

LAUDATIO MARC DE MEY

F. Vandamme

I feel honoured and pleased to give this laudatio at the occasion of the awarding of the Sarton Medal to Marc De Mey for his outstanding work, publications, research and education concerning the philosophy and history of sciences.

In a laudatio, traditionally one describes the quality of the work, its genesis and motivation and the human being hidden in the researcher. In fact, we want to do that be it through the elaboration of some symbolic aspects and dates.

It was about 15 years ago (1981-82) that Marc brought up the idea of the Sarton Centennial 1984. The board of Communication & Cognition reacted with enthusiasm and realized a congress with participants and contributions from all over the world. During this congress Mr. Liebaert, M. Thiery, rector Cottenie and the board of Communication and Cognition conceived the idea of a more stable and continuous honouring of the person and work of George Sarton : the Sarton Memorial Chair of the University of Ghent was founded and the Sarton Committee implemented. With Prof. M. Thiery as its chairman the Committee has succeeded in coralling an impressive group of chair holders en medal holders. Moreover, the Committee succeeded in giving an impetus to the study and research of the philosophy and history of science, internationally and locally.

It was about 30 years ago that Marc De Mey and I went to the United States, to Harvard and MIT, as young alumni of the University of Ghent with a Piagetian-Apostolean perspective, to do research concerning the cognitive and communicative processes and interactions. Once back at Ghent, uncountable hours of discussion lead the basis for the founding of the workgroup Communication and Cognition and its journal Communication and Cognition which has grown to a

widely respected international journal.

I must add that the Sarton interest was not a deviation from Marc's basic interest in cognitive and communicative processes. It was rather the explicitation of an implicit dimension of his interest. Not only the synchronic study of cognitive and communicative structures are and were important to him. Also the diachrony, the genesis, and the genesis of the scientific constructions and theories in view of their understanding were important. Sarton is here without doubt complementary to the Piagetian thought. For sure, the genesis is important for Piaget too, but this thought was perhaps still too implicit, and too synchronic so that a true diachronic approach was needed and symbolized in Sarton. Later on we find in De Mey's work the tendency to make more explicit still (and characteristic of the Piagetian thought) the actional component in the cognitive and communicative processes. Here probably the Aposteleian development, in giving priority to the *actional application as a motor to achieve structural change* in a Piagetian, Whitehead perspective, will have influenced him too.

In this actional application perspective, the principle that even viewing is based on action [moving of the object, moving of the instrument i.e. the eyes] may be at the basis of De Mey's intensive and successful use of multimedia and slowly but surely integrating virtual and augmented reality technologies in his study of understanding cognitive and communicative processes. The application area selected (art) is another symbolic element, which throws a vivid light on the person within the scientist.

Finally, we believe that his basic openness for developments in the world is also very illuminating. He too has had his opening to the Asian cultures. In first instance by bringing his ideas and theories to this world in publications and teaching, but also with an open mind for the Asian tradition, perspective and potential contributions to the evolvement of a better and more performant science.

It is also interesting to mention that Marc De Mey in his Science of Science approach, always was very strongly in favour of a

complete separation between the evaluation of a scientific work and its social targets and merits. Nevertheless, as a person he had always a very strong social and human engagement, in the largest sense. He helped individuals to realize their personality, even if these realisations are not that evident. This humanistic aspect of Marc is less well known than his scientific work, but certainly complementary to it.

But besides these lines on the development of his work and personality, we must mention some constants in De Mey's scientific work : the use of bibliometric and bibliographic tools for the cognitive approach to science, his intensive work and application of the "Eye" on the cognitive processes, and his precise and cultivated language and style.