bildung”, the estrangement of the modern individual, and the thought of the aesthetical revolution. I close the item with the presentation of the Schlegelian veiling truth.

The second part of the Schlegel-chapter is about his Jena-Berlin-years, the eminent period of his subversive activity. I start this unit with the discussion of the typical subversive notions, for example irony, fragment, and wit. Schlegel transformed the communal idea of wit to an individual-logical notion. I discuss the role of the desire and fantasy in his famous and infamous novel titled *Lucinda*. I detect a subversive transformation in line with the Kantian power of imagination. I compare the “I” concept of the early German romanticism with the subjectum of the German mysticism. I conclude that the German mysticism’s direct impact on

the Jena romanticism was minimal; rather the members of the romantic circle recognised their intellectual ancestors in Meister Eckhart and Jakob Böhme afterwards. I research Shaftesbury-interpretation of Schlegel associated with his “Bildung”-, enthusiasm-, and virtue-concept. I state that Schlegel and Novalis was acquainted with the works of the English Lord, but they interpreted his ideas through the representations of other German authors (e.g. Schiller and Herder). I also analyse the historical conception of Schlegel; I detect that he proceeded to create two historical typologies. Firstly, he wrote about a mythical pantheon, after that he started to plan a systematic history of philosophy. In both the main character is Spinoza; so I reconstruct Schlegel’s Spinoza-reception too. The topic of the historical typology is relevant from the perspective of the thesis, because this problem contains morphological and historical aspects too.

In the thesis I emphasise the importance of the Schlegelian language-theory. In this respect I focus on the philosophical proceeds of his epochal work titled *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*. I compare the lingual notions of this work with his earlier studies and the relevant texts of Novalis. I argue that Schlegel turned to the organic history- and culture conception in this period, and rejected the mechanistic way. This decision has several implications, for example political and metaphysical consequences. In the last part of the chapter I examine the transformative political process of the late years. I state that behind these subversive procedures is absent the valid epistemological background.

### 3.2. Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard was familiar with Schlegel’s works. He discusses the German philosopher’s thoughts in some notes and studies, and he criticised them very often. I consider the importance of the Schlegel-Kierkegaard analogy, so I compare the parallel notions of the two philosophers. First, I show the relevant ideas of Kierkegaard, for example the indirect communication, the concept of exception, the subjectivity of the truth, and the notion of absurdity. Because of his religious faith Kierkegaard does not seem to be a subversive thinker, but I argue so that these concepts show his subversive potentiality. Chiefly I focus on his pseudonym writings, especially on his early texts. I select from the oeuvres this way because these writings were made when Kierkegaard was a real aesthetic author yet. He did not find



his religious intention in this time, so the subversive processes were legitim forms of recognition for him in this period.

I start the text-analysing with the examination of the notes on the “Master Thief”. I distinguish the criminal and romantic elements of the corpus, and detect a third category: the mythical tendency of the notes. It is not independent from his interpretation of romanticism: he refuses the playful conception of the swindle, and the mythical-demonic aspects of the irresponsible play. After that I examine his early student comedy titled *The Battle of the Old and the New Soap-cellars* in the respect of the philosophical relevance. I suppose that the theoretical importance of the comedy depends on its genre: if we regard it as a parody, it has not significance, but if we define it as a low comedy, it has a subversive and productive philosophical relevance. Kierkegaard never published his comedy, but he used some details of the work in other essays and studies.

In the next part I reconstruct Kierkegaard’s Schlegel-interpretation and I compare the irony-concept of the Danish and German thinkers. In this regard the figuration of “nudity” is a very important factor; it shows the difference between the veiling truth-conceptions of the authors. I also analyse Kierkegaard’s humour-conception, and I demonstrate the importance of his Hamann-interpretation too. In the last part I examine an example of the contemporary misinterpretation of Kierkegaard; I show the different effectiveness of the direct and indirect communication.

### 3.3. Friedrich Nietzsche

Perhaps Nietzsche is the most typical subversive thinker. He represents the spirit of the subversion supremely. I start this chapter with the discussion of the relevant notions too. I emphasise the importance of the untimeliness, and show his subversive phrasing (e.g. Nietzsche uses the term “Umkehrung” instead of “Subversion”). I prefer the thematical structure in this chapter, since Nietzsche’s changeable ideas can be recapitulated only in the respect of the oeuvres. I do not use meta-terms to describe Nietzsche’s philosophy, but I tend to maintain the metaphorical character of his thinking in my analyses. I show his intellectual relationship with Schlegel and Kierkegaard: Nietzsche knows Schlegel’s works badly, and he regards him as a religious fanatic; contrarily he read about Kierkegaard only in his last sane year. All the same, we can find several homologies and similarities among these philosophers.

In the first part of the chapter I reconstruct Nietzsche's lingual and rhetoric notions. Initially he was ambivalent about the figuration of veiling; we can find the contours of the revelative and relative truth-conceptions too. I demonstrate the subversive significance of the specific Nietzschean idea of "Verstellung", and I show Nietzsche's Aristotle- and Cicero-interpretation. The Nietzsche-literature is not really concerned with his Aristotle- and Cicero-experience, but these have cardinal importance for understanding the rhetoric ideas of Nietzsche. He does not regard them as precursors, rather he debates their lingual conceptions. I put an enigmatic citation into the centre of the Aristotle-interpretation of Nietzsche, and I identify it as a sentence of the *Rhetoric*. I show the Nietzschean subversion of the Aristotelian justice-conception; and I analyse Nietzsche's relation to the pan-metaphorism of the Greek thinker. Nietzsche mentions Cicero relatively often apropos of the question of language, elocution, reading, and culture. He regards Cicero as the representative of the decaying Rome who simplifies the antic beauty to decorativeness. I compare Nietzsche with Cicero in regard of the dance-metaphor to demonstrate the differences of the two ways of thinking.

In the next part I deal with the subversive culture-conception of Nietzsche. I analyse two early works (*The Future of Our Educational Institutions* and *Schopenhauer as Educator*) to show the subversive character of the Nietzschean "Bildung". I write about the question of the institutional education, the aversions toward the philosophers, and the exoteric tradition of literature.

After that I highlight the Nietzschean subversive aspects of the culture-conception, and I discuss the absurd problem of the "subversive paradigm": Nietzsche's reflections on Spinoza and Luther lighten the incompatibility of the terms of subversion and paradigm. Nietzsche recognises Spinoza as a philosophical precursor, as a fellow in his ageless solitude. We can find some analogies between the thoughts of the two philosophers (e.g. the question of superstitions, the importance of demystification, the similarity between "amor intellectus Dei" and "amor fati" conceptions etc.). Nietzsche was disappointed in Spinoza lastly; I suppose he looked for a Machiavellian figure in Spinoza, and he realised the absence of these attributes. The other main character of this part is Luther. In the beginning Nietzsche respected the father of the reformation because of his literary talent and cultural significance, but Luther became one of the most hated persons for Nietzsche in his last years. Nietzsche regards the reformation as an amiss re-evaluation of all values which eliminates achievements of the renaissance.

Finally, I write about the variations of Nietzsche's origin-concept and the "surety" of the philosophers. I examine the late concept of the "aria humanity", and I detect the presence

of the philosophical subversion in the rhetoric question of “Wie?”. I also demonstrate the ultimate veiling truth-notion of Nietzsche, and analyse his relation to the risk and the surety. I consider the political consequences of the subversive philosophy.

### 3.4. Summary

In the conclusion I make some remarks about the political implications of the subversion, the female attributes of the truth, and the potential forms of the subversive philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I conclude to state the upcoming end of the subversive tendency.



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### List of publications related to the dissertation

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