

## HANS-MARTIN SASS (1935-2023): IN MEMORIAM

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On February 6, 2023, Hans-Martin Friedrich Ludwig Sass died. A memorial was held for him in Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Bethesda, MD, and in the Washington Plaza Baptist Church in Reston, VA, where Hans-Martin resided after he had retired. He died with 87, in sleep, preserving full brightness of his mind up to his last days. One might say: a blessed departure of one German-American. But what a full and dynamic life is to be uncovered behind those modest lines: a life of a curious, warm, lively being who, with a smile and energy, permanently and positively changed so many people and careers. Born on December 4, 1935, in Hagen, Germany, to a family of the Pastor Hans and Else Sass, Hans-Martin was raised together with his brother Klaus and sister Annemarie. After the high school in Gelsenkirchen, he studied literature, geography, and philosophy in Erlangen, receiving PhD in Münster in 1963 and habilitating in Bochum in 1972. From the Ruhr University, thanks to a Volkswagen-Foundation scholarship, in 1980, he visited Kennedy Institute of Ethics in Georgetown, Washington D.C.: it is here that Hans-Martin, up to then expert for Hegel and Marx, turned into a medical ethicist. Like in many similar occasions, moreover, he became a fervent scholar and populariser of the discipline, recalling the times of his first experiences as a teacher, when he used to transform complex issues into stories to be more easily accepted by the pupils (that is probably why he will like so much the 2-3 pages long articles by Fritz Jahr). Working hard on connecting German and American scholars, and on introducing modern medical-ethical concepts to Europe, Hans-Martin kept his particular “dual” position (Philosophy Professor in Bochum and Senior Research Scholar at Kennedy Institute) up to the end of his career, sponsored also by the German Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia. He organised courses, developed clinical-ethical methods (Bochum Protocol), edited advance directives (on decision making in healthcare), etc. In Germany, Hans-Martin founded the Bochum Centre of Medical Ethics, the Göttingen Academy of Ethics in Medicine, edited periodicals (*Ethics in Practice*; *Medical-Ethical Materials*), and directed General German Society for Philosophy (1975-1981). In 1985 and 2001, respectively, he became a professor at People’s University of China and Peking Union Medical College. For his work, including a dozen of books and more than 250 papers, Hans-Martin Sass was honoured by the title of the Knight of Justice of the Order of Saint John and Germany’s Cross of Merit.

Those believing (and studying) a broader version of bioethics than the mainstream one (that is, bioethics reduced to the issues of medicine and research), can never overestimate the influence Hans-Martin had on them: his pioneering work on Fritz Jahr from 2007, soon translated into Croatian and English and published in the *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, changed the entire future of bioethics. For Hans-Martin, this also was a beginning of a new era: coming to Rijeka for the world congress in 2008 and the first conference on Jahr in 2011, he persuaded me to jointly edit two collections dedicated to Jahr and publish them at Lit (Münster/Zürich), just as he persuaded Christian Byk to do the same in Paris, and instigated Natacha Lima to translate Jahr’s articles into Spanish and Leo Pessini into Portuguese. He somehow enjoyed the “race” in which he, Florian Steger and I engaged in searching for further articles by Jahr. Hans-Martin “analyses” of Jahr were not necessarily profound, and yet they were somehow witty and ingenious, such as emphasizing Jahr’s short sermon form and his bromide-induced vertigo.

An interesting question is how Hans-Martin came to know about Jahr and his article from 1927. In the preface to the translation of Sass’s article from 2007 into Croatian, Ivan Šegota tells an anecdote about his conversation with Sass during one dinner in an Australian-Dalmatian fish restaurant in Sydney in 2004:

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*On that occasion, I told him how I had heard some of our colleagues in America mentioning Potter had not been the first to “coin” the word “bioethics” because one German had done it forty years before Potter. But - I added - Potter told me in a letter that he had never heard of this German and the German word “Bioethik”. Apparently, after that conversation, Sass started “digging” in German literature and unearthed Fritz Jahr and his term “Bio-Ethik”.*

Once later, Šegota will recount that he heard about this mysterious “German” from Warren Reich in 2003, at a conference in Portugal: Reich allegedly justified the Americans who had resisted Potter’s candidacy for the Nobel Prize. However, Warren Reich would later claim to me that he first learned about Jahr from Sass. It is also unlikely that Šegota corresponded with Potter about Jahr (that is, “the German”), since Potter died in 2001.

Hans-Martin himself, however, offered different versions of the story. In an interview given in the spring of 2011 on the way from Rijeka to Zagreb to the young Argentinian scientist Natacha Lima, Sass will claim that he discovered the copy of the Kosmos journal from 1927 with Jahr’s article by accident, during a visit to an antiquarian. Other times he will say that “he worked seriously on Jahr, probably in 1995 or 1996, and that in November 1996, his assistants bought him a Kosmos from 1927, found in an antique shop, as a birthday present. The third time will allow the possibility that he talked about Jahr with Šegota in Taiwan (sic!), but that he discovered Jahr thanks to Eva-Maria Engels’ article from 1999 (so from *Metzler’s Lexicon*), and that only in 2004 or 2005. Since Hans-Martin’s first paper on Jahr was published in 2007, the latest version seems the most likely.

No less interesting is the evolution of Sass’s attitude towards Van Rensselaer Potter. In the book *Bioethik in den USA*, edited by Hans-Martin in 1988, there is no Potter among the authors on the reference list, nor does Hans-Martin mention him at all, but in his highly cited 2007 article (the first to report globally on the discovery of Fritz Jahr’s work), Hans-Martin mentions Potter in the very first sentence. After he lost his wife Renate in 2004, Hans-Martin could still be enjoying the love of his daughters Gabriele and Angelika and granddaughters Elisabeth and Anna. But number of colleagues and students he disseminated all over the world is not easy to count. We can only hope that, on those unimaginably beautiful fields of Elysium to which we all are drifting to, we shall get one more chance to have a beer and a chat with the friend we already miss so much.