

Literati's Health and Illness as Metaphors of the Reflections to the Modernity in the 19th-century Hungarian Intellectual History

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Abstract

The present paper offers a description of several trends of the *mental history* of the 19th-century Hungarian *intelligentsia* as special answers to the questions of *modernity* and *modernization*. The often usage of the metaphors of *health* and *illness* in the public discourse of the researched epoch both in politics and in the cultural life is a form of the description of the problems of modernity and modernization. This paper offers an analysis of the differences between the approaches of modernity and modernization in the period of the *Hungarian Controversy on Kant* (1792–1822), in the *Hungarian Reform Era* (1825–1848), in the time of *neo-absolutism* (1849–1867), and in the *period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy* (1867–1918), including the first post-war reflections to this period. It will be continuously focused on the usage of the metaphors of *health* and *illness*, connected with the description of the types, and possible roles of the *intelligentsia*, embedded in the discourse about the characteristics, types, roles, virtues and weaknesses of the Hungarian *cities*. By the hypothesis of the author, the complex of the abovementioned problems can be interpreted within a framework of the *structural turn of the scholar public sphere* used by the *intelligentsia*, from the point of view of the *history of philosophy*, including the interpretation of the theoretical reflections to the communicational turn in the past.

Keywords: history of intelligentsia; history of mentality; Hungarian Controversy on Kant; Hungarian philosophy; turn of scholar public sphere.

Introduction

The topics analyzed in this article are parts of a common research project of the Polish and Hungarian Academies, concerning the role of the *intelligentsia* in the formation of the Polish and Hungarian nations as modern political communities. This ongoing research is a *follow-up project* of a previous research organized in the same frame, entitled *The Impact of Noble Legacy in Shaping Citizenship in Central Europe* (2014–2016). However, these projects are bilateral ones; consequently, the contributors' main task is to make a comparison between the Polish and Hungarian research results in the same field; research plans of these projects contain an endeavor for extending this comparison for third countries, and finally, in an ideal-typical case, for the whole of the East-Central European region. Consequently; however, this present case study is an analysis of the development of the usage of the metaphors of health and illness in the Hungarian intellectual history of the "long 19th century", focused on the topic of the *reflections to the process of the modernization*; the final aim of the investigations in this field is to offer a contribution for the

historiography of the typical problems of the modernization in the whole East-Central European region.

It is not possible to discuss in detail all the typical cases of the usage of the metaphors of health and illness in the analyzed period, in this relatively short paper. Data related to the Hungarian history of philosophy will be used, especially the texts of the significant controversies as sensitive indicators of the emergence of metaphors of health and illness as special types of body metaphors, in the philosophical discourse as answers for the challenges of the process of modernization in the sphere of the Hungarian *intelligentsia*. In the first section, the cultural shock caused by the transformation of the scholars' public sphere in the times of the Hungarian Controversy on Kant (1792–1822) will be discussed. A series of the typical cultural reflections of the *intelligentsia* for the emergence of the machinery of modern cultural industry, incarnated in capitalist editing houses, in the time of the Hungarian Reform Era (1825–1848) is the topic of the second section. Historical reflections to the romanticism of the Hungarian Reform Era and the revolution of 1848–1849, formulated in the period of the neo-absolutism (1849–1868) are the topics of the third section. In the fourth and the last section, a metamorphosis of the usage of the cultural heritage of the well-known body-metaphors, adapted for the circumstances and needs of the modern politics will be discussed.

“Dying Kant” and “Kant’s soul” as new metaphors of illness and health in the Hungarian philosophical discourse

In the very last period of the Hungarian debate on Kant (1792–1822), a highly ironic *pasquinade* was published in Hungarian language, entitled *The Priest and the Doctor around the Dying Kant* (Rozgonyi, 1819), written by the same author, who was the initiator of this great controversy of the Hungarian philosophical life in the beginning of the “long 19th century” as the author of the first critique of Kant, published in Hungary, shortly referred in the literature of philosophical historiography as *Dubia* (Rozgonyi, 1792). *Dubia* is a discussion paper in a separate volume, written in Latin, and formulated by the academic standards; *The Priest and the Doctor* is a popular *pasquinade*, published as a cheap brochure, written in Hungarian, far from any academic standards (without references, quotations, etc.). The links between these works are their common author and their common philosophical essence. Their author, József Rozgonyi (1756–1823) was a part of the intellectual establishment as a professor of philosophy of Calvinist colleges (in the town of Losonc, later in Sárospatak) both in the times of the publication of his former and later work. The core of the philosophical opinions outlined in these texts is the same; a derivation of the Kantian philosophy from the theory of causality of Hume, and a refutation of this supposed Humeian foundation of the Kantian philosophy, based on the critique of Hume formulated by the Scottish common sense tradition, especially by Thomas Reid (1710–1796). Opponents of Rozgonyi are the German and Hungarian followers of Kant in his generation, and not Kant himself, directly. One of the most significant differences between the styles of these works, identical ones in their philosophical content is the usage of a strong metaphor of *illness* in the argumentation of the Hungarian brochure. The contemporary philosophical life of Europe, in Rozgonyi’s opinion, has an invalid participant in a highly bad condition, i.e. Kantianism, personified by Kant himself. (Kant was not alive at the time when the brochure was published. His figure is symbolic; Rozgonyi does not speak about Kant’s personal death.) As usual, people (the philosophical public of Europe) call a priest and a doctor for the dying Kant. (One of his opponents in the controversy on Kant was a Roman Catholic priest, and the other one, however, was not a medical doctor, but a Ph.D. of Göttingen.) The meaning of this *metaphor of illness* is clear; the Kantian philosophy is not a false,

refuted theory, only, but an *illness*, a source of an *epidemic*, and a living dead *in*, and *for* the European philosophical life.

In the last period of the same controversy, similar phenomena can be observed on the other, Kantian side, as well. One of the alumni of Rozgonyi's college of Sárospatak, László Ungvárnémeti Tóth (1788–1820), a significant poet of his age has used a little bit morbid scenery in his popular article in Hungarian, written *for* the Kantian philosophy (Ungvárnémeti Tóth, 1819). The frame of his story is a fictive conversation between Kant, Aristippus (the head of the Hedonist school of ethics), and Mercurius (as the guide of the dead's souls), in the Elysian Fields. The main question of their conversation is that whether the Hedonist or, the Kantian souls represent the majority of the Hungarian newcomers in the other world. Ungvárnémeti Tóth's writing is another type of the usage of the metaphor of health and illness; it refers to the *mental condition* of the Hungarian nation *as a body, or as an organism*. The philosophical meaning of this writing is indirect, and depends on the ethical content; the moral quality of the dead Hungarian souls is a consequence of the popularity of the Kantian movement amongst the living Hungarians, by Ungvárnémeti Tóth's argumentation. It is symptomatic that Rozgonyi has not tolerated the usage of this metaphor in the writing of his alumnus-opponent; and he has identified it as an anomaly in a philosophical discourse. His answer *for the defense of Aristippus* (Rozgonyi, 1822) is actually his last lesson of the history of philosophy, on the historical values of the Cyrene School of Hedonism, for his talent, but perfidious alumnus. (Actually, it was his last writing before his death, and the last work of the Hungarian controversy on Kant, as well.)

The above-detailed characteristics of the Hungarian controversy on Kant show well the consequences of the change of the structure of the scholar public sphere in the mirror of the methods of the usage of the metaphors of health and illness, in East-Central Europe, in the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. At first, it can be observed a *dual usage* of the Hungarian and Latin languages within the philosophical discourse of the same (Hungarian) scholar community. Works published in Latin follow the international academic standards, and their style avoids the usage of metaphors. Works, written in Hungarian, sometimes by the same author, are full of metaphors, and they are out of the availability of the academic standard. It is clear that the target audiences of these publications are different; Latin works are written for the scholars, Hungarian ones for the uneducated, laic audience. The authors, who have published their works both in Latin and in Hungarian, at the same time, were under conditions of the so-called *functional bilingualism*.

This turn of the structure of the open sphere of the scholars has not restricted to the linguistic aspects, and it was not a specialty of the East-Central European region, only. The core of this change was the emergence of the *public philosophy*, out of the walls of the universities, and other institutions of the traditional intellectual establishment, e.g. the churches. (The Hungarian case is symptomatic from this point of view; the controversy on Kant was the first intellectual debate in the history of the Hungarian philosophy with participation both of Protestants and Catholics, in a common, laic communicational sphere.) The gap between the new *public philosophy* and the traditional philosophical systems of the intellectual establishment has its classic analysis in the well-known Kantian terms of *philosophia in sensu scholastico*, and *philosophia in sensu cosmopolitico*. However, Kant himself has formulated the distinction between these two methods of the philosophical thinking neutrally concerning their languages, a tension between the aristocratic but international vernacular of Latin, and the democratic but local discourse of the public philosophy, formulated in national languages, has emerged. The most important dilemma of the new situation was the inherent controversy of the *philosophia in sensu cosmopolitico* in a national language, determined to be local, and particular. This dilemma of the segmented public sphere and *functional bilingualism* of the philosophical life was not restricted to the smaller languages, or to the East-

Central European region, it was a problem for as large and developed scholar community and its audience, as the German philosophical life is. This general European problem has been mirrored within the German philosophy in the endeavors of the first generation of the Kantian philosophers for the distribution of the Kantian philosophy out of the familiar, domestic, but local and particular atmosphere of the German language, throughout in the European culture – in the language of the international audience of the Western philosophy, in Latin, as Friedrich Gottlob Born, professor of the Leipzig University has formulated in his correspondence with Immanuel Kant about the topic of his plan of the Latin translation of the main works of the Kantian critical philosophy, what was fulfilled successfully several years later, in Kant's lifetime, yet (Kant, 1796–1798).

However, the emergence of the *public philosophy*, formulated in *national languages* was linked with similar problems everywhere within the European philosophy; the smaller languages of the East-Central European region were highly sensitive for its consequences, for two reasons. At first, these language communities have never had the illusion that their language will be the new, common vernacular of the international philosophical life, after the rule of Latin, consequently, they have reflected consciously to the tension of the *locality* of the language of the public philosophy, and its *cosmopolitan* endeavors. Secondly, the turn of the structure of the scholar public sphere has happened relatively quickly, within the active life of the same generation, at least, in the Hungarian case. Within these circumstances, the malleability of the norms of the newcomer public philosophy it is not a surprising phenomenon. The frequent usage of the metaphors of illness in the works written in Hungarian, in the period of the communicational turn is a kind of the answer for the needs of a new type philosophy for a new type audience, with a non-traditional institutional background, and a new function.

In the next period of the Hungarian philosophy, after the establishment of the Hungarian Scholarly Society (1825, now: Hungarian Academy of Sciences), and before the revolution of 1848, in the so-called Reform Era, the changed conditions of the personal *Lebenswelt* (*lifeworld*) of the philosophical authors have supported the usage of the metaphors of health and illness within the controversies and debates of the Hungarian philosophical life. The *milieu* of the suddenly established scientific periodicals, with their formal requirements, deadlines, and size-limits was completely different from a university or college chair or a study room of a country gentleman. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences was a fundamental factor in the management of this modernization process, not only by the support of the scientific press. This management of the modernization of Hungarian science had a significant influence on the everyday life of the academic people, especially those members of the Academy who have lived regularly in Pest. (The rules of the Academy have distinguished the residents of Pest, and of the countryside.) The annual awards of the Academy have required the fulfillment of the task of reviews on the submitted manuscripts for a fixed deadline, by formal standards. The most of them were written by the members of the Academy living in Pest. The audience of the regular lectures and meetings was recruited from the same circles, etc. It is a symbolic phenomenon of the modernization that the Academy has required the submission of professional CVs of its new members, including the self-evaluation of their previous scientific careers, with short and longtime personal research programs and plans. (For Szontagh's CV, written "for the order of the secretary of the Academy", submitted on 10th May 1839, amongst the dozens of similar documents see: Szontagh, 1839a.) However, while the Hungarian philosophical authors of this age have evaluated their epoch as a blossom of their national culture, and the philosophy within it, in their personal life they were seriously shocked by the machinery of the modern cultural industry. In the next section, the answers to this change of the *Lebenswelt* (*lifeworld*) of the *intelligentsia* will be analyzed, exemplified by the writings of a typical

representative of the new type of the *public intellectual* in the field of philosophy, Gusztáv Szontagh.

Alienation from the objective world and from the female world as symptoms of the literati's illness, caused by the *milieu* of the modernity

Gusztáv Szontagh (1793–1858), as one of the main professional critics of the Hungarian philosophical literature and *belles-lettres*, as the author of the programme of the development of the Hungarian philosophy (Szontagh, 1839) and the political philosophy (Szontagh, 1843), was a prototype of the independent, modern public intellectual. Through his philosophical programmes and criticisms, he heavily influenced the public opinion of his age, especially in the field of philosophy. A standard element of Szontagh's criticisms was an analysis of the author's relationship to the empirical experiences both in the physical and social world. One of the most important indicators of the sound, reliable description of the world both in the *belles-lettres* and in the philosophy is the author's relationship with the female world, mirrored in their works (Szontagh's criticisms has referred *male* authors); the reliability of the female characters is the criterion of the sound literary world in the *belles-lettres*, and the successful argumentation for a philosophical opinion in a saloon maintained by educated women is the criterion for a sound philosophical worldview, by Szontagh's argumentation.

This female glance of the culture has emerged in his writings as early as 1826, when he has participated in a literary controversy about the women's role in culture. The cause of this debate was a negative criticism on a collection of average comedies, written by one of the first Hungarian female public intellectuals, Éva Takáts (1780–1845) (Takáts, 1822). Takáts has focussed on the unreality of the characters of the plays, especially the female ones. The (male) author of the comedies, Gábor Sebestyén (1784–1864), a lawyer and politician with extended influence, in his answer has formulated an ultra-conservative opinion about the prohibition of the female presence in any segment of the public sphere, including the pages of periodicals, based on Scriptural fundamentals (Sebestyén, 1826). Szontagh in his contribution (Szontagh, 1826) did not restrict his ideas to the simple right of the women in the public sphere; in his argumentation were formulated the advantages of the presence of a *female glance*, or, *female world-view* in the public sphere, for the correction of the male point of view, what is inclined to the alienation from the real world.

In Szontagh's ideas, these (usually sound) female and (often unrealistic) male world-views *have no biological determination*, they are *dependent on the social status* of the males and females in the 19th-century Europe. The gender aspects of the possible world-views meet here a reflection of modernity. The dependence of the male intellectuals on the institutional network of the modern culture and their assimilation to its standards press them to be a resident of the pseudo-world of these cultural institutions, instead of the empirical world, ruled by *common sense*. This unrealism of the male world-view of the epoch of his lifetime was always incarnated in *alienation in the words*, or (by an anachronistically modern term) in a *false logo-centrism*, in Szontagh's criticisms and discussion papers. This symptom of alienation is detectable throughout the societal and intellectual life, in his analysis. In the political life, it appears as the hegemony of the *mere rhetoric*, instead of the analysis of the statistics, economy, and the functionality of the institutions. In the field of the national historiography, especially, in the section of the *ethno-genesis*, the same alienation means the rule of the *speculative narratives*, based on rare and laconic data of the written sources, over the objective, empirical data of the archaeology, and the ethnographical parallels of the economics, tools, clothes, and houses of the peoples who live far from the influence of the modern civilization. This critical view of the modern *alienation in the words, in the language*, is the root of Szontagh's

role in the so-called “trial on Hegel”, one of the most discussed controversies of the Hungarian philosophical life in the 1830s, as the protagonist of the anti-Hegelian side. Szontagh’s critique of the Hegelianism, at least, the Hungarian branch of the Hegelian movement of the European philosophical life, has focused on the Hegelian concept of *speculative philosophy*, and the Hegelian terminology, what has become an autonomic, *auto-poetic (self-creating)* system, or, by other words, an alternative reality, instead of the real, empirical world, by the analysis of Szontagh. Within these circumstances, Hegelian philosophy cannot offer a sound description of the empirical world, just an escape from it, and can be an ideal-typical philosophical basis of the abovementioned illusions in the belles-lettres, historiography, and politics, as well.

This image of the alienation of the (male) authors from the real world in the imagined empire of the language, connected to a kind of the German idealism, especially to the Hegelian one, and linked to the alienation from the female glance, offers another opportunity for the usage of the metaphors of health and illness, concerning the lifestyles, and personalities of the criticized authors. However, the modern (19th-century) culture is almost purely masculine, this fact is not a symbol of the power and health; on the contrary, the pure masculinity is the root of the weakness, in this line of ideas. The absence of the objectivity of the world-view, and its symbol, the *female glance* make ill the *lonely male souls* in the machine of the modern institutional network of the cultural production. The description of the literati’s illnesses is between the real, physiological diagnosis, and the metaphor of illness, when it has appeared at first in the Hungarian culture as the *reason why* of the alienation from the real world, detailed above. It will be exemplified by the author's next period, by the description of the physiological symptoms of the intellectuals of his generation, and by his own ones, as well as in his *memoirs* (Szontagh, 1849–1851). It will be the topic of the next section of the present article.

Physiological symptoms of the literati of the Hungarian Reform Era (1825–1848) as the reason why of the world-view mirrored in their works, from a retrospective point of view

Szontagh’s endeavor in his memoirs was to offer a formulation of the synthesis of his philosophical opinions in an epitome, published sporadically, within the frame of criticisms, discussion papers, and philosophical programmes. A part of this aim was the synthesis of his opinions about the connection of the literati’s personal health and illness, and their sound, or false world-view. The first step was the formulation of his own, mental and physical condition, connected to his role in the machinery of the modern cultural industry, represented by the urban *Lebenswelt (lifeworld)* of Pest in his epoch. Szontagh, after the sporadic publication of several smaller but sometimes-important articles on the pages of the top-level Hungarian periodicals, has suddenly become a part of the sphere of the professional intellectuals of the Hungarian capital, in the 1830s. He offered a sensitive description of his arriving. It was winter, he had several dental problems and rented a flat on the fourth floor of a new building, which was still wet. Its windows only offered the panorama of the roofs of the neighboring houses. In spite of these circumstances of disillusion, he was inspired by the new intellectual environment, he had written the criticisms and discussion papers in industrial amount, and he had outlined the concept of his first serious philosophical monograph (Szontagh, 1839), in the same time, which was written within several moons, later honored by the correspondent membership of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The hard and exclusively intellectual work had an effect on his health. The first, easy realizable symptoms, concerning his physical conditions, were the *piles*, because of the continuous sitting in the libraries, and in his study room. The second symptom, concerning his mental conditions, probably was a light form of the *nervous breakdown*, based on his laconic description. Under these circumstances, after

the submission of the manuscript of his abovementioned monograph, he has left Pest for a medical cure in Starý Smokovec in the North Carpathians, near his parents' home, and has become an active, but "correspondent" participant of the intellectual life of Pest, for a few years (1839–1844). When he moved to Pest again in 1844, after an auto-therapy, he developed a healthy way of the urban life for himself. Based on these personal experiences, he had offered a general *physiological cause* of the alienation from the real world in his *memoirs* written between 1849 and 1851.

In the chapter of his *memoirs* entitled *Hungarian literature*, all his previous discussion papers, criticisms, and programmes have been connected to a physiological description of the lifestyle and the typical illnesses of the modern *intelligentsia*, in opposite of the ancient Greek culture, and the negative consequences of these illnesses for the modern world-view, with physiological and philosophical advices for the escape from the labyrinth of the ill, alienated pseudo-worlds, created by these modern intellectuals. His sporadic notes about the unhealthy lifestyle and illnesses of concrete individuals have been generalized in an overall visage of the *ill intelligentsia*, and its therapy. His diagnosis is relatively concrete; diseases of the modern intellectuals are the *piles*, because of the continuous sitting on the workdays, and the lack of body exercise, *hypochondria*, because of an over-reflection to the physical conditions of their own body as a consequence of the restricted perception of the outside world, and *different nervous problems* as consequences of the abovementioned psychophysiological symptoms. It is easy to see that this diagnosis is identical with the description of his *personal diseases*, in the same *memoirs*. The only difference between him and other intellectuals of his generation is the *consciousness* of the problem and the *endeavor for its solution*. However, this usage of the topic of the *illness in and of the culture* was rooted in a reflection of the consequences of the modernity and was connected to the *unnatural urban lifestyle*, and the *unhealthy artificial environment of the cities*, Szontagh has never become an opponent of the urbanity, he has searched the solution of his problems in an *urbane* way, *within the frames of the modernity*.

Instead of a conclusion: survival of Szontagh's topic in other function

Two decades after Szontagh's *memoirs* had been published, a brochure of a young intellectual and politician, János Asbóth (1845–1911) was released, as the first document of his conversion from the liberalism to the conservatism (Asbóth, 1873). It is interesting to see that the topics of this brochure are mainly similar to Szontagh's *loci*. The analyzed and criticized personalities of the Reform Era are almost the same, the parallelisms between the literary and political life appear in the same form in both of the texts. (The direct influence should be excluded; Szontagh was dead at the beginning of Asbóth's career, and his *memoirs* were not available.) The usage of the metaphor of illness is highly similar, as well; Asbóth's specialty is the description of the *theatrical swoons of the politicians in a public realm*, character and (bodily and mental) health of the described persons are in close connection in his chain of ideas. The gender aspect appears in another form in Asbóth's writings, he speaks about the *feminine character* of his (male) opponents. Despite these similarities, Asbóth's point of view is totally different from that of Szontagh; it is free from the personal experiences. By Asbóth's ideology, appeared in more radical form two years later in his conservative manifesto (Asbóth, 1875), the *illness in and of the modern culture* is not the problem of the whole of the nation, at least, its *intelligentsia*, but a characteristic of the representatives of his political opponents, only. The solution of the problem is different, as well, in Asbóth's writings; he has searched the methods of the escape from the modern world, but he has not linked the *modernity* and the *urbanity*, yet. In the Hungarian conservative thought, the connection between the criticism of the modernity and urbanity has appeared in a vivid form after the WWI, in

the book of great impact written by Gyula Szekfű (1883–1955) (Szekfű, 1920), linked to the term of *sinful city*.

Szekfű's essay has been directly rooted in Asbóth's one, their titles are the same, as well; and Asbóth's analysis has used the same topics that the contemporaries of the Reform Era, e.g. Szontagh, has described. The personal experience of the shock of the modernization in the *Lebenswelt* (*lifeworld*) has evaporated during seventy years, what remained is an ideological usage of the topics of *illness*, and *sinful city*, with programmes of the solution out of the sphere of the urbanity, and modernity. It has become a mere rhetoric; open for the biological metaphors of the 20th-century languages of politics, far from the atmosphere of the Reform Era.

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