

**Awardee: Ágnes Heller**  
**Philosopher**

**Ágnes Heller is considered one of the most important philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In her many writings, the favourite student and later assistant of György Lukács described the culture of Europe and always sought out dialogue with the great philosophical forerunners Kant, Nietzsche, Aristotle, Shakespeare and Kierkegaard. In doing so, she produced a very remarkable, multilingual oeuvre.**

Ágnes Heller's philosophy is closely interwoven with her own life experience. Her works were produced in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and reflect an age that was torn – as her own biography was – by the Holocaust, the Second World War and the totalitarian regime in Hungary. Her greatest values are life and liberty; her themes are justice, morality, social life, politics, history, art and science. The Goethe-Institut is awarding Ágnes Heller with the Goethe Medal for her life's work, which encompasses over forty books. The large number of her publications translated into German reflects the significance of her work for German-Hungarian cultural relations, going far beyond the field of philosophy.

Ágnes Heller was born to Jewish parents in the year 1929. During the National Socialist dictatorship, her father and many of her relatives were victims to persecution of the Jews, while she and her mother by chance repeatedly managed to narrowly escape deportation and murder. After completing secondary school in 1947, she began studying physics and chemistry at the university in Budapest, but, impressed by a lecture held by György Lukács, she changed her major to philosophy. In 1955, she completed her doctorate under Lukács's professorship and then became his assistant.

In the following years, she belonged to the Budapest School, an oppositional group of intellectuals and philosophers centred on Lukács. She quickly entered into a conflict with the ruling Communist party and was accused of a lack of allegiance. This was followed by her being banned from her profession, spied upon and finally her emigration to the west. From 1978 until 1983, Ágnes Heller was professor of sociology at La Trobe University in Melbourne. In 1988 she succeeded Hannah Arendt in the philosophy chair at the New School for Social Research in New York, where she taught until her retirement in 2009. Ágnes Heller has received many awards including the Lessing Prize of the City of Hamburg (1981), the Hannah Arendt Prize of the City of Bremen (1996), the Silver Cross of the Hungarian Republic (2004) and Denmark's most distinguished cultural award, the Sonning Cultural Prize (2006). In 2008, she became an honorary citizen of Budapest. Since her retirement, Ágnes Heller lives half the year in Budapest and half in New York.

**Tribute speaker: Lutz Niethammer**

Lutz Niethammer was born in Stuttgart in 1939. He studied Protestant theology, medieval and modern history and social sciences primarily in Heidelberg, where he obtained his doctorate in 1971. After an assistantship in Bochum, he was professor of modern and contemporary history from 1973 at the Universität Essen, the Fern-Universität in Hagen and, from 1993, in Jena. Between 1989 and 1993 Niethammer was the founding president of the Institute of Cultural Science at the Wissenschaftszentrum NRW in Essen and worked as visiting professor in Oxford, Paris, Berlin, Basel, Florence, Vienna and Warsaw. He was chair of the International Oral History Association, received the Bochum Historian's Prize for Economic and Social History in 2002 and in 2003 became the Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. From 1998 to 2000 he served as advisor to the German Federal Chancellery for reparations to forced labourers under National Socialism. Since his retirement in 2005 he continues to direct a number of research projects in Jena, including the transformation in East Germany and the VW research group *Remembrance – Power – History*, and advises the WAZ media group in Essen and Vienna on cultural and further education issues. He has published over 25 books as author or (co-)editor.