

## I. CULTURAL IMAGES: TIME AND SPACE

### A COMPARATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE HUNGARIAN AND SLOVAKIAN NATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES: A CENTRAL EUROPEAN CASE<sup>1</sup>

Béla Mester

Institute for Philosophical Research,  
Hungarian Academy of Sciences,  
1119 Budapest, Etele út 59-61, Hungary  
E-mail: mester@webmail.phil-inst.hu

The paper analyses a well-known phenomenon, that of the 19th century Central European so-called “national philosophies”. However, the philosophical heritages of the Central European countries have their roles in the national identities; historians of philosophy in these countries know; our philosophies have common institutional roots with our neighbours. The paper deadlines paradigmatic problems from the Hungarian and Slovakian philosophy: the Latin language in philosophy, the different role of Kantianism and Hegelianism in the national cultures, and the problems of canonisation.

Keywords: canonisation, Central European philosophies, Hegelianism, Hungarian philosophy, Kantianism, Latin in philosophy, national identity, “national philosophies”, Slovakian philosophy.

doi:10.3846/limes.2010.01

#### Introduction

Our lecture offers a special contribution for the discussion about the last question of the *Call for Papers*, referring “the role of history” in *cultural regionalistics*. The rise of the so-called “national philosophies” is a well-known phenomenon in the historiography of the 19th century European philosophies, especially in Central Europe. (It is a characteristic phenomenon of the 19th century, different from the opinions of personally nationalist philosophers; or from philosophies in national languages.) However, the national philosophies of the 19th century, and the national historiography of the philosophical heritages of the Central European countries have their roles in the national identities; historians of philosophy in these countries know, that our national philosophical heritages have common institutional roots with our neighbours.

---

<sup>1</sup> This text is an enlarged version of our lecture in the conference titled Cultural Images in the Region under Transformation, organised by Culture, Philosophy and Arts Research Institute and Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, 28th–29th May 2009, Vilnius, Lithuania.

The case of Hungarian and Slovakian philosophical historiographies is paradigmatic by this point of view.

### Editorial experiences in comparative history of philosophy

The Slovakian-Hungarian example is almost self-evident for our topic: two neighbouring countries with their very long common history, and – from the point of view of history of philosophy – with a part of a common institutional background of philosophy, the network of the Lutheran, and later the Jesuit schools of the territory of modern Slovakia. The students and *alumni* of these colleges came from the Slovakian-, Hungarian- and German-speaking people of the same region, frequented the official Latin lectures and made their own student circles in their native languages in the first half of the 19th century. It is a good example for this epoch of the history of philosophies, *before* the rise of national philosophies, the early years of a Kantian professor, András Vandrák. He read his normal Latin lectures, wrote his works in Hungarian, and tried to explicate the (German) Kantian terminology for his Hungarian and Slovakian students in Hungarian and Slovakian. (Some elements of this terminology have survived in the scholar vocabulary of these languages.)

However, the Slovakian-Hungarian example is obvious for the narrow circle of the scholars of history of philosophy *with domestic loci* in Slovakia and in Hungary; it can appear as a strange experiment for comparison in front of the larger scholar community. The common roots of our philosophical cultures are invisible due to our incommensurable national canons, made in the next period of the history of philosophy of the region. Our task is to reconstruct this pre-national period of the history of philosophy, the process of the rise of the national philosophies, and the retroactive effect of their canons upon the history of philosophy. It is not a usual, spontaneous aim of our activity; it is often appears as a reaction of an accident phenomenon. It can be a particular genre of the special issues of the academic periodicals of philosophy and humanities, that of the national issues. Our last experiences, as a reader, author and editor have met with several forms of this genre in the last months. The first experience, as a reader, was a Hungarian special issue of the *Studies in East European Thought* (Demeter 2008). The second one was the other special issue of the same periodical (Kačerauskas 2009). (I was informed about these issues before their publication, thanks to the editors.) These readings show that a special national issue cannot miss a national narrative of philosophy, which is an *oxymoron* by an old-style view: philosophy is not a *prima facie* national phenomenon, why it needs a national canon. Our next experience was that of an author. Our task was to write an overview about the Hungarian philosophy for the Hungarian issue of *Восточно-европейские исследования* (Мештер 2008)<sup>2</sup>. Our task was not only to understand and to interpret

---

<sup>2</sup> This interesting periodical of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, edited by Natalia V. Korovicyna, which had an aim to show the cultural image of the region between Russia and the German-speaking countries for the Russian audience, unfortunately seems to be disappeared in the last year.

a national narrative of philosophy, but also to write, to create one of the possible national narratives of Hungarian philosophy for the Russian-speaking audience. After our readings and writings, our editorial experiences about the “Hungarian Special Volume” in Bratislava/Pozsony/Pressburg<sup>3</sup> (*Súčasná filozofia v Maďarsku* 2009); and the thematic collection called “Papers of Slovakian Philosophers”, in *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* (Hungarian Review of Philosophy, Budapest), have offered a good opportunity for the explanation of this phenomenon. In these issues our task was not only to tell a story of the Hungarian philosophy, but also create a hidden *canon* and a hidden *concept* of the Hungarian philosophy. I have chosen a consciously provocative form: by our concept the emigrants, the members of the Hungarian minorities of the neighbouring countries, and the immigrants, having an affiliation in Hungary, are “Hungarian philosophical writers”<sup>4</sup>. Election of the authors and their *writings* was not our task in the case of the Slovakian special volume. Its *initiator* was professor András (in his Slovakian writings: Ondrej) Mészáros, the former head of the Department of Hungarian Studies at the Comenius University in Pozsony/Bratislava/Pressburg<sup>5</sup>. (It is characteristic, that to find a scholar, who writes an initial overview about the Hungarian or Slovakian philosophy for these issues, was one of the most difficult tasks. It is understandable: this kind of writings implicates a hidden narrative and canon about our own scholar community, which is closely connected with our identities. This canon must be communicated for another audience, which is familiar with another canon.)

Consequently, our problem is the *collision* of our national philosophical canons with each other and with the generality of philosophy itself. I have seen the problem in its full context by the aid of an international conference titled “From the National Pantheon to the European Pantheon” (Duda *et al.* 2008). We have tried to describe the transitions of the narrative identities in the European culture. This project reminded me an old topic of philosophical historiography about Marcus Aurelius, the first Austrian philosopher, because he wrote some chapters of his main work in the field of his battle against *Marcomanni* and *Quadi* in a region, which *later* became the part of the Hapsburg Empire (Mester 2008). May be, it is an ancient and boring instance. Our examples about the Slovakian and Hungarian philosophies will be not so extreme

---

<sup>3</sup> Because of our topic, which touches the linguistic plurality of the region, we will use the toponymes in linguistically plural form in the following.

<sup>4</sup> Several examples from this issue: Gyula Klima, a Hungarian-American professor in the Fordham University, New York, has settled in America twenty years ago; Howard Robinson, professor of the Central European University, Budapest, has settled in Hungary more than ten years ago. Both of them publish their works in English, only, excluding their writings in this issue (they were originally chapters of Hungarian volumes, not available in other languages). Péter Egyed, a professor of Babeş-Bolyai University in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca/Klausenburg, in Romania), a well-known figure of the intellectual life of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, who publishes his works mainly in Hungarian, in Romania. (I have not chosen philosophical writers from the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, because all of them are well-known authors for the Slovakian-speaking audience by their writings in Slovakian, mostly in the issues of the same periodical.)

<sup>5</sup> Professor Mészáros is a historian of philosophy; his other affiliation is at the Institute of Philosophy of the Slovakian Academy of Sciences.

ones, but they will show the difficulties to apply the concepts of national philosophy for the philosophy of another period, and some concepts and values of the universal narrative for the 19th century national philosophy.

### The Slovakian-Hungarian example

The first, simpler question is connected with the territoriality of the modern states, in the context of the history of philosophy. For instance, the latest history of Slovakian philosophy had conceptual problems with the ancient Slovakian writers, who lived and published out of the borders, established some centuries later. The greatest instance is Ján Kollár, an indisputable Slovakian national classic, one of the fathers of the Slovakian thought, whose position was difficult in this manual because he lived “abroad”, in Budapest, as a Lutheran priest of the Slovakian-speaking congregation of the highest rank in the Slovakian cultural life in his time.

In this lecture our main instance is an anti-Kantian philosopher, from the time *just before* the rise of the Hungarian and Slovakian national philosophies, József Rozgonyi, whose *œuvre* is familiar for me, as a researcher of the history of Hungarian philosophy (Mester 2007). He – *mutatis mutandis* – has made similar territorial problems for the historians of philosophy, as Kollár made later. There is a good manual, written by professor Mészáros, the *Lexicon of the School Philosophy in Upper Hungary*<sup>6</sup> (Mészáros 2003, 2008). Professor Mészáros’ lexicon contains professor Rozgonyi’s complete biography and the bibliography of his works, because he was a schoolmaster of a new founded, small Protestant (Calvinist) secondary school within the 20th century borders of Slovakia, for several years, at the beginning of his career. Rozgonyi spent the most years of his career and life in a greater and more important Protestant (Calvinist) College, in the town of Sárospatak. The manual contains the results of his years in this college, but their colleagues are missing. It is the smaller and easy solvable problem: we should edit common manuals for the period of our common ones with the Slovakian colleagues. The other problem, connected with professor Rozgonyi, is the Latin language in all his serious works, and his role in the (special Hungarian and the well-known European) debates on Immanuel Kant, and – consequently – his position in the Hungarian national canon of the philosophical heritage. Trying to solve these problems, we should know some facts about his philosophy.

### The case of Rozgonyi

Rozgonyi was the greatest character of the Hungarian debate on the Kantian philosophy, on the part of the anti-Kantians. Usually we discuss his *œuvre* as a part of this

---

<sup>6</sup> The toponyme *Upper Hungary* (*Horné Uhorsko*) is a term used by the Slovakian historians, too, for a part of the Kingdom of Hungary, mainly identical with the modern Slovakia. The term *Uhorsko* (Hungary) in Slovakian language has a historical meaning, based on an archaic ethnonym for Hungarians; Hungary today in Slovakian is called *Maďarska*. The difference between the two names of the country cannot be expressed by any translation in any languages.

discourse, which is an important part of our national culture due to its connection with the questions of the linguistic reform, with the aim of the creation of Hungarian vocabulary of the sciences. Despite his position in the canon of the national culture, his philosophical position and his criticism on the Kantianism based on this position, were unique in his time. At that time his philosophical background was not usual in Central Europe. He was graduated at the University of Utrecht, where he was a disciple of professor Johann Friedrich Hennert. In his years in Utrecht, under the influence of his professor, he became a follower of the Scottish *common sense*-philosophy; his favourites were mainly Thomas Reid and James Beattie. Probably, he learnt English in Utrecht, before his studies in London, and Oxford. The end of his student years happened at the same time as the French Revolution. He became familiar with the Kantian philosophy during his journey home, mainly at the German universities, Jena and Halle, where he frequented Reinhold's and Jacob's lectures on the Kantianism. In these years he was a thinker with established system of ideas, in an age older by some years than his professors. Consequently, he did not change his mind influenced by his German professors, the result was something other: his Kantian professors inspired him to write a criticism on the Kantian philosophy based on his earlier philosophical opinion, the Scottish *common sense*-philosophy. His *Dubia* (Rozgonyi 1792) was written in Latin, published in Hungary, but by its aims it was a writing dedicated to Reinhold and Jacob on its frontispiece, and addressed to the philosophers of the world, at least of (the Continental) Europe. The target audience of Rozgonyi's other Latin works is the same: the European philosophers. He tried to organise his audience by practical tools, via *peregrinatio academica* of his disciples in the College of Sárospatak. We can recognise his effectiveness with a quick overview of the online catalogues of the libraries of the ancient universities of the Continental Europe; and one can find some positive reviews on the pages of *Gelehrte Anzeigen* in Göttingen, and so on. His writings in Hungarian – a few of short pamphlets – represent another register: he wrote it for the people, who could not read, or could not read in the needed level in Latin. The most interesting one amongst them, *The Priest and the Doctor around the Dying Kant* is just a short and popularised version of his *Dubia* (Rozgonyi 1819). From his situation – to be a part of a European discussion and of a Hungarian one, by works of different languages and registers – follows a possibility of a false interpretation in a national narrative. In a traditional history of Hungarian philosophy, professor Rozgonyi is the “bad guy”, a protagonist of the “conservatives” (by their linguistic style and philosophical views), who has a debate against the Kantianism, “the incarnated Enlightenment”. In the national canon mainly his Hungarian works signs Rozgonyi's position – it means: his pamphlets. His opponents, who wrote in Hungarian, without any reception abroad, are counted among the progressive *Europèeres* – in a special national canon. It is clear, that the problem is hidden in the structure and nature of the national canon, which is unable to describe the European network of the philosophy.

One could think, that it is a special problem of Hungarian historiography of the domestic philosophical heritage, at least concerns to the cultures with as vivid late Latin philosophical literature, as Hungary, the last significant country in Europe, which had

give up the legislation and administration in Latin. (I think, this eighteenth-century Latin was an important element of the *academic life* of several countries out of Hungary, for instance in the universities of the Netherlands.) By our point of view it is more important, that Rozgonyi's case works as a horse-model of the veterinarian faculty – we can see all the symptoms of all the possible horse-illnesses on it at the same time. If you regard as a Hungarian philosopher, you cannot see the European context. If you regard as a European philosopher – for instance, as an anti-Kantian partner of an important figure of the modern Scepticism, Ernst Schulze in Göttingen – you cannot see the Hungarian context, with the linguistic reform in the history of ideas, and the special political history of the country. Taking seriously and retroactively the national canons of modern nation states, such as Slovakia and Hungary, you cannot decide, whether a *Latin* work, written in a territory, which is nowadays a part of Slovakia, but it was published in a territory, which is nowadays a part of Hungary, is a part of the Slovakian or Hungarian culture, or a meaningless antiquity of the flea market. (The former was the position of the works written in the late Latinity in the time of the creation of the roots of our national canons; after this canonisation process.)

### Slovakian and Hungarian philosophy in the 19th century

In Rozgonyi's case we have seen a 18th century philosopher's affair with the 19th century national philosophy, or, in other words, with the historiographical patterns rooted in the paradigm and the vocabulary of the so-called "national philosophies". There are reciprocal cases, when a philosopher of the period of "national philosophies" is counted in the conceptual network of the history of reception just as a grey and average follower of a well-known trend in the historiographical tradition, separated from the context of the *nation-level* discussion of his age, which is the basis of its real significance. The *œuvre* is separated from the context of the national-level discussion of his age, which is the basis of its real significance. Our instances will be the representatives of the next generation of the Slovakian and Hungarian philosophers in the first half of the nineteenth century. Before detailing these historiographical examples, we should formulate the concept of national philosophy, or, at least, to say, what was contained the minds of our 19th century predecessors, whose world has the relevant field of the meaning for this word, when they have proclaimed the need of a national philosophy. Everybody knows, that this task cannot be satisfied, because of the too large meaning of this term. I can refer in here a contemporary intellectual experiment from the June of 1847, only. It was a usual convention of the Philosophical Department of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, with the topic of the possibilities and the definition of a national philosophy, in its official agenda. Surprisingly, the proposal used a Kantian basis for his thesis: the difference between the *philosophia more scholastico* and *philosophia more cosmopolitico*. The proposal says: the former is a cultural basis of any philosophical activity, and the later is a rare phenomenon, connected with the concept of *genius*. We are interested here in the genres of philosophy *between these margins*. The first one, closer to the school philosophy is the *personal*

*philosophy*. The most of our colleagues are the representatives of this genre out of the doors of their universities, when they write articles or read conference papers (if they are not included in the genre of *genius*, authorised for cultivation of the *philosophia more cosmopolitico*, or, at least a chance to be a *nation-level* classic). It is not mean any deification of the personality by a romantic manner, just the first level of the independent use of their reason. The other genre, closer to the world philosophy, is titled “national philosophy”. Speaking about this level, the proposal mixes the point of view of the levels of the independent use of the reason, the *object* of our thinking, and the practical target audience of our thinking. All of these elements are based in the consequences of the use of the native vernacular. If we are speaking in a national language, our audience will be the speakers of the same language, and – step by step – our topics will be national-level problems. We can see in this point, that this academic convention has seen well the problem, rooted in the situation of the new communication in the 19th century, but by this formulation it went to a slippery slop. Probably, the convention felt the ambiguity of this topic, and turned to the next item of its agenda, a more lucrative – at least, more popular – question: to find a “very Hungarian” equivalent of the German word, *der Witz*.

Our last examples are the Slovakian and Hungarian Hegelians and anti-Hegelians, at least non-Hegelians. (The genre of the conference lecture and the characteristics of the opportunity – it is not a Hegel-conference – allows that we speak about this large and important phenomenon *en bloc*.) In short, if we regard them just as instances for the good or wrong interpretations of the Hegelian philosophy – as some traditional historiographies used – without their role and function in their own national canons, it remained a marginal, boring philology of the reception of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, as our task. If we regard the sources and the consequences in the national cultures only, we will write the historiography of the political ideas in national level, not the history of philosophy itself. (Some possible frame for the interpretation: the Slovakian Hegelianism as a revolt of a generation against their Kantian *and* mainly Hungarian professors. The Hegelian philosophy of history has its role in the Slovakian national identity. The two branches of our *common sense* philosophy, rooted in the Scottish tradition, have the meaning of the differences in the national canons. The so-called Hungarian *harmonistic philosophy* was focussed on the epistemology, the Slovakian one, the so-called “*system real-ideal*” on the ontology. The Slovakian Hegelianism was focussed on the history, the Hungarian one mainly on aesthetics, and in its late period – in the nineteen fifties – on an archaic form of the philosophy of science, and so on.) These topics mark a few open questions amongst the possible ones.

## Conclusions

We have spoke about national and universal narratives of the history of philosophy, and about their insufficiency in a conference about the concept of “region”. One can easy guess we make a solution: a form of the *regional narrative* between our national

and universal narratives can be treated as a rule of the thumb in our scholar activities. The first step would be a *regional comparative historiography of philosophy*. We think we can try something similar with the special issues of our academic periodicals, mentioned in the initial part of our lecture.

## References

- Demeter, T. (Ed.) 2008. “The Sociological Tradition of Hungarian Philosophy”, special issue of the *Studies in East European Thought* 60(1–2).
- Duda, G.; Paraschiv, M.; Nica, M.; Ștefan, A. (Eds.) 2008. “From the National Pantheon to the European One: Identity Discourses and Cultural Diversity”, special issue of the *Buletinul Universității Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești: Seria Filologie* 60(2A).
- Kačerauskas, T. (Ed.) 2009. “Philosophy in Lithuania”, special issue of the *Studies in East European Thought* 61(1).
- Mester, B. 2007. “Magyar felvilágosodás – német vagy skót? Rozgonyi József Kant-kritikája”, in Ludassy, M.; Miklósi, Z.; Pogonyi, Sz. (Eds.) *A felvilágosodás álmai és árnyai*. Budapest: Áron Kiadó, 394–446.
- Mester, B. 2008. “Re-thinking the Concepts of Our (Philosophical) Identities”, *Buletinul Universității Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești: Seria Filologie* 60(2A): 265–270.
- Mészáros, A. 2003. *A felső-magyarországi iskolai filozófia lexikona*. Pozsony: Kalligram.
- Mészáros, O. 2008. *Školská filozofia v bývalom Hornom Uhorsku*. Pozsony: VEDA, vydateľstvo Slovenskej akademie vied.
- “Papers of Slovakian Philosophers”. 2009, *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* 53(3–4): 385–548.
- Rozgonyi, J. 1819. *A' Pap és a' Doctor a' sínlődő Kánt körül, vagy rövid vizsgálása főképen a' Tiszt. Pucz Antal Úr Elmélkedéseinek: A' Kánti Philosophiájának fő Resultátumairól, 's órdalalag illetése az erköltsi Catechismust Író' Bétsi feleleteinek*. Pest: s. n.
- Rozgonyi, J. 1792. *Dubia de Initiiis transcendentalis idealismi Kantiani, ad viros clarissimos Jacob et Reinhold*. Pestini: typis Matthiae Trattner.
- “Súčasná filozofia v Maďarsku”. 2009. Special issue of the *Filosofia* 64(2).
- Мештер, Б. 2008. „Венгерская философия сегодня: обзор“, *Восточно-европейские исследования: Международный журнал по социальным и гуманитарным наукам* 8: 107–111.

## VENGRŲ IR SLOVAKŲ NACIONALINIŲ FILOSOFIJŲ KOMPARATYVISTINĖ ISTORIOGRAFIJA: VIDURIO EUROPOS ATVEJIS

Béla Mester

Santrauka

Straipsnyje tyrinėjamas gerai žinomas fenomenas, XIX a. Vidurio Europoje vadinamas „nacionalinėmis filosofijomis“. Kad ir kaip būtų, filosofiniai Vidurio Europos valstybių palikimai turi įtakos nacionaliniams tapatumams, ir tai žino šių valstybių filosofijos istorikai. Mūsų ir mūsų kaimynų filosofijos turi bendrąsias paprotines šaknis. Straipsnyje brėžiama paradigminių vengrų ir slovakų filosofijos problemų perskyra pagal lotynų kalbą filosofijoje, skirtingą kantizmo ir hėgelizmo vaidmenį tautinėse kultūrose bei kanonizacijos problemas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kanonizacija, Vidurio Europos filosofijos, hėgelizmas, vengrų filosofija, kantizmas, lotynų kalba filosofijoje, tautinis tapatumas, „nacionalinės filosofijos“, slovakų filosofija.

*Received 23 November 2009, accepted 1 February 2010*