

researchers, succeeding to draw an accurate image of how hermeneutics can be useful in social and human sciences. It shows the situation of hermeneutic research in today's Hungary and, in addition, the possibilities and limits of philosophical hermeneutics (for instance, the limits of dialogue, language and understanding). The book *Szót érteni egymással. Hermeneutika, tudományok, dialógus* can be useful and interesting not only for those who are in contact with some area of human or social sciences, but also for readers seeking to understand something about social life, human nature, human interactions, understanding or self-knowledge. As I never intended to give an exhaustive description of this book, I tried to show just a few interesting topics and conclusions, so I let the readers discover more details about the problems approached, asking them to play the role of the interpreter onwards.

**Lack and Hungarian Philosophy
– An Essayistic Review on Ildikó Veres's Book –**

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It is not incidental that the conjunction “and” appears in the title of this review.

It is not there just to avoid a seemingly more scholastic titling such as “The concept of lack in Hungarian philosophy” or its “history”, etc. No: this conjunction stands there rather to connect questions and questionable things. So it is in fact a question itself.

The problem of lack has been a permanent concern of philosophy ever since “ancient times”, whether it was called *steresis* by the Greeks or *privatio*, *deficientia* by the Romans. It is such a central and unsettling affair that we could even say, paraphrasing Schopenhauer: If lack did not exist..., man would probably hardly philosophize at all. Or, for that matter, would hardly do anything...

It is a different question that philosophy – not only on its secondary levels – mostly “relates” (and not *refers*) to lack as something that should not be merely and primarily filled up or filled in – meaning: accepted or thought of as an existential challenge – but eliminated or removed – meaning: denied, exceeded – in the direction of a conceptual “completeness of being”, “lack-lessness”, “completeness” (absolute) – that is, lack of problems and questions – which of course always proves illusory. So, just like “lack” itself, the challenge of deficiency, its “philosophy” is always questionable.

Not less questionable is, however, the affair of “Hungarian philosophy” or “national philosophies”. This has mostly made its way through the agora of culture in

the former socialist countries, amidst the confusion of the 1989 turn. The questions and debates rising at that time have subsided in the meantime, and by this day – at least in the Hungarian case – they seem settled. They follow two directions, neither of them unproblematic. On the one hand, the problem of Hungarian philosophy is increasingly considered an exclusively *historical question*, and thus transferred to a limited circle of historians of philosophy. On the other hand, it becomes a compulsory “subject” of the Hungarian-language universities in and outside Hungary...

These are of course interconnected. And as I said, not unproblematically. For what does it actually mean that we can only research or speak about “Hungarian philosophy” as a “historical” question, or be able, forced, or willing to “deal” with it only as such? What else would this mean that this “Hungarian philosophy” – about which at this point we do not know what it means – always and exclusively “exists” as... HAD-BEEN-ness. The problem with it is mainly that in this approach the “historical” had-been-ness of Hungarian philosophy gets into our apparent “philosophical” PAST only as such – as HAD-BEEN-ness...

So it can hardly become a real preliminary, or perhaps dialogue partner or spring board of some lively today-ness. For that what always “is” only as something that had been, in fact – at a deeper thought – it never was. This is what sets these things apart from the business of, let’s say, “Greek” philosophy. Because when we speak of “Greek philosophy”, then we do not usually think of the thoughts of contemporary professors of Greek universities, but completely different thinkers... Those to whom we always have to turn in dialogue to articulate – recte: explicitly inquire – our current and very much ardent questions. And not only, or not primarily because of the historical-literary filiations that have reached us today, but much rather “in spite” of them.

Therefore Hungarian researchers or professors of philosophy usually feel closer to the “classics” of the “universal history of philosophy” or the stars of modern philosophy trends and movements than to the “ancestors” of their own environment, even if that particular “ancestor” taught or researched at the same university or department...¹

The researches about Hungarian philosophy are much rather connected to objectives and interests of science and research in the one hand, and also (national) cultural policy, as well as those connected to the legitimation of communities or personalities “dealing” with a certain “subject” or “field”. This has a role to play in the “discipline-related” and “unproblematic” prevalence of “turning into past”² that “Had-been-ness” while covering up its problematic nature and the challenges it might entail. That is to say: it becomes a mere “historical question”, and not as an actual – being in action, and being kept *in actu* – problematic challenge to be undertaken...

This the very reason why I accepted to review Ildikó Veres’s book: because I find that she feels this void, feels it, and partly also undertakes these problems. First, by

¹ See Lajos András Kiss, “Gondolatok a halálról, a szabadságról és a történelemről (Király V. István három könyvéről)” (Thoughts on death, freedom and history (On three books by István Király V.), *Alföld – Irodalmi, Művészeti és Kritikai Folyóirat* May (2010): 85–95.

² On the connections and differences between “Had-been-ness” and Past see my article “Had-been-ness and Past” in the journal *Philobiblon – The Bulletin of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library Cluj-Napoca* IV-V-VI-VII (1999–2002): 263–288.

being one of the small number of works which are *thematic*, albeit mostly in a historical sense, amidst a large number of summarizing or monographic attempts. On the other hand of course, this thematic is nothing else than *lack* itself. Even if the scope of the writings is broader and more diverse than this, given that we are dealing with a volume of studies.

The studies of the volume are divided into four larger, chapter-like groups: *Lack as “such”*; *The absolute and the philosophical system*; *Philosophy and criticism*; and *Segments of Béla Brandenstein’s philosophy*.

The title of the chapter *Lack as “such”* suggests a kind of conceptual analysis. This is somewhat toned down by the preface entitled *Lack and Secret – In Place of an Introduction*, where the author lists the most significant thinkers for the issue of lack, interconnected of course, yet all very different: Aristotle, Heidegger, Sartre. First of all, in order to approach the Hungarian – and primarily, yet not exclusively Transylvanian – thinkers who, analysing the existential situation after 1918–1920, had to face the problem of lack.

When I say that the suggested merely conceptual analysis of the preface is “toned down”, I mean that the explicit or implicit aim of conceptual analyses is usually a sort of “clarification of concepts”. Distinctly from this, the case here is rather to sketch the concepts (“lack”, “secret”, etc.) in their conceptuality, but actually in the *problematic nature* of this conceptuality. Including the meanings and interpretations rendered to them by Ildikó Veres herself. For, in the works of the thinkers under scrutiny (also), “lack” is primarily considered a “relational concept”, one that is contrary to the fullness of being. This has of course an epistemological – or rather simply knowledge-connected – context, for not everyone is or can be aware of all the things connected to the fullness of being. One shape of such non-awareness, such lack of knowledge is the lie, the “not-true”, the secret, the concealment, the mask, and – according to the author, and especially in case of arts – also the rareness.

The first study of the volume is built on these ideas: *Lack and life-world – Etudes on the not-true*. The study focuses on the work of two Hungarian thinkers from different times: Károly Böhm (1846–1911) and Béla Hamvas (1897–1968), starting from the fact that both took inspiration from ancient Indian thinking as a source of philosophy. In this sense the epistemological and logical considerations seem inseparable from ethical as well as ontological ones. Since for them this inseparableness and the *questionableness* of the related “fullness” and lack means that what – historically – is called metaphysics.

For Böhm, truth is the whole world, while every defect counts as a lack, one that creates a moving sense of lack. This acquires an ethical dimension as well in the sense and direction of the urge for completion and satisfaction, within the connections of the “social world-braids” of the I and Other-I. Thus the essence of the whole authentic world that one should strive for is precisely the truth contrary to non-truth and freed from mere “epistemology”. As opposed to this, for Béla Hamvas the whole world is a lie and a masked carnival. The world, the cavalcade of existence is ruled by the non-true, the lie, the camouflage, what identifies with its mask. He considers that the primal and original authenticity – as a sort of golden age – is permanently lost for the real historical world, but still something desirable that should be sought for, while he uses the mask – a term he uses as a critical analysis of the world after this loss – in the most “modern” and

everyday sense.¹ Although we do have some knowledge about the original authenticity (of course, a rare and obscure one, as a self-initiation, and as such, very uncertain), but – precisely on this account – the history of human life, the apparent saturation of the permanent carnival is in fact the concealed rule of the lack. The truth is therefore only a mere mask, or the untruthful “truth” of the mask seen as a “pseudo-face”. The effort to counter this is “vigilance” without which the philosophy of the future is also sentenced to inauthenticness. Not to mention man and human life.

The studies of the volume analyze aspects central and characteristic for the works of the chosen authors, while these analyses are as a rule duly detailed, therefore they are impossible to be presented one-by-one in a review. Instead, it emphasizes the consideration common, so it seems, for all the studies, that Ildikó Veres succeeds in proving that the issue of lack was a central concern for most Hungarian thinkers of the late 19th–early 20th century, and that they – also those not mentioned previously in this review – treated it primarily and essentially as a relational concept connected to a kind of metaphysical (illusory?) “fullness of being”. Something, that is, which eliminates not only lacks, absences or all kinds of deficiencies, but the lack as such, to the extent that it no longer needs to emerge at all.

Therefore, no matter how dynamic or mobilizing lack can be, it is ultimately still a kind of onto-theological (historical, ethical, logical, epistemological, etc.) stroke of faith... And not a living, factual characteristic of being. “Vigilance”, the challenges of conscience, etc. as tasks of philosophy are not understood in fact as its (lack’s) clarification(s) and acceptance(s), but rather, or merely, as its incidental (and not possible! since such a thing is not only not possible, but it is the very origin of man and being...) transgressions, eliminations, or the desire for such things.

If we think of lack simply as something that is missing, something incomplete – and what is more, in relation with the desires of the “fullness of being” – then it will be precisely in effervescent ontology of the lack... For the lack apparently becomes indeed *steresis* – or rather, privation – in this sense, which results in lack really meaning: absence. While absence is something more or less outlined, since we feel or know the absence of something and as such, lack shows off what it is, and also how it lacks. It is not by chance that thus that already Aristotle knew that *steresis* is similar to *eidos*, to form... However, such a concept of lack in its ontological depths seems unsatisfactory. For lack should not only be connected to absence and especially not only to the filling-up or completion of this absence, but with non-being, the privation of being and its dynamics. For instance, the temporality of beings and especially of the human being is also constituted by their past and future in every “present” time. But one of these – the past – exists no longer (no-longer-being) while the other – the future – does not exist yet (not-yet-being). Both of them occur simultaneously – as a particular kind of non-being – in how, for example, the man IS at any time...

Metaphorically we could also say about these no-longer-beings and not-yet-beings that they are “absent”, but it is clear still that no kind of “refill-programme” could be applied about them, which would engage any kind of fullness of being. And this

¹ In contrast to this concept, see my study: István Király V., “Beavatás, hallgatás, álarc” (Initiation, silence, mask) in Idem, *Határ – Hallgatás – Titok* (Limit – Silence – Secret) (Kolozsvár: Komp-Press, 1996), 117–133.

completedness fundamentally questions the “absolute” too, including the philosophical systems dedicated to the absolute, to which, with respect to Hungarian philosophy, Ildikó Veres consecrates a whole chapter in her book.

The volume continues with a series of studies about Béla Brandenstein, while the last chapter deals with the inevitability of philosophical criticism, introduced by a meditation on the present and future of philosophy, actually discussing the Hungarian Philosophical Society founded between the two world wars.

In conclusion, I could say that Ildikó Veres’s book about Hungarian philosophy and the central role of the subject of lack in it urges the readers/philosophers of our times to meditate about and creatively study the current and timely tasks of thinking, treating this history as a living and critical dialogue partner. For Hungarian philosophy was true PHILOSOPHY and it must remain so in its interpretations as well! This is the only way it can become our EUROPEAN critical past, present and future. And not merely a kind of historical “object”.

Translated by Emese Czintos

Literature as Life; Life as Literature.

A review of Irina Petraș’ book *Use(less) Digressions. Life and Literature*

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Irina Petraș’ book – literary historian and critic, president of Cluj Union of Romanian Writers – appeared in 2012 at Eikon Publishing House, entitled *Divagări (in)utile. Viață și literatură (Useful(/less) Divagations. Life and Literature)*. The book is somehow paradoxical due to its premises, and this is because the writing presents itself as a book of personal recoveries that don’t claim to save the world. We talk about personal recoveries, as the author desires to gather some of her speeches regarding the Romanian post-revolutionary literary life. On the other hand, these recoveries don’t expect miraculous effects in the world trajectory mutation. Moreover, in Blaga’s style, Irina Petras considers that her demarche is going to emphasize the uncertainty of the world change, becoming, subsequently, from this point of view, a useless demarche and a fortuitous act.

There are two levels of divagation – term borrowed by Irina Petras and assumed from George Bacovia – as species to place her writings. A content divagation consists in things that are to be said, established under the sign of a relative lack of seriousness (that is going to prove later a dimension of the author’s ludic spirit), and a formal divagation,