

LAUDATION

in praise of Sándor Kerekes

on the occasion of delivering the JUSTITIA REGNORUM FUNDAMENTUM award

We would like to greet Professor Sándor Kerekes, a worthy successor of the great teachers of Hungarian cultural history, a lecturer with comprehensive and in-depth knowledge of his discipline, with the ability to capture the attention of his students and with great presentation skills. He has a young spirit and he understands and loves young people with all his heart. The comments made by his students speak for themselves. "In these classes, I really felt that we can learn something." "This was the only lecture that I always attended". "My thinking of the world has slightly changed since I joined this course." The subject of Professor Sándor Kerekes is the world itself, i.e. the relationship between humankind and the planet, which is the scene of human existence. The Professor interprets the very human mid-term dilemma of "to be or not to be" and tries to teach the technology of survival in an institution that represents a science which tends to orientate its young scholars towards the "not to be", although not intentionally.

It is a special feature of the scientific activities of Sándor Kerekes that he has resisted the dominant ideology in the economic policy of both the recent past and the present with a logical and systemic argumentation, offering a value-based alternative to the interest-driven structures of thought. One of the secrets to the professional success of Professor Kerekes may lie in his intimate relationship with reality. In a world of ideological principles and wild speculations, he obstinately holds on to reality with the sober attitude of a teacher of industrial chemistry, he quotes facts in his arguments and warnings. His fundamental principles of environmental economics are simple and to the point: "The 'creation of values' by the economic system is the generation of waste from the ecological point of view. However, the 'creation of values' involves a loss of values and a deterioration of quality from the aspect of nature".

Professor Kerekes is a person who fulfills the important mission of maintaining a school; he is open to be involved in workshops, he builds on the work of others with humility and is ready to cooperate. He is the kind of educator who knows that the ability to learn, from anybody, be they a professor emeritus or a student, is at the heart of teaching as a vocation. As part of the work of his friend and colleague Professor József Kindler, and as a person who further developed these ideas, he makes irreplaceable contributions to the cause of Hungarian science and sustainable development. He does all this in a hostile environment: Professor Kindler has also expressed the fundamental reason for the multifaceted crises of our days, including the environmental crisis, in a way that is unbearably clear to the influential powers of the world: "Economic globalization removes power from the hands of the governments which are responsible for the public good and transfers it to the hands of a very small number of ... multinational and transnational companies and financial institutions, which are driven by one single coercive force: the endeavor to achieve short-term financial gains". The conclusion that Professor Kerekes has drawn is as follows: "For maintaining the environment in a good condition, we need a

strong state, as in the case of a weak state, a non-interfering state, ... the good condition of the environment as a long-term interest will inevitably be pushed into the background”.

It is the merit (and at the same time, the sin...) of Professor Sándor Kerekes that he examines and creates the basis for environmental economics in such a broad context, more precisely, in a basically “market loving” environment, where it is very difficult to achieve a breakthrough in approaches even by using the most thorough and most substantiated reasoning. This is why he goes deep and uses a wide spectrum of sources, not even afraid to break taboos and collect the arguments of the most excellent alternative economists to support his views. For example, by quoting Michael Snyder: “Our current monetary system has such characteristic features which are incompatible with the concept of sustainability. The endless cycles of economic upturns and downturns, the short-term thinking of people, the constraint of economic growth, the concentration of assets, the underestimation of natural and social capital are the ‘natural’ consequences of the current global financial system. Thus, the changes are vital both for social and environmental sustainability.”

The holistic approach is expanded by Professor Kerekes to the broad entity of culture, whereby he boldly quotes such spiritual and moral values which have not been too “trendy” either in the recent past, or in our days. “The wisdom of Paul’s letter to the Romans is still valid today: ‘For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.’ It seems like humankind is struggling in this trap. Despite all the good intentions, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, there are more starving people than ever, and the extent of alienation is unprecedented on our planet. ... The common root of all these problems is definitely human greed and egoism, i.e. the “experiment with the existence” of a world without moral values.

He quotes less fashionable thinkers too: “If people were deprived of the protective shield of cultural institutions, they would die of social isolation: as the victims of acute social chaos, of immorality, perversion, sins and starvation. Nature would fall into its elements, the environment and the landscape would turn into dumpsites, the rivers would be contaminated” (Károly Polányi). The Professor points out, with his pessimistic realism, that the wording is accurate, it is only the conditional tense that is unjustified, as a larger part of the world has forgotten about the warning and has tried what life was like without the protective shield of culture. They did so only to see with their own eyes that the world in fact cannot bear the environmental impact caused by the “insatiable appetite” of the population of over seven and a quarter billion. But despite the hard facts and practical experience, we do not even believe our own eyes at the beginning of the 21st century and we just keep treading the unwalkable path”.

The solutions proposed by Professor Kerekes are reasonably radical, like his diagnosis, as he knows very well that the approach of ‘business as usual’ leads nowhere. “We should change our views and expectations on prosperity, convenience, consumption, production and almost everything that we are accustomed to. There is hardly anything left that we can do the way that we have done to date”. “Competition should rather be slowed down, we need more cooperation ... and time to ensure that everything that is invented by human creativity should in fact serve the best of humankind”. “Cooperative growth, energy or agricultural strategy that acknowledges interdependence would put diversity in the focus of attention. This would mean that a variety of ownership structures, company sizes and a diverse energy mix, landscape

management adjusted to the special features of the landscape, a wide range of species and varieties, as well as a multifunctional network of institutions would characterize this old-new public discourse, if there were such public discourse.” “It would not hurt the Earth if everything were a bit more expensive – then perhaps we would think over more thoroughly what and how much we consume. We should consume more love, we could be happier and our ecologic footprint would shrink, this is how the world could become more sustainable”.

The Professor frequently and boldly steps off his pedestal to present his arguments to those who (may) have the power to take measures for these vital changes. As a highly popular presenter at symposia, he has been trying to, and has sometimes succeeded in influencing the thinking of politicians, bureaucrats and industrial leaders in his capacity as the key figure and president of the science branch of the National Environmental Council, in addition to his fulfilling a number of other functions. In this field, he has been fighting together with us, we have shared goals, we support each other. We are on the same wavelength, we have learnt a lot from him. This award is meant to express our gratitude for the work of several decades as well, it is to thank Professor Kerekes for all that he has done for the future generations during his career.

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