



# Ruralization of the (Urbane) Concept of *Sensus Communis* in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian Philosophical Controversy

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**Abstract.** The topic of the present article is the destruction of the common sense tradition linked to the urbanity of philosophy, which had deep roots both in the European and Hungarian traditions. This destruction was based on Hegelian ideas by János Erdélyi as an argument of the greatest philosophical controversy of the Hungarian philosophical life in the 1850s. In Erdélyi's argumentation, the turn from the supposed *urbanity* to the supposed *rurality* of the common sense has a fundamental role. The idea of the *rurality* of the common sense has an influence on the Hungarian intellectual history of the next centuries, as well.

**Keywords:** common sense, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Gusztáv Szontagh, János Erdélyi, János Hetényi

## Introduction

It is highly rare that someone formulates their concept of philosophy and their own philosophical programme *against* the *common sense*, as an *opposite* of it, as János Erdélyi does it in his 'The Present of the Inland Philosophy':

I would be happy if it were explained what is the advantage to recommend to the [...] Hungarian people something what does not need to learn, just to know based on the common sense,. Oh, my dear common sense! [...] The common sense can easily be compatible with superstition, ignorance, stagnancy, all the moral and material wrong [...]. Contrary, for all great things, which were for the progress of the humankind, there are deep, serious, secure and sublime marks of the thought. (Erdélyi 1981: 43)<sup>1</sup>

1 The same in the original Hungarian text: „Nagy örömemre szolgálna ezek után, ha

Erdélyi's discussion paper was published at first as a series of periodical articles in 1856 and then as a separate volume in the following year, as well. Its interpretations in the cultural memory of the Hungarian philosophy are essentially identical; Erdélyi's writing is a turning point from the dilettante idea of the national philosophy to a professional philosophy in accordance with the international trends. It is an inevitable fact that Erdélyi's work was a constant reference for highly different philosophers with a single common feature, the defence of a differently formulated concept of the professional philosophy from differently constructed enemies.

One of the first examples is Károly Böhm's editorial preface for the first issue of the 'Hungarian Philosophical Review' published in 1882. His main problem is the relationship of philosophy and practice and the rights of theory formulated as a contrast to practice. He did not refer to Erdélyi in a concrete manner – it is not a treatise, just a short preface without references and bibliography –, but he repeated Erdélyi's critique of Hetényi and Szontagh:

A mind engaged with the questions of the practical life can fail when making judgements on the practical utility of *abstract* doctrines. In our culture, Hetényi and Szontagh overestimated the practice when they stated the impracticality of the idealistic 'Sophie-style' knowledge, against the Hegelians. It is true that philosophy was never directly practical, did not teach anybody directly to create steam ships, telegraphs, or other new inventions. But *such* practical things do not represent the *whole* of practical life. All of them are just *instruments* for achieving a much more sublime and practical end [...]. This practical end is the ideal disposition of the human life; we can achieve it with the different tools of the practice; and philosophy teaches to understand it, to argument for it, and to explain it consciously. (Aigner–Böhm 2017: 260; originally published in 1882)<sup>2</sup>

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2 In Hungarian: „Mert a gyakorlati élet kérdéseivel elfoglalt elme könnyen tévedhet, mikor *el v o n t* tanok életrevalóságáról ítélni készül. Nálunk pedig Hetényi és Szontagh nagyon is a gyakorlat malmára hajtották a vizet, mikor Hegel követőivel szemben az ilyen idealisztikus >>Zsófi-féle<< ismeret impraktikus voltát hirdették. Közvetlenül gyakorlati, az igaz, a filozófia nem volt soha; nem tanított meg közvetlenül senkit vasutak, gőzhajók, távírók s egyéb új találmányok megalkotására. Azonban az *i l y e n* gyakorlati dolgok még nem teszik az *e g é s z* gyakorlati életet. Mindezek csak *e s z k ö z ö k* egy sokkal magasztosabb gyakorlati cél elérésére [...]. Az emberi életnek ideálszerű berendezése, ez a gyakorlati cél; erre szolgálnak a gyakorlat változatos eszközei, s e célt megérteni, indokolni, öntudatosan kifejteni, erre csak a filozófia tanít.”

In the following century, Gyula Kornis talks about the triumph of ‘pure logicism’ in Europe over the ‘philosophy of Dollar’ of the American technological civilization:

[Erdélyi] as a real Hegelian, defends German idealism and the theoretical character of philosophy with a satirical enthusiasm against the Szontaghs’ attack. The first conscious attack of logicism against psychologism appeared in this polemic, for the first time in the history of Hungarian thought; it was incarnated in the one-sided practical character of the Hungarian harmonistic philosophy, by a modern term, in the form of pragmatism. Szontagh clearly formulates the theory of the truth of pragmatism. [...] If he had anticipated that this theory of truth would be born in America, half a century later, he would have recommended the technical home of the philosophy of Dollar for the Hungarians as an ideal. [...] It has never been thought at such a low level about philosophy in our culture; Hegel’s Hungarian disciple reflected to it by these words. (Kornis 1944: 35)<sup>3</sup>

Surprisingly, the evaluation of Erdélyi’s writings did not change in the Marxist historiography of philosophy; however, it was formulated at first *against* Kornis:

[Szontagh’s philosophy] was a reactionary, agnostic philosophy, a mixture of the Kantianism and Humeanism [...] Szontagh was the first Hungarian neo-Kantian [...], the ancestor of the paulers and kornises.<sup>4</sup> (Heller 1952: 411–412)<sup>5</sup>

There is no place here for a detailed analysis of the interpretations appeared in the professional historiography of Hungarian philosophy. We must mention Endre Kiss’s approach to Erdélyi’s concept of the *common sense*, connected to the everyday usage of language and its conservatism (Kiss 1984). However,

3 In Hungarian: „[Erdélyi] mint vérbeli hegelianus, szatirikus hévvel védi meg Szontaghék támadásával szemben a német idealizmust s ezzel a filozófia teoretikus jellegét. E polémiában tűnik elének a magyar gondolkodás történetében a logizmus első tudatos támadása a pszichologizmus ellen, mely a magyar egyezményes rendszer egyoldalúan gyakorlati, életrevaló jellegében, mai műszóval élve, a pragmatizmus formáját öltötte fel. Szontagh ugyanis egész világosan megformulazza a pragmatizmus igazságelméletét [...]. S mintha már megsejtette volna, hogy ez a pragmatista igazságteória félszázad múlva Amerikában fog megszületni: már ekkor a dollárfilozófia technikai hazáját állítja oda a magyarnak eszményképül. [...] Sohasem gondolkoztak – fakad ki ennek hallatára Hegel magyar tanítványa – még oly alacsonyan nálunk a bölcsészeti dolgában.”

4 It was a common rhetorical element in this epoch to type in minuscule the initial letter of a family name used in plural, for expressing a pejorative opinion of a criticized person.

5 In Hungarian: „[Szontagh filozófiája] reakciós, agnosztikus filozófia volt: a kantianizmus és a humeianizmus keveréke [...] Szontagh az első magyar újkantianus [...], a paulerek és kornisok őse.”

Erdélyi's philosophy of language is truly one of the most important parts of his œuvre, which was touched upon in my previous publications, as well; I have chosen another topic for the present article.

In the following, I will describe at first Erdélyi's chain of ideas about the *common sense*, after which the possible reason of his position *against* the *common sense* will be problematized. For an answer, the function of the development of a modern concept of the common sense must be outlined under conditions of the changing structure of the philosophical communication in modernity in the European philosophy in general and especially in Hungarian philosophy. In the end, the consequences of the neglected concept of the common sense in Erdélyi's thought and in the intellectual life of the next generations will be outlined.

## Erdélyi's Critique of the Philosophy of His Age

Erdélyi has identified the disadvantages of the thought of his opponents in their three main biases in the formulations of the requirements of the Hungarian philosophy; they are the needed *usefulness*, *popular language*, and (Hungarian) *nationality* of the philosophical works, formulated by his opponents, János Hetényi and Gusztáv Szontagh, based on a concept of the *common sense*. All of these three features were considered by him as contradictory to professional philosophy. Actually, at the very beginning of his chain of ideas, it becomes clear that he does not defend professional philosophy in general but the positions of a particular system. At the end of his writing, it will be evident that it is identical with the Hegelianism interpreted by him. At first, he opposes the epistemological approach of the foundations of philosophy, without a direct reference to Kant but clearly against the Kantian critique of the reason:

The endeavour of the philosophers who always think about what we can know and what we cannot; it is to mark the borders of the knowledge. (Erdélyi 1981: 28)<sup>6</sup>

From this basis, he suddenly derives the critique of a topic of the Hungarian philosophical discourse of his age:

It was anticipated that this and this philosophy fits the Hungarian mind; it can and must receive such and such quantity from it; it is equivalent with the statement that the cultivation of philosophy beyond the established

<sup>6</sup> In Hungarian: „Legalább ide megy ki azok igyekezete, kik bölcsekedvén, örökké azon törik fejüket: mit lehet tudni, mit nem; s erőnek erejével ki akarnák jelölni, hogy meddig terjedjen a tudás határa.”

borders is a sin committed against the nation and the common sense. (Erdélyi 1981: 28)<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, by his ideas, both the approaches of philosophy in its focus of the questions of what I can know as a human and what I can know as a Hungarian are wrong. He uses the concepts of *reason*, *spirit*, and *idea* as opposites of the *common sense*, which is not possible for the philosophical practice because it is not a useful tool for achieving the Hegelian dialectic:

The idea [...] contains all the singularities and opposites [...] as stating and negating elements because it is the way of becoming. This point is the top of speculation where all the things are opposites or syntheses of the opposites. A purely distinctive thinking, frozen in its distinctions will never achieve these heights. Consequently, the common culture, the so-called common sense realizes ‘inconsequence’ in its greatest men in every country but does not care about higher correspondences. (Erdélyi 1981: 34)<sup>8</sup>

The requirement of *usefulness* appeared for him as the rejection of the aim of the pure scientific knowledge for the advantages of practicality. After discussing this topic, his next target is the *popular language* of philosophy as a false requirement:

All sciences, other conscious human activities and crafts must be learnt; philosophy is the sole exception. Everybody wants to learn it less and less but know it more and more, based on a birth right marked by the common sense. (Erdélyi 1981: 35)<sup>9</sup>

The aim of *popular language* was an evidence for him that their opponents had given up the norm of the well-defined academic vocabulary of philosophy. By his argumentation, his opponents do not yet feel the need of a precise terminology

7 In Hungarian: „már előre kimondatott, hogy a magyar elmének ez s ez bölcsészet való, s ennyit vagy annyit bír el és kell elbírnia műveléséből; mintha mondatnék, hogy a kiszabott mértéken túl bölcselkedni aztán nemzet és józan ész elleni vétség.”

8 In Hungarian: »A[...]z eszm[ében ...] különösségek, ellentétek sőt ellenmondatok megvannak [...] mint [...] állító és tagadó elemek, mert ez az útja a létesülésnek. És e ponton igazán az elmélődés (speculatio) magasságain vesszük magunkat észre, hol minden csupa ellenmondás, vagyis ellenmondások egysége. E magasságra a pusztán csak különböztető, és különbözőseiben megfagyó gondolkodás soha de soha fel nem jut. Azért volt, van és lesz, hogy a közrendű műveltség, az úgynevezett józan ész, miképp nálunk úgy másoknál is, rendszeren „inconsequentíákat” vesz észre legnagyobb embereiben; de a felsőbb egybefüggést nem is keresi.«

9 In Hungarian: „Minden tudománynak vagy bármely célzatos emberi munkásságnak, minő avagy csak a mesteremberek foglalkozása is, megadatik, hogy tanulni kell. Csak a bölcsészet e részben kivétel; mert mennél kevésbé tanulatik, annál jobban akar tudatni, és ezt valami születési jognál fogva követeli magának, mégpedig a józan ész nevében boldog, boldogtalan.”

because of their low-level philosophical practice that can be managed without professional terminology:

I can see that people are afraid of the idealism concerning language and the common sense. They defend language against science. I believe that on the level of the development where our popular philosophers are they do not need a precise terminology to explain their thoughts, and they can be satisfied by the service of the common language. (Erdélyi 1981: 36)<sup>10</sup>

The critique of the third bias, the idea of *nationality* in philosophy is connected to his Hegelian way of thinking, as well. He can connect literature and arts as emotional phenomena to the nation, disregarding the concept of *Weltliteratur* and connect philosophy to the whole of humanity, disregarding the fragmentation of its empirical audience by language borders, based on the Hegelian concepts of *reason* and *spirit*. In his argumentation, a Hegelian vision of the *end of the history of philosophy* has a special importance. However, the objects of the reason and spirit were always universal, but all the history of philosophy was needed for the explicit universality in the history. By his argumentation, *there were* particular philosophical cultures, but in his own age it is the epoch when their possibility ended:

The spring days of the eclectic philosophy and the particularities of national philosophies, such as the English or Scottish common sense, the French Enlightenment, and the German subjectivity, disappeared. A new floor has been finished in the building of science; we should inhabit and reinforce it for going further. (Erdélyi 1981: 96) [...] In this part, the German spirit has the triumph. (Erdélyi 1981: 95)<sup>11</sup>

By his self-image, the task of his generation is to eliminate the remained local particularities of philosophy for achieving the Hegelian ending point in the thought of every civilized nation, amongst them the Hungarians.

10 In Hungarian: „Különösen valami aggodalmas félelmet látok az idealizmustóli óvakodásokban nyelvre, józan észre nézve. A tudománytól féltik a nyelvet. Elhiszem, hogy azon fokáig a haladásnak, meddig a mi keletben levő bölcsészeink feljutottak, nincs szükség a gondolat megjelölése végett szabatos nyelvre, s meg lehet elégedni a közbeszéd szolgálatával.”

11 In Hungarian: „elvirultak a váladékos (eklektikus) bölcsészet tavaszi napjai; szinte késői dolgok a nemzeti bölcsészet ferdén látott alakulásai: az angol vagy a skót közérzék, a francia felvilágosodás, a német alanyiség részszerintiségei. A tudomány épületén egy új emelet van készen; ezt kell meglaknunk, megerősítnünk, hogy tovább léphessünk. [...] E részben a német szellemet illeti a dicsőség.”

## Common Sense as a Rural and Conservative Phenomenon in Erdélyi's Theory

There is a special significance of the supposed *rurality* of the *common sense* in the argumentation of Erdélyi. At first, he summarizes that all obstacles of the professional philosophy are based on the *common sense*: "all these superstitions are cultivated and taught in the name of the *common sense*" (Erdélyi 1981: 55).<sup>12</sup>

After the numerous pejorative references to the *common sense*, he must formulate his own *common sense* concept. In this formulation, he identifies at first the *common sense* with the conservatism of the everyday thinking, both in the public life and philosophy:

The common sense wants always the perfected; it cannot be renewed. The spirit, on the contrary, always follows its own way, makes the progress of the world. [...] Because the common sense always wants the perfected, it consequently insists on the perfect truths which were established in a philosophical or political school long time ago for eternity. (Erdélyi 1981: 57)<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting that Erdélyi's examples of the innovation *against* the conservatism of the common sense come from the fields of the sciences, economy, and the linguistic reform, as well. (The lack of social and political reforms is probably the consequence of the calculation with the possibilities of the publication, under conditions of the censorship in the age of neo-absolutism.) The counter-concepts of the conservative *common sense* and the progressive *spirit*, formulated above, have been fulfilled by concrete content in here:

What was the role of the common sense? By the evidence of the history of the spirit that the innovators, such as Galilei as scientist, Széchenyi as economist, or Kazinczy as linguist, are usually the ones who receive the first critique on the part of common sense. (Erdélyi 1981: 57)<sup>14</sup>

12 In Hungarian: „mindez előítéletek a *józan ész* nevében tanítatnak, ápoltatnak”.

13 In Hungarian: „Így az *józan ész* mindig a bevégzettet akarja, vitatja; újjá megeredni, megújhodni már nincs módjában. Ellenben a szellem mind a mellett folytatja a maga útját, viszi elő a világot [...]. És mert a *józan ész* mindig a bevégzettet akarja, örömet ragaszkodik a kész igazságokhoz, melyeket valamely bölcsészeti vagy politikai felekezet valaha elvekké tett, mintegy örökig tartó érvényességgel felruházott.”

14 In Hungarian: „Elvégre tehát miben látjuk szerepelni a *józan ész*t? Az eszme története úgy tartja, hogy az újítók, akár Galilei, mint természetbúvár, akár Széchenyi, mint államgazdász, akár Kazinczy, mint nyelvész lett légyen az, rendszerint a *józan ész*től kapják az első ellenmondást.”

Erdélyi has formulated a non-communicative concept of the *common sense*. There is no social communication, just standard biases against the progressive initiatives:

The common sense can easily be compatible with superstition, ignorance, stagnancy, all the moral and material wrong [...] Contrary, for all great things, which were for the progress of the humankind, there are deep, serious, secure and sublime marks of the thought. (Erdélyi 1981: 43)<sup>15</sup>

Their main types are the ignorance and malignancy toward modern technology, such as the railway network, and toward the institutions of the established Enlightenment, mainly the system of public education. By the last example of Erdélyi, a rural housewife was against the school education of her daughter because a literate girl could write letter for her lover, as an adult; and this idea against women's education is based on a *common sense* judgement:

Recently, we care more about things than persons; improvement of sheep and cattle was more important than the improvement of humans; it was said that educated humans could feel more deeply their troubles. Country women have prohibited the education of their daughters for literacy because a literate girl could send letter for her lover. (Erdélyi 1981: 56)<sup>16</sup>

With these words, Erdélyi eliminated the *urbanity* of this programme, disregarded Hetényi's ideas of the urbanity of the common-sense-based national philosophy for creating a non-communicative concept of the *common sense*. As Hetényi wrote; 'a national culture must come from the cities as law comes from Zion' (Hetényi 1841: 239).<sup>17</sup>

Gábor Kovács has recently problematized the origin of the Hungarian expression of the 'peasant's common sense' [józan paraszti ész] based on his previous analysis of the national characterology of Huizinga (Kovács 2015). Huizinga has identified the Dutch and the *burgher* characters with patriotic pride, and *urbane* common sense is given high importance in his description. The concept of common sense was usually connected with *urbanity* in all epochs of intellectual history; *rurality* of the common sense seems to be a Hungarian speciality. By my

15 In Hungarian: „De mindamellert nem terem-e meg igen könnyen a józan ésszel a babona, tudatlanság, tespedés, minden erkölcsi és anyagi rossz [...]? Ellenben minden nagy dolgon, mely az emberiséget elővitte, a gondolkodás mély és komoly, nyugodt és fenséges nyomai látszanak.”

16 In Hungarian: „Még nem régen is több gond volt nálunk a dologra, mint a személyekre; juh, marhanemesítés hamarább lett közteendővé, mint az ember nemesítése és mondatott, hogy a nevelt ember csak jobban fogná érezni bajait. A falusi asszony pedig azért nem hagyá írásra taníttatni leányát, hogy levelet fog küldeni szeretőjének.”

17 In Hungarian: „a városokból kell kimenni a nemzeti műveltségnek, mint Sionból a törvénynek.”

opinion, this Hungarian idea has its roots in Erdélyi's thought; the opposition of the *conservative, rural common sense* and *the spirit of the progressive urbane civilization* are essential. According to Erdélyi's ideas, this rural common sense has a negative role in history, but the critics of modernity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century could use the pattern established by him against urbanity, for the ideas of an agrarian populism, as well.

## The Tradition of *Sensus Communis* in the History of Philosophy according to Erdélyi's Interpretation

The consequence of Erdélyi's above detailed ideas about the common sense was that he does not regard the concept of common sense as a philosophical term and that he regards the ones who take common sense seriously as dilettantes, based on these ideas. His opinion is more complex; by his argumentation, the core of the problem is the appearance of common sense *in philosophy*:

the theory of the common sense was ruined by the philosophers when they made from it more than it was possible, and they attributed to it more than it can satisfy (Erdélyi 1981: 55).<sup>18</sup>

At this point, we need to make his opinion clear about the significance of the tradition of the common sense in the history of philosophy. He has reduced its role for the common sense school of the Scottish Enlightenment, neglecting the 17<sup>th</sup>-century British ancestors and the antique sources:

in philosophy, the common sense appeared one hundred years ago in Scotland in a short but effective role (Erdélyi 1981: 57).<sup>19</sup>

This Scottish reference is enough for his controversy with Gusztáv Szontagh, who regularly refers to the same Scotsmen and supports his strategy of creating a negative image of the philosophical tradition of the common sense as an irrelevant, local, historically antiquated trend. He closed the historical overview with the following words:

The philosophy of common sense emerged and declined suddenly. After Hume, who was sceptical about empirical experiences and offered a novelty

18 In Hungarian: „a józan ész elméletét elrontották a bölcsészek, midőn többet csináltak belőle, mint ami; többet fogtak rá, mint amennyi tőle telik.”

19 In Hungarian: „Bölcsészetben a józan ész rövid, de hatékony szerepléssel mutatkozott a skótoknál ezelőtt száz esztendővel.”

for the progress of philosophy, we cannot speak about English philosophy from a point of view of the history of philosophy. [...] Both the Scottish school and Kant appeared after and against Hume; the Scottish philosophy remained a local phenomenon, but the Kantian philosophy occupied the world. (Erdélyi 1981: 59–60)<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the significant cultural influence of the opposed Scottish school on the Continent was also clear for him. It can be considered as superficial, but it is essentially *urbane* and far from the *rural*ity in its every feature:

In Scottish philosophy [...], the internal source of our cognition was well and nicely elaborated, concerning the moral [...], mainly by Scotsmen but by French and German authors also. A lot of manuals of the common courtesies have their roots in here and have enwreathed the world as a liana. Philosophers explained the topics of the ‘etiquette and convenance [common courtesies in French]’ [...] It was called practice, art of beauty life [...]. (Erdélyi 1981: 59)<sup>21</sup>

Erdélyi here excludes the whole of any educational, cultural, and social programme of modernity, based on a concept of common sense, from philosophy. One of his opponents, János Hetényi, refers to the same programme in a work authored by him (Hetényi 1841). Erdélyi’s note that the criticized literature focussed on the *beauty of life* instead of philosophical problems has directly referred to the central concept of the philosophy of his deceased opponent, Hetényi, *kalobiotismus*, from the Greek *kalos* (beauty) and *bios* (life). It is conspicuous that the referred programme, based on common sense, is *urbane* and *reformatory*; consequently, its description is contrary to the above analysed characterization of common sense as a *rural* and *conservative* phenomenon. The most conspicuous from this point of view is the relationship of common sense and literacy. In an above quoted locus, Erdélyi offers the example of a rural housewife who was against the school education of her daughter because a literate girl could write letters for her lover, as an adult; and this idea against women’s education is based on a *common sense* judgement in Erdélyi’s interpretation. Later, in the

20 In Hungarian: „A közös érzelem vagy közrendű értelem bölcsészete amint hamar felkapott, úgy hamar is letűnt, s Hume óta, ki a tapasztalást megkértette, s ezáltal lényeges mozzanatot hozta elő a bölcsészeti haladásban, angol bölcsészetről, tudománytörténeti szempontból, mai nap már nem lehet beszélni. [...] Mind a skótok, mind Kant Hume után és ellen keltek föl, de a skótok bölcselkedése helyszerű maradt, míg a kanti észjárás elfoglalta a világot.”

21 In Hungarian: »A skót bölcsészetben [...] belső forrása ismereteinknek [...] jótékonyan, szépen dolgoztatott fel morálra leginkább ugyan magok a skótok, de franciák s németek által is. Az a sok illendőségten mind itt veszi gyökerét, s befutá a világot, mint valami folyondár növény. Bölcsészek dolgozzák az „etiquette, convenance” rejtelmét [...]. Ezt aztán [...] mondák [...] gyakorlatnak, életszépítő mesterségnek [...].«

last quotation, he refers to an educational programme based on the same *common sense*, with intrinsic elements about the development of communicational skills, amongst them, the polite correspondence, usually in different languages, mainly offered for women.

At the end of his analysis, Erdélyi described common sense philosophy as a failed programme:

Seemingly, the philosophy based on common sense, which was considered as unitary, will cure the wound of scepticism. They hoped for the harmony of life and philosophy, and it had followers. A kind of reality for empiricism has appeared in it; the content could be cleared and increased. But the progress of philosophy skipped the doctrine of the common sense because it is mere obscurity. (Erdélyi 1981: 58)<sup>22</sup>

A constant motive of Erdélyi's historical analysis of common sense philosophy is an aversion towards the understanding of the human powers of the Scottish Enlightenment, where moral and aesthetic judgements are mixed with the processes of thinking, and the whole of the cognition is embedded in the human practice. He preferred to maintain a realm of *pure rationality* free from both the *empirical cognition* and *human practice*. His opponent, Gusztáv Szontagh, clearly formulates the contrary opinion: 'a philosopher does not think purely for the sake of thinking; on the contrary: a human is thinking and investigates the truth for the right acting' (Szontagh 1857: 217).<sup>23</sup>

We can easily understand Erdélyi's aversion: the acceptance of an epistemology and anthropology based on the *sensus communis* could immediately destroy the dichotomy of the *common sense*, on the one hand, and the *thought, spirit, idea*, and *reason*, on the other. This dichotomy is maintainable if all the emotional content and social context is linked to the *common sense*, and the concepts of *thought (spirit, idea, and reason)* remains in the sphere of a context-free, emotionally neutral pure rationality. He could regard the arts and literature as parts of the national cultures and philosophy, as an affair of the universal humankind in the above mentioned loci, based on this dichotomy.

22 In Hungarian: „Úgy látszott, hogy az egységesnek hitt közös érzelmen alapuló bölcsészet összeforrasztja ismét azt a sebet, mely a skepticismus által üttetett a tudományon. Az élet s bölcsészet kibékülése vártak tőle; s voltak is követői. Benne valami realitás mutatkozott volna az empirizmus számára; tehát tisztult és növekedett volna a tartalom; mindamellett a bölcsészeti fejlődés átugrá a közös érzelem vagy józan ész tanát, mert ez csupa bizonytalanság.”

23 In Hungarian: „a bölcselkedő nem gondolkodik pusztán hogy gondolkodjék, sőt inkább az ember gondolkodik és keresi az igazságot, hogy helyesen cselekedhessék.”

## Hegelian Sources of Erdélyi's Critique of the Common Sense

The above detailed writing was the first serious work of Erdélyi, formulated clearly by the Hegelian ideas; it is explicit in the argumentation against the philosophical concept of common sense, as well. In Hegel's first significant philosophical writing entitled 'The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy', published at first in 1802, Hegel identified theoretical thinking with speculation, as a counterpart of common sense, in the chapter entitled 'Relation of Speculation to Common Sense':

For this reason, speculation understands sound intellect [gesunde Menschenverstand] well enough, but the sound intellect [gesunde Menschenverstand] cannot understand what speculation is doing. [...] Common sense [gesunde Menschenverstand] cannot understand speculation; and what is more, it must come to hate speculation when it has experience of it; and, unless it is in the state of perfect indifference that security confers, it is bound to detest and persecute it. (Hegel 1977b: 99–100)

Hegel's writing includes not only the hierarchy of speculation and common sense but the reason of the conservatism of common sense, as well:

In particular, ordinary common sense [gemeine Menschenverstand] is bound to see nothing but nullification in those philosophical systems that satisfy the demand for the conscious identity by suspending dichotomy in such a way that one of the opposites is raised to be the absolute and the other nullified. This is particularly offensive if the culture of the time has already fixed one of the opposites otherwise. [...] Common sense [gesunde Menschenverstand] is stubborn; it stubbornly believes itself secure in the force of its inertia, believes the non-conscious secure in its primordial gravity and opposition to consciousness; believes matter secure against the difference that light brings into it just in order to reconstruct the difference into a new synthesis at a higher level. (Hegel 1977b: 101–102)

Later, in 1807, in the preface of his early masterpiece, entitled 'Phenomenology of Spirit', he discusses the concept of *insight* as a result of the theoretical thinking and the concept of *edification* connected with the emotional approach as opposites in the description of the actual state of the self-conscious Spirit. The endeavour for the edification is incarnated by his opinion partly in the theory of Romanticism of his age, partly in the German *Populärphilosophie*, and partly in the enthusiasm of religious pietism:

[A]t the stage which self-conscious Spirit has presently reached [...] now demands from philosophy, not so much *knowledge* of what it *is*, as the recovery through its agency of that lost sense of solid and substantial being. Philosophy is to meet this need, not by opening up the fast-locked nature of substance, and raising this to self-consciousness, not by bringing consciousness out of its chaos back to an order based on thought, nor to the simplicity of the Notion, but rather by running together what thought has put asunder, by suppressing the differentiations of the Notion and restoring the *feeling* of essential being: in short, by providing edification rather than insight. The ‘beautiful’, the ‘holy’, the ‘eternal’, ‘religion’, and ‘love’ are the bait required to arouse the desire to bite; not the Notion, but ecstasy, not the cold march of necessity in the thing itself, but the ferment of enthusiasm, these are supposed to be what sustains and continually extends the wealth of substance. (Hegel 1977a: 4–5)

It is verisimilar that Hegel’s ideas formulated in the above quotation had an influence on Erdélyi’s statements on the one-sidedness of the emotively connected common sense as an opposite of the theory; however, Erdélyi usually did not refer to concrete Hegelian loci. This lack of references is probably part of his philosophical opinions: Hegel for him was not *a* philosophical writer but the actual zenith of the philosophical thought; consequently, his opinions were mentioned as parts of the universal truth, obligatory for everyone, with just a general remark that this truth was discovered and perfectly formulated by Hegel.

Hegel discussed the role and the character of common sense in details, especially in the subchapter entitled ‘Reason as Lawgiver’ (Hegel 1977a: 252–256), where he describes that common sense leads us to a contradiction of terms during the formulation of the moral law. The relationship of common sense and theoretical thinking is the same in this special case as what was described earlier in general. Erdélyi’s loci about the inclination of common sense for the moral judgement and the theoretical insufficiency of these judgements are in accordance with the referred loci of Hegel’s work.

Hegel later, in the introduction of his ‘Lectures on the History of Philosophy’, in the subchapter entitled ‘Philosophy Proper Distinguished from Popular Philosophy’ (Hegel 1892: 92–94), extended the concept of *Populärphilosophie* from a concrete German philosophical group to a universal phenomenon of history from Cicero through Pascal to the religious mystical thinkers. The only common element of these highly different authors is a kind of common sense connected with moral sense in Hegel’s opinion:

But the drawback that attaches to this Philosophy is that the ultimate appeal even in modern times is made to the fact that men are constituted

such as they are by nature, and with this Cicero is very free. Here the moral instinct comes into question, only under the name of feeling [...]. Feeling is first of all laid hold of, then comes reasoning from what is given, but in these we can appeal to what is immediate only. Independent thought is certainly here advanced; the content too is taken from the self; but we must just as necessarily exclude this mode of thinking from Philosophy. (Hegel 1892: 93)

As we have seen above, Erdélyi has later evaluated the role of common sense in general and the role of the philosophical schools operating with the concept of common sense in the history of philosophy, using these Hegelian ideas. Erdélyi's well-known metaphor about the building of science is also rooted in Hegel's texts. The German philosopher has formulated his ideas in the preface of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* this way:

Besides, it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. [...] dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, [...] Just as little as a building is finished when its foundation has been laid, so little is the achieved Notion of the whole the whole itself. (Hegel 1977a: 6–7)

Hegel speaks here about a 'transition to a new era'; several decades later, after the detailed explication of Hegel's system of philosophy – and Hegel's death –, the completion of the renovation has appeared in Erdélyi's vision, and he follows Hegel's architectural metaphor this way: 'a new floor has been finished in the building of science; we should inhabit and reinforce it for going further' (Erdélyi 1981: 96).<sup>24</sup>

By an overview of Erdélyi's work, it is clear that he has incorporated with Hegel's *loci* several elements of the German discourse of the previous generation into the Hungarian situation of his age. Amongst Hegel's targets, German pietism, enthusiastic theories of the art philosophy in the circles of sentimentalism and romanticism, and the followers of Kant and Fichte did not have a significant importance in the Hungarian intellectual life of the 1850s as they had in the German discourse a generation ago. The only common element could be the identification of the last representatives of the *German Populärphilosophie* as the opponents of Hegel with the representatives of *Hungarian harmonistic philosophy*, Hetényi and Szontagh, as the opponents of Erdélyi. Erdélyi followed this path, as we

<sup>24</sup> In Hungarian: „a tudomány épületén egy új emelet van készen; ezt kell meglaknunk, megerősítnünk, hogy tovább léphessünk”.

have seen above in the case of the identification of ideas incarnating Hetényi's *kalobiotismus* with the opinions formulated in the continental manuals of education, based on the Scottish *common sense* tradition. This identification is false because the philosophies of his opponents, especially in Szontagh's case, are the representatives of the post-Kantian philosophical epoch and offered an interesting complex of the elements of the Kantian and Scottish *common sense* philosophies. Erdélyi's position is characterized by a special form of asynchrony. He was a participant of the Hungarian philosophical life in the Reform Era, as well; but he was silent in the late 1830s and early 1840s, when a controversy regarding the Hegelian philosophy was in the focus of Hungarian philosophical life, with the participation of Szontagh as the protagonist on the anti-Hegelian side, and re-discovered Hegel in the following period when Hegel was not frequently read in European intellectual life. He never reflected on Hetényi's or Szontagh's works when they were published, but he offered a retrospective evaluation of their *œuvre*. This asynchrony is the root of Erdélyi's misinterpretation of his opponents' philosophy; they never spoke about *popular language* but a *clear Hungarian terminology*; instead of a national particularism of philosophy, they searched the position of philosophy in the process of cultural nation building. One of the most important differences between their opinions about the essence of philosophy was included in his last debate with Gusztáv Szontagh.

Erdélyi's thought is characterized by the dichotomy of speculative thinking and human practice; in Szontagh's ideas, all forms of theory are always embedded in human activity, in individual and societal practice, while all distinctions between *vita activa* and *contemplativa* are false. A triumph of either of them over the other one cannot be achieved following the method used by Erdélyi, evaluating each other as a non-philosophical system of ideas. We can see that this asynchrony of Erdélyi's reflection is the main cause of his anachronistic judgements and misinterpretations. There was not any sign of his controversy with Szontagh before; it is symptomatic that in his memoirs written several years before their debate Szontagh mentioned Erdélyi's name just in a *single locus*, as a source of an anecdote from Erdélyi's *alma mater*, the College of Sárospatak (Szontagh 2017: 152). Under conditions of his misinterpretations based on the asynchrony of his work, a question has emerged; how have his ideas become a standard opinion in the Hungarian cultural tradition concerning the description of philosophy of his opponents and the relationship of *common sense* and theoretical thought in general. This problem is linked with the history of the canonization process of Erdélyi's *œuvre* amongst the 19<sup>th</sup>-century classics of Hungarian culture.

## The Role of the Concept of Common Sense in the Modern Programme of Public Philosophy

The concept of common sense (*sensus communis*) has another, more essential role in modern philosophy than the above mentioned ones, concerning the reformulation of self-identity and the role of philosophy under conditions of the changed structure of scholars' public sphere. Consequently, Erdélyi's re-interpretation of the role of common sense has a significant influence in the Hungarian tradition on the self-identification of philosophy. This communicational turn was twofold; it was linguistically a change from Latin to the national languages and in the institutional background a turn from the old-fashioned disputes at the universities to the scenery of the modern open realm dominated by the press and periodicals. This process is characterized by the extension and fragmentation of the audience at the same time; the large domestic audiences of philosophy will be separated from one another because of their native vernaculars. (For a recent analysis of a Hungarian aspect of this communicational turn, see Mester 2018.)

The idea of the link between the urban culture and philosophy is as ancient as Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes*; as he has formulated it: 'Socrates was the first *who brought down philosophy from the heavens, placed it in cities*, introduced it into families, and obliged it to examine into life and morals, and good and evil' (Cicero 1877: 166; my italics).

This topic of *urbane philosophy* has been connected with the term of *sensus communis* in Cicero's oeuvre. This stoic term, Latinized by Cicero, had a new position as *common sense* in early modernity, since Shaftesbury's masterpiece, when the new phenomenon of *public philosophy* emerged as an answer to the turn of the structure of the European philosophical communication. The usage of the term *common sense* went always hand by hand with the considerations of the possibilities of the public philosophy in the period of the Scottish Enlightenment and the German *Populärphilosophie*. In the intellectual movements of East-Central Europe, this idea was combined with other German interpretations of the turn of the structure of the public sphere, included in the Kantian twin terms of *philosophia in sensu scholastico* and *philosophia in sensu cosmopolitico* and Herder's description of the historically changing structure and concept of *publicum*. (Erdélyi has distanced himself from them, as well; he was against Kant's critique of reason based on Hegelian ideas, and Herder's ideas about the national character represented for him a sub-philosophical level of culture.) In the Hungarian philosophical life, this problem has emerged as the paradox of *philosophia in sensu cosmopolitico* cultivated *in Hungarian*. The solution was a programme of a *public philosophy* as a continuous theoretical critique of Hungarian arts, literature, politics, economy, and society, as part of the collective

development of *common sense*, based on the programme of *politeness* and *refinement* known from the Scottish Enlightenment. These ideas have appeared in the works of the authors of the Hungarian Harmonistic philosophy, Hetényi and Szontagh; especially Hetényi's works on the history of the Hungarian cities and Szontagh's programme for the development of the Hungarian philosophy were clear representatives of these ideas.

## Conclusions

The target of the above discussed common sense tradition was re-positioning philosophy within a new public realm. In the Hungarian case, the programme was to put philosophy cultivated in Hungary into the new system of the so-called *national sciences* and to have a theoretical interpretation and conscious design of this process. In other words, *national philosophy* as a special version of modern *public philosophies* in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century East-Central Europe has adapted to the system of the new modern national culture and wanted to fulfil the role of the philosophical interpreter of this new type of political community called nation and the designer of this community at the same time. By this system of ideas, from the cultural, political, economic, scientific, and artistic development of a country, a theoretical reflection appeared in the open sphere and based on common sense, which can create a national community and a national culture, connected with the development of the actual level of the concrete appearances of common sense, as well. The clearest and the most radical manifestation of this approach to philosophy and science, linked closely to common life, is the decision of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) in March 1848 that the HAS expresses its acknowledgment for the people of the city of Pest because the people have enforced the liberty of the press, what is a fundamental requirement of any scientific or cultural activity.

After the military defeat of the revolution, this conception, which was connected to the rule of the public opinion and the nation, could not be easily upheld. Erdélyi's above detailed work was published at this time and in this context. His target was the concept of *national philosophy*, but he destroyed the *philosophical concept of nation* and made difficult the theoretical analysis of the political community, for ages, despite the fact that it had had a long and well-established tradition.

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