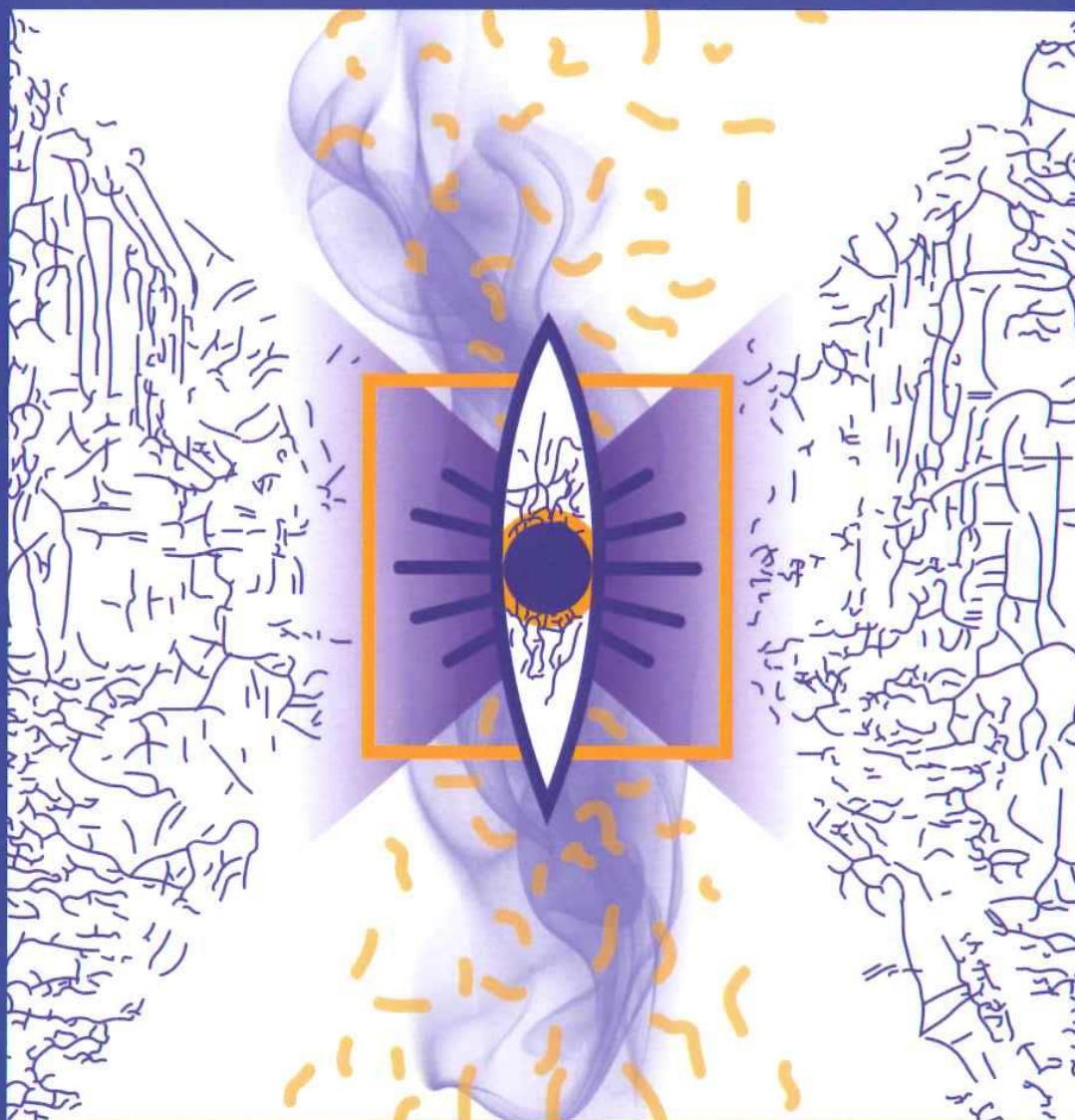


Bojan Žalec, Stjepan Štivić (Eds.)

Culture Wars

Past, Present, Future



LIT

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Culture Wars

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CONTROVERSIES OF PHILOSOPHERS WITH PROTESTANT, CATHOLIC AND SECULAR BACKGROUND IN THE *HUNGARIAN PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW* (1882–1891)

Béla Mester, Budapest

1 Introduction¹

The first series of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review* (*Magyar Philosophiai Szemle*, 1882–1891) was the first periodical of philosophy in Hungarian, established by a spontaneous initiative of several circles of philosophers in Budapest, with the financial support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. (The periodical of Philosophical Committee of the II. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences department also has the same title nowadays. However, its advisory and editorial boards regard themselves as intellectual inheritors of the “founder fathers”. Here, we will discuss the first ten years of the periodical, when the Hungarian Academy of Sciences offered its financial support, but the editorial board was independent of the Academy. In the next period, from 1892 to 1947, this periodical changed its name to *Athenaeum* and directly belonged to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, later to the Academy and the Hungarian Philosophical Society. In these eras, the quality of the periodical did not become worse than earlier, but the structure of the controversies changed under conditions of deeper institutional embeddedness. In the following, we will focus on this periodical’s first, more independent era.)

Hungarian Philosophical Review was the first and single Hungarian periodical of philosophy from its establishment until 1885. Its open-minded editors inspired the scholar community of Hungarian philosophers to use it as a forum for controversies of highly diverse opinions from strict Positivism through neo-Kantianism to the Catholic philosophy of this period. In these discussions, the religious or secular commitments of the participants had a fundamental role. A Catholic

¹ This article was written within the framework of the research project entitled *The tradition of “sensus communis” in the Hungarian thought: Philosophy and the public realm; public philosophy, national philosophy, national characterology*, supported by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office (K 135 638).

philosopher provoked the most vivid controversy; the founder editor had a clear Protestant commitment, and it appeared as a Positivist secular worldview. However, a Catholic monk-teacher, Valér Maczki SOCist (1847–1921), represented the same generation as the founder-editor of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review*; he was a newcomer in the centre of the Hungarian professional philosophical life in Budapest, and most of his previous publications were published in the cities of Pécs and Eger, where he taught and lived. In his first publication on the scene of the intellectual life of Budapest, he proposed the redefinition of the tasks of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review* and that of the Hungarian philosophers. He evaluated the actual state of Hungarian philosophy by a typical metaphor of self-orientalisation: Hungarian philosophy is like a translation of Homer into the language of the so-called 'Kaffirs' who do not want to read it. In the following, I offer an overview of the similar controversies on the pages of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review* with a strong background of worldview (Weltanschauung), depending on the religious background of the protagonists. It was a unique historical moment of the Hungarian philosophical life. A few years later, the first Hungarian periodical of philosophy was founded, engaged with a particular philosophical school, neo-Thomism (*Periodical of Philosophy / Bölcséleti Folyóirat*, 1886–1906). However, it survived twenty years; only after it separate, often ephemeral forums of the different philosophical schools and trends appeared one after the other, and the structure of the scholarly communication of the Hungarian philosophical communication never became similar to the first period of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review*, again. This chapter aims to show the beginning of the relative fragmentation of the open sphere of the Hungarian philosophy within a process of a *soft culture war*.

2 Two Concepts of the Hungarian Philosophy: Program for Translation of the Classics of Modernity and Foundation of a Scholar Periodical

At the beginning of the 1880s, two innovations appeared in Hungarian philosophy: an endeavour for the systematic translation of the modern classics with critical apparatus and commentaries on the one hand and the establishment of a professional scholar periodical in its strict meaning, on the other. These endeavours represented different visions about the task and essence of philosophical thinking, incarnated in two characteristic personalities with different cultural, religious and ethnical backgrounds: a culturally assimilated but not converted Jew, Bernhard Alexander (1850–1927), and Károly Böhm (1846–1911), a culturally and in language assimilated, so-called *Zipser*. (It is a particular German-origin term for German-speaking Lutheran Saxons of a territory of Upper Hungary, or by Slovakian term, *Horné Uhorsko*. However, Böhm was born and

buried in Bankská Bistrica, now in Slovakia; his career developed in Bratislava, Budapest and Cluj/Kolozsvár in Transylvania. Here, his Budapest period will be discussed only.) These different cultural backgrounds became clear by the intellectual provocation of Father Maczki. He was not the cause or initiator of the fragmentation of the Hungarian philosophical life, just an indicator of the hidden ruptures. First, the concepts of the book series and the periodical, founded by two rivals, will be outlined; after that, I will show the controversy on the pages of the periodical with its religious background and consequences. (For a detailed analysis of these rival concepts, their historical roots, and their consequences in Hungarian, see my recent essay entitled *Should We Edit or Translate? On two Manners of the Philosophical Activities. For the 140th anniversary of the Writers of Philosophy and the Hungarian Philosophical Review*, see Mester 2023.)

3 Editorial Concept of the Series Entitled Writers of Philosophy

Editors of the *Writers of Philosophy* series asked for the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences based on their well-developed conception of the editorial ideas. However, they were fellow students in their peregrination in Western Europe, with almost the same curricula. Bernhard Alexander was interested in the classic form of the work of a historian of philosophy; it is to understand philosophers of the past by making translations and commentaries that are useful in higher education, as well. The field of József Bánóczy (1849–1926) was the Hungarian terminology of philosophy, discussed more from linguistics than philosophy. His tradition is the endeavour of the *Dictionary of the Philosophical Terminology* (see: *Philosophiai Műszótár* 1834), published in the Hungarian Reform Era; he extended this endeavour from the sphere of original Hungarian writings to the standardised vocabulary of the translations. It is the beginning of a systematic and conscious making of terminology, creating the foundations of the language of philosophy. The book series represents characteristic editorial conception. The symbolical beginning is Descartes, from the general point of view of the history of Western thought and the Hungarian point of view. In the general aspect, Descartes is the starting point of modernity in European philosophy; by the Hungarian glance, Hungarian Cartesians were the first thinkers in the history of Hungarian philosophy who achieved the same level as his mainly Dutch masters, and they had severe endeavours and results in the creation of the Hungarian philosophical terminology, as well. As Alexander formulated it in the *Foreword* of the first volume of the series:

“We started the *Writers of Philosophy* with the translation of the main works of Descartes. It is not only the beginning of the philosophy of modernity, but we can go to this school with utility and pleasure nowadays as well. This translation

also pays a national tribute to the great philosopher. We also thank Descartes for the first awakening of philosophical thinking in Hungary. At the University of Utrecht [...], a poor Hungarian student [...] decided to establish this thought in his homeland and the language of his homeland. This student was the first Hungarian philosopher, János Apáczai Cseri [1625–1659]” (Alexander’s *Preface* in Descartes 1881, V.).

Several volumes of the contemporary manual books of the history of philosophy and Alexander’s writings are linked weakly with the original conception. The series’ posthumous edition of János Erdélyi’s history of Hungarian philosophy is essential. This edition is the root of the canonisation of Erdélyi’s Hegelian vision of the history of Hungarian philosophy in Hungarian cultural memory. The editors’ endeavour was more ambitious; they wanted to extend the canonisation of Erdélyi’s other philosophical writings by the evidence of the frontispiece: *Erdélyi’s works Vol. 1*, but this endeavour was never fulfilled (see: Erdélyi 1885). In the last years of the century, the conception was partly modified with the appearance of the Greek classics: mainly Plato, the fragments of the pre-Socratics, a monograph on the Cynics, but Aristotle was represented just by his *De anima*. The Great War represented a financial break, and after that, Alexander was marginalised in the Hungarian academic scene, which was not independent from the anti-Semitic atmosphere of post-war Hungary. He tried to reanimate the series in his last years, without the academy’s support, with modified editorial ideas. Two volumes of Spinoza represent the old concept and his interest as a historian of philosophy; two volumes of Bergson and a volume of Windelband and Ernst Mach represent an endeavour to modernise the canon. (For a detailed analysis of Alexander’s career, especially of the post-war years, see Turbucz 2021.)

Prefaces and other manifestations of the editors demonstrate that they regard the role of the series as fundamental in the significance of philosophy in Hungarian culture. The foreword of the Descartes volume drew attention to the status of the Discourse on Method in French schools as a recommended reading. Based on the Hungarian translation, we can achieve the level of French philosophical education, in Alexander’s opinion. In other words, based on a developed system of philosophical translations, the role of philosophy will gradually be the same as in the great philosophical cultures of Europe.

4 Károly Böhm’s Concept on the Hungarian Philosophy and the History of the Hungarian Philosophical Periodicals

The opposite of this concept in the same epoch is the radical and principled rejection of the programme of the translations in the utterances of Károly Böhm, both

in the book reviews about Alexander's translations, published in the periodical edited by him and in his inaugural lecture as a professor:

"Several people think that we should translate foreign works and that the philosophical translation program of our Academy of Sciences was fruitful. I regard this opinion as a *petitio principii*. Understanding these works presupposes a previous philosophical education. Consequently, our endeavour must be an autonomous philosophical activity based on a critical approach. The Hungarian Philosophical Review was founded for this purpose, and we established it in 1882 to support this autonomous activity. We did not require articles on a European level, just reasonable ones based on independent research." (Böhm 1896/1941, 189–190.)

Scholar periodicals have deeper roots in the Hungarian cultural tradition than the translations. However, the first scholarly periodicals had general content, containing all the relevant fields of academic life; they generated philosophical controversies about the most important events and milestones of Hungarian philosophical life in the long 19th century. A network of Hungarian scholar periodicals was the basis of the nation-level communication of the Hungarian philosophers who were mainly teachers of the schools of different denominations. The significant periodicals were the media background of the most significant philosophical controversies. *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* (*Scientific Collection*, 1817–1841) was linked with the last period of the *Kantian Controversy* (1792–1822). *Athenaeum* (1837–1843) was the media sphere of the *Hegelian Trial*, and the *Debate on Hungarian Science* appeared on the columns of *Új Magyar Múzeum* (*New Hungarian Museum*, 1850–1860). This background was, at the same time, a quality barrier to the scholarly discourse. The *Hungarian Controversy on Kant* was incarnated in Latin books and Hungarian brochures, but its end manifested in normal (Hungarian) articles in scholarly periodicals. The low quality of the *Hegelian Trial* was connected with its laic medial background; the *Debate on Hungarian Science* discussed the philosophical question of the essence of the *historical fact* with the participation of *just one philosopher*. Its media environment determined the atmosphere of the Erdélyi–Szontagh-debate (1857–1858), as well.

5 The Establishment of the Hungarian Philosophical Review

Consequently, our next question is what changed in Hungarian philosophical life with the establishment of the philosophical scholar periodical in its strict meaning. First, we should offer an overview of the circumstances of establishing the *Hungarian Philosophical Review*. An essential prerequisite is the *Budapest Philosophical Circle*, established in the late 1870s, which organised open readings and discussions in cafés; it can be regarded as an antecedent of the Hungarian

Philosophical Society, established legally in 1901. To the memories of Károly Böhm, published just several years after the events, the idea of a philosophical periodical appeared in this circle at first, and it was the point where the ways of the most important members of the Circle divided (Böhm 1884). Bernhard Alexander considered that the Hungarian philosophical life was not ready for a scholarly periodical, and Károly Böhm was sceptical toward Alexander's programme for philosophical translations. (For the analysis of the opposite programs of Alexander and Böhm, see Bretter 2005.) They applied for the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for their periodical and book series of translations, and the Academy managed these endeavours as two faces of the same issue. Practically, Böhm's and Alexander's behaviour was almost contrary to their doctrines. Alexander, who was sceptical toward the possibility of a philosophical periodical, became the Hungarian philosopher of his age who was the most familiar with the medial environment of the periodicals, and Böhm, who was a monomaniacal worker of the next volume of his well-planned philosophical system, became the editor of the first philosophical periodical. Böhm was known as a worker of his own unique terminology and an opponent of Alexander's translation programme. However, after Alexander published his translations of the classics, the new terminology appeared in Böhm's writings, with tacit consent, especially the vocabulary of Kantianism. The relationship between Alexander and Böhm was connected with a personal line; the first volume of Alexander's monography on Kant (Alexander 1881), which was never finished, won the same award from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, for what Böhm's application disappeared in the academic offices. Böhm blamed the Academy both for making an administrative and an essential mistake, as well; his application was an *original philosophical work*, the first volume of his philosophical system called *Man and his World* (Böhm 1883), while Alexander's writing was "just history of philosophy".

With this background, it is not surprising to see the first article of the review section of the periodical edited by Böhm, a review of Alexander's Kant-monography. The main theoretical question of the review is the relevance of the connection of biography and works of a philosopher; later, it criticises Alexander's usage of references until the accusation of plagiarism (Nemes 1882). The review is the first media environment in Hungarian philosophy where *philosophers and only philosophers* can discuss each other's works. The list of the authors represents a large scale from the point of view of their generations, fields within philosophy and opinions. Cyrill Horváth (1804–1884), who had begun his philosophical career in the Reform Era, is still active. The old professor, a founder of a peculiar system without serious works, published a lengthy article about the difficulties of philosophical thinking (Horváth 1882). A few years later, a debate about *the*

existence of his system appeared on the pages of the same periodical (Nemes 1886). On the one hand, a frequent author is József Sándor Simon (1853–1915), with his ideas about *beauty as a neural phenomenon*, and Valér Maczki SOCist, a Catholic monk-teacher from Eger, from the model-city of the Counter-Reformation, or, politically more correctly, the Catholic revival in Hungary. (For a detailed analysis of the cultural and social background of the authors of the first period of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review*, see Varga 2020.) Father Maczki evaluated the Hungarian philosophy of his age on the same level as that of the *Kaffirs* in Africa. He said, “our philosophy is like Homer translated to Kaffir language what is untouched by the Kaffirs themselves” (Maczki 1885, 48). Father Maczki’s approach is a typical self-orientalising gesture of the Hungarian culture from a particular Catholic point of view. *Kaffir* is a classic Arabic word for all the Pagans, or gentiles, excluding the “peoples of the Books”, the believers of the monotheistic religions, especially Christians and Jews. For cultural reasons, this word referred from early times to the African tribes who were not Christians. It cannot be reconstructed whether Father Maczki knew the etymology of this word, but it is in accordance with his orientalist and missionary approach. By this narrative, the products of the Western culture are just foreign, imported goods in the land of the “people of the East”, from Roman Catholic Christianity to classic philosophy, and their cultivation is the task of several missionaries, religious or secular ones.

Another frequent author of book reviews and discussion papers was Jenő Henrik Schmitt (1851–1916), who later developed his system of Gnostic Pacifist Anarchism. Criticisms and debates were formulated with pointedness and were not free from personal insults. This contesting spirit of the periodical was based on the difference in the philosophical beliefs of the authors. The only standard point is to maintain the common media sphere of Hungarian philosophers. The best example is the debate between Valér Maczki and Károly Böhm about the value of the first volumes of the periodical. Here, Father Maczki wanted to formulate the task and role of the periodical from the point of view of his missionary approach. This missionary attitude is also characteristic in the utterances of Alexander and Böhm. They regarded their endeavours and the new institutions they established as a mission in a cultural desert as their vocation for the nation’s development. Father Maczki’s paper said more because he criticised not only the general backwardness of what is a general topic in the East-Central European national cultures but also the new, modern and secular institutions of a vivid and prosperous period of the Hungarian philosophy. The Catholic background of his attack is hidden in his papers and Böhm’s answer (Böhm 1885). Böhm has never mentioned the Jewish origin of Alexander or Maczki’s close connection to the Roman Catholic Church. On the other side, Alexander’s professor, Cyrill Horváth,

and his several important disciples were Catholic monks. The religious root of their conflict became clear just from a notion of Böhm: "We Protestants cannot cultivate philosophy in another way, just seriously". Consequently, followers of other religions are not so severe in their work of thinking and the edition of a periodical.

6 Consequences for the Present

The critiques of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review* and the answers to these were particularly valuable because they appeared on the pages of the same periodical. Unfortunately, it was the last period of a common sphere for all Hungarian philosophers. In the following year, after Maczki's discussion papers in the *Hungarian Philosophical Review*, in 1886, the first Hungarian periodical appeared, which was engaged for a concrete philosophical school, the Catholic neo-Thomism, entitled *Periodical of Philosophy* (*Bölcseleti Folyóirat*, 1886–1906). The endeavour of the previous generations of Hungarian Catholic thinkers was to participate in the new, modern, national common sphere and represent the Catholic community there from the beginning of the 19th century. Cyrill Horváth was a Hungarian Academy of Sciences member and a professor at the Royal University in Budapest. He published his late articles in the *Hungarian Philosophical Review*. The members of the Catholic *fin de siècle* generation established *their own* philosophical periodical as the alternative to the *Hungarian Philosophical Review*, their own philosophical society (Saint Thomas Society, established in 1892) and their own Saint Stephen Academy (established in 1915), as an alternative of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The result was segregation that was similar to that which existed in the pre-19th century era. This situation inspired psychic and intellectual attitudes, which are also vivid nowadays.

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Béla Mester

**Controversies of Philosophers with Protestant, Catholic and Secular
Background in the *Hungarian Philosophical Review* (1882–1891)**

The first series of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review* (*Magyar Philosophiai Szemle*) was the first periodical of philosophy in Hungarian, established by a spontaneous initiative of several circles of philosophers in Budapest, with the financial support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. (However, the periodical of philosophy of the Academy has the same title nowadays, as well; it will be discussed here just the first ten years of the periodical when the Academy offered its financial support, but the editorial board was independent of it.) The single Hungarian periodical of philosophy and its open-minded editors inspired the scholar community of the Hungarian philosophers to use it as a forum for controversies of highly diverse opinions from the strict Positivism through the neo-Kantianism until the Catholic philosophy of this period. In these discussions, the religious or secular commitments of the participants had a fundamental role. A Catholic monk-teacher, Valér Maczki (SOCist), provoked the most vivid controversy; the founder editor had a clear Protestant commitment, and it appeared to be a Positivist secular worldview. It was the situation until the foundation of the first Hungarian periodical of philosophy, engaged for a particular philosophical school, namely neo-Thomism (*Periodical of Philosophy / Bölcséleti Folyóirat* 1886–1906). This paper offers an overview of the controversies on the pages of the *Hungarian Philosophical Review* with a strong background of worldview (*Weltanschauung*).

Keywords: *Catholic philosophy, Hungarian Philosophical Review, Hungarian philosophy, neo-Kantianism, neo-Thomism, Positivism, public philosophy.*

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