

Hans Lenk – An Olympic Philosopher of World Format. On the death of Hans Lenk (1935-2024)

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Hans Lenk, who was born in Berlin on March 23, 1935, was a philosopher and an Olympian of superlatives. The Olympic spirit embraced his whole life, especially his ceaselessly progressing and extremely extensive scientific work. Stagnation was not in his nature. The fuel that always propelled him forward was an old European virtue, classically known only as “curiosity”; whereby in Hans Lenk's case it would be more correct to speak of “unbridled curiosity”.

He was gripped by this irrepressible curiosity until his last breath. Four days before his death, he still wanted to know in the hospital what exactly the new work is about, which a mutual friend in Taiwan is writing during his sabbatical. And even after several operations, when his wife told him that the writer of this could only come to see him after a conference in Vienna, he knew not only the name of the conference organizer but even the topic of the lecture. It had only been said once, and that was almost eight months earlier, but Hans Lenk had an incredible, almost galactic memory, which always surprised and fascinated. In this respect, too, he moved in a circle of superlatives.

Even in hospital, he couldn't be without a daily newspaper. The world continued and he wanted to be part of it, always up to date, and he also kept an eye on the sport until the end, as a matter of course. It is somehow significant that he died during the ongoing – “his” – Olympic Games in Paris. In the hospital, he laconically asked his visitors to bring him new articles the next time they visited so that he would not be so bored. Reading, thinking, discussing, but also writing had become second nature to him throughout his life. The summary of one of his books once named this as “Interpreting, Interacting and Intervening in a Cogni-

tive and Active Engagement with the World” in a chapter title.¹

Anyone who visited him at home in the Black Forest town of Waldbronn usually found him reading. With the latest book lying on the table, conversations often began with him briefly reporting on what he had read. Thus, people were encouraged to tell him the latest news, but here the focus was always on the visitors' own work progress. He was truly always up to date, wanted to be informed about all significant developments, this applied to philosophy, but also far beyond, whether questions of war and peace, whether ecology or archaeology, whether literature or theater, whether other countries and cultures. The range of his interests and curiosity seemed endless.

But anyone who thinks that Hans Lenk was unable to pause and savor the moment is mistaken. He was not without rest, even if it was easy to get a different impression. A small remark was enough to let you know immediately how intensely he had perceived something. Whether in political contemporary history or in literature, whether on a museum visit or on a hike, even decades later he was able to recall in minute detail the astonishing facts and peculiarities that he had perceived and memorized.

When he did report such things, it was always in passing, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. He was never one to draw attention to himself, was very modest and cooperative, but undoubtedly very ambitious. He didn't know any different, because his rise to become an Olympic, World and European champion would have been just as difficult to master without his will to win and discipline as his educational rise, which he owed above all to his rowing trainer and school teacher Karl Adam, who convinced his mother that the boy had to go to high school and awakened his interest in logic, mathematics and physics.

Hans Lenk thanked his “fatherly friend” Adam and his mother throughout his life and was always drawn back to the picturesque, rural and remote Ratzeburg lake, where rowing and his education at the *Lauenburgische Gelehrtenschule* (grammar school) miraculously opened the door to the big wide world for him in the post-war period. He remained loyal to the place of his youth and his family, both in his autobiographical 2013 memoirs *Ratzeburger Goldwasser – vom Lago Albano bis Lambarene* [Ratzeburger Gold Water – From Lake Albano to Lam-

¹ Hans Lenk, Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie, Interpretation - Interaktion - Intervention (Stuttgart: UTB Fink 2005), 291.

barene],² which he wrote about his time as a rower and about his coach Adam, his origins and his personal conquest of the wide world, and in his private life as a regular visitor who met with his old rowing buddies there for as long as he could. Hans Lenk has now also been buried there.

The early Ratzeburg influence remained decisive throughout his life. The boy from a modest background in post-war Germany, who grew up without a father, always remained people-oriented, open-minded and with the irrepressible curiosity. His generosity was characterized by two things: The devastating Second World War, which Germany instigated and was responsible for, whose nationalist ideology he countered with a great openness to the world; and his Christian faith, which confirmed to him that all people are equal and should be treated equally, which was possibly further confirmed to him by his intensive study of Kant.

The latter explains his decades-long fascination with Albert Schweitzer, on whom he published extensively until a few weeks before his death, including *Albert Schweitzer – Ethik als konkrete Humanität* [Albert Schweitzer – Ethics as Concrete Humanity] (2000),³ and who inspired him to develop his own concrete humanity in a philosophical way in his book *Konkrete Humanität. Vorlesungen über Verantwortung und Menschlichkeit* [Concrete Humanity: Lectures on Responsibility and Humanity] (1998).⁴ The polymath Schweitzer impressed the polymath Lenk, not only because of the quintessence of his writings, that people recognize themselves as brothers when they reflect on themselves, but especially because he combined his studies with concrete actions, which was reflected in his work as a “jungle doctor” in the hospital he founded in the Central African country of Gabon in Lambarene, which Lenk describes as a “symbol of humane aid for people” and visited himself.

This impetus led Hans Lenk to attach great importance to the field of applied philosophy at an early stage. It is no coincidence that he has

² Hans Lenk, *Ratzeburger Goldwasser – vom Lago Albano bis Lambarene*, Ein philosophierender Olympiasieger erinnert sich. (Bochum; Freiburg, Br.: Projekt Verlag 2. Aufl. 2015).

³ Hans Lenk: *Albert Schweitzer – Ethik als konkrete Humanität* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2000).

⁴ Hans Lenk: *Konkrete Humanität, Vorlesungen über Verantwortung und Menschlichkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1998).

been a member of the International Advisory Board of the *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* almost since its foundation. He was extensively active in this field himself. A large number of works on the philosophy of technology, the philosophy of sport, the responsibility of science, but also, for example, at the interface between philosophy and economics, impressively demonstrate this. He had already recognized decades ago that humanity must not neglect the pressing ethical problems of technology and applied science.

Hans Lenk, who studied mathematics, philosophy, sociology, sports science and psychology in Freiburg (Breisgau) and Kiel, began his academic career in 1961 with his doctorate on the topic of *Wertsetzung und Wertverwirklichung der neuzeitlichen olympischen Bewegung* [The Setting and Realization of Values in the Modern Olympic Movement] in Kiel. He continued his studies philosophically inspired by his academic teacher Kurt Hübner with a habilitation thesis on logic in Berlin in 1966, which is still available from Walter de Gruyter today: *Kritik der Logischen Konstanten. Philosophische Begründungen der Urteilsformen vom Idealismus bis zur Gegenwart* [Critique of the Logical Constants. Philosophical Justifications of the Forms of Judgment from Idealism to the Present] (1969).⁵ In this work, he goes through the history of philosophy from Kant to the present day, looking at the attempts made to solve the problem of the *a priori* justification of the forms of judgment. He also habilitated in sociology. His remarkable career began as an assistant at the Technical University of Berlin until he accepted the call to the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Karlsruhe (now the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology) in 1969, where he remained for the next 55 years.

Hans Lenk's work and influence would certainly be inconceivable without the philosophy of sport, a field that he successfully established in Germany but also represented internationally as founding member and president of the International Association of Sport Philosophy. Therefore, he is regarded as the founder of German philosophy of sport. He understands sport in analogy to personal achievement, which is an expression of the individual freedom of people. It is no coincidence that Hans Lenk received the DOSB Ethics Award in 2010 for his outstanding

⁵ Hans Lenk, *Kritik der Logischen Konstanten, Philosophische Begründungen der Urteilsformen vom Idealismus bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1969).

contribution to promoting ethical values in sport and was inducted into the German Sports Hall of Fame in 2012. In addition, he received the Distinguished Scholar Award from the International Philosophical Society for the Study of Sport as early as 1995.

However, it would be a great mistake to reduce Hans Lenk to this field, as has been done based on his impressive career as a competitive athlete and Olympian. His opus is much more extensive: Logic, systems theory, epistemology, philosophy of mind, Kant, Wittgenstein, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, action theory, ethics, applied ethics, aesthetics, anthropology, cultural philosophy, pragmatism were among the areas of interest that he systematically worked on for decades.

His most important works chronologically include four Suhrkamp volumes published in quick succession: *Philosophie und Interpretation. Vorlesungen zur Entwicklung konstruktionistischer Interpretationsansätze* [Philosophy and Interpretation. Lectures on the Development of Constructivist Approaches to Interpretation] (1993),⁶ *Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft* [Interpretation Constructs. On the Criticism of Interpretative Reason] (1993),⁷ *Interpretation und Realität. Vorlesungen über Realismus in der Philosophie der Interpretationskonstrukte* [Interpretation and Reality. Lectures on Realism in the Philosophy of Interpretation Constructs] (1995)⁸ and *Schemaspiele. Über Schemainterpretationen und Interpretationskonstrukte*⁹ [Schematic Games. On Schematic Interpretations and Interpretative Constructs] (1995).

Philosophy und Interpretation deals with the historical development of interpretationist approaches in philosophy and the social sciences and culminates in an advanced approach of Lenk's own, which aims to create a unified concept for empirical sciences, formal sciences and normative disciplines. In this way, a distinct methodological constructivism of interpretation is developed, which ties in with Kant's tran-

⁶ Hans Lenk, *Philosophie und Interpretation, Vorlesungen zur Entwicklung konstruktionistischer Interpretationsansätze*, Überarbeitung unter der Mitwirkung von Ekaterini Kaleri (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1993).

⁷ Hans Lenk, *Interpretationskonstrukte, Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1993).

⁸ Hans Lenk, *Interpretation und Realität, Vorlesungen über Realismus in der Philosophie der Interpretationskonstrukte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1995).

⁹ Hans Lenk, *Schemaspiele, Über Schemainterpretationen und Interpretationskonstrukte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1995).

scendental idealism and Nietzsche's perspectival philosophy of interpretation. This methodological constructivism of interpretation emphasizes the methodological problems and questions of constructivity and the schematic application of interpretations.

In *Interpretationskonstrukte* Lenk attempts to show that contrary to the first impression of an absoluteness and unbridgeability of the mentioned split between the humanities and the so-called understanding sciences, in that a gap seemed to open up between the objective natural sciences, on the one hand, describing the world and reality, and the understanding humanities, on the other hand, in the course of a differentiated examination of previous interpretation theories and interpretative approaches, with scientific-philosophical concepts of the natural and social sciences, as well as with epistemological considerations of everyday knowledge, shows that there is a more abstract, overarching epistemological level at which this seemingly unbridgeable gap can be overcome. The "bridge" is formed here by the concept of constructive interpretation or, rather, of scheme interpretations and interpretative-schematizing activities, as well as of action and cognition with symbols and symbol-analogous inner representations.

Interpretation and Reality is a continuation of the lectures on the development of constructivist interpretation sentences that appeared under the title *Philosophy and Interpretation* and is exclusively systematically oriented. It is devoted to the main question of how the methodology of interpretation, or rather the epistemology and philosophy of interpretative constructs, can be reconciled with a modified everyday realism and with variants of scientific realism.

Schemaspiele attempts to develop a constructive integration of the approach to the philosophy of interpretative constructs by incorporating philosophical, anthropological, neurophysiological and psychological aspects and applying them in an epistemological way. Lenk concludes that we humans do not have the option of postulating absolute facts as justifications for our practices of conceptualization, rule-following, or for the internal differentiations of the mental. Facts do not exist *in themselves*. Rather, they can only be understood and grasped in the light of interpretations and the relevant orientations, objectives, ways of life, perspectives, which are directly interwoven with our "being-in-the-world".

It is fair to say that the theory of interpretive constructs forms the philosophical and theoretical focus of Lenk's work. Man can only access

the world through interpretation. Therefore, no non-interpretative description of the world can exist. All interpretation is always done through schemata, which represent the formative basis of our knowledge and our actions. Since people cannot evade interpretation, they cannot fall prey to relativism either but remain in a pragmatic realism.

Hans Lenk's well-founded and wide-ranging opus includes over 150 books and approximately 3,000 articles in over twenty languages. Doing justice to this huge body of writing is certainly impossible in the context of a short memoir. Nevertheless, some works are particularly noteworthy: *Kleine Philosophie des Gehirns* [A Brief Philosophy of the Brain] (2001),¹⁰ *Bewusstsein als Schemainterpretation. Ein methodologischer Integrationsansatz* [Consciousness as an Interpretation of Schemas: A Methodological Approach to Integration] (2004)¹¹ and *Human-soziale Verantwortung. Zur Sozialphilosophie der Verantwortlichkeiten* [Human and Social Responsibility. On the Social Philosophy of Responsibilities] (2015).¹²

Kleine Philosophie des Gehirns examines the question of whether humans have free will or whether thought processes are determined by physiological processes in the brain. The results and methods of recent brain research are used, as are the philosophy of mind and epistemology. In doing so, the book attempts to overcome the difficulties in understanding between scientific and philosophical knowledge.

Bewusstsein als Schemainterpretation applies the approach of methodological schema interpretivism developed by Lenk to the kinds and types of consciousness and the problems of the philosophy of mind. At the same time, the work provides an overview of the discussion of research approaches and interpretations from neurobiology, neuropsychology, and neurophilosophy, as well as the philosophy of mind.

Human-soziale Verantwortung is an investigation of the complex problems of responsibility from a philosophical and social science perspective. Theoretical results, methods and practical conclusions such as typologies, forms of conflict, priority rules and codes of professional

¹⁰ Hans Lenk, *Kleine Philosophie des Gehirns* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft / Primus Verlag 2001).

¹¹ Hans Lenk, *Bewusstsein als Schemainterpretation, Ein methodologischer Integrationsansatz* (Paderborn: Mentis 2004).

¹² Hans Lenk, *Human-soziale Verantwortung, Zur Sozialphilosophie der Verantwortlichkeiten* (Bochum; Freiburg i.Br.: Projekt Verlag 2015).

ethics on socio-philosophical questions of responsibility are presented. The presented findings are discussed under the guiding principle of a concrete humanity to be practiced.

Another indication of his awareness of problems was how Hans Lenk, long since emeritus, increasingly turned his attention to questions of environmental issues and ethics in books and essays, and this was long before the topic reached the political arena. From the 2000s onwards, three profound books can be found alongside essays: *Natur – Umwelt – Ethik* [Nature – Environment – Ethics] (2003),¹³ *Umweltverträglichkeit und Menschengeträglichkeit. Die neue Verantwortung für unsere Umwelt und Zukunft* [Environmental Compatibility and Human Tolerability. The New Responsibility for Our Environment and Future] (2009),¹⁴ and *Human zwischen Öko-Ethik und Ökonomik* [Human Between Eco-Ethics and Economy] (2018).¹⁵

It was precisely because he had been dealing with environmental issues since the early 1980s that Lenk was able to see with great accuracy that the environmental question had now entered a new, even more critical phase in world history. The subtitle of *Umweltverträglichkeit und Menschengeträglichkeit* was not by accident: The New Responsibility for Our Environment and Future.

And another field was becoming more and more important to Hans Lenk: He wrote several anthropological books about creativity, which increasingly fascinated him. He studied the philosophical, psychological and anthropological approaches to creativity theories that dealt with the creative processes in humans as meta-level beings.

The results of these studies include the book *Kreative Aufstiege. Zur Philosophie und Psychologie der Kreativität* [Creative Ascents. On the Philosophy and Psychology of Creativity] (2000),¹⁶ *Das flexible Vielfachwesen. Einführung in die moderne philosophische Anthropologie zwischen Bio-, Techno- und Kulturwissenschaften* [The

¹³ Hans Lenk and Matthias Maring, *Natur – Umwelt – Ethik* (Münster; Hamburg; London: LIT Verlag 2003).

¹⁴ Hans Lenk, *Umweltverträglichkeit und Menschengeträglichkeit, Die neue Verantwortung für unsere Umwelt und Zukunft* (Karlsruhe: Universitätsverlag Karlsruhe 2009).

¹⁵ Hans Lenk, *Human zwischen Öko-Ethik und Ökonomik* (Bochum; Freiburg i.Br.: Projekt Verlag 2018).

¹⁶ Hans Lenk, *Kreative Aufstiege, Zur Philosophie und Psychologie der Kreativität* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2000).

Flexible Multiple Being. Introduction to Modern Philosophical Anthropology between Bio-, Techno- and Cultural Studies] (2010),¹⁷ and the book *Kreative Pluralität. Anthropologische Perspektiven* [Creative Plurality. Anthropological Perspectives] (2013),¹⁸ dedicated to his mentor Kurt Hübner, and in the same year the 324-pages *Einführung in die moderne Anthropologie* [Introduction to Modern Anthropology].¹⁹

Anthropology thus clearly determined the last phase of his life. In *Kreative Aufstiege*, he wrote on 350 pages about the philosophers as a motto in their family register: “Real philosophy is creative, creative interpretation that crosses boundaries and conceptual design.”²⁰ [transl. by the author] In his 531-page book “*Creative Plurality*”, he also makes clear statements about how the human being of the future should be, who, as a natural social cultural being, is already called upon to be a fellow human being, companion, environmental partner and warning voice for others and for nature: “A pluralistic approach would also have to complement and emphasize the future-oriented nature of human beings and their actions, in short: the perspective of the future, which particularly emphasizes the responsibility of human beings for each other, for future generations, the environment, nature and creation.”²¹ [transl. by the author] In his *Einführung in die moderne Anthropologie*, considering the neurosciences, information sciences, social sciences, cultural studies and humanities, he emphasises that anthropology is always interdisciplinary and that humans must be understood as culturally diverse beings.

Of these four books, the 648-pages work *Das flexible Vielfachwesen* is certainly the most influential and has received a great deal of media attention. The subtitle “Introduction to Modern Philosophical Anthropology between the Bio-, Techno- and Cultural Sciences” is a deliberate understatement. Lenk was aware of the massive impact this book has had on the German-language philosophical landscape. A glance at the bibliography also gives an impression of the breadth of the

¹⁷ Hans Lenk, *Das flexible Vielfachwesen, Einführung in die moderne philosophische Anthropologie zwischen Bio-, Techno- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft 2010).

¹⁸ Hans Lenk, *Kreative Pluralität, Anthropologische Perspektiven* (Bochum; Freiburg i.Br.: Projekt Verlag 2013).

¹⁹ Hans Lenk, *Einführung in die moderne Anthropologie* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2013).

²⁰ Lenk, *Kreative Aufstiege*, Cover.

²¹ Lenk, *Kreative Pluralität*, 21.

author's reading. In the field of anthropology, this work sets the tone in German-speaking countries. His quintessence amounts to a clear-cut mission statement for the next generation of anthropologists: "An anthropology (philosophical as well as scientific) must be interdisciplinary and include the results of the sciences, insofar as they are important for this topic of man and the comprehensive treatment and integration of all aspects in this context."²² [transl. by the author]

In this work, Lenk once again emphasizes the special nature of humans, but at the same time highlights the major challenges facing humanity, which, in his view, can only be solved through an interdisciplinary approach, because every form of anthropological specialization inevitably reaches its limits here. It anticipates the theme of the Anthropocene without using the term coined by Paul Crutzen in 2000. In retrospect, Hans Lenk regretted this and saw the necessity of metaphorically introducing the concept of the Anthropocene into anthropology, since the man-made age – independently of the question of the geological age – represents a turning point in modern anthropology that we cannot negate.

The author can testify to how urgent and important this topic was for Lenk in his later years. In preparation for my Landau lecture "Introduction to Anthropology" for the summer semester of 2024, he strongly encouraged me to rethink modern anthropology and expand it to include the Anthropocene, because this incursion into human history was still largely missing from the subject and anthropology should not stop here. He himself had done some preliminary work on this, but it did not go nearly far enough for him. As a result, I renamed my lecture "Anthropology in the Age of the Anthropocene. On the Crisis and Reorientation of the Image of Humanity and Nature" and entered uncharted territory, which he welcomed and did his best to support with input in the form of articles and books. The lecture, which was aligned with the current climate crisis, was very well received by the environmentally conscious student audience in Landau, as I was able to tell him in the hospital, with warm thanks for his support.

In addition to all his works, Hans Lenk taught after his retirement in 2003 until well into old age. That kept him mentally young. Discussions with students and contact with younger people were important to him. He wanted to know what motivated students and what they

²² Lenk, *Das flexible Vielfachwesen*, 14.

thought. For him, teaching was not an obligation, but rather the free-skating program in the work of a philosopher. He also used lectures in the Humboldtian sense, to test his own theses and ideas and put them up for discussion. This is particularly evident in the Suhrkamp books of the 1990s on the theory of interpretation constructs, because these are directly derived from his lectures.

As if all this were not enough, Hans Lenk was also active in another capacity. He was a kind of diplomat among German philosophers, as his numerous honorary positions at both the national and international level show. This world of international philosophy, of exchange across cultures and countries, was also close to Hans Lenk's heart. He traveled extensively and enjoyed receiving foreign visitors. Among his former employees were colleagues who came to Germany from other countries. He also made sure that a Russian colleague taught philosophy of technology at the institute. For Hans Lenk, all of this was a matter of course and not worth mentioning.

But he was horrified when, at the institute, younger staff were asked whether they would be willing to participate in exchange programs with universities in Eastern and Central Europe and in North African countries. All the younger colleagues surveyed back then, except for the author, rejected this, with one employee's reason standing out: "You can learn something from the philosophy in the United States and in England, but what can you learn philosophically in these countries?" The author contradicted his younger colleague *coram publico*: "The distribution of intelligence is the same worldwide. The people in these states are no more stupid than we are." The answer came promptly, something like this: "Maybe so, but philosophically they have nothing to say. They don't appear in the relevant literature." To this I replied again to my colleague: "In which literature? In English or German, or in their native language? And who is to say that, even if they were unable to engage directly with the Western world for decades, say, because of the Iron Curtain, that they did not create their own philosophy during this time, one that differs from our own and is perhaps worth discovering?" But this attempt was also not very fruitful, as the reply came again by return of post: "Yes, all well and good, but it doesn't help my career."

Afterwards, Hans Lenk, who was grateful to me for my intervention, was greatly dismayed that someone could be so uncurious and unopen-minded. He could not and would not believe it. For Hans Lenk, in particu-

lar, who, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, saw his task as reaching out to colleagues in Eastern Europe, engaging with them on an equal footing and helping them to find their way in and to integrate them into the academic world of Western Europe, which was also manifested, for example, in his presidencies of the bilateral philosophical societies with Hungary and Romania – in addition to Argentina and Chile – as well as the German-Russian Society of Philosophy and Technology, this new ignorance and disinterest of younger people in Germany was a deep shock.

For him, who had experienced war and the post-war suffering as a child, scientific exchange of peoples was always peace work. His curriculum vitae shows this: During his career, he has held guest professorships at universities in Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Chile, Hungary, India, Japan, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, Venezuela and the United States of America, at the University of Illinois (1973), the University of Massachusetts (1976) and Texas Central University (1987).

The fundamental disappointment of the lack of interest and participation of Germans in international exchange and in the work of international committees continued in the following years. He regretted that hardly any young Germans were present at the international congresses and was irritated and a little concerned about this new German isolationism, as he was keen to see Germany as a good neighbor and partner in the world.

Repeatedly he tried to persuade me to go to world congresses in Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, etc., which I would have liked to do, but he understood very well that this was not possible without financial support. He was disappointed by the lack of funding for international exchange activities at German universities. He was always very keen for a nation like Germany to take part in international exchanges and in the committees of international associations with representatives, and to listen carefully to philosophers from other nations. International exchange was a value for him.

As always, he led by example and the former Olympian had plenty of superlatives to report: Member and President of the International Association of Sport Philosophy, Associate Fellow, American Academy of Physical Education (now known as the National Academy of Kinesiology), Member of the of the International Academy of Philosophy of Sciences, Member of Russian Academy of Science, President of the German-Russian Society of the Philosophy of Science and Technology, Member of the International Olympiad Union, Member of the Interna-

tional Academy for Philosophy, Honorary member of Philosophy Section of the Romanian Academy, Honorary member of the World Academy of Letters, Honorary Member of the International Olympic Academy. It may well be that I have forgotten some here; his entire environment was no longer able to follow his diverse activities and functions.

In Germany too, he held several offices: From 1973-1975, he was Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Karlsruhe, an office he also held outside Germany as Dean of the European Academy of Land Use and Development in Strasbourg, France, from 1993-1996. He was a member of the German UNESCO Commission, a member of the German Olympic Committee, an honorary member of the German Rowing Association and, from 1990 to 1993, the elected president of the German Society for Philosophy.

Subsequently, he was elected a member of the Steering Committee of the *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie* (International Federation of Philosophical Societies) and served as its Vice President from 1998 to 2003. In 2005-2008, Lenk was the first German to be elected president of the *Institut Internationale de Philosophie* (the “world academy” of the subject) in Paris, to which he had been appointed as a member in 1994 and whose board he had been a member of since 1996. From 2008, he was their elected honorary chairman.

Hans Lenk was also at the Olympic heights of superlatives when it came to international honors: Even his Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, which lists eight honorary doctorates, seems to have lost track of them here, which is not surprising, however, as Hans Lenk is probably the most prolific professor in the post-war history of this institution. As far as I can remember (he always told me about every new honor), so the number of honorary doctorates is more than ten. Among others, these include honorary doctorates from the German Sport University Cologne, the University of Moscow, Rostov-on-Don and other Russian universities, the University of Córdoba (Argentina), Budapest and Pécs (Hungary), Bucharest (Romania) and the University of Patras (Greece). In addition, he has received many prizes, including the scientific Carl-Diem-Medal, the UNESCO Philip Noel Baker Research Prize, the Outstanding Academic Book Award of the Association of College and Research Libraries (USA), the International Plato Award, Lifetime Achievement Award IBC and the Great Cross of Merit of the German Federal President, to name just a few.

Of all the German post-war philosophers, he stands out for his international engagement, which was not something he was born with, but which became his lifeblood through his early international sporting successes. Lenk's omnipresence is not only related to his works, but also to his proverbial worldwide engagement in many academic societies, at congresses around the world, and as a globally esteemed and well-connected official of world philosophy.

Another of his trademarks was his sense of humor. Although he was born in northern Germany and grew up in a place that is not considered a carnival stronghold, Hans Lenk was enthusiastic about the southern German carnival and embraced it with great gusto in Karlsruhe. He regularly gave carnival lectures at the back then University of Karlsruhe, in which he made fun of philosophers or philosophy or retold the history of philosophy in a humorous way. This even led to a series of books of his own, which he called “Neo-Jocologica” and which comprised no fewer than nine volumes.

But he also cultivated humor beyond carnival, which can be seen from the fact that he repeatedly printed cartoons in his books to lighten the subject matter a little. He regularly put copied cartoons or jokes from newspapers and magazines in the pigeonholes of his colleagues at the institute, which also served to maintain contact and exchange ideas in the hallway. In addition to the Neo-Jocologica series, other such works have been created, most recently *Satirische Sammelsurja*²³ [Satirical Collection] (2022) in verse form and with caricatures, which he published with a co-satirist and a caricaturist. Humor also played a significant role in Lenk's anthropology, where he never forgot to point out that humor is only a prominent feature of humans.

I remember how Hans Lenk, when I passed his closed office and he heard my voice through the thin wooden walls of the neighboring secretariat, opened the door to his office about every other week so that I would pass the open office door on my way back, where he then regularly invited me into his room for a short conversation. Once, he had an apple in his hand and said with a laugh: “Won't you come in for a chat over an apple?”

Hans Lenk was constructive and supportive. He was also very sensi-

²³ Günter Voss and Hans Lenk, *Satirische Sammelsurja*, In ernsten und heiteren Versen über die man schmunzeln, den Kopf schütteln oder sich ärgern darf, mit Karikaturen von Jan Tomaschoff (Bochum; Freiburg i.Br.: Projekt Verlag 2022).

tive. A former assistant of his, who later became the head of an institute at a Greek university, called one day to speak to Lenk's successor, who was the head of the institute at the time, to see if an exchange program could be arranged between the two institutes. Since he was not present, but I was assigned to him, the institute's secretary handed me the phone and asked me to take the matter up and instruct the institute's director about it. Thus, I talked with the Greek professor, who was a stranger to me. After the request, she told me that she had been Hans Lenk's assistant for a few years and enthused about what a wonderful and pleasant time it was working with Lenk as her boss. Then she asked if he might happen to be at the institute. But since that wasn't the case either, she then told me that he had written her such a sensitive letter on the death of her father that it meant so much to her that she would never forget it.

That was typical of Hans Lenk. He sensed when he needed to support and encourage someone. After years of not receiving any support from my doctoral supervisor before my doctorate on Wittgenstein, and not receiving any feedback from him on my work, he called me into his office one day and asked me when I had last been to a Wittgenstein conference. When I replied that this had been the case several years ago, he said without further ado: "You are now going to a Wittgenstein conference. You need to discuss the content to finish your doctoral thesis, and don't worry about the funding, I'll organize that."

But Lenk also perceived things the other way around with equal precision: Once, I reported to him, annoyed, about a book by a celebrated young German philosopher, because, in my opinion, she had written complete nonsense that is obviously illogical. He listened to a detailed description of the problem, understood it immediately, and simply said, "You are absolutely right." But he immediately added: "There's no question that you can tear this woman apart now, but you shouldn't do it." When I asked him whether such nonsense should be left unchallenged, he said: "No, but just don't refer to this woman by name. That will only cause bad blood, even if you are right. Focus on a good counter-proposal that makes it clear that it is not that simple. You can also criticize in the abstract but leave out the name of the colleague. That's better."

Lenk's qualities also included the ability to recognize the achievements of others without envy. Just recently, when I sent him a draft, he wrote back: "The essay is absolutely brilliant, every Wittgenstein journal or collection of essays should be thrilled to receive it." He always

tried to give special recognition to the achievements of others. That was rather unusual, especially since the institutional environment was not without envious people who regularly approached him. He saw this as envy on the part of people who had nothing to offer themselves, as he once told me. And how seriously he took it can still be seen today in a dedication in one of the many books he generously gave me, where it says: „‘Age does not protect against performance – but every mediocrity does.’ – In other words: Defy mediocracy!“

To sum up his life’s work is an impossible undertaking, especially in a short memoir. His life enriched the world immeasurably, and the gap he leaves behind with his death is correspondingly large. Hans Lenk was a unique man. He was generous and cooperative. After his death, a friend and colleague from the Karlsruhe Institute wrote to me: “He was the one who supported me during the ‘rigorosum’. I found that amazing.”

But that was not surprising, because I saw how he made a student his graduate research assistant to protect her. She was probably dyslexic and had significant inferiority complexes due to her educational background from abroad, since the educational canon there was different from that of her fellow students in Germany. Some professors openly ridiculed the student, which had a clearly negative effect on her performance. She was often agitated and nervous, obviously permanently stressed. Lenk asked me if I could include her in my seminars as a participant and give her a little support and encouragement, which I was happy to do. In the end, she therefore attended every conceivable seminar with Lenk and me (she didn’t miss any with me), gained in confidence and improved noticeably. She improved by more than one grade level and became increasingly self-confident.

One professor was amazed but asked me if we really wanted to invest so much time in weak students. I replied that an improvement of one grade, whether from 3 to 2 or from 2 to 1, meant that the student’s potential had increased by the same amount. And wouldn’t that be a wonderful sense of achievement for every lecturer? His answer was that he preferred to surround himself only with the already very good students, from whom he would have more than from improving average or below-average students. It was immediately clear to me that without Lenk’s forward-looking decision to make this student his graduate research assistant, she would never have been able to successfully complete her studies.

Hans Lenk’s view of the world was based on the fragility of every-

thing valuable and human, due to his experiences as a child during and after the war. He rejected any kind of grand ideological plans. Instead, he focused on human action and practice, as well as on the question of whether actions are beneficial for people. The pragmatic design of everyday practices in the sense of human benefit and in the tradition of the philosophy of pragmatism of William James, C.S. Peirce and John Dewey was the goal of his philosophical work.²⁴

Hans Lenk's efforts, not self-interested for himself and his own, but for humanity as a whole, were to contribute to developing a possibility for all of humanity to live well. Not with a grand plan, but with many humanistically minded fellow campaigners who were prepared to work daily to steer the world a little in the right direction, so that things would improve for everyone on the planet. Humane living conditions for all was the dream that defined his life.

Lenk was always constructive; the worst thing for him would have been to become cynical. He did not like this at all, and he was also quite open about this. He also expected those around him with whom he had closer contact to remain constructive and people-oriented. If someone was annoyed with someone, he would first show understanding, but then immediately admonish the person to be lenient. A pioneering example for others.

At the same time, he always approached people, tried to help them, sometimes repeatedly with those who were dismissive or not friendly towards him. It should never fail because of him: His hand was and always remained outstretched. Several times I watched him get a massive rebuff. Sometime later, he tried again. It took a long time before he gave up – temporarily, of course. But even then, he remained elegantly silent about it, only hinting to me once or twice, with disappointment, that he had tried very hard for nothing with this or that person.

Today I know that these characteristics were the secret of his success with people in general and the reason for his great popularity: People-oriented, constructive, supportive, never envious, never cynical.

On July 30, 2024, Hans Lenk died in Karlsruhe at the age of 89.

²⁴ Hans Lenk and Ulrich Arnsward, "John Dewey on Public Life, Technology and Modern Media. Notes on philosophy and public life with special regard to John Dewey's approach", *Philosophia. Yearbook of the Research Center for Greek Philosophy at the Academy of Athens*, Vol. 46, (2016): 325-333. Hans Lenk and Ulrich Arnsward, "Public Life, John Dewey and Media Technology", *Philosophy Now. A Magazine of Ideas*, No. 103, July / August (2014): 24-27.