

## Jean Ladrière (1921-2007)

Professor Jean Ladrière was born in Nivelles in 1921 from an Armenian mother and an architect father best known for renovating the collegiate church of Nivelles. During the war Jean Ladrière was a member of the Brigade Piron. After the war he graduated in mathematics and in philosophy at the Catholic University of Louvain. Having started his career as a researcher of the National Foundation for Scientific Research, he was later appointed to a chair at the UCL to teach the philosophy of science and the philosophy of nature. Soon he made his regular Friday seminar a high point of the week for philosophers : new trends and methods in philosophy were presented and critically discussed at those meetings.

Professor Ladrière's own contribution to philosophy is considerable. His book *Les limitations internes des formalismes* (1957) is a landmark in the field of proof theory. His translation of Gentzen's works, undertaken with Robert Feys, and his paper on Gentzen's *Cut elimination theorem* fostered in the French-speaking world an interest in logic that proved long-lived.

Professor Ladrière was keenly aware of the role of formalism in many areas of the philosophy of science and devoted several ground-breaking papers to explaining its nature and virtues. Let me quote a few lines from his essay « Le formalisme et le sens » : «Formal language promotes meanings by its own resources and gives an original access to areas of meaning which could not be reached otherwise ».

In several essays, Professor Ladrière pondered the role and nature of theory in the empirical sciences. He criticized the claim that the content of a theory can be reduced to the experiences which either confirm it or could do so. He stressed the heuristic role played by theories and theoretical concepts. Theories anticipate and shape experience.

It would, however, be wrong to think that Professor Ladrière confined himself to the study of scientific theories and formal languages. He also investigated the relationship between the language of science and the language of faith, and he made substantial contributions to the philosophy of religion. His earlier reflections on these topics can be found in two books : *L'articulation du sens, volume 1. Discours scientifique et parole de la foi* (published in 1970) and *L'articulation du sens, volume 2. Les langages de la foi* (published in 1984).

On more general philosophical issues, he published *Les enjeux de la rationalité. Le défi de la science et de la technologie aux cultures* (1977). In this book he studied the internal dynamics of science and technology and showed how science and technology give rise to a super-structure which becomes more and more autonomous. He assessed the impact of science and technology from the standpoint of ethics and aesthetics.

Professor Jean Ladrière played a major role in the greatest editorial enterprise of the *Presses Universitaires de France*, namely the *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, edited by Professor André Jacob and his colleagues. He inspired and supervised the team of philosophers entrusted with the task of analyzing the epistemological doctrines of the XXth Century.

Last but not least, Professor Ladrière contributed to the revival of the philosophy of A.N. Whitehead.

In 2004 Professor Ladrière published three books : *La Foi chrétienne et le destin de la raison*, *Le temps du possible* et *L'espérance de la raison*. All three books were written with

the same care and attention to the detail of argument as his more technical works. In Professor Ladrière's work there is no *confrontation* between faith and reason but the description of a relationship which is *rationally justifiable* and intimately experienced from within.

Professor Ladrière was a very open-minded thinker, capable of a constructive dialogue with philosophers of other persuasions. Like Paul Ricoeur, he was a member of the group *Esprit*. In the early nineteen fifties he was responsible for the creation of CRISP in Belgium, an independent organisation devoted to the study of political decision in Belgium and the rest of Europe.

Professor Ladrière was a man of great courage who never hesitated to commit himself and to take a stance on delicate issues.

He was devoted to his colleagues, to his students and to the institutions of which he was a member : the University of Louvain, the International Institute of Philosophy in which he served as general treasurer, the World Union of Catholic universities, and the Royal Academy of Belgium. He was *président d'honneur* of the *National Centre for Research in Logic* of Belgium.

One of the great European thinkers of our time, Professor Ladrière was also a man of exceptional charisma. He will be much missed.

Paul Gochet