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**“System” in Philosophy as a Consequence
of the Institutional Context of Universities***

Abstract

Importance of the educational context in the creation of works of philosophy is known well by the historians of philosophy. Without a target audience consisted by disciples, any philosophical work could not be formulated from Aristotle's works through Hegel's lectures to the present context of a philosophical work in our today academic life. The first aim of my paper is to analyse the connection between this educational context and the phenomenon of “system” in philosophy. Second aim of mine is to characterise a new cultural requirement in the 19th-century European philosophy for philosophical system-building. Third topic of my paper is the adaptation of the requirement of “system-philosophy” into the program of establishing national cultures in Central Europe of the 19th century. The consequence of this program in the age of decline of philosophical systems is the last topic of my contribution.

Key words

Bernát Alexander, Cyrill Horváth, Gusztáv Szontagh, János Erdélyi, Károly Böhm, philosophical systems, post-Hegelian philosophy

Introduction

In the following I will outline the phenomenon of *philosophical system* not as an intrinsic feature of several works of philosophy, but as a cultural requirement, emerged in the institutional environment of theoretical thinking. The first inevitable condition of a philosophical system as a cultural phenomenon and literary genre is the educational context of philosophy from the early times, and especially in the special case of universities. The main thesis of my paper is that a new context of philosophical systems in modern times has emerged, developed in the universities before. It is the new-type public sphere of the scholar periodicals out of the former institutional network of the universities, with organized reviews of philosophical works. Under conditions of the Central-European cultural nation-building in the first half of the 19th century, this structural switch of the public spheres, from the university lecture rooms to the pages of scholar periodicals was in synchrony with a linguistic switch from the aristocratic, but universal Latin to the democratic, but particular national vernaculars. The new media has found its role in the process of making national cultural canons in the scholar sphere.

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In the following, first I will offer a short outline of the general requirements of the institutional context of education, concerning the philosophical system-making, from the early time to the university network of the age of the classic German philosophers. Later, I will show several cultural patterns of the requirement of system-making, emerged in the new media in Central-European national languages, borrowed from the world of literary and art criticism, in the second part of my paper. The next part of this paper will be focussed on the typical answers of the 19th-century philosophers toward this required system-making, emerged in the process of cultural nation-building, under conditions of the post-Hegelian decline of systems in the European philosophical climate. I will outline several consequences of this difficult constellation, composed by the requirement and exclusion of the possibility of philosophical systems in the same time, in the last part of my article. My examples for the above mentioned phenomena of history of philosophy are based on my recent researches of the narratives of the Hungarian historiography of philosophy, in the mirror of a planned comparative Central-European history of philosophy.

Institutional context – philosophical systems as parts of curricula of the universities

However, the educational context of the creation of philosophical systems is well-known in the history of philosophy; its importance is under- or over-estimated by the historiography. A historiographer of philosophy sometimes intends to reconstruct a “system” from any fragmented data, and at the same time hesitates to recognise the large volumes of school-philosophy as real philosophical systems, based on the idea of philosophy established in the historiographer’s education at universities. Forms and genres of philosophy were connected to an educational context in every time, but from this context a system of philosophy does not evidently follow. First forms of the conservation of the philosophical thought do not look like “systems”, they exist in the context of the personal communication of a great philosopher. Intellectual heritages of the archaic figures of philosophy are incarnated in systematised collection of the oral tradition, compiled by a group of disciples with authority, like in the case of Confucius’ *Lunyu*,¹ or by different individual disciples, keeping the possibility of personalised memory, and a multiple image of the common master, like in Socrates’ case in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*.² Either in the case of the authorised and canonised memory of an intellectual community and a personal remembrance of an individual disciple cannot form a philosophical *system* from the spiritual fortune of their estimated masters. In this genre the maximum size of information is contained by the form emerged in Plato’s early dialogues. In this form of philosophical works a philosophical thesis is embedded within a conversation, and formulated by a *third person*, a philosophical writer who plays a key-role in the cultural memory. These texts require a special target audience, familiar with the spirit of a particular teaching of philosophy, under the leadership of masters who are in an established position of the chain of philosophical authors of the same school. However, though their spiritual identity revolves around the fact that they are followers of the (deceased) founder of the school, actually they are not identical with a circle of the personal audience of a master, in the structure and working of their group. This imaginary *group of symbolical followers of a teaching* is the first step toward an abstract idea of the public sphere of philosophy. However,

the model was emerged from concrete communities of disciples of different masters; now it is divested of personal relationships and individuality.

A change of the genre of philosophical works has emerged, when significant philosophers has recognised the importance of the ideal-typical target audience of their works; it is a generalised idea of the present and future *reading community* of their real and imagined disciples. As early time as that of the didactic poems of the pre-Socratics, philosophers have intended to neglect the function of the *third person* mentioned above, and managed the formulation of their own philosophies, writing their didactic poems as their *last spiritual will and testament*. The new context of communication, consciousness of a special target audience in the author’s mind, in an educational context requires summarising their thought within a system. At the beginning of philosophical disciplines, in Aristotle’s oeuvre, the connection between the structure of the philosophical system and the teaching practice is clear. To create a system or to establish a school was almost equivalent, and the institutional background of this educationally embedded system-philosophy was the network of universities from the middle age. However, we can find important exceptions in the great philosophical authors of early modernity; in many important cases, a philosophy, born far away from the world of universities, has become a *system* in a strict meaning of the word in a network of the universities. The best example is the history of the reception of Descartes’ works and thoughts within the universities of the Netherlands, and in several German universities. Without the series of diligent Dutch professors who have created from Descartes’ texts organised networks of theses of school-philosophies, applied for the requirements of the university lecture rooms, Cartesian theory could have hardly emerged as influential trend of early modern Continental philosophy as it really was.

In the next epoch of the communicational system of Western thought, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, production of new systems has emerged as a clear requirement for a significant professor, especially in the German universities. In the same time, philosophical debates have found a public sphere different from the lecture rooms that are the virtual space of printed scholar periodicals, with their columns for regular reviews of philosophical books. A serious amount of the emergence of new, and newer systems of philosophy, developed in detail, and rooted in a university environment, and the new sphere of their evaluation out of this context, in the new world of scholar periodicals; all have emerged in the same historical moment. This new structure of scholar community with different spheres has its classical description in the analysis written by Immanuel Kant. The distinction between the public and private usage of reason, and between *philosophia in sensu scholastico* and *philosophia in sensu cosmopolitico*, both made by the German philosopher are rooted in

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Confucius’ heritage is a paradigmatic case of the structure of the cultural remembrance of the archaic age of theoretical thinking. However, he is known as an author of works as well, the content of his own books, a collection of traditional songs (*Shijing*), and a chronicle of his homeland, country of Lu (*Chunqiu* “*Springs and Autumns*” = *Annals*) are far from his theoretical thinking, collected in his *Lunyu* (“*Conversations and Sayings*”, in English translations usually *Analects*). The later one was edited by the third generation

of *rujia* (*Confucians*). For a new, reliable English version see: E. Bruce Brooks, Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects*, Columbia University Press, New York 2001.

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For a new English translation see: Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, Trans. Amy L. Bonnette; Introd. by Christopher Bruell, Cornell University Press – Agora Editions, Ithaca 1994.

this new context of philosophical communication, at least partly.³ What was in Kant’s description a functional distinction between the thinking activities of the same person in different public spheres, it has changed, in many cases, different functions of intellectual life, incarnated in different persons: university professors and “public intellectuals”. The latter type of the *intelligentsia* has often found an institutional background in new-model organisations of the intellectual life, especially in the national academies of sciences. (For instance, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, founded in 1825, was consciously organised partly as a counter-institution of the university in the same city. The lecture room of the Academy was a counter public sphere of the university lecture room, in a sense; but the core of the change of the public sphere of scholars was hidden in the strategic, long-time support of the periodicals of different disciplines, amongst them that of philosophy, by the Academy.) Under these circumstances, the task to express the need of production of systems forms a new role of the intellectual life, that of the *professional critic* of philosophical works. By the words of one of the first representatives of this type in Central Europe in the first half of the 19th century, his task is not to produce new philosophical systems, as a contemporary German professor, he offers a theoretical reflection of system-making, a kind of the actualised meta-philosophy.⁴

Cultural requirement of philosophical system as a literary genre in Central Europe

These special functions of the differentiated public spheres of the scholars has emerged in East-Central Europe in the same time as another change of communication from the ancient, aristocratic universality of the Latin of the schools to the enlarged, but particular and local open sphere of the national vernaculars. In this situation, criticism of philosophical works has been contextualised in the process of cultural nation-building, and has used the patterns of this discourse, borrowed especially from the contemporary writers of literary criticism.⁵ The Hungarian case is paradigmatic in its institutional background: public intellectuals, living often on grants of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, write criticisms about the philosophical works of professors, on the pages of scholar periodicals, sponsored by the same Academy. It is a new context for philosophical systems. In the previous century, a professor of philosophy has systematised his opinions because of the requirements of education, and sent the epitome of this system to print because of a new university rule.⁶ These works, been before parts of different European cultural networks, have emerged as intrinsic parts of a complete national culture, in the new context of the 19th century, the age of rising national cultures.⁷ At first, the requirement of a philosophical system has emerged as the need of a nation-level narrative and canon of history of philosophy, with plans for the future.⁸ Trends of this organised historiography were clear; the end (*telos*) of this narrative was producing new philosophical systems in large volumes in the future, after the mere reception of world trends. The patterns of this meta-philosophy were the same as in the vivid debates in the same time about the genres of fictional literature. In this context, a complex national culture requires the genres of *epic* after the model of *Kalevala*⁹ and *Fritjof’s Saga*,¹⁰ the later one produced by the contemporary literary and political movement of another periphery of European culture, entitled *Scandinavism: Plays of the Theatre* after the model of the contemporary Romantic cult of Shakespeare;¹¹ and *novel* after the model of Walter Scott. In the sphere of philosophy, the requirement of pro-

ducing systems after the model of German professors, with different content, has the same role as writing large novels, or series of novels in the literary life in Scott’s style, about our own history. A complex, emancipated national culture, which is equal with other European cultures, must have both novels and philosophical systems in large volumes in our own language as well as a literary life. In this case the parallelism is clear: a critic who has canonised a book of his time as the first *modern* Hungarian novel, and has recognised that the Hungarian literature has passed its non-age and attained its majority, was the same person who first formulated the requirement of producing new systems in the philosophical life of the same national culture.¹² It was evident

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Kant repeated the above mentioned key terms of his analysis in emphasised *loci* of his main works, *passim*, for instance in his *Was ist Aufklärung?*, in his lectures on logics, in his lectures on metaphysics by the edition of Pölitiz, and in *The Critique of Pure Reason* as well.

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Gusztáv Szontagh, one of the most known and employed critics of the Hungarian intellectual life of the first half of the 19th century on the top of his career, in the eighteen thirties and forties mainly lived on emoluments of his philosophical criticisms and on the grant of the Academy. In his *ars poetica* the role of philosophy is a critical analyse of all other production of the contemporary culture. Demand of system-making in contemporary German school-philosophy was an often quoted wrong example for the influential cultural patterns of Central Europe, and the Hungarian philosophy in his articles, with a comparison of the role of the French academic people in the alternative public sphere of intellectual saloons of Paris, as a good instance.

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These functions have met in the same person in several cases. For instance, the above mentioned main figure of the early Hungarian criticism of philosophical works, Gusztáv Szontagh has a remarkable role in the critical analysis of the rise of the genre of novel.

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Queen Maria Theresa has reformed the faculties of theology and arts of the university in 1753. (In this time Hungarian Kingdom—without Croatia—had only one university.) By the new rules it was the professors’ task to write compendia and textbooks based on their university courses, instead of the regular dictation in lecture rooms, which was usual before.

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The roots of the rising Central-European national cultures of the 19th century in the history of communication, and their philosophical context were analysed in details in my recent paper; see Béla Mester, “Philosophers in the Public Sphere of the Cities – the Birth of the National Philosophies from the Spirit of the Editorial Offices and Saloons in the 19th Cen-

ture”, *Limes: Borderland Studies* 4 (1/2011), pp. 7–20.

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It is a symptomatic event that one of the first actions of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was to initiate an award for writing a history of Hungarian philosophy. It was clear for the contemporaries that it is an intrinsic part of the cultural and scientific program of the Academy. For the winner proposal see: Pál Almási Balogh, “Felelete ezen kérdésre ... [Answer for the Question ...]”, in: *Philosophiai pályamunkák [Design Proposals in Philosophy]*, Magyar Tudós Társaság, Buda 1835, pp. XI–XVI; 1–211.

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However, final edition of the Finnish epic were published as late as 1849, its first version was available from 1833, and several draughts were published a few years earlier, in the end of the third decade of the 19th century. Extracts from this work were available in Hungarian translation from the beginning.

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Work of Esaias Tegnér was published at first in 1825. An extract was translated to Hungarian in the same year on the pages of the most influential literary periodical of this epoch.

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For a detailed analysis of the role of Shakespeare in the Romantic literature, with Central-European data see: Péter Dávidházi, *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare: Literary Reception in Anthropological Perspective*, Macmillan – St. Martin’s Press, Basingstoke – London – New York, 1998 (*Romanticism in Perspective: Texts, Cultures, Histories*).

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I should refer here again the above mentioned Gusztáv Szontagh. His famous criticism on a popular novel of his age was published in 1836, and his manifesto for the future of Hungarian philosophy was published three years later, only. For the later one see: Gusztáv Szontagh, *Propylaeumok a’ magyar philosophiához* [Propylaea for the Hungarian Philosophy], Magyar Kir. Egyetem, Buda 1839.

for him, and for his target audience as well that these cultural phenomena are two faces of the same entity. In the end of the first half of the 19th century, we can observe an established national narrative of the history of philosophy, and an established pattern of the philosophical discourse about the requirement of system-making as the task of the future.

Central-European cultural requirement of philosophical system-making under the conditions of post-Hegelian European decline of system-philosophies

It was an enormous external circumstance that the requirement of systems was expressed in the most explicit form in Central-European cultures in an epoch when the decline of philosophical systems was a commonplace in Europe, under conditions of the post-Hegelian state of philosophy in the middle of the century. In the following I will offer a short reconstruction of the cultural patterns about the philosophical systems in the second half of the 19th century with their antecedents a few decades ago and its several consequences for the later period, by a single example of the unconscious interaction of a public intellectual, in the role of the author of series of criticisms of philosophy, and a university professor, in the role of the would-be system-maker. The context is the jungle of the 19th-century debates on Hegelianism. Our public intellectual is working in these years on a new narrative of Hungarian philosophy, and on a new canon of the philosophical life of his contemporaries.¹³ By his intentions, both of them must be established on Hegelian basis – he intended to use those against his anti-Hegelian opponents.¹⁴ Within an ordered overview of the contemporary intellectual life, he has mentioned several articles written by professor *Cyrrill Horváth* that there is a possible reading of it, as a promise for a system; later, he has published several positive criticisms about the new works of the same author, emphasising him as a good example, against the style and thoughts of his anti-Hegelian opponents.¹⁵ From this point, his accident note about a would-be philosophical system has begun its individual life as a cultural topic. Our professor has started to think of himself as an author of a philosophical system – written in the future. His disciples, who have been informed from the scholar periodicals, believed that their professor has a complete philosophical system, and they often asked him for interpretations of the actual questions of philosophy “in the light of *concretism*”, by their master’s system. The most faithful ones have tried to find the system amongst his manuscripts, after his funeral, and have made a scandal when it was mentioned in a necrology that this system remained a promise, and it was never developed. One of his best disciples, heritor of his professorship, has written in details about his hopeless, but continuous interviews with his master about the supposed system.¹⁶ It is interesting the relationship between Professor *Horváth* and his other disciple, *Bernát Alexander* who has become later the father of history of philosophy in Hungary as a special discipline of philosophy, and the first owner of the new professorship of history of philosophy at the university of Budapest. The cultural period of his *peregrinatio academica* was a desert from the point of view of philosophy, and he wanted an intellectual guidance from his professor in a continuous correspondence. He wrote in Berlin, in 1872 that there are only six or seven students at the university studying philosophy as a major, and one of them, only, who is a hope for the future of philosophy, having sufficiently educated and clear mind. Later, he has described the bad and hopeless atmosphere of the German philosophical circles; almost everyone had given up on the development of new philosophi-

cal systems, and for those working on such plans, those works are closer to the agony of philosophy than its renaissance.¹⁷ In this pessimistic atmosphere, he asked his professor for intellectual guidance for his first professional writing, a book-review,¹⁸ and his question was how he can interpret this system from the point of view of *concretism*. However, we are not informed about the professor’s answers; we can imagine their content based on the later career of the disciple. He has given up the system-philosophy in his own works and ceased to believe in a rise of any new complete system in philosophy. Philosophy for him remained a professional historiography of philosophy, with its philological particularities. However, a lot of classics are available in Hungarian by his great project of systematic translation of the main works of philosophy; and the terms introduced by him are inevitable parts of Hungarian scholar vocabulary in philosophy, *as a philosopher* he remained a rarely quoted author.

It was not the only method for the coexistence of the cultural topic of the requirement of a system-philosophy. Another excellent member of his generation thought of the system as a control of philosophical ideas; a good and true idea must be able to be a basis of a system without contradiction, according to his opinion.¹⁹ However, in his case, the idea of a system did not kill the possibility of philosophical work; the image of a philosophical system contained interesting elements in his and in his disciplines’ thinking. This idea of system is actually less a system of thoughts, more a series of volumes, containing the disciplines of philosophy separately, able to use it in the universities. Because of this strict and formal meaning of a system, he and his disciples have focussed on the development of the masterpiece and less on the actual discourse of philosophy.

Conclusion

Above, I have offered at first a short overview of the educational context of the history of philosophical system-making, with a special regard to the universi-

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I will refer here János Erdélyi, the most known figure of the 19th-century Hungarian Hegelianism.

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The most influential figure of his anti-Hegelian opponents was the above mentioned Gusztáv Szontagh.

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It is enough for the aims of the present article to refer his first article in this topic; see: János Erdélyi, “Horváth Cyrill”, *Új Magyar Múzeum* 2 (1854), pp. 13–29.

16

Original resource of this often quoted story is the remembrance of this monk-professor, namely *Imre Pauer*, recorded for the history of the Hungarian Province of the Piarist Order; for details see: Imre Bíró, “Horváth Cyrill (1804–1884)”, in: György Balanyi (ed.), *Magyar piaristák a XIX. és XX. században: Életrajzi vázlatok* [Hungarian Piarists in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Biographical Sketches], Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 1942, pp. 85–95.

17

Samu Szemere (ed.), *Alexander Bernát ifjúkori levelei Horváth Cyrillhez* [Letters of the Young Bernát Alexander to Cyrill Horváth], Neuwald, Budapest 1928, p. 30. The ‘new system’ referred by Alexander is that of Eduard Hartmann.

18

His actual tutor, Professor Zimmermann at the university of Vienna has offered for him to write on the works of Immanuel Hermann Fichte, son of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Op. cit. 16.

19

I refer here the main figure of Hungarian neo-Kantianism, *Károly Böhm*. However, he was the initiator of the first philosophical periodical in Hungarian, by the strict meaning of the word (1882), because of the cultural requirement of *system-making*, he has written a relatively few amount of scholar articles, and he has focussed on his well-planned system, *Man and His World*. (The last three volumes of six was edited by his disciples based on his notes and manuscripts after his death in 1931.)

ties. Later, I have drawn a sketch of the cultural position of the philosophical system-making under conditions of the 19th-century modern media that is the world of printed periodicals, and the new context of nation-building with its cultural patterns. In this time, cultural topics about philosophical systems were borrowed from the theory of literature, and it was parallel with the old idea of the novel as a required representative genre of a national culture. In the end of my paper I have offered several instances of the new dysfunctions of this highly embedded cultural topic at the end of the 19th century. We should now realise that theory of literature has given up this network of concepts, which was borrowed by us, historians of philosophy, and now uses other paradigms. It is time to rethink the old idea of a system in philosophy as a requirement of our philosophical activity, and a historical tradition of the universities, which remained only as a requisite in the canons of our historiographies.

Béla Mester

**»Sustav« u filozofiji kao posljedica
institucionalnog konteksta sveučilišta**

Sažetak

Važnost obrazovnog konteksta u stvaranju filozofskih djela dobro je poznata povjesničarima filozofije. Bez ciljne publike koju čine učenici, niti jedno filozofsko djelo od Aristotelovih djela preko Hegelovih predavanja do suvremenog konteksta filozofskog rada u današnjem akademskom životu. Prvi je cilj ovoga teksta analizirati vezu između obrazovnog konteksta i fenomena »sustava« u filozofiji. Drugi je cilj okarakterizirati novi kulturni zahtjev europske filozofije 19. stoljeća za izgradnjom filozofskih sustava. Treća tema članka je prilagođavanje zahtjeva za »sustavnom filozofijom« u program uspostavljanja nacionalnih kultura u Srednjoj Europi u 19. stoljeću. Posljedica ovoga programa u razdoblju pada filozofskih sustava je posljednja tema ovog priloga.

Ključne riječi

Bernát Alexander, Cyrill Horváth, Gusztáv Szontagh, János Erdélyi, Károly Böhm, filozofski sustavi, post-hegelijanska filozofija

Béla Mester

**„System“ in der Philosophie als Auswirkung
des institutionellen Kontextes der Universitäten**

Zusammenfassung

Die Bedeutsamkeit des institutionellen Kontextes bei der Schaffung philosophischer Werke ist unter den Philosophiehistorikern wohlbekannt. Ohne das aus Jüngern bestehende Zielpublikum hätte sich kein philosophisches Werk entsponnen – von Aritoteles' Werken über Hegels Vorlesungen bis zum gegenwärtigen Bezugsrahmen der philosophischen Arbeit innerhalb unseres akademischen Lebens heutigentags. Die erste Zielsetzung meines Artikels wäre, den Bezug zwischen diesem Bildungskontext und dem Phänomen des „Systems“ in der Philosophie zu ergründen. Mein zweites Bestreben heißt, das im 19. Jahrhundert neu entstandene kulturelle Verlangen der europäischen Philosophie nach Ausgestaltung philosophischer Systeme zu charakterisieren. Die dritte Themeneinheit meines Papers beinhaltet die Abstimmung des Bedarfs an „Systemphilosophie“ auf das Programm der Herausbildung nationaler Kulturen im Zentraleuropa des 19. Jahrhunderts. Die Bilanz dieses Programms zu Zeiten des Abklingens der Philosophiesysteme repräsentiert das letzte Thema meines Beitrags.

Schlüsselwörter

Bernát Alexander, Cyrill Horváth, Gusztáv Szontagh, János Erdélyi, Károly Böhm, philosophische Systeme, nachhegelianische Philosophie

Béla Mester

**Le « système » dans la philosophie comme conséquence
du contexte institutionnel des universités**

Résumé

Les historiens de la philosophie connaissent bien l'importance du contexte de l'enseignement dans la création d'œuvres philosophiques. Sans un public cible constitué de disciples, aucune œuvre philosophique n'aurait pu être formulée, à commencer par les œuvres d'Aristote, en passant par les leçons de Hegel, jusqu'au contexte de l'œuvre philosophique actuelle dans la vie universitaire d'aujourd'hui. Le premier objectif de mon article est d'analyser le lien entre le contexte de l'enseignement et le phénomène de « système » dans la philosophie. Mon deuxième objectif est de caractériser une nouvelle exigence culturelle de la construction des systèmes philosophiques dans la philosophie européenne du XIX^{ème} siècle. Le troisième sujet de mon article est l'adaptation de l'exigence de la « philosophie-système » dans le programme d'établissement des cultures nationales dans l'Europe centrale du XIX^{ème} siècle. La conséquence de ce programme à l'époque du déclin des systèmes philosophiques est le dernier sujet de ma contribution.

Mots-clés

Bernát Alexander, Cyrill Horváth, Gusztáv Szontagh, János Erdélyi, Károly Böhm, systèmes philosophiques, philosophie post-hégélienne