

SARTON MEDAL LECTURES

LAUDATIO HUBERT DETHIER

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The unanimous choice of Hubert Dethier for the Sarton Chair, by the George Sarton committee, was more than justified in view of the enormous value of his scientific and critical work concerning the history of philosophy and moreover of his successful and stimulating efforts for motivating thousands of students during several decennia to actively study the history of philosophy and philosophy in general. In this laudatio we want to describe (1) how we discovered the immense value of his work. We will touch on some perhaps accidental correspondences, (2) between the work of Sarton and that of Dethier. A short overview (3) of the pluridimensionality of his scientific work will be given. Finally we will (4) elaborate on the personality of Dethier, on his strong, warm, rich and in the first place stimulating personality, for whom knowledge, wisdom, personal and social engagement are all strongly interrelated.

1. How we discovered the relevance and quality of the scientific, historic and philosophic work of Hubert Dethier.

The common man, scientist or not, at one or another moment in his career is confronted with our own western culture in which our professional scientific work is integrated. What are the drivers, the evolution, the future of this western culture? In this spirit we are inclined also to look for the roots, the history of this western culture with the hope better to understand the present status and the future. Rightly or wrongly we also believe that science is the pivot of the modern western society and more in peculiar determining its future. So we are interested to learn more of the origin of science in the western society. We have all learned that for this we have to look to the Renaissance: the basis and origin of modern science.

However, Sarton and Duhem already in the beginning of the 20th century have learned us that this popular view, which seems impossible to eliminate and which still is accepted by the generally erudite people and even by a lot of scientists, is completely wrong.

From Sarton, Duhem and Dethier we learned that modern science didn't find its origin in the Renaissance, not with the Greeks, not in Egypt or Mesopotamia nor in China or India but rather in the Islamic golden age. In the Islamic golden age all the ingredients of modern science which existed in one or another form, separated from each other in these several cultures, were integrated and produced the fruit of modern science, with all its merits and its curses as well (Vandamme, F., 1990, 2001).

Central for this integration is Averroes. Padua was a crucial center where the Islamic philosophers bridged the West and gave rise to the Western Sciences with Copernicus, Galilei, Harvey, Columbus...

When studying the Islamic golden age as well as its western impact one inevitably gets involved with the unbelievable erudite *Summa Averroïstica* of Dethier (with its four parts, I, II.I, II.II, II.III, III).

We can here only be jealous of Dethier who successfully worked for several years in Padua, the cradle, bridge and integrator of Western and Islamic Knowhow, Science and Philosophy ! We only dreamed of visiting Padua, the historical pivot of Islamic and Western science, culture, wisdom and knowledge.

Pitiful enough, both cultures after this intense interaction in Padua, pretty soon went each their own way. By this, they impoverished themselves and each searched its own route. In the 20th and 21st centuries, they meet again. Perhaps both centuries are nowadays more and more one-sided, more and more complementary. Let us hope that both cultures will integrate and again fertilize and ingrengate rather than destruct each other and perhaps even mankind at the same time.

2. Similarities and dissimilarities between Sarton and Dethier

Many authors have elaborated the biography of George Sarton. Social engagement was a fact very early in his life. It was his basic target. He was convinced that the emancipation and development of the workman had to be based on cultural development: literacy, theatre, art, science were basic levers for his emancipation. For these reasons Sarton was rather early active in these domains. He was convinced that to be efficient in this emancipation and development we have to know the processes, motors, roots of our knowledge and science, to be able to use them for the emancipation, progress and

prosperity of mankind. This idea is basic for his attention for the history of science. He approached this area with competence and a systematic method, which made him – as a lot of authors agree – the founder of this new discipline.

It is a pleasure to note that this same social engagement is the basic feature of Dethier's personality. He too searched for the roots of development for the same reasons. He too discovered the crucial role of the Islamic culture for the progress of sciences and western culture in general. He too succeeded in bridging the history of thinking with the construction of a future society. This type of bridging, Dethier realised through his teaching, through his involvement with handicapped people as well as through his political action for the sake of pluralism. His attention and involvement for art and film have also to be mentioned here.

3. The scientific work of Hubert Dethier.

To elaborate on the merits and impact of a scientific work of Hubert Dethier and give a critical analysis would require monograph. Therefore we will restrict us to a short overview. The opus of Hubert Dethier is very elaborated and broad and at the same time very profound.

We have already mentioned his four volumes, the *Summa Averroïstica*. A masterpiece ! However, we have in his work a lot of other contributions to the history of philosophy and knowledge, history of science, alchemy, history of religion, and culture. His strong involvement in esthetics too has to be mentioned. Very important is his elaborate approach to the discussion on the "Two Truth". This old problem is still very important for the better understanding of our own identities and the elaboration of our futures. Perhaps this pluralistic problem of the two truths is not that much anymore the discussion between the truth of the Ratio versus the truth of "revelation". For the 21th century, the traditional opposition between individualistic truth versus collective or even ecosymbiotic truth is perhaps much more important. The work of Averroes "Destruction of the Destruction" is here again probably pivotal.

4. The personality

Here too we could elaborate a monography on Dethier's rich personality. Still we can try to characterize it in some basic sentences. Hubert is a scientist with a mission to understand the past in order to build a better world and a

better future for the human, not only as an individual but in symbiosis with his society and environment. Hubert is an artist, an artist with language and with an analytic perspective. Hubert is a person who radiates strength and warmth: strength which stimulates but never overwhelms. Hubert is a teacher with a mission, motivated to help his students, collaborators, audience and to elaborate their own identity in symbiosis with and not against their cultural, ecological environment. Hubert is a politician too, in the noble meaning of the term, driven by pluralism but also targeting to realize a pluralistic society with as a target as well as a means a symbiosis of strong individuals with their environment.

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