

THE BUDAPEST ROOTS OF MICHAEL POLANYI'S LIBERALISM¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the social and intellectual background of young Michael Polanyi, a native of Hungary. Surveying the social landscape of Budapest, the newborn capital (1873) of Hungary, it portrays the Liberalism of the fin-de-siècle Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and especially of Budapest, highlighting especially the Jewish contribution to Hungarian culture and civilization in the pre-World War I era. Often described in glowing terms, the period after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 saw the birth of outstanding people, both gentile and Jewish, whose contribution to the arts and sciences turned out to be phenomenal. The immediate pre-World War I period nurtured this ambitious generation with politically liberal and often leftist views intent on changing the outdated social and political system of the country. These productive young people contributed to building a new Hungary, the collapse of which after 1918-20 drove many of them, especially the Jews, into exile. Michael Polanyi was a superbly gifted member of this generation, whose spectacular career as a scientist and a scholar in three different countries (Hungary, Germany, and Britain) richly reflected the group as a whole.

Keywords: Michael Polanyi, Austro-Hungarian Compromise 1867, Franz Liszt, Budapest 1900, fin-de-siècle, Jewish middle class, assimilation, *A Holnap*, *Nyugat*, A Nyolcok, Liberalism, genius, Béla Bartók, generations, religious conversion, Endre Ady, Hungarian revolutions 1918-19, Republic of Councils, World War I.

1. BUDAPEST

Soon after the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867) and the unification of Buda, Pest, and Óbuda into the representative and impressive Hungarian capital city of Budapest (1873), a new, complex and modern, Hungarian intellectual élite emerged. Centered in the city of Budapest, this modernizing group came partly from

¹ The present paper was first given as a lecture at the Budapest conference on „Reconsidering Polanyi”, on June 28, 2008. The conference was organized by the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. Much of the paper was subsequently incorporated in the author's *Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 1919-1945* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009). Its current publication in the original form of the lecture may be justified by the particular attention it could draw to Michael Polanyi's liberal, Budapest background, social, psychological, and cultural.

the decaying landed gentry of feudal origins and partly from intellectually aspiring members of the assimilating (predominantly German and Jewish) middle class. While creating metropolitan Budapest in the intellectual sense, they constituted themselves as a group through what proved to be a completely new and unique social and psychological experience.

Before the unification of Buda, Pest, and Óbuda, the population of Pest-Buda was 269,293 (1869). Between 1890 and 1910, the population grew from 492,227 to 880,371, with additional growth in the suburbs (from 61,289 to 217,360). (Vörös 1978:158, 577) By 1930, the city had 1 million people, and by 1941, it reached 1,2 million. In the meantime, the suburbs grew from 311,000 in 1920 to 560,000 in 1940. (Horváth 1980:418)

Several economic and social factors contributed to the emergence of this gifted and creative professional group at the time of the rise and fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918). In a country where the long decay of feudalism had become visible and the political and social system based on huge landed estates had come under sharp attack, the beginnings of a new, capitalist society stimulated work in science, technology, and the arts. The transformation of the Habsburg Monarchy and the creation of a “Hungarian Empire” contributed to an economic prosperity that brought about a building and transportation boom, the advancement of technology, and the appearance of a sophisticated financial system. The rise of a new urban middle class affected the school system. Around 1900, there was a creative spirit in the air throughout Europe, permeating literature, music, the arts, and sciences. In Hungary, the poet Endre Ady, the group of poets *A Holnap* (Tomorrow), the editors of the new literary journal *Nyugat* (West) (1908), the modernist composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, the artistic group *A Nyolcak* (The Eight), philosophers such as Georg Lukács and Karl Mannheim, art historians such as Charles de Tolnay, Arnold Hauser, Lajos Fülep, and Frederick Antal, offered a new and stimulating agenda for artistic and social discourse. This creative atmosphere set the tone for a generation that included the many celebrated scientists born in the early years of the new century.

From assimilated Jewish-Hungarian upper middle-class families, Michael and Karl Polanyi, Theodore von Kármán, John von Neumann, Leo Szilard, Eugene Wigner, and Edward Teller were born into this challenging intellectual atmosphere of Budapest, which bred provocative questions and pioneering answers. Paradoxically, the approaching decline of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy seemed to have generated unusual sensitivity and creativity. (Mátraí 1976; Nyíri 1980; Nyíri 1988; Hanák 1998; Vörös 1978:3 210–723; Gluck 1985; Hargitai 2006:3-31; Lukacs 1988:137-181) In many ways, the political and social decline of the Monarchy created a special opportunity for Hungarian Jewry, which had grown and flourished throughout the fiftyone years of the Monarchy. The result was a professionally defined middle class, instead of a feudally-defined one in Hungary. Whereas the first generations of assimilating middle class Hungarian Jews concentrated on amassing material wealth, subsequent

generations were destined to focus their activities on accumulating knowledge. (McCagg 1986:25-47) Their often-strong financial background enabled them to concentrate exclusively on their studies and eventually join the various scholarly or scientific groupings such as the *Társadalomtudományi Társaság* [Society for the Social Sciences], the *Galilei Kör* [Galileo Circle], or the journal *Huszadik Század* [Twentieth Century] where the critically perceived social issues were often debated with a highly politicized focus. These circumstances provided a good schooling for this generation of prospective émigré intellectuals.

The period that ended with World War I saw a relatively peaceful cooperation and often-true friendship between Jew and Gentile in Hungary. What historian Raphael Patai described as “the love affair [...] between the Jews and Hungary” (Frank 2000; Patai 1980:68; Terao 1997) often resulted in intermarriages and other forms of close social ties and networking. For those opposing the influx of Jews into Hungary, however, Budapest seemed a special, “un-Hungarian” case, out of line with Hungarian tradition. The popular conservative author Ferenc Herczeg expressed this sentiment in a straightforward manner when he spoke about “foreign elements in [the] chemistry” of Budapest. (Cf. Horváth 1974)²

Assimilation was the by-word of the period: religious conversion, the dropping of German, Slavic, and particularly Jewish family names, and ennoblement were all standard practice. (Gerő 1940) The tortuous process of Jewish assimilation in Budapest was (often ironically) documented by the Hungarian novels of the period such as *Az éhes város* (The Hungry City, 1900) and *Az aruvimi erdő titka* (The Secret of the Aruvim Forest, 1917) by Ferenc Molnár, *Budapest* (1901) by Tamás Kóbor, *A nap lovagja* (The Knight of the Day, 1902) by Sándor Bródy, and *Andor és András* (Andrian and Andrew, 1903) by Ferenc Herczeg. (Cf. Birnbaum 1989: 331–342) Nevertheless, the full social history of Magyarization at all levels is yet to be fully researched and written. The capital city of Hungary played the role of a Hungarian melting pot through the four decades preceding World War I. It attracted a vast number of migrant workers, professionals, and intellectuals from all quarters of the kingdom of Hungary and beyond. It became an energized meeting ground for a multitude of ethnic and religious groups with varying social norms, modes of behavior and mental patterns. The mixing and clashing, fusion and friction, of such diverse values and codes of behavior created an unparalleled outburst of creativity, a veritable explosion of productive energies. In this exciting and excited ambiance, a spirit of intellectual competitiveness was born, which favored originality, novelty and experimentalism. Budapest expected and produced excellence and became deeply interested in the secret of genius. For many of those who were later to be highly recognized both nationally and internationally, Budapest seems to have been the natural place to have been born.

² Quoted by John Lukacs 1988: 202.

2. GENERATIONS

The emergence of those splendidly gifted generations in turn-of-the-century Hungary should be explained not only in terms of economic opportunity and political expediency, but also through social need and psychological disposition.

Just as in most of Europe, middle class and upper-middle class Hungarian families, particularly Jewish-Hungarian ones in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were based on the dominant role of fathers, with mothers relegated to the role of preserving the German trinity of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, church). Most families were supported by the single income of the father who reigned supreme in his family. More often than not, fathers had the final word in serious matters such as the education of the children as well as decisions about their marriages and jobs. Indeed, fathers loomed so large in middle class Jewish-Hungarian as well as Austrian families that one of the most significant issues to be resolved for young people was their relationship to their fathers. Sigmund Freud's concept of the dominating father figure was experienced in most middle class families, especially among Jews. The problem was conceptualized by Freud's notion of the "father complex." In his 1899 *Die Traumdeutung* [The Interpretation of Dreams], Freud observed that

even in our middle class families, fathers are, as a rule, inclined to refuse their sons' independence and the means necessary to secure it, and thus to foster the growth of the germ of hostility which is inherent in their relation. A physician will often be in a position to notice how a son's grief at the loss of his father cannot suppress his satisfaction at having at length won his freedom. In our society today fathers are apt to cling desperately to what is left of a now sadly antiquated potestas patris familias and an author who, like Ibsen, brings the immemorial struggle between fathers and sons into prominence in his writings, may be certain of producing his effect. (Freud 1965:290)³

As Claudio Magris added in his *The Habsburg Myth*, the source of Freud's general assumption is not only a basic rule of psychology, but it is also recognized today as an imprint of the particular Austrian social and family structure based on the dominating figure of the father. The crumbling, patriarchal institution of the family, Magris concluded, reflected the hierarchical order of the Habsburg system. (Magris 1963, 1988:91)

From our own sample, a case in point is Edward Teller, who remembered his father to have drummed it into him that because of the anti-Semitism of the political restoration after 1919, "he, as a Jew, had to excel just to keep abreast; that because of it he would have one day to emigrate to a country where conditions were more favorable for minorities; and that from anti-Semitism a sure escape was science,

³ One could easily add several other literary examples to Freud's reference to Ibsen, from German, Austrian, and Hungarian literature.

an international discipline.” (Teller 1961:160–1,⁴ cf. McCagg 1986:164) Though he had shown a precocious gift for mathematics, Edward Teller studied chemical engineering and took a degree in that subject, mainly because his father, a lawyer, thought his son ought to study a practical subject.⁵ Many fathers at the time thought that chemistry would be the appropriate subject to secure a safe future for their sons. (Palló 2004: 161–166) Similarly, noted psychologist Géza Révész was forced by his father to study law instead of psychology, in which he was interested from very early on. (Gál Csillag 1985:9) Like Max Teller, Révész Sr. was convinced that his son would make a better living with a “useful” degree. It was only after completing law school in 1902 that young Révész was able to pursue his real interest and study experimental psychology with G. E. Mueller in Göttingen, Germany.

Even at a late age, Theodore von Kármán maintained regular, almost daily contact with his father, who gave his son, by then a professor at a respectable German university, instructions on all issues of life. Kármán Sr. remained a decisive influence in the life of his son until the elder’s death in 1915. Von Kármán kept his father’s letters framed in his study during his long years at Caltech in Pasadena, California in the 1930s and 1940s.⁶ Freud’s words should also be recalled when we realize that the death of Mihály Pollacsek, the father of Michael and Karl Polanyi, was such a loss to his children that they exchanged letters to commemorate the event each year until the very end of their lives, over half a century later. (Duczynska 1971:9)⁷

3. ASSIMILATION

It is informative to look at some of the crucial issues of change in Hungary (and Austria-Hungary). Assimilation, and particularly Jewish assimilation, seemed one of the most important gateways of opportunity in the country. In order to strengthen the national identity in a rather disparate, diversified society, Magyarization proved a guiding principle of building the Hungarian nation, itself traditionally a composite mixture of ethnic, religious, and language groups of all sorts.

In a country that provided an almost unparalleled measure of religious tolerance before World War I, assimilation often included language shift, name change, ennoblement, mixed marriage, and religious conversion. This was particularly the case in Budapest, a city referred to by the contemporary poet Endre Ady as “made

⁴ *Life* magazine, Dec. 13, 1963. p. 89.

⁵ C. P., “Edward Teller” (Bio-bibliography), Archive for the History of Quantum Physics, American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia, PA; J. R. Shetley and Clay Blair Jr., *The Hydrogene Bomb* (New York, 1954), p. 41. Cf. the new biography of Teller by István Hargittai, *Judging Edward Teller* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010).

⁶ Mór Kármán to Theodore von Kármán, Correspondence 1912–14., Theodore von Kármán Papers, 141.10, 141.11, 141.12, 141.14, 142.1, California Institute of Technology Archives, Pasadena, CA.

⁷ On Mihály Pollacsek and his role in the Polanyi family see Szapor 2005:17. On the effect of his death on the family see pp. 28–29.

by Jews for us.” (Ady 1977:520) The change from German or Yiddish into Hungarian, from Jewish into Hungarian families, from Judaism to Roman Catholicism or various forms of Protestantism, served the purpose of integration into Hungarian society, yet these various forms of assimilation often created a sense of spiritual vacuum, an aura of lost identity, a religious no man’s land.

Assimilation, along with its various manifestations, reflected the measure of psychological insecurity, social uneasiness, and inner unrest of generations of Jews in Budapest as well as elsewhere in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and even beyond. (McCagg 1989 cf. Ettinger 1995 quoted by Ryan 1996:24) This issue has been discussed by a growing and increasingly interesting literature on Jewish insecurity. (Gilman 1986:22–67, 139–308; Karády 2000:125–284; McCagg 1989:47–158; Patai 1996:230–441; Katz 1980:203–9, 221–42) Ironically, the insecurity of the assimilated Jew was particularly noticeable, revealing a tradition abandoned in converted individuals and families, and a set of values yet to be conquered. The price of assimilation for religious converts was the loss of roots, social and psychological; its reward was promotion and social recognition. In the increasingly secularizing world of fin-de-siècle Budapest, it often seemed a reasonable bargain to exchange socially undesirable traditions for the psychological and commercial benefits of a seemingly secure position in gentile Hungarian society.⁸

For the converts of the World War I era and the immediate postwar years, these benefits were short-lived. Nevertheless, assimilation into Hungarian society provided the Jewish middle class with a set of experiences that prepared them for successful immigration and naturalization in the United States. Their success in the U.S. was conditioned by having already experienced comparable change in Hungary and the Habsburg Empire. They were prepared for the typical problems of émigrés/immigrants, having already experienced multiple values, double identities, and a sense of living, as it were, in between different societies.

The single most remarkable characteristic of assimilation in Hungary around the turn of the century (and a measure of its success) was Magyarization. The abandonment of the German language for Hungarian was rapid: the number of Jewish speakers of German dropped from 43 percent in 1880 to 21.8 percent by 1910, and the percentage of Magyar speakers in Hungary reached 75.6 percent. (McCagg 1989:190) To some degree, name change, already a frequent phenomenon in Hungary by the 1840s, was also part of this movement. Changes in family name often were from Hebrew to German under Joseph II, then from German to Hungarian in the 19th century, and again, among émigrés and exiles, from Hungarian to American.

Historian Peter Gay briefly noted the widespread practice of changing Jewish-sounding names in late nineteenth-century Germany. His German examples (Abramsohn to Otto Brahm, Goldmann to Max Reinhardt, Davidsohn to Jakob van Hoddis, Julius Levi into Julius Rodenberg) resemble the corresponding practice

⁸ On the nature of the assimilation patterns of the Pollacsek-Polányi family see Judith Szapor 2005:15.

in Hungary where Magyarization of Jewish-sounding German names became increasingly customary through the nineteenth century. (Gay 1979:98 n.12) The Hungarianization of names became a real movement in the 1880s-1890s: in the two decades preceding World War I, name changes amounted to 2,000-3,000 annually. An estimated 66,000 people of Jewish origin chose a new, Hungarian name between 1848 and 1917. (Alajos Kovács quoted by Mester 1939:3, 1940:3) Polányi, Szilárd, Kármán, Solti, Ormándy are all Hungarianized family names, just to mention some of the most well-known cases.

Another avenue of assimilation was mixed marriage. The politically right-wing statistician Alajos Kovács estimated the number of Jewish-gentile intermarriages between the mid-nineteenth century and World War II as 50,000.⁹

The boldest, and least likely, step toward gentile Hungarian society was ennoblement. The late William O. McCagg provided a detailed survey of Jewish nobles around the turn of the century. (McCagg 1986:25-47) Ennoblement gave the Jewish upper middle-class a chance to integrate into Hungarian high society, i.e. into the nobility or, eventually, the higher echelons of aristocracy. Von Kármán and von Neumann were born into such families.

4. CONVERSION

More than perhaps any other change, religious conversion from Judaism to Christianity marked the deepest level of assimilation. Religious conversion seems an indication of a certain type of mental pattern that enabled and prepared some of the émigré intellectuals and professionals to adapt to the challenges of life outside Hungary.

It would be misleading to suggest that conversions in the Jewish upper class started at the turn of the century. The history of apostasy goes back to biblical times, and has been known as emancipation, or as assimilation where it became a movement in some European countries. The nineteenth century produced a long list of significant individuals who converted, including French actress Sarah Bernhardt, British statesman Benjamin Disraeli, German poet Heinrich Heine, Hungarian-German violinist Joseph Joachim, the father of the political economist Karl Marx, and the composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. (S[eltmann] 1929a:54-7) Because of its importance as a social phenomenon, conversion was discussed in this period in a number of novels, short stories and dramas, both in Europe and the United States, including *Die Jüdinnen* and *Arnold Beer* by Max Brod; *Israël, Après moi, L'Assaut*, and *Le Secret* by Henry Bernstein; *Der Weg ins Freie* by Arthur Schnitzler; *Dr Kohn* by

⁹ Kovács considered this a fairly small number, altogether some 0.7% of the Jewish population in the territory of partitioned Hungary. Cf. Kovács 1939 and the theoretical considerations of Victor Karády (1985:57-58.)

Max Nordau; *Az új keresztény* [The New Christian] and *A túlsó parton* [On the Other Bank] by Péter Ujvári, *Quelques Juifs* by André Spiré. (S[eltmann] 1929b:63–5)

Conversion to Christianity was a familiar form of assimilation in Germany, where Jews played a strong role in the “free” professions. “The exodus was not massive,” historian Peter Gay noted: one source estimated the number of converts in the nineteenth century at around 22,000. Anti-Semitism, however, produced repeated waves of conversion. Half of Germany’s Jewish academics and most of the Jewish journalists and editors were, in fact, converts. Conversion was, as Peter Gay points out, the “one way to ease ascent on the academic ladder.” (Gay 1979:116) when the Jewish medievalist Harry Bresslau complained to Leopold von Ranke that his religion blocked his career, he was advised to be baptized. Until the 1870s, conversion was essentially the only way to leave Judaism. It was only after 1876 that Prussian legislation made it possible for Jews to leave their faith without adopting another one, a turning point that facilitated escape from Jewish identity. (Gay 1979:96–8, cf. Cohen 1961:259–69) It was not enough, however, to convert and baptize one’s children:

Normally it took several generations, several intermarriages, possibly a change of name and of residence before the past of the new Christian faded into invisibility. Jews generally despised their baptized brethren as renegades, Christians despised them as opportunists. Convert, seeking to win by moving from one camp to another, lost in both. (Gay 1979:98)

Everyone understood—everyone, philo-Semite and anti-Semite alike—that even those former Jews who had repudiated Judaism by religious conversion to Christianity, or legal disaffiliation from the Jewish community, were still somehow Jews: it never occurred to treat radicals like Karl Marx or the conservative legal theoretician Friedrich Julius Stahl as non-Jews. Berlin was full of Jewish agnostics, Jewish atheists, Jewish Catholics, and Jewish Lutherans. Indeed, these non-Jewish Jews were, if anything, more conspicuous than those who held, no matter how tepidly, to their ancient label, for they labored under the added reproach of cowardice, social climbing, secret service in a world-wide conspiracy—in a word, self-seeking mimicry. By the nature of things, these non-Jewish Jews were among the most prominent figures on the Berlin intellectual landscape. (Gay 1979:174–5)

The number of conversions in Hungary was relatively small before 1910: in the twenty years between 1890 and 1910, only 5,046 chose religious conversion. Although the tendency was relatively new and limited, contemporary urban authors such as Ferenc Molnár referred to it as a typical Budapest phenomenon and used it as a major theme as early as 1900. (Molnár 1993:6–7, 13–4, 165–6) It took the great political upheavals such as the revolutions following World War I to make religious conversion into a mass movement. (U[jvári] 1929:65)

Historian William O. McCagg Jr. observed that “in 1919 and 1920 there was a massive wave of conversions out of Judaism among wealthy families. Contingent

on this was a great deal of name changing and deliberate expunging of the past[...]" (McCagg 1986:240) Between 1919 and 1924, 11,688 Jewish persons (6,624 men and 5,064 women) were baptized. In 1919 alone, the number increased by 7,146. (T[ieder] 1929:554, cf. Kovács 1922)

From our own sample, the physicist Leo Szilard made the decision to get himself baptized in the Calvinist church of Hungary on July 24, 1919 (i.e., just before the fall of the Soviet system), at the age of twenty-one.¹⁰ Michael Polanyi was baptized into the Catholic Church on October 18, 1919 (i.e., well into the times of the White Terror), but it is unclear whether this represented his faith or was a practical step to facilitate his employment in Karlsruhe, Germany, where he was to emigrate shortly.¹¹ The choice of the date during the last days of 1919 is noteworthy and follows the pattern suggested by McCagg. In Hungary, members of the Jewish intellectual elite could claim substantial rewards in terms of career opportunities and advancement for converting. Thus, some had already started converting earlier in the nineteenth century or at least had had their children baptized. The mathematician George Pólya was baptized a Roman Catholic weeks after his birth in January 1888, in Budapest, and the baptismal records show his parents as Roman Catholic as well.¹²

Mass conversion became a serious proposition only as late as 1917: in a book on Jewish-Hungarian social problems, law professor Péter Ágoston suggested that total assimilation and mass conversion should be the correct attitude to solve the problems of growing anti-Semitism in Hungary. (Ágoston 1917) As a reaction to Ágoston's proposition, the social science journal *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century) addressed some 150 leading intellectuals and public figures in spring 1917, focusing public attention on the Jewish question in Hungary.¹³ But the Jewish leader Ferenc Mezey considered conversion cowardice; for such people would be looked upon as opportunists and conversion would not exempt them from racism. (Hanák 1984:32–3) Mass conversions had a modernizing effect within the Jewish community itself in that they forced Jewish leaders to introduce a more liberal, worldly fraction, one hospitable to new ideas: a Neology section in addition to the Orthodox majority.

¹⁰ Kivonat a budapesti VI-VII. ker. faszori református egyház keresztlési anyakönyvéből [Extract from the Baptismal Registry of the Calvinist Church at the Faszor, Budapest, VI-VII District] II. kötet, 14. lap, Budapest, July 24, 1919. Leo Szilard Papers, Box 1, Folder 11, Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

¹¹ [Author Not Indicated.], "Polanyi Biography," Draft of Chapter One, Summer 1979, MS, George Polya Papers, SC 337, 86-036, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.

¹² Keresztlével [Baptismal Record], Kivonat a budapest-terézvárosi római katolikus plébánia, Keresztelték Anyakönyvéből, Vol. XXXIV, p. 6, January 9, 1888. I am grateful to Professor Gerald Alexanderson of the University of Santa Clara for showing me this document as well as his collection of Pólya documents that were to be transferred to the George Polya Papers, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA.—It is interesting to note that the godfather of George Pólya was Count Mihály Károlyi's uncle, Count Sándor Károlyi, one of the great aristocratic landowners of Hungary.

¹³ Partially republished by Hanák 1984:13–115.

Psychologically, it was easier to convert from Judaism to Christianity for those whose families had earlier changed from Orthodox to Neological theology (roughly the equivalent of “Reform” Judaism in the U.S.). (McCagg 1987:142–64; Barany 1974:51–98; Hanák 1974:513–36, 1983, 1984:235–50; Venetianer 1986:147–73; cf. Rozenblit 1983; Farkas 1997)¹⁴

Conversions continued during the interwar period, even among immigrant Jewish-Hungarian-Americans. An interesting case was that of the mathematician John von Neumann, who converted to Catholicism after his father’s death in 1929, “for the sake of convenience, not conviction,” as his brother Nicholas remembered in 1987.¹⁵ Von Neumann was baptized again in Trenton, New Jersey, in April 1935, at the age of thirty-two, perhaps as an added effort to provide security for his family. In his last illness, while being attended by a Benedictine monk, various legends spread about yet another conversion and baptism.

5. CREATION

One of the best examples of the chemistry of Budapest, the contribution of immigrants (predominantly Austrians, Germans, and Jews) to the success of Hungarian culture comes from the field of music. Here we see how the Hungarian version of the melting pot worked, especially in Budapest, showing the imprint of great German masters on their sometimes even greater Hungarian students, the transformation of cosmopolitan, European taste into the Hungarian vernacular, as well as the merging of the European traditions of musical high culture with the ancient folk legacy of Hungary. Music performed in the concert halls or often home made, played an important social and psychological role in the life of the middle class in an era when there was no gramophone, tape recorder or CD-player to produce it. Home produced music contributed to and helped sustain several layers of urban society.

Most Hungarian musicians received their professional education at the Music Academy of Budapest, founded by Franz Liszt in 1875. Liszt made a concerted effort to link his native Hungary with the more advanced, western part of Europe. He is remembered today primarily as a composer and a piano virtuoso and less for his organizational achievements in the international field of music, from which Hungary benefited perhaps most of all. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Liszt, more at home in Weimar, Germany, and Rome, Italy, than anywhere in his native Hungary, settled in what was Pest, then a small, German-speaking provincial city connected to Buda by a single bridge. He stayed there from 1868 through the mid-1870s and his presence contributed to the spiritual growth of the

¹⁴ For a stimulating contribution to this discussion see Terao 1997.

¹⁵ Certificate of Baptism, Saint Mary’s Cathedral, Trenton, NJ, April 11, 1935. John von Neumann Papers, Box 7, “Birth, Divorce, Other official documents,” The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Rare Books and Special Collections; Vonneumann 1987:17.

city that became Budapest. He handpicked the first professors of musicology, violin, and cello, among others, and founded a musical tradition equal to the very best in Europe. He had both the reputation and the authority to attract the best people, Hungarians and foreigners, who came to the new Music Academy at his invitation. Professor Jenő Hubay gave up a promising career in Brussels, where he worked with the great violinist Eugene Ysaÿe, to return to Budapest and found what was to become a great school of violin at the Music Academy, where he remained for the rest of his life. Professor Dávid Popper, originally from Prague and arguably the greatest cellist before Pablo Casals, came from a distinguished position as concertmaster in Vienna to teach and perform in Budapest. With Hubay, he formed a unique string quartet to present classical and contemporary chamber music by Johannes Brahms, Antonín Dvořák, Josef Suk, Karl Goldmark, and others. Professor Hans Koessler came from his native Bavaria and became the teacher of subsequent generations of Hungarian composers. Though he was conservative in his own music and a follower of Brahms, he allowed his students a great measure of freedom to write their own, modern music. They included Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Ernő (Ernst von) Dohnányi, Leo Weiner, Imre (Emerich) Kálmán, Gershwin=editor Albert Szirmai, and several other well-known composers. (Frank 1989:346–7)

However, none of these examples of late-19th century „modernism” should cause us to believe that Budapest did indeed become a center of modern music. Liszt himself was modern, the Music Academy much less so. As Bartók added in his inaugural address at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1936, “[t]he compositions of Liszt exerted a greater fertilizing effect on the next generation than those of Wagner.” (Bartók 1936:24–8 quoted by Klay 1987:26–30) Liszt’s Music Academy, however, set out to preserve classical values and nurtured conservative and cosmopolitan tastes; contemporary music was not much appreciated, although it is difficult to argue that the musical public of the Hungarian capital was not at all responsive to the new voice of the twentieth century. Up to the end of the 19th century, however, the ideal was the late romanticism of Johannes Brahms, who often came to the Hungarian capital from nearby Vienna and some of his works were first performed by the Hubay-Popper Quartet and pianists like Vilma Adler-Goldstein in Budapest.

It was in the decade immediately preceding World War I that, in a delicate interplay with music, most modernist trends swept across the country in literature, the arts, philosophy, and the social and physical sciences. This incentive produced a renaissance of Hungarian national culture and the birth of modernism. It symbolically started with the poetry of Endre Ady (1877-1919), whose *Új versek* [New Poems] made a veritable literary revolution in 1906, and with the poetry anthology *A Holnap* [Tomorrow] (1908-1909), with Ady, Mihály Babits, Béla Balázs, and Gyula Juhász among the most prominent names represented. The movement came into full speed with the launching of the (mainly) literary periodical *Nyugat* [West] in 1908, which was to become the dominating organ of the modernists through World War II and which published vintage modern poetry and prose by authors like, again, Endre Ady

and Mihály Babits, as well as Margit Kaffka, Frigyes Karinthy, Dezső Kosztolányi, Zsigmond Móricz, Árpád Tóth, and a host of others.

The literary pioneers had their counterparts in almost every other field. The art group 'A Nyolcak' [The Eight], with Károly Kernstok, Róbert Berény, Béla Czóbel, and other excellent artists, was as important to this new generation as Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály were in music. Hungarian modernism was present in almost every field, and usually ahead of many European countries. The very best left Hungary early, first temporarily, most either during or right after the revolutions of 1918-1919. Many migrants kept returning to Hungary for visits before their decision to leave became final.

The immediate pre-World War I period nurtured a gifted and ambitious generation with politically liberal and sometimes leftist views intent on changing the outdated social and political system of the country. (Lukacs 1988:140–1) In a 1944 review of F. A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, Polanyi remembered the bygone world of 19th century Europe with nostalgic longing:

Some of us still recall that before 1914 you could travel across all the countries of Europe without a passport and settle down in any place you pleased without a permit. The measure of political tolerance which commonly prevailed in those days can be best assessed by remembering local conditions which at the time were considered as exceptionally bad. The domineering and capricious personal régime of Wilhelm II was widely resented, even though it allowed, for example, the popular satirical paper, *Simplicissimus*, regularly to print the most biting cartoons, jokes and verse directed against the Kaiser. Europe shuddered at the horrors of Tsarist oppression, though under it Tolstoy could continue to attack from his country seat in Yasnaya Polyana with complete impunity the Tsar and the Holy Synod, and persistently preach disobedience against the fundamental laws of the State, while pilgrims from all the corners of the earth could travel unmolested to Yasnaya Polyana to pay tribute to him. After less than a generation, say in 1935, we find that all the freedom and tolerance which only a few years earlier had been so confidently taken for granted, has vanished over the main parts of Europe. (Polanyi 1944)

After World War I, the situation fundamentally and dramatically changed, particularly for Polanyi's generation. Most who left Hungary after World War I were members, students or followers of this generation. The lists are impressive by themselves and speak highly of the ability of many of the professors in Budapest to give not only a thorough musical training but also a good sense of how to understand the contemporary world. For the post-World War I generation of Hungarian musicians, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály were the great examples admired and emulated. As Eugene Ormandy pointed out in a 1937 article for *The Hungarian Quarterly*, it was because of those two:

that Hungary has emerged as a musical entity. This Hungarian music of the twentieth century is intensely nationalistic and, while nationalistic art is of necessity limited

and destined to a comparatively short life, paradoxically enough the worlds of these two composers in the very intensity of their nationalism transcend[ed] nationalistic bounds. (Ormándy 1937:165)

Ormándy added,

[i]n the dramatic inevitability of Bartók, we have a composer who might be compared to Beethoven [...] Breaking away from the over-refined, essentially cerebral and decadent music of the post-Romantic period, Bartók has injected new life blood into his music. It has a savagery and yet withal a youthful vitality that makes it of universal importance. (Ormándy 1937:165–7)

Bartók and Kodály revived “the racial idiom of Magyar music,” Ormándy acknowledged, “to portray the distinct individuality of Hungarian music.” (Ormándy 1937:167)

The modernism of the music and ideas of Bartók and Kodály, their philosophy and lifestyle, integrity and puritanism, served in many ways as a model for their students at the Music Academy. Ormándy, along with Fritz Reiner and George Szell, was the first to present the music of Bartók to audiences outside Hungary. These conductors remained deeply committed to modern music throughout their career. Though mainly performing a classical repertoire, Eugene Ormándy had a real interest in contemporary music such as Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, Dimitri Shostakovich, and Dimitri Kabalevsky, whom he frequently introduced with the Philadelphia Orchestra.¹⁶ Antal Dorati, besides being a composer himself, performed the work of many of his contemporaries like Paul Hindemith, as did Fritz Reiner who played Stravinsky, William Schuman, Zoltán Kodály, and Leo Weiner. George Szell also delighted in performing Mahler, Hindemith, and Kodály, as well as Leoš Janáček, Jean Sibelius, Sergei Prokofiev, Sir William Walton, and Lukas Foss.

6. GENIUS

In and out of the school system, mental processes and the concept and structure of cognition received increasing attention in fin-de-siècle Central Europe. Hungary's new generation was intrigued by the phenomena of scientific discovery and problem-solving. Contemporary Europe was fascinated, indeed, thrilled by genius, and the subject seemed particularly relevant in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, well before World War I. Italian psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso's landmark

¹⁶ See Ormándy's correspondence with Princess Irina Sergeevna Volkonskaia, the daughter of Sergei Rachmaninov, 1955-1968; Columbia University, Butler Library, Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

study on genius and insanity [*Genio e follia*, 1864] was translated into German in 1887, his *Luomo di genio in rapporto alla psichiatria* (1889) in 1890. Hermann Türck published a highly successful study on genius in 1896 in Berlin, Albert Reibmayer described talent and genius in Munich in 1908 in two volumes, and Wilhelm Ostwald studied the biology of genius in Leipzig in 1910. Ernst Kretschmer published his Marburg university lectures on genius in 1929, shortly after the appearance of W. Lange-Eichbaum's volume on genius and madness. (Lombroso 1887; Trück 1910; Reibmayer, 1908; Ostwald 1910; Lange-Eichbaum 1928, 1931, Kretschmer 1931)

Research in Germany obviously influenced, or at least coincided with, Lewis M. Terman's Stanford studies on genius. Both the German and the American studies on intelligence were based largely on the French Binet-Simon intelligence test, which was adapted for the needs of several countries (for example, the Stanford-Binet Scale developed by Terman in the United States, as well as the tests by Bobertag in Germany, Jaederholm in Sweden, and Mátyás Éltes in Hungary). Considerable interest was shown in the subject in contemporary Hungary, as indicated by Henriette von Szirmay-Pulszky's study of genius and insanity among Hungarian intellectuals (Von Szirmay-Pulszky 1935) as well as József Somogyi's book on talent and eugenics. (Somogyi 1934) Psychologist Géza Révész studied talent and genius throughout his career, culminating in his 1952 book *Talent und Genie*. (Révész 1921, 1925, 1933, 1952)

To be sure, Central Europe was dazzled and perplexed by the secrets of the mind and its workings, and the processes of understanding/knowing, intuition/perception, intelligence/ /intellect came to be recognized as central issues in the sciences and humanities of German-speaking Europe. In 1935, Karl Duncker of the University of Berlin provided a summary of the psychology of productive thinking. (Duncker 1935) To those trained by the German literature on the subject, including several generations of Hungarian scientists and scholars, the plethora of work done on productive thinking in German provided copious introductions to the theory of knowledge, the biology of talent, and the philosophy of problem-solving. Much of the interest in the theory of knowledge and of knowing was generated in Vienna, where philosophers such as Professors Ernst Mach and Ludwig Boltzmann contributed significantly to the development of a scientific interpretation of the workings of the mind. Mach's main concern was the relationship between everyday thinking and scientific reasoning.¹⁷ Franz Brentano and his students Kasimir Twardowski and Christian von Ehrenfels were active in the field of phenomenology and knowledge and played an important role in the philosophical study of language. (Weibel 1985; Nyíri 1988) From Vienna these new ideas and trends quickly spread to Budapest.

Mach's work had considerable influence on contemporary European philosophers and scientists such as the English Sir Oliver Lodge and Karl Pearson, the Russian A.

¹⁷ Ernst Mach, *Erkenntnis und Irrtum. Skizzen zur Psychologie der Forschung* (2nd ed. Leipzig: Barth, 1906), p. XI.

Bogdanov, and the Austrian Friedrich Adler, assassin of Austrian Prime Minister Count Karl von Stürgkh. These works became a target of vicious critical attack by V. I. Lenin in his defense of Marxism in 1908 for “the old absurdity of philosophical subjective idealism.” (Lenin 1908:93) It is remarkable how anti-Marxist, non-Marxist, pseudo-Marxist scholarship, and particularly Ernst Mach’s work, influenced the philosophical tradition in central Europe, including Germany, Austria and Hungary. (Hanák 1989) Apart from the actual content of Mach’s studies, their philosophical and political implications were also relevant in the region, making a lasting impact on liberal thinkers who endeavored to maintain an anti-totalitarian stance in an age of political and doctrinal dictatorships. Albert Einstein extensively used Mach’s epistemology and physics, including “Mach’s Principle,” in his theory of general relativity.¹⁸

The anti-Marxian roots of liberal thought contributed to the complete estrangement of Hungarian émigré scientists and scholars such as Michael Polanyi and Oscar Jászi after the Soviet takeover of 1945 and made their already existing, pre-War anti-Soviet attitudes definitive. Apart from directly political reasons, this framework may be helpful in understanding the seemingly unconditional support given to the U.S. military and to NATO during the Cold War period by scientists such as John von Neumann, Theodore von Kármán, Karl Mannheim, and, most notably, Edward Teller. The philosophical underpinnings of the anti-totalitarian politics of Hungary’s émigré professionals can thus be traced to the traditional idealistic approach to science in Central Europe and the corresponding *Weltanschauung*, a legacy emanating from the philosopher George Berkeley through Albert Einstein.

The notion of a new type of learning, utilizing problem solving and the heuristic method came to be proposed by European immigrant scientists and mathematicians, several of them Hungarians. By the end of World War I, young Karl Mannheim had already written his doctoral dissertation in Budapest on the structural analysis of the theory of knowledge. The dissertation became well known after being published in German in 1922 as *Die Strukturanalyse der Erkenntnistheorie* [The Structural Analysis of the Theory of Knowledge]. Mannheim drew heavily on the work of the Hungarian philosopher Béla Zalai, who, though largely forgotten today, was instrumental in presenting the question of systematization as a central issue in Hungarian philosophy. In 1918, Mannheim referred to a 1911 article by Zalai on the problem of philosophical systematization. (Mannheim 1922, Zalai 1911, Szilasi 1919, cf. Beöthy 1977)

In a related field, heuristics was described as “tactics of problem solving,” and “an interdisciplinary no man’s land which could be claimed by scientists and philosophers, logicians and psychologists, educationalists and computer experts.” (Polya 1971:623-9,

¹⁸ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), Vol. 7, p. 631; cf. Albert Einstein, “Principles of Research,” Address before the Physical Society in Berlin, 1918; “Geometry and Experience,” Lecture before the Prussian Academy of Sciences, January 27, 1921; “On the Theory of Relativity,” Lecture at King’s College in London, 1921; and 1936:227, 239, 248, 303.

quote 624) Fascination with the subject among émigré Hungarians is probably best demonstrated by three important books by the author Arthur Koestler. Sharing the background of many of the Hungarian scientists in exile, Koestler was intrigued by the “act of creation” for a long time after World War II (*Insight and Outlook*, 1949; *The Sleepwalkers*, 1959; *The Act of Creation*, 1964). While working on these books, Koestler regularly consulted some of his illustrious Hungarian friends in England, such as Nobel laureate Dennis Gabor or Michael Polanyi, and Koestler once went to Stanford specifically to discuss the matter with Hungarian-American mathematician George Pólya. (Koestler 1949, 1959, 1964)¹⁹ The tradition of heuristics is deeply European, with roots in antiquity (Euclid, Pappus, and Proclus) and with forerunners such as Descartes and Leibniz. Heuristic thinking reached the Habsburg empire early in the nineteenth century when it became part of Bernard Bolzano’s philosophy: his four-volume *Wissenschaftslehre* [Theory of Science] (1837) already contained an extensive chapter on *Erfindungskunst* [The Art of Discovery], meaning heuristics. Through the questionable services of his disciple Robert Zimmermann, who possibly plagiarized much of Bolzano’s original book and published many of his master’s ideas under his own name in a popular and widespread textbook called *Philosophische Propädeutik* [Philosophical Propedeutics] (1853), these ideas reached a wide audience, and *Erfindungskunst* became an integral part of the philosophical canon of the Habsburg monarchy just before the great generation of scientists and scholars was about to be born. (Winter 1975:7-36, cf. Bolzanos 1837)

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¹⁹ Cf. M[enachen] M. Schiffer, “George Pólya, 1887-1985,” George Pólya Papers, SC 337, 87-034, Box 1, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA; cf. Arthur Koestler 1964:53; Hidegkuti 1995.

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