

In Memoriam: Thomas Alexander Szlezák (1940-2023)

Address given at the solemn Opening Session of the International Plato Society XVI Symposium Platonicum, held at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, May 5, 2025, to honour the memory of Professor Thomas Alexander Szlezák.

On 18th October last, Thomas Alexander Szlezák, Thomas to his friends, left us at the age of 83. It is well known that Szlezák was one of the most distinguished classicists of the last half century for his wide knowledge of Greek literature and culture, as well as for his broad culture and his defence of philological rigour. It is not my intention here to repeat his academic career, but I cannot fail to point out some of his most important scientific accomplishments

His seminal 1985 work, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie*, argued that Plato's dialogues are not self-contained but require supplementation through Plato's unwritten teachings. This perspective became a cornerstone of the Tübingen School's interpretation of Plato. Szlezák's 1993 publication, *Platon lesen*, originally commissioned as an introduction to Plato's philosophy, achieved remarkable success and has been translated into 17 languages. In this work, he defended and expanded upon the interpretative approach of the Tübingen School, making complex philosophical ideas accessible to a broader audience. It is impossible to review his more than 150 contributions, which develop his understanding from classical thought to contemporary philosophy. His last remarkable work was his impressive book on Plato, published in 2021. In it, Prof. Szlezák offers a hermeneutically momentous panorama of Plato's life and work.

Francisco L. Lisi

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

flisi@hum.uc3m.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8644-6374>

Szlezak's most relevant contribution to Plato's interpretation was his discovery of a substantial hint to the connections between written and unwritten doctrines, between the *Dialogform* and the indirect tradition, in the idiom "to help the discourse" (βοηθεῖν τῷ λόγῳ), with which Plato indicates the necessity of resorting to personal, oral contact with a philosophical guide beyond the written work.

Szlezák was very active in the academic world and had a deep sense of personal friendship. A founding member of the IPS, he was always concerned with the diffusion of classical culture. In his 2010 book (*Was Europa den Griechen verdankt*), he clearly set out the fundamental values of the Western tradition, the importance of notions such as freedom, democracy, equality before the law, and the rule of law. His defence of the critical approach and freedom of speech remains an inspiring example for all freedom-loving people in a Europe endangered by the resurgence of bureaucratic totalitarianism after its collapse in 1989.