

IN MEMORIAM
ISTVÁN M. FEHÉR
(1950-2021)

On 17 June 2021, after a long illness born with patience and a persistent work ethic, István M. Fehér, professor emeritus, Széchenyi Prize-winning professor of philosophy, full member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, passed away in Budapest.

István M. Fehér was born on 24 April 1950 in Budapest. He began his university studies in English and Italian in 1969, and later graduated in philosophy from the Eötvös Loránd University. In 1977 he was appointed assistant professor at the Department of History of Philosophy at the Eötvös Loránd University. He defended his doctoral thesis in 1979, his candidate thesis in 1985 and his academic doctoral thesis in 1990. In 1981 he was promoted to assistant professor, in 1987 to associate professor and in 1992 to professor. Between 1990-97 he was head of department. He has lectured in the fields of modern and contemporary history of philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics, and since 1992 he has been the developer and director of the Doctoral Programme in Hermeneutics at the Eötvös Loránd University. In parallel, between 1992-97 he was also a professor at the University of Miskolc, and from 1993 he was head of the History of Philosophy Department. In 1991 he taught at the József Attila University in Szeged, and between 1995-97 he was professor at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Piliscsaba. While retaining his position as a historian of philosophy at the Eötvös Loránd University, he was also professor of the history of ideas at the Andrásy Gyula German Speaking University in Budapest, from its foundation in 2002 until his retirement. Between 1997-2000, he was awarded a Széchenyi Professor Fellowship. He has made extended research trips and held guest lectures at universities in Italy (1983-84), Germany (1987-88), and at the University of Virginia in the United States in 1992-93. He was a Humboldt fellow at the Ruhr University in Bochum and visiting professor at the Humboldt University in Berlin in 1999.

In his research in modern and contemporary philosophy, István M. Fehér has been involved in an in-depth study of German idealism, phenomenology, existential philosophy, neo-Marxism and philosophical hermeneutics. His research areas have included the philosophy of Schelling and Hegel, Husserlian phenomenology, the

philosophical work of Martin Heidegger, György Lukács, Jean-Paul Sartre, Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the humanist and hermeneutical tradition associated with it, as well as 20th century German, French and Italian philosophy. His interest extended to the course and outcome of the philosophical debates that shaped the main schools of thought. He was receptive to interdisciplinary research, and was deeply involved in questions at the interface of philosophy and literary studies, and in the history of ideas. He was an internationally renowned researcher in his field, who maintained lively professional and friendly contacts with students of Heidegger and with representatives of philosophical hermeneutics clustered around the elder Gadamer. His research has led to the writing of several monographs, most notably his book on Martin Heidegger. He has also edited volumes of essays and conference proceedings, and has published numerous studies in Hungarian, German, English, French and Italian, along with his translations of Heidegger and Gadamer. He has presented his research at international philosophical conferences, universities and in academic societies.

István M. Fehér was a creative, innovative historian of philosophy, who did not stop at analysing, summarising and synthesising the philosophical achievements he studied, but found partners in great predecessors and contemporaries, and in the course of an intensive philosophical dialogue with them, he worked on developing his own philosophical approach, his novel insights and original ideas. His creative thinking has focused mainly on asserting the values of the humanist tradition as it emerges in the hermeneutic horizon, engaging in dialogue with contemporary experience, exploring the deeper connections between being and meaning, and illuminating the possibilities of meaning and hermeneutic benevolence. His attention was also focused on questions of philosophical scepticism and critique, the conditions for the cultivation of debate and dialogue, especially with regard to the possibilities offered by philosophical hermeneutics, while he was also able to show the limits of these possibilities as the "cross of hermeneutics". His professional conduct and his human attitude were characterised by impeccable preparation and competence, an unconditional respect for scientific values, openness, modesty and humility in his philosophical research and in his collegial relations. The volume of his work, its pioneering character for philosophical hermeneutics, and its inestimable value for the reception of the modern European philosophical tradition, is indicated by the publication of *Filozófia, történet, értelmezés. Hermeneutikai tanulmányok (2000-2020)* (Philosophy, History, Interpretation: Hermeneutic Studies) by L'Harmattan shortly before his death. It is a four-volume collection of the products of his work over the last two decades and a unique achievement in contemporary Hungarian philosophy.

As a teacher, researcher and the most prominent representative of philosophical hermeneutics in Central Europe, István M. Fehér was a *school-establishing* philosopher. His students who completed their doctorates under his guidance are now renowned representatives of Hungarian philosophy. Under the auspices of the ELTE and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Hermeneutical Research Group, which he founded and which brings together his direct students and colleagues, has enriched the Hungarian and international hermeneutical literature with new research results, textbooks and conference proceedings since 2012. Even more important was the cultivation of a fertile culture of philosophical debate, which also turned the cultivation of philosophy into a living practice among his disciples. On several occasions (2010, 2012, 2017), his students and colleagues have published joint volumes of studies in his honour.

István M. Fehér has also worked continuously as a scientific organiser. The highly successful international conferences he organised in Budapest (on Heidegger in 1989, on Gadamer in 2000, on Schelling in 2003 and 2014) were landmarks on the Central European philosophical scene. He was actively involved in professional societies and in the work of organisations governing scientific life. For a long time he was a member of the board of the Hungarian Philosophical Society, and between 1990-95 he was its secretary general. He was elected a member of the Board of the International Schelling Society in 1986, of the International Hermeneutical and Scientific Society in 1994, and the Honorary President of the Hungarian Daseinanalytical Association in 2004. He has served on the Scientific Committee of Philosophy and the Scientific Ethics Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and as a doctoral representative to of General Assembly of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He also co-chaired the Philosophy Committee of the National Provisional Accreditation Commission in Hungary. He has been involved in the editing of several journals. From 1982 to 1995 he was editor of the *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* (Hungarian Philosophical Review), and participated in the editorial boards of several foreign journals (*Heidegger-Studien*, *Itinerari filosofici*, *Heidegger-Jahrbuch*). Since 2000 he has edited the series *A filozófia útjai* (The Paths of Philosophy) published by L'Harmattan.

István M. Fehér has won the highest professional awards for his rich scientific activity and extensive life's work. He was elected a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2007 and a full member in 2013. In 2013, he was awarded the Széchenyi Prize for his internationally renowned achievements in the field of Heidegger studies and philosophical hermeneutics, as well as for his multifaceted teaching, research and scientific organizational activity.

A special mention must be made of István M. Fehér's professional and friendly relationship with the Babeş-Bolyai University, and in particular with the Hungarian section of the Philosophy Department. This relationship has been continuous and multifaceted from the second half of the 1990s until now. He has frequently served in doctoral committees as a subject matter expert and held numerous lectures and seminars for students and lecturers. For a longer period, he helped to maintain the Hungarian-language master's programme in hermeneutics as an annual guest lecturer. Here, he gave a series of semester-long lectures on the hermeneutical critique of the aesthetic and historical consciousness. He last visited Cluj in October 2016, when he was invited by the Centre for Applied Philosophy of the Babeş-Bolyai University to give lectures in Hungarian and English and share his professional and organizational experiences on the activities of the Hermeneutics Research Group of the Eötvös Loránd University. He has published several papers in the Central University Library's journal *Philobiblon* and in the Transylvanian Hungarian Philosophical Society's journal *Többllet*, in volumes edited in honour of professors of philosophy, and currently has a two-part, voluminous German-language paper in the Philosophy series of the *Studia* of the Babeş-Bolyai University.

With the death of István M. Fehér, a leading figure in Hungarian and international philosophical education and research, an irreplaceable expert and irreplaceable friend, has passed away. The void he left behind will be unfillable for a long time.

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