

## *Original Paper*

# *The Culture of Philosophy Withering Away*

## On the Basis of Hungarian Philosophical Experiences

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### ***Absract***

*Philosophy is for itself, in other words, it is an activity for itself by itself. It is one of the most precious intellectual treasures and pleasures of a human being. There are many symptoms which show that abstract thinking has lost its former glory, its glorious position in society. Unfortunately, the culture of philosophy has become a degraded intellectual phenomenon, and this short study analyses the reasons for its diminished value. It would like to stress there reasons: the first is: the practicable principle and interest as the age symptom. The second is: when the politics intervenes in the philosophy of the function (but we know that act of the way of thought is other as the movement of politics. The third is: the responsibility or irresponsibility of the philosophers. This study remarks some critical point of views in connection of there reasons. In conclusion, I claim that the current state of philosophy is the business of everybody; philosophy is a common intellectual property for all of us. In contrast to the public awareness, it is not an “aristocratic genre” but a “plebeian” one.*

### ***Keywords***

*philosophy, culture, teaching, research, judgement*

Many symptoms show that abstract thinking has lost its former glory, its glorious position in society. Philosophy has become a degraded intellectual phenomenon. There can be several reasons for its degradation, and I would like to present some of them.

First of all, one should make it clear: the contemporary time period (its general movement and tendency) is not very beneficial for the propagation of philosophy. It is not hard to see that reality is dominated by the pragmatic perspective, principle of direct and immediate practicality and interest at that given moment. Nowadays, we do not have enough time, patience and do not want to endeavour to analyse phenomena in their own complexity, their own long-term process and consequences. The

short-term lucrative investment and pursuit of success have occupied the everyday life of institutions, companies and people who work. There is no capacity to process long-term profound general correlations, in many cases the competence itself is missing as well. Globalisation, climate crisis, modern migration, pandemic etc. occur in scientific, political and public discourses as general problems, but *the universal thinking with a wide historical contextualisation* to understand the above-mentioned phenomena is lacking, or at least it only exists as exceptions in society. It is not very surprising that there are no epoch-making representatives of contemporary philosophy, as Aristotle, Hegel, Heidegger or Sartre were before. Presumably, the last influential philosopher was Adorno who lived in the middle of the past century and whose lecture was attended by an audience of 2000 people. We, of course, know that exceptional, ingenious think tanks (and thus artists, social scientific researchers, too) are rarely born. Nevertheless, it is obvious to me that we are waiting for a new Socrates, new Kant, new Heidegger, as psychology is waiting for the new Piaget, or pedagogy is waiting the new Dewey. It is obvious that many brilliant philosophers are working in Hungary and the entire world. However, one can rarely come across one whose work would hugely determine the intellectual facet of our era. It can also be the case that we live in a period when there is no need for a superior philosophical authority who tells the ‘truth’, because with the spread of the Internet, mobile phones and other gadgets one might have the false impression of being smart and well-informed: as if they could solve the dilemmas of the world and their life on their own.

Secondly, the role of artificial effects on philosophy cannot be disregarded. Above all, I am referring to the appearance of politics. One should not think of the scenario when we trust philosopher as the elected wise with the leadership of a city (and/or a nation), as they are the ones who understand the most the problems the community faces (see Plato’s conceptions), but the other way around. When the political will and interest—not tolerating any resistance—penetrate the world of philosophy: its institution, research and education. In the former case, it can turn out well, while in the latter one only harmful effects come into being. Without discussing in detail the sensitive relations of Hungarian politics and philosophy, I highlight that in the political discourse after the change of regime (in terms of both right and left wing governments) there were serious abuses and reckless measures. Once one sees the opinion that “there are too many philosophers in Hungary”, the other time the so-called “lawsuit against philosophers” triggers indignation. In my humble opinion, both political reactions harmed the relationship of philosophy and politics. Politics should not intervene in the functioning of philosophy (philosophising), because if such attempts are made, philosophy will be degraded and infantilised. Furthermore, philosophers will have the illusion of being capable of maintaining their authority and reaching their goals, which will sooner or later lead to the decline of philosophy itself. What the politician and philosopher should consider (or rather accept) is that *politics and philosophy are governed by different rules and laws*. The activities of the former are ruled by the endeavours for power, the latter one’s focal point is the in-depth analysis of phenomena. Politics limits the possibilities, while

philosophy is creative and without boundaries.

Thirdly, I emphasize the professional responsibility of philosophers. Philosophers themselves contribute to the given state of the culture of philosophy: both positively and negatively. If one has the perception that philosophy's influence on society is gradually degrading, then the professional potential and nature of the person conducting philosophy can also be regarded as a cause. In relation to this particular aspect let us turn to the self-critical statement of Schopenhauer as an example! Philosophers are usually loners and are not really social people. During their long and thorough contemplation, they distance themselves from reality. Their thoughts fly above the sky, and they write in a manner that it is nearly or completely impossible for average people to understand their train of thought. They reach a kind of sublime state of mind in which they feel that they are the only ones who are capable of seeing and understanding the dilemmas under investigation. Robert Musil ironically continues the description that God was cautious when he ordered the elephant to become a new elephant, the cat to become a new cat, but when he ordered the philosopher to be a new philosopher, he did not simply become a new one but the follower or opposer of his predecessor. The former one does not have one single authentic thought, while the latter tries to demolish the work of his ancestor. To me neither of them is better than the other. If philosophers cannot overcome such a weakness, philosophy will lose its convincing power, and such a flaw will have negative impact on the state of philosophy in its integrity, even if politics and society otherwise supported the free development of culture.

The above-mentioned objective and subjective processes demonstrate under what circumstances the viewpoint of philosophy can prevail. Despite the unfavourable tendencies, philosophy should not give up its position; it should not react with resignation and passivity to the occurring problems but should respond by offering new possibilities, thoughts and experiments in order to take its former position and authority back. It knows the truth, but it should also make society accept the fundamental truth that *narrow-mindedness can result in thinking that the independent culture of philosophy is unnecessary*. Although one can live without aptitude for philosophy and can get on without it. What is more, such an activity will not bring direct and easily graspable values (not in the same way as numerous sciences and practical work), nevertheless, the historical experience up until now is that philosophical thinking, the desire to better oneself and conscious and/or instinctive endeavour for bettering oneself cannot be eliminated from the life of humans.

Who question the right of philosophy for existence or at least try to decrease the importance of its effects do not know the two-thousand-year-old saying of Aristotle according to which humans being started to philosophise due to astonishment. The world is full of secrets, mysteries and unexplainable phenomena, in other words, wonders. The human-being of a given period is continuously inquiring about things, especially the most exciting dilemmas, in other words, what kind of world it is, what he himself is (as a concrete living human being) what the ultimate meaning and task of his life are. It is probable that he will not be able to answer these questions. Let us remember the realisation of Spengler:

philosophy is nothing else but the defence against the unknown. But maybe the ultimate goal is not finding the only and undeniable answer but always articulating newer and newer questions or approaching old dilemmas in a more sophisticated and differentiated manner. This poses a challenge big enough.

According to my conceptions, I think many other colleagues can share my point of view, *philosophy is an activity for itself by itself*. It is one of the most precious intellectual treasures and pleasures of a human being. If we accept this argument, we should do everything for it freely and for the sake of our moral and intellectual development. There certainly are many ways to reinforce the social role and significance of philosophy. Nevertheless, I must recommend Cicero's statements that he voiced in relation to Socrates: let us bring philosophy down to the face of the earth, bring it into the houses and all aspects of life. To relate it to the Hungarian reality: professional researchers and educators dealing with philosophy should endeavour to react more rapidly and efficiently to new problematics of reality and could furthermore develop more vivid and respectful relationship among one another in their given community than the one they currently have. Furthermore, such an education policy does its job well which desires to re-establish the compulsory and independent courses on philosophy in higher education (it is a painful fact that, for example, in Hungary medicine and teacher training have banished such courses!) and orient public education to the goal that teachers of all the disciplines should be willing and ready to discuss the philosophical and ideological aspects of the material they present to students. Such a publishing house, radio or TV announcer, international, national or local newspaper owner or editor acts in an exemplary manner who is capable of taking into consideration and discussing the general and profound correlations of phenomena. In fact, the state of philosophy is our common business; in contrast to the public awareness, it is not an "aristocratic genre" but a "plebeian" one.

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