

A SZENT ISTVÁN TUDOMÁNYOS AKADÉMIA  
SZÉKFOGLALÓ ELŐADÁSAI  
Új Folyam. 2/2. szám  
Szerkeszti: STIRLING JÁNOS OESSH főtitkár

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# THE BEGINNINGS OF HUNGARIAN PHILOSOPHY

(THE RECEPTION OF NICHOLAS OF CUSA  
IN THE WORK „DE HOMINE” BY  
PÉTER CSÓKÁS LASKÓI)



BUDAPEST 2004



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*Magyar nyelven elhangzott a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Felohtasó termében  
2003. november 25-én*



BUDAPEST 2004

*Minden jog fenntartva,  
beleértve a bárminemű eljárással  
való sokszorosítás jogát is*

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KÉSZÜLT A SZENT ISTVÁN TÁRSULAT,  
AZ APOSTOLI SZENTSZÉK KÖNYVKIADÓJA NYOMDÁJÁBAN.  
IGAZGATÓ: FARKAS OLIVÉR OESSH  
BUDAPEST, V. KOSSUTH LAJOS U. 1.

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# THE BEGINNINGS OF HUNGARIAN PHILOSOPHY

(THE RECEPTION OF NICHOLAS OF CUSA IN THE WORK  
*DE HOMINE* BY PÉTER CSÓKÁS LASKÓI)

The present study does not intend to get involved in the academic dispute flaring up from time to time to discuss whether there has ever been Hungarian philosophy or not. According to our view, Hungarian philosophy did, does and, hopefully, will exist, for it has its own properties. As it is well known, philosophy is the science investigating the ultimate principles and causes. It is not uncommon for the Hungarian spirit to examine the ultimate questions either. As expressed by the Latin phrases: *primum vivere, deinde philosophari* ("first you should live, afterwards you may philosophize") and *inter arma silent Musae* ("in the midst of rattling of guns, Muses are in silence"), the history of Hungary has rarely provided the philosophizing mind with periods of peace and prosperity necessary for being devoted to the investigation of the questions of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> However, the philosophical

<sup>1</sup> JÁNOS ERDÉLYI, the first researcher of the history of the Hungarian philosophy made the following grievous remark in the 60s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: "philosophy, as a science, would have reached the place it nowadays has even without us, and it is very probable that it is not our nation's duty to play a significant role in it." Cf. J. ERDÉLYI: *A bölcsészet Magyarországon* [Philosophy in Hungary], Budapest 1885. Nevertheless, in contrast to the pessimistic opinion of ERDÉLYI, we should note

works of the Hungarian authors have a peculiar characteristic feature: they are all oriented on practice. It does not mean that Hungarian authors of philosophy did not understand the ideas of the great thinkers of the West. On the contrary, they did understand them (as far as they were able to get access to them), and did interpret them to their readers in a simple, intelligible way.<sup>2</sup> The practical attitude was required by the readers' interest as well. In the very beginning Hungarian philosophical reflection was restricted to the rational confirmation of Christian religious truths, promoting the practice of religion with the strength of rational persuasion, later it preferred to examine questions emerging in the field of practical ethics and the philosophy of law,<sup>3</sup> whereas in the second half of the 20th century philosophy served the official ideology of the Communist party. Of course, there have been ex-

that after the Compromise of 1867 philosophical studies became to flourish in Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the same aspects are valid for the cultivation of religious sciences (theology) in Hungary as well.

<sup>3</sup> Philosophy in Hungary generally could not indulge in the luxury of dealing merely with theoretical questions, so it confined itself to describing and practically implementing the famous and received trends of the West. This phenomenon cannot be explained by the lack of sense towards philosophical questions in the Hungarian spirit — as the works written in more favourable conditions by Hungarian philosophers forced into emigration point to the opposite direction —, but rather by the fact that publishing philosophical works written in the Hungarian language would have brought little profit to the publishers. Those interested in purely speculative questions of philosophy, owing to their education, were able to read the classical works in their original editions. In spite of this fact excellent translations were published (and are still being published nowadays) in Hungarian. Cf. the series *Filozófiai írók tára* [Collection of authors on philosophy], published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which started already in the 19th century in the competent editorship of BERNÁT ALEXANDER.

ceptions: a few thinkers among them, having made a name for the Hungarian philosophy abroad, dealt with this science on a European level. We mention only the most outstanding ones: Péter Pázmány, Károly Böhm, Bernát Alexander, Ákos Pauler, Antal Schütz, Béla Brandenstein, the Marxist philosopher György Lukács who deserved a better fate, or the phenomenologists Vilmos Szilasi, famous mainly abroad, and Michael Polanyi. Summarizing the above, we can say that Hungarian philosophy has tried to keep abreast with the current of European philosophy all the time, right from its very beginnings.

### **The beginnings of Hungarian philosophy**

Though Péter Csókás Laskói can be considered to be the first Hungarian philosopher (writing, however, not in Hungarian, but still in Latin), it is necessary to give here a brief account of the beginnings of Hungarian philosophical thinking as well.

At this point we should briefly clear an incidental problem, viz. whether or not we can suppose the existence of an independent philosophical science. It seems to us that under the pretext of philosophy the ancient Greek philosophers regarded as classical indirectly, and in their peculiar way, dealt with theological questions, since the Greek polytheist religion had not served sufficiently their intellectual inquiry towards the ultimate principles. The Christian Middle Ages, the Patristic period included, was preoccupied predominantly with theology by analyzing its theoretical issues with the conceptual categories of the ancient philosophical tradition. It is obvious that philoso-

phy was regarded as the maidservant of theology. The first reason for this is that in the liberal arts (*septem artes liberales*) it was dialectics which provided, in the Latin translation of Boëthius, an elementary introduction to the works of Aristotle, so that logics, preceding theology in the curriculum, appeared only as *ancilla theologiae*. But it was subordinated to theology in another sense as well, since — opposed to ancient Greek philosophy's attempt to replace theology by a "quasi-theology" (Aristotle called philosophy *theologikē epistēmē*, i.e. "a science about God") — Christian theology was, primarily in the Patristic age, able to provide the philosophical inquiry of the ultimate principles with a full, comprehensive content. With the newly discovered Aristotle, transmitted by the Arabic tradition and in the Christian interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas, inquirers were becoming more familiar with Aristotelian metaphysics, and by re-thinking the Christian theology of creation were being led to nominalism and renaissance thought's interest in nature. All these questions were raising a series of independent topics of philosophy and specialized branches of science, gradually separated from theology. As in modern times the priority of reason was emphasized from one point of view and experience from the other, and for this even the sacred sciences were called upon in a peculiar way, philosophy was gradually losing its metaphysical and theological basis and, being detached from its enlivening sources, began to become similar to a decorated Christmas-tree, sparkling and glittering for a while, but soon to dry and to be thrown away. Ideology, however, was unable to replace metaphysics and theology. Earlier philosophy served theology, but after the last great representative of systematic philosophy, Hegel, it was could only be the



slave of specialized branches of science or of different ideologies. The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II not inaptly writes in his Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, discussing the relation between theology and philosophy, that, while earlier reason was advocating religious belief, in the 21st century it is faith that should prevent reason from itself as well as its scientific enterprises and adventures against mankind, so that faith ought to advocate reason.

After this clarification we wish to demonstrate in short that Hungarian philosophy is not to feel ashamed, since — in spite of its prevailing disadvantageous position — it has tried to keep up with the current trends of European philosophical thinking. Although monographic elaboration of the medieval sources is still lacking — even the sources themselves are hardly available in adequate editions —, the first work on the history of Hungarian philosophy by JÁNOS ERDÉLYI<sup>4</sup> can be considered of documentary value, being ultimately referred to by present-day authors as well.

The grounds for philosophical education were laid down in Hungary at the level of episcopal, monastic and chapter schools, in which the subjects of the seven liberal arts were taught. The first schoolbooks were arriving from abroad. Bishop Bonipert of Pécs, born in France, who had corresponded with Fulbert, the founder of the school of Chartres, asked for schoolbooks from France (1008). Among these schools that of Csanád, founded by St. Gerard (Gellért), Bishop of Marosvár, had earned reputation in the early times and was attended by foreign

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ERDÉLYI: *A bölcsészet Magyarországon* (n. 1).

students as well,<sup>5</sup> which did not cause any difficulty, as the official language of education was Latin. From the works of St. Gerard, it is the commentary on the three young men's song from the Bible (Dan 3, 57) that survives, which at the same time is regarded as the oldest written record of Hungarian philosophical literature.<sup>6</sup> Though this book is a biblical-theological work, taking a strong position against the dialectics (the rationalist thinkers of the age), nevertheless it does not dismiss at all the rationalist tendency of its own age. By the digressions interrupting his theological reasoning the author reveals his ideas which are very similar to those of Neo-Platonism. Besides having a profound knowledge of the Doctors of the Church, the author seems to be familiar with ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. His knowledge of the secular sciences remains in the framework of the *Etymologies* of St. Isidore of Seville. Thus even in the 11th century the influence of European philosophical thinking can be detected in Hungary.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, under the rulers of the House of Árpád, it is especially in the schools of the monastic orders spreading in Hungary that those lecturers and scholars are to be found who received higher education, first at the universities of Paris, later at those of Bologna, Padua, Vienna and Cracow, including a great number of lay students in addition to the clerical ones. As

<sup>5</sup> Primarily from the neighbouring countries. It is proven by data that the episcopal school of Marosvár besides the Hungarians was attended by German, Polish, Czech and even French students.

<sup>6</sup> *Deliberatio Gerardi Moresanae ecclesiae episcopi supra hymnum trium puerorum ad Insigninum liberalem*, edited by IGNÁC BATTIYÁNY, Bishop of Transylvania in 1790. The book was dedicated to Insignin, the teacher of the humanities and the bishop-colleague of St. Gerard.

regards domestic higher education in philosophy, greater importance is to be acknowledged in the 14th century to the first Hungarian university of Pécs, which lasted only for a short period of time, similarly to the university of Óbuda that was founded later by King Sigismund and ceased to work for political reasons. The curriculum of the university of Pécs was modelled on that of the university of Bologna. Among the teaching material of philosophy we find the *Logics* of Petrus Hispanus, the *Organon* of Aristotle as well as his works on metaphysics, physics and ethics together with the commentaries of Boëthius, St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas. In the field of mathematics and the exact sciences the works of Euclides and Bradwardine were known in this time.

In the study of philosophy primarily the Dominicans and the Franciscans were becoming prominent. The most outstanding among them in the 14th century was Boëthius de Transylvania, who commented on Aristotle's smaller psychological works.<sup>7</sup> Thomism, studied mainly by the Dominicans, flourished under the reign of King Matthias, who elevated the college of Dominicans' in Buda on university level (*studium generale*)<sup>8</sup> in 1480. The

<sup>7</sup> Both the smaller works and the book on the eternity of the universe (*De aeternitate mundi*) of Boëthius had disappeared.

<sup>8</sup> Today the so-called Dominican court, situated in Buda castle and forming a building-complex with Hotel Hilton, preserves the remains of this famous college. The *studium generale* was entitled to confer the academic degree of a *magister*, the highest degree of education. This college was intended to be developed into a university by King Matthias, but after his death the Turkish rule counteracted this plan. Famous professors held lectures in the college, among them the German Petrus Nigri, who wrote his chief work, the famous *Clipeus Thomistarum* in Buda and dedicated it to King Matthias (1481). Nicolaus de Mirabilibus, the court priest of the Hungarian king Wladislas taught

theologians of the Franciscan order preferred the philosophical thoughts of St. Bonaventure and Duns Scotus.<sup>9</sup> The most eminent Franciscan scholastic author of this period was Pelbart of Temesvár (1435—1504), who graduated at the university of Cracow and earned a reputation abroad not only by publishing his sermons, but also with his work expanding the entire system of theology (*Aureum sacrae theologiae rosarium*, 1503—1508), on the philosophical basis of Duns Scotus and Bonaventure. The scholastic methodology and way of thinking penetrated the Hungarian culture of that time to such an extent that even the statute-book of István Werbőczy, the famous *Tripartitum opus* (1517) reflects this influence.<sup>10</sup>

Yet it was not only scholasticism, but, from the first quarter of the 15th century, nominalism as well that was exerted great influence in Hungary by a man who was Dominican, graduated in Vienna, but left the clerical order, and whose name is unknown. According to the historians of the Dominican order,<sup>11</sup> this person, whose name

also in this college, who shows a great philosophical knowledge in his disputes and treatises.

<sup>9</sup> The influence of the Franciscan school appears in the ascetic writing *Spectro delle anime semplici* [The mirror of Simple Souls], translated probably from Latin into Italian and attributed traditionally to St. Marguerite of Hungary, which analyses the stages of the access of the soul to God on the base St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*.

<sup>10</sup> Werbőczy very frequently adopted the views of St. Augustine and of St. Thomas Aquinas in the basic questions of the philosophy of law, citing both of them several times. In accordance with the latter he thinks that natural law, in its final sources, seems to be the source of all the other branches of law, and all rules drawn by man contrary to it can be enforced neither by convention of the general public, nor by customary law.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. NIEDER: *Ferraris rendtörténet*. ANGELUS WALZ OP: *Compendium historiae Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Romae 1948<sup>2</sup>, 145<sup>1</sup>

was not handed down, ridiculed the mysteries of the Christian faith and proclaimed, in the spirit of pure nominalist rationalism, that reason was able to recognize the universal and ultimate principles of the universe.<sup>12</sup> The approaching of the ideas of the renaissance in the 15th century is attested by a fragment of the Codex of Érsekújvár,<sup>13</sup> in which the pagan philosophers denying the divinity of Jesus refer to Aristotle's authority, while St. Catherine refutes them with the wisdom of "Master Plato". Placing Plato over Aristotle and emphasizing the importance of astrology reflects a typical spirit of renaissance.

As a consequence of the relations with Italy, numerous Hungarians received humanistic education, especially in Florence's flourishing Neo-Platonic academy. Among them the most famous is the Bishop of Pécs, Ianus Pannonius, who during his studies in Italy, in the school of Guarino of Verona got acquainted with the works of Plato, Plotinus and Plutarch, whose philosophy influenced his exquisite poems written in Latin. Ianus Pannonius was a friend to Marsilius Ficinus, the reputed renaissance philosopher,<sup>14</sup> who was invited by King Matthias himself to the Academy of Buda, to be established, in his intentions, on the model of the Academy of Florence. Ficinus sent Philippon Valori for himself to Buda, but with the death of Matthias the good plan was buried as well.

<sup>12</sup> As the Dominican historians relate, the unknown Hungarian friar who had left the order withdrew his teachings for fear of the inquisition and retired for penance to a Paulist monastery.

<sup>13</sup> Its original Latin copy is unfortunately no longer available.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the thorough investigations conducted by JÓZSEF HUSZTI on this topic.

After the disaster of Mohács out of renaissance Catholic scholasticism and the early Protestant philosophers there emerged, as a sort of "transition", András Dudith (1533—1589), Bishop of Pécs. He was an eloquent speaker and representative of the Catholic Church of Hungary at the Council of Trent, yet because of his marriage he later became Protestant. He was highly educated and cultured, acquiring a profound European knowledge during his travels abroad, and used a Latin in the style of Cicero. He spent the last years of his life in Breslau (Wrocław), where with Joachim Perion he translated into Latin the works of Dionysius Areopagita as well as the speech of Themistius rhetor on the freedom of religion.<sup>15</sup>

The quick expansion of Protestantism in Hungary, in spite of the miserable circumstances under the Turkish rule, gave an impetus to the progress of the Hungarian culture. A lot of young Hungarians studied in Wittenberg during the 16th century.<sup>16</sup> The Protestant lords founded

<sup>15</sup> András Dudith or Dudics (Andreas Duditius Sbardellatus, 1533—1589) was a prominent scholar of Latin and Greek of his age. First he published the works of four antique authors. The phenomenon of comets and black death (plague epidemic) appearing very frequently in the 1570s led to the spread of old superstitions. Dudith, as a genuine humanist, fought against these with the weapons of reason and science, as manifested in his work written in Latin on comets (*Short commentary on the phenomenon of comets*, Basle 1579).

<sup>16</sup> Péter Laskói Csókás (or, in a latinised form, Monedulatus), who himself studied in Wittenberg, in the introduction of his book *De homine*, published also in Wittenberg in 1585, gives a list of the Hungarian students staying at the time in Wittenberg, naturally in their Latin version which was very typical at the universities of the renaissance. The *Epistola dedicatoria*, prefixed to the book and including this list of names, was written by Laskói to the consul, Samuel Seelfisch, who apparently gave a lot of assistance to the Hungarian students studying in Wittenberg. The *Epistola dedicatoria* was first translated into

printing offices, partial and entire translations of the Holy Scriptures were published, among the publications there were also a few theological polemic essays, which, according to the spirit of the age, had drawn heavily on the works of the Patristic writers and the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. Thus philosophy — although with a certain renaissance independence — served even in these the apologetical purposes of the faith. In the 16th century Counter-Reformation launched an attack in a similar genre, lining up the philosophical-theological arguments of Baroque scholastics, but Péter Pázmány, who had held Latin lectures in Graz, preferred to write his philosophical works in Hungarian. Among the Protestants in the 17th century the same was accomplished — also in Hungarian — by János Apáczai Csere, who studied in Utrecht and taught in Gyulafehérvár and Kolozsvár, and who endeavoured to elaborate a Hungarian philosophical terminology, though with only a very limited success (e.g. the concept of *substantia* [from Lat. *stare*] was translated by him literally as *állat* [from Hung. *állni*], which in ordinary speech means “animal”).<sup>17</sup> Yet in his work, entitled *Magyar logikátska* (“Short Hungarian logics”, 1654) he presented in Hungarian the doctrines of Descartes and followed closely the thoughts the famous renaissance professors of logics, the Huguenot Ramus and the puritan Amesius. After him it took a lot of time until Hungarian

Hungarian from the original Latin by STEFÁNIA VERMES, who in translating the quotations from Greek poetry was assisted by the philologist JÁNOS VIRÁG (unpublished manuscript, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. JÁNOS APÁCZAI CSERE: *Magyar enciklopédia* [Hungarian Encyclopaedia], Utrecht 1653, which was written in Hungarian by the author (who discusses in Latin “The learning of wisdom”). Apáczai treated in this work metaphysics, logics and theology as sciences equal to physics, geometry and astronomy.

philosophical works were published, since in the university of Nagyszombat, founded by Péter Pázmány in 1635, philosophy was still transmitted in Latin. The situation partially was the same in the Protestant schools of Sárospatak, Pápa, Debrecen, Marosvásárhely, Fogaras and others.

### The book *De homine* by Péter Csókás Laskói

Péter Csókás Laskói (†1587),<sup>18</sup> the excellent representative of Hungarian Calvinist theology in the 16th century, studied in Wittenberg, where he published a few theological works, mainly of controversial and apologetical nature. His longest work on philosophy, entitled *De homine* (whole title: *Two books on man, this great miracle of nature and his essential parts*, Wittenberg 1585),<sup>19</sup> was writ-

<sup>18</sup> Péter Laskói or Laskai (because of the uncertainty of the name, these forms will be used indiscriminately) Csókás or, in a latinised form, Petrus Lascovius Monedulatus comes from the Hungarian village of Laskó, but the events of life predominantly happened in the premises of the relatively independent Principality of Transylvania, and not in the territory occupied by the Turks. It was the Transylvanian area from where he went to abroad and it was here that he returned in 1587. He died as the director of the Presbyterian College in Fogaras.

<sup>19</sup> The full title of Laskói's chief work is as follows: *De homine, magno illo in rerum natura miraculo et partibus eius essentialibus libri V. Autore Petro Monedulato Lascovio Ungaro. Wittenbergae, Per haeredes Iohannis Cratonis, 1585.* The form of the book is a small octavo on 439 pages. The book is introduced by a letter of dedication, written by the author to the Mayor of Wittenberg, Seelfisch, and here are enlisted the Hungarian academical students, attending the University of Wittenberg between 1522—1585. It is followed by the philosophical part, consisting of two parts. The first part is on human soul, the second part is on human body. The first book includes 12 chapters, the second



ten in Latin, which was the scholarly language of his age. A part of this work (chapter 1) appeared in Hungarian in 1961 in the translation of LÁSZLÓ MÁTRAI (ca. 3 and a half pages) as part of the book *Ancient Hungarian philosophers of the 15-17th centuries* in the series "National Library".<sup>20</sup> The original work, comprising 439 pages, can be found, according to my investigation, in the *antiqua*-collection of the National Széchényi Library (called Old Hungarian Library), in the Vatican Apostolic Library and in the Library of the University of Halle (where the former university library of Wittenberg is now placed); an earlier copy had been preserved in the Presbyterian Library of Sárospatak. Laskói's time and place of birth is uncertain,<sup>21</sup>

contains 4 chapters. Laskói wrote some other works on the subject of theology, and religious controversies, which had also been published in Wittenberg, but our study deals only with his philosophical work.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Régi magyar filozófusok, XV—XVIII. század* (Nemzeti könyvtár) [Old Hungarian philosophers, 15—18th centuries (Series "National library")], Budapest 1961. LÁSZLÓ MÁTRAI did not translate the first chapter of Laskói's *De homine* in its full length, only a few extracted parts of it. Laskói's whole book *De homine* was first translated into Hungarian by the author of the present study, except for the *Epistola dedicatoria*, the preface of the book (the publication of this translation is in process).

<sup>21</sup> The date of birth of Péter Csókás Laskói is unknown. His place of birth is similarly disputed by scholars. According to one opinion, the place of Laskói's birth, Laskó (Laska) is in county Baranya, which seems most probable, since his name includes a reference to his origin from Baranya (Barovius). However, some scholars think that he was born in the village of Laskó, to be found at that time in the territory of the present-day county Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén. Otherwise the bibliography in Hungarian about him provides a detailed information about his personality, career and oeuvre. Cf. JÓZSEF SZINNYEI: *Magyar írók élete és munkái* [Lives and works of Hungarian authors], VII, Budapest 1900, 798—800; *Magyar irodalmi lexikon* [Hungarian literary encyclopedia], II, Budapest 1965, 17 and *A magyar irodalomtörténet bibliográfiája 1772-ig*

nevertheless he is known to have received a comprehensive humanistic education. As a preceptor working for distinguished Hungarian (Transylvanian) noble families, he lived in Italy, Basle and Germany. Even his book *De homine* was published in the very place where he earlier studied theology, in the town of Luther, namely in Wittenberg. At this point there may arise the question of why a Calvinist pastor and theologian, first the tutor and director of the school of Marosvásárhely, then of the Calvinist school of Fogaras, studied and published in the “Rome of the Gospel”. This topic requires another study; it suffices to say here that right in Wittenberg, and right among the Hungarian students, there were several followers first of Melancton, then of the Calvinist trend, and Péter Csókás Laskói seems to have already joined the Calvinist Reformation<sup>22</sup> in the very beginning of his

[Bibliography of the history of Hungarian literature to 1772], Budapest 1972, 319. Laskói's *De homine* is available in present-day Hungary in the Széchényi National Library's collection of Old Hungarian Literature (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár [OSZK], RMK) in the book signed and registered as III. 744 (439 pages, 20 unpagged folios), further copies can be found in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, in Eger (the title page is missing), and in the libraries of the Presbyterian colleges in Sarospatak and Debrecen. The bibliography of the oeuvre of Laskói: JÁNOS ERDÁLYI: *A hazai bölcsészet történelméhez* [To the history of Hungarian philosophy], Sáropataki Füzetek 1857/58, 50—63, and LUDOVICO TARDY: *Aspetti della fortuna di Pico nella cultura ungherese. Petrus Monedulatus Lascovius, L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'umanesimo*, II, Firenze 1965, 399—403. (N.B. LAJOS TARDY first wrote about the reception of Pico della Mirandola in Laskai's book of *De homine*). Earlier literature: KÁLMÁN SZILY: *Elnöki megnyitó beszéd* [President's opening speech on Laskai being the chief contributor to the Hungarian part of Calepinus' Dictionary], *Magyar Nyelv* (1913) 49—57.

<sup>22</sup> The Hungarian students studying in Wittenberg were bond for Melancton, because he — showing tolerance towards the Hungarian

studies in Wittenberg. Another, still remarkable, curiosity is that Laskói presents in the lengthy introduction of his book a detailed and comprehensive list of the names of Hungarian students studying<sup>23</sup> at the university of Wittenberg from the beginning of the Reformation. The data of this *registrum* provide rich material for specialized studies on the topic of the *peregrinatio academica* of Hungarian Protestant youth in the 16th century. Anyway, the fact itself that the author considered it necessary to mention his compatriots to such an extent, indisputably speaks for his patriotic feelings and his devotion to his homeland under Turkish rule.

Laskói's book *De homine* is on human being, which consists of body and of soul. In terms of current scientific terminology, he writes on theological anthropology, but

students' insufficient knowledge of German, had lectures to them in Latin (which were understood by them). Many enthusiasts of Calvin visited Wittenberg and in a shortwhile the Calvinist school was adopted by the Hungarian. The reason for his popularity was probably that the Calvinist theory of predestination promoted the interpretation of the fatal consequences of the battle at Mohacs (the Turkish victory and the Turkish occupation of the central part of Hungary), influencing the fate of Hungary. The Lutheran school had been losing its importance by extending the general hostility against the Habsburgs, which culminated in the end of the 15th century in the revolt led by Bocskai against the Habsburgs. In that time the question appeared whether the dependant may rebel against his legal ruler, or not? According to the Lutheran school it is not allowed, while the Calvinists — referring to certain texts of the Old Testament — considered it permitted. This way the "ideological" establishment of the revolt seemed to be provided. From this time in Hungary it became widespread that Calvinism is a Hungarian religion, while Lutheranism is a German religion, and Catholicism can be regarded as the manifestation of the loyalty towards the Habsburgs.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lascovius: *De homine*, the numbered pages of the *Epistola dedicatoria*.

hidden under that surface we find philosophical anthropology — to use a recent term again —, becoming apparent in every turn, especially in the first chapters of the book, where Laskói advances his topic on philosophical grounds. Péter Csókás Laskói wrote his important philosophical work in the style of the late Renaissance, making use of its methods. In this period the intelligentsia was usually involved in the religious polemics, though there appear several signs of the observation of nature and human being as the characteristic tendency of modern times. Our author — following the customs of his age — quotes in an almost encyclopedical excess the thinkers of classical antiquity (mainly the pagan philosophers),<sup>24</sup> the ancient Doctors of the Church (among them primarily St. Augustine,<sup>25</sup> the fashionable author of the Reformation)

<sup>24</sup> The Renaissance authors did not elaborate an independent philosophical system, but relearned on the classical Latin and Greek authors of the antiquity as well as the great representatives of the patristic and scholastic age. Here is a list of the most frequently cited authors by Laskai (all the names are in their Latin form to be found in *De homine*): Aristoteles, Aurelius Augustinus, Plato, Galenus, Plinius, Cardanus, Anaxagoras, Basilius, Macrobius, Cicero, Vergilius, Marcus Maximilianus, the Cabbalists, Philo, Reuchlin, Boëthius, Hilarius, Cyprianus, Eusebius, Gennaidus, Tertullianus, Lactantius, Irenaeus, Clemens Alexandrinus, Athanasius, Pythagoras, Varro, Duns Scotus, Hieronymus, Plutarchus, Priscillianus, Democritus, Aelianus, Theophrastus, Aeneas Gazenus, Bernardus, Thomas Aquinas, Chrysostomus, Theodoretus, Cassiodorus, Gregorius Nyssenus, Gregorius Nazianzenus, Avicenna, Nicolaus Cusanus, Picus de Mirandola, Theodoretus Beza, Martinus Luther, Philippus Melanchton, Caietanus, Mercurius Trismegistus, Heraclitus Ponticus, Prudentius, Epiphanius, Horatius, Avicenna and others.

<sup>25</sup> Laskai mostly cites Aristoteles (ca. forty times), but most frequently cites several works of St. Augustine (appr. sixty times). The reception of St. Augustine in Laskai's book is worth being elaborated elsewhere; here we give the list of only those the works of St.

and certainly the Bible itself, and furthermore the popular authors of the 15th century, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Among the Renaissance philosophers of the 15th century he prefers Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, whom he is the first to cite in the scholarship of Hungarian philosophy, and to whose system his philosophical intuition — as we will see later — is primarily indebted. Regarding the methods used by Laskói, in verification he argues with the help of the scholastic syllogism, though in the first chapters of his work, and in Book II, where he treats the construction of the human body, this method has been neglected. Laskói's work does not originate from a theological preconception. The existence of the world is derived not from the existence of God, but on the contrary: accepting implicitly the existence of God as Creator, first — using an inductive approach (which is very typical of Renaissance philosophical intuition) — he gazes in wonderment at the world, then by analyzing the operation of the human soul he arrives at the final principle of human existence, i.e. God. The chapters on human body give a rather descriptive phenomenology of an anthropology covering the knowledge of his age, but contain a number of interesting observations, regarding especially medical history.

It is worth having a glance, in a literal translation,<sup>26</sup> at the contents of Laskói's *De homine*, because it presents the

Augustine which are more often cited by Laskai: *Liber de immortalitate; De civitate Dei; Retractiones; Tractatus in Iohannem; De fide et symbolo; De spiritu et anima; De essentia divinitatis; De Genesi ad litteram; De incarnatione; De libero arbitrio; Contra Faustum; Adversum Valentinum; De Trinitate; In haeresiologia.*

<sup>26</sup> The translation of the contents by LÁSZLÓ MÁTRAI was corrected and improved by the author of the present study.

entire logical structure of the book and unveils the theological conclusion which he — at least in the first book — is about to prove.

### Chapters of Book I:

1. The variety of the universe, or the division of the entire world.

2. Every knowledge, particularly that of nature, is acquired in three ways of gazing in wonderment at the world.

3. Among the three worlds after the spiritual (intelligible) world the most wonderful is the microcosm.

4. Why did the ancient Greeks call man microcosm, Jesus Christ universal creature, and the ancient wise men the great wonders of the world?

5. On the microcosm, or the small world, i.e. the parts making up the essence of man.

6. On the structure of human soul, primarily on the various distribution of its capacities.

7. Whether there is a soul (*anima rationalis*) in the human being.

8. On the essence of the soul; is it merely an emptiness or a transient quality, or a kind of natural body?

9. If the soul is not merely a quality, nor is a body, but a spiritual essence, is it derived from the essence of God?

10. If the soul is not a part of the divine essence, then was it created before the world and was it preserved in the celestial pharmacy of the divine riches?

11. If the soul, not previously created, is not stored in the heaven, is it inherited, like the body, by sexual semens, as supposed by some?

12. If the soul (contrary to the opinion of others) is transmitted not like the body, i.e. by sexual semens, then does God create it into the body of the newly born children day by day?

13. If God (as others opine) pours the soul day by day, where is the residence of the soul within the human body?

14. With the destruction of the body does the soul also perish with it, or is it eternal and immortal?

15. If the soul does not perish with the destruction of the body, whether it wanders from body to body.

16. If the soul does not wander from body to body, does it then roam in this world?

17. If soul does not roam in this sublunar world, whether it is taken to the purgatory?

18. If souls are not taken to the purgatory, where is their residence and resting place, until they take up their bodies again?

19. If souls find their place and rest in heaven, in the company of Christ, whether they pray and intercede for the matters of our life on earth?

## Chapters of Book II:

1. On the structure and construction of the human body; whether human body is a prison or torture chamber, where souls are suffering for their previous vices.

2. On the perfection and beauty of human body, as presented to our eyes by the material cause and the efficient cause (*causa materialis* and *causa efficiens*).

3. On the perfection of human body, as presented to our eyes in the neat disposition of the external parts.

4. On the perfection and beauty of human body, as placed before our eyes in its external appearance, constitution and nobility.

As apparent from the contents of Laskói's chief work, the author begins with a prospective of natural philosophy, through the *philosophische Gotteslehre* proceeds to the philosophical-psychological analysis of human being, supported by various quotations from classical philosophers and theologians, and finally arrives at the theological conclusion that there is no purgatory after death and, furthermore, the dead and blessed are not able to intercede through their merits for those living on earth. This theological aspect is a basic article of faith of the Protestant theology. This being the final conclusion of Laskói's Book I, in Book II — which, after a discussion on soul, deals with the human body — he sets himself against the common medieval concept which under a Platonic inspiration regarded human body as a bad thing, the prison and torture chamber of the soul, and, with a Renaissance tendency of making a cult of nature and human living, considers human body well-made and perfect, in which he also admires the wisdom of God the creator.

Peter Monedulatus starts from the act of gazing in wonderment and, following his ancient classical — mainly Platonic and Neo-Platonic — sources, he regards this staring at the wonders of the world as the starting point of philosophical reflection. First he writes about the universe and calls it *macrocosmos*. Corresponding to this great world, like a reflection in a mirror, is a smaller world, called *microcosmos*. The smaller world is the image of the great world, while the great world is the reflection of the "greatest". There is nothing similar to the greatest,



i.e. God, except for God himself. All knowledge, especially that of nature, derives from staring at this threefold world, which is compared by the author to the threefold division of the sacred tabernacle of Moses.<sup>27</sup> According to Aristotle,<sup>28</sup> human mind had emerged from this gazing in wonderment in order to be able to investigate and analyze the causes. The threefold world reveals God for the human mind on each of its levels. Peter Laskói refuses the conception of Anaxagoras, according to which man is called only to the passive observation of the world.<sup>29</sup> On the contrary: based on Aristotle, he also accepts that intellectual cognition is attained through perceptual cognition, which leads us to the recognition of the existence of God, whose mystery is revealed in the Bible. Referring to the Bible, Laskói declares that man should not explore the mystery of God.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Laskai: *De homine*, 1, 1. For the sacred tabernacle of Moses, where the sacrifice was offered before the the Church of Jerusalem was build, see the description in Ex 35—38.

<sup>28</sup> According to Aristotle, the starting point of philosophy is the activity of admiring. Laskai accepted this Aristotelian concept, cf. *De homine*, 1, 2 (p. 24).

<sup>29</sup> Laskói refuses the view of the presocratic Anaxagoras. Man does not only admire the miracles of the world, but his cognition — as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas teach — derives from the perceiving experience, and formulates the universal concepts through several stages of rational abstraction.

<sup>30</sup> The Protestant theology — especially in the beginning — was against philosophy (which can be regarded acceptable, since Luther — as a biblical theologian — did not show any respect to the conceptual captiousness of the late scholasticism, Calvin (as a lawyer, and not as a philosopher, became a theologian) asserted that faith itself is enough for salvation, so metaphysical, philosophical establishing is not necessitated at all. Nevertheless the Bible does not forbid to enlighten the content of faith by ratio.

In Laskói's opinion, man is a small world, a microcosm. The spirit of life and the mud of earth are mixed up in him, just as the soul and the body of flesh are making up the person together. God, who cannot be received by the "sky of skies", was nevertheless made such a man in his Son, Jesus Christ. The author can find seventeen similar features between the macro- and the microcosm. The most important similarity for him is the second one. The analogy is the following: "As the intelligent spirit is regarded the moving power in the universe, the same holds true in the human being as well."<sup>31</sup> The rest of the analogies for exploring this similarity seem to be very artificial, e.g. "the shape of the world is globular, just as the figure of man when we connect the final points of his stretched arms and legs in a curved line".<sup>32</sup>

According to Peter Monedulatus the most essential parts of human being are the intelligent soul (*anima intellectiva*) and the sensual body. Regarding the constitution and operation of soul, he usually quotes — besides other, primarily Patristic authors and the Bible — Philon, Athanasius, Pythagoras, Varro, Plato and Aristotle, and, several times, St. Thomas Aquinas, which shows his knowledge of the medieval scholastic authors as well. In Laskói's view, the intelligent soul is not a body, nor does it form a part of the divine essence. It did not exist before the creation of the world, but gets into the human body either by transmittance (*per traducem*) or by the act of God, who breathes a new intelligent soul into each newly born human being. So Laskói holds the individual personal creation of every human soul. He says that the seat of the

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Lascovius: *De homine*, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Lascovius: *De homine*, p. 31.

intelligent soul is in the human brain, without excluding the possibility that it is placed in the human heart.<sup>33</sup> The intelligent soul preserves its immortal and imperishable existence and strength even after death. Laskói refuses transmigration, since he believes that every man has his own soul. After death, this personal, intelligent soul does not migrate either into another man or into an animal, but appears before God, where the risen Christ is found. He thinks that the blessed glorify and eulogize the Lord and have no duty of interceding whatsoever.

In the second book of his work, Laskói writes about the parts of the human body, which I am not going to deal with here. I quote the following passage only as a curiosity, to give some hint on his style and observing ability: "The part of the body in opposite to the human back is called breast, which lies between the nipples. Being broad in its extension, it serves to accommodate the heart and the lungs. Lest the strong skeleton of the breast should appear, the Creator has placed the bosom on the breast, in which there is again manifested the gift with which God has endowed man, for none of the animals has nipples on its breast, as seen in the case of man, except for the elephant."<sup>34</sup>

JÁNOS ERDÉLYI, who first endeavoured to outline the history of the Hungarian philosophy in 1857, in his book entitled *The philosophy in Hungary*<sup>35</sup> evaluates the work of Peter Csókás Laskói as follows: "Laskói does not exhibit science, but initiates psychology. He is free from mysteries, but knows more than what human mind is able to

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Lascovius: *De homine*, p. 138.

<sup>34</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, p. 421.

<sup>35</sup> ERDÉLYI: *A bölcsészet Magyarországon* (n. 1). For a previous publication, see Sárospataki füzetek, 1857.

comprehend. He is rather a theologian than a philosopher. He refers to the Scriptures, where he fails to find grounds for renouncing to investigate the mysteries of God. The mysteries of God are truth, either in nature or in the moral world." ERDÉLYI's evaluation can basically be accepted. Nevertheless, opposed to ERDÉLYI I think that Laskói is still rather a philosopher than a theologian (at least in this work of his). If we examine the Hungarian authors before him, it is definitely true of them that, even if they philosophize, their writings are penetrated by the ambiguities of renaissance natural mysticism, which is totally alien to Laskói. On the other hand, it is also true — but not to be dealt with here — that authors immediately following him in chronological order, including Decsi Csomor János,<sup>36</sup> another Protestant scholar (*Synopsis phi-*

<sup>36</sup> János Decsi Csomor (Ioannes Decius Barovius Csomor) was born in Decs, county Tolna. He maintained his activities just in the period after Peter Csókás Laskói. He can be respected as one of the most clear-headed thinkers with a wide intellectual horizon among the Hungarian authors of philosophy in the 17th century. (Cf. S. TELEKI: *Iani Pannonii ... poemata*, Traiecti ad Rhenum 1784, x, Preface, mentioning him as "cordatissimus, doctissimusque vir". He worked in Debrecen, afterwards in Kolozsvár. As a tutor of the son of Farkas Bánffy, he studied abroad. In 1587 he settled down in Wittenberg. He wrote several books on historical, linguistic, legal and philosophical topics. Péter Bod recommended him to the reader in his *Magyar Athénás* [Hungarian Athenas]: "It should be read by those preferring to look for curiosities of such kind." János Jeszenszky (Iohannes Jessenius a Jessen, 1566—1621) also enriched the special literature of philosophy in Hungary after Laskói. He became reputed as a medical professor in Wittenberg and Prague. At Padua he was influenced by Pompanizzi and started to widen his knowledge. The genuine master of Jeszenszky was Francesco Patrizzi from Ferrara (1529—1597), who inspired his Hungarian student to write a Neo-Platonic work in the subject of natural philosophy. This work of cosmology, the *Zoroaster* ("A new, short and genuine philosophy about the universe", Wittenberg 1593), which was written

*losophiae* and *Syntagma*, 1593), as well as János Jeszenszky and János Apáczai Csere, published more characteristically philosophical works.

### **The reception of Nicholas of Cusa by Péter Csókás Laskói**

Laskói in his book *De homine* quotes fifteen times the famous renaissance philosopher-theologist, doctor of canon law and cardinal bishop of the 15th century, the German Nicholas of Cusa, to whose works he is also regularly referring. Cusanus is a philosopher of the renaissance period who, escaping from the rigid bonds of late scholasticism, acquired renaissance spirituality in a way that he became able to throw new light upon the Christian doctrine. It is not an entirely unfounded hypothesis that had his contemporaries known and appreciated the world of Cusanus's ideas, Reformation would

in Latin, and which proves, that he does not belong to the astrological impostors of the Skalich-type, moreover he maintained friendship with Kepler and Tycho de Brache, and was familiar with the teachings of Copernicus and Vessalius. János Apáczai Csere (Iohannes Cheries Apáczius, 1625—1659) seems to be a prominent representative of Hungarian philosophy, and even so of the Hungarian world of science in the 17th century. His scholarship was mainly supported in "the golden age of Transylvania". Apáczai studied in the Netherlands. He became acquainted with the rationalism of Descartes and the logics of Ramus, which he was the first to adopt in Transylvania after his return to Hungary. In his works (*Magyar Enciklopédia* [Hungarian Encyclopaedia], Utrecht 1653) he first endeavoured in Hungary to distinguish philosophy from sciences. With his work entitled *Magyar logikácska* [Short Hungarian logics] he tried to establish a Hungarian philosophical terminology. His theoretical knowledge was mainly implemented in his works of pedagogy.

not have taken place. Laskóí seems to belong to those who appreciated Cusanus, because his philosophy is based rather on Neo-Platonism than Aristotelism.<sup>37</sup> In his system, he put an emphasis on the dialectics of unity and multiplicity, and Laskóí seems to implement the idea of micro- and macrocosm or, by expanding it, the idea of the special relationship between God and the world, which, in spite of its peculiarity, is reconcilable even with Christian theology.

Peter Laskóí in the first chapter of Book I of *De homine* writes about the multiplicity of the universe, i.e. the division of the entire world. He outlines the general conception of his age, enlisting the so-called world-divisions of the ancient and renaissance thinkers who supposed the existence of several worlds.<sup>38</sup> He himself prefers the viewpoint of the excellent renaissance thinker, Cusanus, in establishing his philosophical anthropology. He writes the following: "Nicolaus Cusanus in the 14th chapter of Book I of his *De coniecturis* ("On conjectures") very expertly differentiates three worlds, the upper, the middle

<sup>37</sup> Nicolaus Cusanus (Chrypffs, according to the name of his family, 1401—1464) was born at Cues on the Moselle. He studied law in Heidelberg, then in Padua, and later attended the lectures on physics by Toscanelli. He was a lawyer in Mainz, but having decided to become a cleric, he began to study theology. After being ordained, he was nominated to high positions in the Church, as a member of the papal delegation in Byzantium, afterwards Bishop of Brixen. Nicholas of Cusa wrote several works, among them the most prominent are: *De docta ignorantia*, *De coniecturis*, *De ludo globi*, *De venatione sapientiae*, *Idiota de sapientia*, *De concordantia catholica*, *De pace fidei*, *De possess*, *De non aliud*. He became reputed in theology and philosophy by elaborating the definition called *coincidentia oppositorum*, the coincidence of the immanency and transcendency of God.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 1 (pp. 6—9).

and the lower one.”<sup>39</sup> In the middle of the upper world there is God; in the second one — which is called the spiritual or intelligent world — there can be found the intelligent creatures (*intelligentia*). In the last one *ratio*<sup>40</sup> is situated, and it is the world of human beings, the smaller world (*microcosm*). This division of the world, according to Laskóï, is repeated by Cusanus in Book I of his *De ludo globi* (“On the game of the globe”), saying: “The world is threefold; a small one which is called man, a larger one which is called universe, and the greatest which is called God. The small one reflects the larger one, the larger one is similar to the largest one, although the largest one has no resemblance<sup>41</sup> among the others, except for himself.” Evaluating Cusanus’s conception, Laskóï writes the following: “Finally the threefold division seems to be acceptable, authentic and more appropriate for our doctrine, therefore we shall be guided by him, neglecting the

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 1 (p. 18): “Nicolaus Cusanus tom. 1, libro 1 *De coniecturis*, cap. 14 tres mundos non inconvenienter numerat: supremum, medium et infirmum. Supremi centrum dicit Deum esse: Medii sive secundi intelligentiam: ultimi rationem. Ex quo intelligimus, tres illum mundos statuere: intelligibilem, quem supremum vocat: sensibilem, quem medium appellat: μικρόκοσμον, parvum mundum hominem, cuius centrum dicit esse rationem seu mentem.”

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 1 (p. 12).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 1 (pp. 11. 19): “Microcosm denique sive parvus mundus vocatur ... olim est a Philosophis omnium rerum creaturarum epitome homo, qui a Cusano tom. 1 *De ludo globi* lib. 1 parvus licet, perfectus tamen dicitur esse mundus, quod quae universum habet universaliter, habeat et homo particulariter proprie et discrete. [...] Hanc distinctionem mundi mutatis verbis repetit, tomo 1 *De ludo globi* libro primo, ubi ait: «Triplex est mundus: Parvus, qui homo: maior, qui universum dicitur: maximus, qui Deus vocatur. Parvus est similitudo magni: Magnus similitudo maximi: Maximus nullam praeter seipsum in alio habet similitudinem.»” It is to be noted that in this first chapter Laskóï quotes twice the work of Cusanus *De ludo globi*.

others."<sup>42</sup> It is unquestionable that Laskó'i's conception (which follows Cusanus who is a little platonizing, but not slavishly imitating Plato, because the author personally agrees with him, and here it is Laskó'i's renaissance attitude that dominates again) is based on the idea that in human being as a smaller world (microcosm), both from the material and spiritual points of view, there can be found all the attributes of the macrocosm as the larger world, and even of the largest world, God — of course in a participated, analogous sense, since Laskó'i accepts the created nature of human being.

In the second chapter of Book I of his work, Laskó'i presents Cusanus's thoughts (though without citation, but most likely on the basis of Cusanus's chief work *De docta ignorantia*) in the following context: "Who could explain sufficiently that the prime motive (*motus primus*, cf. Aristotle) is an intelligible archetype of the world (*archetypus mundi*) or, as Cusanus defines it rightly, the centre (*centrum*) of the universe (i.e. God), who has given existence to the non-existent, and guides, directs, protects and prevents the existent, and so we deservedly call him parent or procreator (*genitor*)."<sup>43</sup> Here Laskó'i accepts Aristotle's philosophical term of God (*primus motor immobilis*)

<sup>42</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 1 (p. 19): "Ceterum cum triplex haec mundi distinctio reliquis plausibilior esse, et ad institutum nostrum accommodatiori videatur, eius considerationem in progressu nostrae tractationis, aliis neglectis persequamur." Thus Laskó'i, examining and evaluating all the other aspects, neglects their conclusions and prefers that drawn by Nicholas of Cusa.

<sup>43</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 2 (p. 20): "Cusanus loquitur centrum (scilicet mundi Archetypum) rebus illis, quae non erant, dederit esse, existentes vero ita gubernet, alat, propaget, ut genitor appellari mereatur?"



and identifies, or rather illustrates, it with Cusanus's so called world-centre (*centrum mundi*) concept of God.

In the third chapter of Book I of *De homine* Peter Monedolatus writes the following: "Though every world according to its own dignity has its own title, nevertheless there is nothing more noble than the intelligible world (*mundus intelligibilis*), since it makes human mind (*intellectus*) gaze in wonderment, particularly at his Creator, whom he wishes to recognize as establisher, since he possesses his image in himself as a microcosm, as asserted rightly by Cusanus in Book III of Volume I of his *De docta ignorantia*. According to him, «it is human nature which has been elevated by God above all the created things and, by placing them among the created ones, only a little lower in comparison to the angels, as David sings»." Then, continuing this train of thought in the same spirit, Laskói joins Cusanus, saying: "How on earth can someone be so fool as not to admire what has been created by the mightiest and best God by creating man in the world of the third level, namely by connecting the enlivening spirit and the body which are united in one person."<sup>44</sup>

In this chapter, discussing the similarity and proportionateness of the microcosm and the macrocosm, Laskói writes that "in the «larger world» (*macrocosmos*) one is the moving power, one is the spirit (*mens*), one is the directing governor, one is the centre. Regarding the inexpressible world, it has a centre, which is also one, which according to Cusanus is God. [...] The other, invisible and formal world, i.e. the world of the angels, has one centre

<sup>44</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 3 (p. 27): "[...] ut enim recte ait Cusanus tomo 1, lib. 3, *De docta ignorantia*: Humana natura est illa, quae est supra omnia Dei opera elevata et paulo minus, ut David canit, Angelis minorata."

as well. [...] This world-centre is called by Cusanus world-intelligence (*intelligentia*)."<sup>45</sup> Discussing the microcosm or man in the same chapter, he quotes Cusanus from Book I of the *De ludo globi*: "It is undeniable that man, who has a soul, is microcosm." Just as God moves the whole universe and is present everywhere in everything, so is man, the "smaller world" (*microcosm*) moved by the soul, which in its operation can be detected everywhere in the body — develops Laskóï further the idea of Cusanus.<sup>46</sup>

In the third chapter of Book I Laskóï quotes the thirty-second chapter of Volume I of Cusanus's *De venatione sapientiae*: "What a beauty is the unity (*copula*) of the universe. [...] On the top of the sensual nature stands man as microcosm. [...] At the same time, man is placed on the lowest level of the spiritual creatures, and it is in him, who is situated in the middle of the existent, that the temporal, bottom level of existence is linked (*connecteus in ipso*) to the world of the eternal, uppermost existence [God]." These words are interpreted by Laskóï in the fol-

<sup>45</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 3 (p. 32): "mundus unum habet centrum Cusano teste Deum, unam animam testibus Hebraeis, quam illi Adonai vocant. Alter quoque mundus formalis, sive invisibilis et Angelicus animatus esse censetur, cuius animam et centrum Cabalistae animam Messiae esse dicunt, quae Angelico illi mundo vitam et motum imperit. Huius centrum vocat Cusanus intelligentiam." Here Laskóï gives no accurate reference to Cusanus.

<sup>46</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 3 (p. 34): "Et hoc illud est, quod ait Cusanus tom. 1, lib. 1 *De ludo globi*: «Non» inquit «possumus negare hominem dici μικρόκοσμον, qui habet animam. Sic enim et magnum mundum animam habere dicunt, alii spiritum universorum, qui omnia intus alit, unit, connectit, fovet et movet, ad quem se habet totus corporalis mundus, sicut hominis corpus se habet ad animam. Ex quibus liquet, quam illud sit plausibile, quod a nonnullis solet usurpari: Deum solum movere universum mundum et tota in corpore reperitur.»"

lowing way: "Cusanus thus places human being in the horizon of time and eternity to underpin the order (*ordo*) of perfections. For we experience in ourselves" he continues, "we, who are one with the other creatures regarding perception, that besides (*ultra*) the perceptive soul we have a mental soul (*mens*) as well. Since as we are similar to animals regarding our sensual nature and thus act according to their nature, so does our mental action prove that we participate in spiritual nature as well."<sup>47</sup>

In the same Volume I, continues Laskói quoting Cusanus (and here the word "volume" probably refers to Cusanus's works, published in Basle, which Laskói may presumably have acquired during his sojourn in Basle), "in Book III of the *De docta ignorantia* Cusanus writes the following: «Human nature, which God has elevated above all things created by him and which he has placed only a little lower than the angels, is nothing else than the close unity (*complicatio*) of the intellectual (*intellectualis*) and the sensible (*sensibilis*) nature, which is furthermore able to condense the whole universe in itself like a microcosm or smaller world (*parvus mundus*), as it was asserted by the ancient philosophers.»"<sup>48</sup> Well, it is the authority of

<sup>47</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 3 (p. 36): "Huc pertinet illud Nicolai Cusani tomo 1 *De venatione sapientiae* cap. 32: «Quam pulchre» inquit «copulam universi et μικρόκοσμον hominem in supremo sensibilis naturae et in infimo intelligibilis locavit, connectus in ipso, ut in medio, inferiora temporalia, et superiora perpetua.»"

<sup>48</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 3 (p. 36). On the same page Laskai quotes Cusanus as follows: "Idem tomo 1 lib. 3 *De docta ignorantia*: «Humana» inquit «natura est quae sit supra omnia Dei opera elevata et paulo minus angelis minorata, intellectualem et sensibilem naturam complicans, ac universa intra se constringeus, ut mikrokosmos, aut parvus mundus a veteribus rationabiliter vocitetur.»" In this quotation Cusanus places nature above all other creatures of God. Nevertheless

Cusanus on the basis of which Laskóí explains and underpins human dignity both from the philosophical and the theological point of view, and we can still accept his justification today, taking into account that the definition of repeatedly mentioned human dignity is nowadays usually exposed to a common human conviction so often seriously manipulated. Going on in the reception of Cusanus, Laskóí writes — in the spirit of Cusanus — the following on this topic, consummating, as it were, his treatise on human dignity: “It is usually said [i.e. by Cusanus] that man is microcosm, who is called a universal creature by Christ and, as a matter of fact, man is a universal world (*universus mundus*), and thus he is a universal creature (*universa creatura*), i.e. the summing up (*epitome*) of the world.”<sup>49</sup> In the latter citation there can be found that later concept, typical of the modern times, of focussing on man, which makes man as detached from God the measure of all things. Laskóí, though, never separated his anthropology from its Christian sources.

In the seventh chapter of Book I of *De homine*, discussing the nature of the intelligent soul, Laskóí quotes Cusanus from his *Exercitationes*: “Think it over carefully that the human soul is made up of four parts. The soul is of spiritual nature, so its parts are also spiritual. For we experience that the human soul has mental functions,

we should interpret this assertion in its full context, or otherwise it seems as if Cusanus rendered an absolute meaning to it, which would lead to a misinterpretation of his thoughts.

<sup>49</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 3 (p. 37). Laskóí, according to Cusanus’ approach, who defines Christ as the *complicatio* of the created and non-created creature, and man — by Christ — is defined as a universal creature, writes the following on p. 37 of his work: “Dicitur enim homo μικρόκοσμος, et a Christo universa creatura, quod universus mundus, ac proinde universa creatura, cuius homo epitome est.”

whence four mental activities can be derived: sensual longing, anger, rational cognition and mental activity arising from free will."<sup>50</sup> It can be inferred from the quotation that Laskóí, analyzing the nature of the soul, accepts without any comments Cusanus's thought on the human soul, which may in itself be regarded as true (and showing a Platonic influence), but in accordance with current psychological knowledge we would say that neither Cusanus, nor Laskóí did differentiate between conscious and subconscious mental activities as well as between emotional and explicitly spiritual mental activities (for which, of course, they cannot be made responsible in their own age).

In the twelfth chapter of Book I of *De homine*, examining man as the image of God, the author quotes Cusanus's sixth chapter of Volume I of *De beryllo*, where he says the following on man's similarity to the divine: "Pay attention to Hermes Trismegistus, who says that man is a creature according to God (*homo esse secundum Deum*): for as God is the creator of every actually existing and natural form, so is man the producer of rational entities (*rationalium entium*) and artificial forms. Which he cannot make otherwise than that he by his intelligent mind (*intellectus*) is similar to God as his creature, since he carries in himself the resemblance of the divine intelligence. So man has an intelligent mind, which is the counterpart of the divine

<sup>50</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 8 (p. 123): "Cusanus lib. 8 *Exercitationum* super illa verba: «Dominabuntur populis» etc.: «Considero bene, animam humanam ex quatuor suis elementis compactam: Anima enim spiritualis est, elementa eius spiritualia sunt. Nam experimur, animam humanam, vim quandam esse spiritualem, ex se quadruplicem motum exercentem, scilicet concupiscibilem, irascibilem, rationalem, et liberum seu voluntarium.»"

intelligence, which becomes apparent right in man's creating activity (*in creando*).<sup>51</sup> Laskóí here quotes Cusanus in order to support his opinion which he puts in the following way: "If the enlivening soul is explicitly an archetype of being the image of God, then it is able to demonstrate God's presence in man in a distinguished way. From this follows that the spiritual soul is alien in its nature rejects to any heaviness and materiality."<sup>52</sup> In other words, Laskóí — in accordance with Cusanus — derives the spiritual nature of the human soul from its being the image of God.

In the twelfth chapter of his Book I, Laskóí also presents a detailed survey on the question of how the soul was created, whether it is a material or a spiritual cause that stands behind its creation. His conception is clear: since the soul is of spiritual nature, its creating cause is also spiritual, which means that it is God who plants "the intelligent soul into the body of the newly born children which has already been shaped in the womb"<sup>53</sup> (N.B. Laskóí, according to the common medical and theological

<sup>51</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 8 (p. 129): "Cusanus tom 1 *De berylo* cap. 6 ita Dei similitudinem explicat: «Adverte» inquit «Hermetem Trismegistum dicere, hominem esse secundum Deum: Nam sicuti Deus est creator omnium entium realium et naturalium formarum, ita homo rationalium entium, et formarum artificialium, quae non nisi intellectus eius similitudinis sunt sicut creatura Dei, divini intellectus similitudines. Ideo homo habet intellectum, qui est similitudo divini intellectus in creando.»"

<sup>52</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 8 (p. 129): "Si itaque anima ad vivum expressa Archetypi imago est, Deumque egregie refert et repraesentat: consequitur necessario, ut ab omni corporea mole et materia sit remota."

<sup>53</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 12 (p. 226): "Anima rationalis quotidie a Deo creatur et corporibus et corporibus nascentium in utero iam formatis infunditur."

conviction of his age, leaves open the question of the exact time of the creation of the individual soul.) Declaring philosophically the spiritual origin of soul, he quotes again Cusanus, namely the nineteenth chapter of Book II of his famous *De concordia catholica*, which is rather concerned with the philosophy of law: "Soul, as far as we understand it as a moving and sensitive soul (*motiva et sensitiva*), is derived from the potency of material (*de potentia materiae*). If, however, soul is examined by the rational (*rationalis*) part of the soul, then it derives from God."<sup>54</sup> Laskóí accepts Cusanus's distinction, termable as modern, of the so-called "sorts" of soul which, and in this sense he stresses the unity of soul and body in their operating interaction.

In the fourteenth chapter of Book I of the work we examine, Laskóí proclaims the immortality and imperishableness of the soul, and besides other ancient philosophers and thinkers of the patristic age, he lines up Cusanus on page 269 of Book I of his *De homine*: "Cusanus in Book V of Volume II of his *Exercitationes* renders a proves from different points of view" writes Laskóí "that the soul is immortal, as he declares it on folio 231 of Book II of *De ludo globi*, in Volume I of his work."<sup>55</sup> (N.B. Laskóí here probably refers to the edition of Cusanus, printed in Basle, which he was able to use as a source.)

<sup>54</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 12 (p. 225): "Cusanus lib. 2 *De concordia catholica*, cap. 19: «Anima secundum eius motivam partem considerata, educitur de potentia materiae: secundum autem rationalem eius partem considerata, a Deo est.»"

<sup>55</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 14 (p. 269): "Cusanus tom. 2, lib. 5 *Exercitationum* multis probat animam esse immortalem, quod et tom. 1 lib. *De ludo globi* facit fol. 231."

As I have referred to this several times above, Peter Csókás Laskói's chief work has an apologetic-theological conclusion, as he denies the existence of purgatory and the interceding of the blessed. In chapter 18 of his work he quotes Cusanus to support this view, detaching it from the context of the entire oeuvre of Cusanus, as if Cusanus shared his theological conception. Any quotation taken out of its context can, of course, be developed in a new way, but it is by no means certain that this follows the rules of the interpretation of texts (hermeneutics). Let us see, then, the text extracted from the nineteenth chapter of Book VIII of Cusanus's *Exercitationes* as it is quoted by Laskói: "It is laid down in God's hands to do perfect justice in the earthly matters, and it is also in his hands to provide the just with the seat of tranquillity after their death. God's hand is a power which preserves and sustains life, and this is the seat of the soul of the saints."<sup>56</sup> Many people ask: Where is the place for heaven? In this matter the conception of Cusanus and Laskói coincide: heaven is exactly there where the risen Christ is found. Who is able to get into heaven? According to Cusanus and Laskói, they are the just, i.e. the saints. But who are the just, in which way can man be justified? According to Laskói, by faith. Cusanus, however, cannot, and is refused to, be quoted by him in this respect.

And, finally, in Book II of Laskói's work *De homine*, dealing with the human body and giving a detailed description of all of its organs, we find a wonderful quotation from Cusanus, underpinning Peter Csókás Laskói's philosophy of man. Discussing the human trunk, accord-

<sup>56</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 1, 18 (p. 364). "Cusanus lib. 8 *Exercitationum*: «Absoluta iustitia in terris, omni iusto locus quietis est manus Dei, seu vis vitae conservativa est, locus animarum sanctarum.»"



ing to the original meaning of the Greek word of "man", *anthrōpos* ("standing upright", "looking upwards"), he explains that "the human trunk was been shaped by the Creator in a way that it he might be able to bend ahead and investigate the fertile part of the earth. But the head of the animals was created by the Creator in a way that it could be directed entirely towards the earth. The eyes of the animals are situated relatively far from each other, and their front legs are bending against the earth like the sustainers of sitting tabourets. Only man was particularly prepared by God. In other animals we see that their mouth is directed ahead, so they bend onto earth, whereas man is a being of upright figure, who explores the skies with his face, for he derives not from the earth, but from heaven, whence he was transplanted to the earth."<sup>57</sup> This is followed by a quotes from Cusanus's Book III of *Liber exercitationum* to illustrate and underpin what has been said before: "God has created man so that he might ascend towards him: every living being and every creature is directed to, and accomplishes its goal in, man, it is only in man that the evolvutional process of living creatures comes to its end and achieves its goal. Man, on the contrary, finds his rest and achieves his goal only in the the tranquillity of the Sabbath. The Sabbath, therefore, is that light which derives not from man's being a creature, but from the God himself, who blessed the seventh day. Because of this, man's peace can originate only from the non-created light, and there is no other

<sup>57</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 2, 1 (p. 434): "Caeterorum enim animalium ora deorsum flexit, quapropter ad terram prona sunt, hominem contra erexit, ut coelum suspectaret, cum sit non terrestris Planta sed coelestis."

blessed light for him except for that of the Sabbath.”<sup>58</sup> In his chief work, as evident from the context of the texts, Laskói quotes Cusanus because he agrees with him. Several times at the end of a chapter, having quoted other authors he cites Cusanus, giving him, as it were, the final word on the question. Here as well — in accordance with Cusanus and emphasizing the “greatness of man” in the title of his work — he declares that how beautiful and admirable the world as the creature of God may be, yet the most admirable in it is man, because in opposition to the subordinated creatures which, having attained their own evolutionary level, come to rest, man is able to find his rest only in God. This is the Sabbath, the feast of God. And it is only man that is able to celebrate.

To sum up, I wanted to verify in my study that Hungarian philosophy has nothing to be ashamed for. We have been able to keep abreast with the intellectual trends of Europe for more than a millennium. Even in the crucial periods of our history, the light of reason was not blown out altogether in Hungary. Peter Csókás Laskói was a philosopher, who first attempted to cultivate an independent philosophy in Hungary, but who in his work could enduringly point out that reason and faith do not exclude each other. Philosophy, if it wants to be authentic, genuine philosophy, cannot neglect its transcendental

<sup>58</sup> Lascovius: *De homine*, 2, 4 (p. 435): “Cusanus lib. 3 *Exercitationum*: «Hominem sursum creavit Deus ad se: Omnia enim animalia, et omnia creata in homine quasi in fine quiescunt, homo autem non nisi in die septimo seu Sabbato quiescit. Sabbatum autem est lux, quae non legitur creata, sed Deus benedixit diei septimo, unde solum in hac luce increata quae Sabbatum autem est lux, quae non legitur creata, sed Deus benedixit diei septimo, unde solum in hac luce increata, quae Sabbatum dicitur est quies hominis et non est hominis lux lux benedicta nisi in Sabbato.»”

condition of possibility. The reception of Cusanus by Laskóí confirms this by the elevation of such a Catholic cardinal, philosopher and theologian from the obscurity of oblivion and misunderstanding (Cusanus was accused of pantheism by Catholics for a long time) who had been able to accomplish the reconciliation of reason and faith in his *œuvre*, furnishing an example even for Laskóí.





