



OBITUARY
GERRIT MANNOURY

It would testify to little piety towards the memory of a deceased friend if, in writing an obituary, one would take no account of his linguistic habits. It is for this reason that we do not wish to commemorate professor Gerrit Mannoury, who died on 30th January 1956, as a student of the philosophy of the exact sciences, but rather as a scientist who was particularly interested in the study of the foundations of his own discipline — mathematics — as well as in those of other sciences. Those who remember the impetuous way in which he pleaded in favour of the present subtitle of our journal and disapproved of any proposition aiming at including the term “philosophy of science” at one of the summer conferences on significs, will have kept the remembrance of a youthful fighter for what he deemed to be correct and righteous. Yet he was at the time 83 years old. The same attitude characterized his activity in other spheres of culture and science. For, although in private life he ordinarily prepossessed people in his favour, gentle and mild as he was, he was severe and even inexorable, when he protested against social oppression or stood up for his political conviction.

Mannoury's main scientific activities lay in the field of investigations of the foundations of science, especially those of mathematics and the science of man, and he fully understood how important a rôle language plays particularly in questions about the foundations of science. He welcomed any contributor to his fields of study, provided the latter disposed of a certain skilfulness, irrespective of the question whether or not he worked along the same line as he himself and whether the outcome of his investigations agreed with his own, Mannoury's, results and tendencies.

Perhaps Mannoury was one of the last individual thinkers who single-handed wrote some standard works on the linguistic aspects of a variety of technical subjects, which in the future will be the result of investigations of groups of specialists.

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Mannoury was a synthetic spirit, meaning that he was able to understand divergent trends of thought and that he knew how to combine divergent views without violating the "meaning" of the "sign users". He himself has repeatedly propounded original and penetrating views, especially in his writings on the foundations of mathematics and, resulting from these, in those of analytical and synthetical significs. The ineffectual way in which political and even scientific discussions are held, was an everlasting annoyance to him.

In the present issue of this journal some of Mannoury's pupils, friends and admirers have thrown a light on striking aspects of his conceptions.*

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to indicate the place of this revolutionary spirit in one or more of the traditional divisions. American sociologists like Robert Merton have tried to stress the difference between the American and the European variants in the field of the sociology of science, a domain that gave Mannoury much food for reflection. According to Merton, the American variant would be especially focussed on opinion rather than on knowledge. The European division, being concerned with knowledge, comes to deal with the intellectual elite, the American variant, concerned with widely held opinion, deals with the masses. The European division refers, on the cognitive plane, to knowledge, the American to information. The American emphasis has been on aggregates of discrete tidbits of information, the European on systems of doctrine. For the American, it is essential to detect, through the techniques of factor analysis for example, the clusters of ideas (or attitudes) which empirically occur. The European investigator stresses relations which subsist logically, the American investigator stresses relations which subsist empirically.

But this more or less general characteristic of the European approach does certainly not apply to Mannoury. He was particularly interested in the sociological aspects of opinion, but on the other hand he clearly saw that a study of the foundations of science should imply a study of certain epistemological problems, consequently of problems referring to the methodology of "knowledge". For many years he has dealt with the sociology of mass communications, and one of his aims was a profound investigation into the forms of language in which the social forms of thought express themselves. In this connection he used to speak of "mass significs". And although, especially as to his synthetic approach, his definitions took the form of a "system", he immediately

* An elaborate English edition, containing Mannoury's outstanding ideas in his own formulation, will be prepared in the near future.

was willing to reformulate or even to abandon his analytical definitions, if it became clear to him that his formulations were not in agreement with empirical data. Moreover, his distrust against any formulation, also against those of mathematics and logic, his aversion from what he used to call "word-fetishism", would have prevented him from being tied down to any logical system, to any system at all.

Mannoury, who, with regard to any divergence of opinion, always conceded that his opponent was also right *up to a certain point*, had the tendency to exceed all the traditional limits, both in daily life and in science. According to him, these are not two sharply separate spheres, but spheres whose intellectual activities gradually pass from the one to the other. He saw every phenomenon as the resultant of a number of differently oriented factors and only understandable in the light of the cooperation and the interrelation of those factors, which are never fully known to us. Besides, he emphasized the psychological background of the linguistic phenomenon: the associative relations that link our linguistic means to their psychic correlations are themselves phenomena of life and consequently are subject to continuous modifications, which are hardly perceptible by means of introspection. It is this conception of gradualness which is underlying the tendency of relativity of Mannoury's point of view.

Even his conception of mathematics, which he saw as a phenomenon of life that should be studied in its relation to other phenomena of life, deviated considerably from views generally held half a century ago. It is true that Mannoury distinguished between the mathematical formula, the exterior form of mathematics (mathematics in a more limited sense), and the mathematical intuition, the interior form (mathematics in a wider sense), and that the former, being a verbal expression, can be examined as a linguistic phenomenon. But the new approach, stressing the psychological significance of the phenomenon, covered a much larger area of practical applications than older conceptions.

In his writings Mannoury has repeatedly pointed out the difference between his views on criticism of language (although he always had scruples about the use of the possessive pronoun in this respect, thinking being for him a common human activity), having their origin in Lady Welby's "significs", and philology, semantics and other parts of ordinary linguistics. We think that Mannoury's ideas can be particularly understood by those who have known him personally and who are conscious of the danger of taking one or a few of his often paradoxically formulated sentences as an example for the trend of his

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views instead of considering them as a link in the network of interrelated terms bearing on the concepts to which these sentences refer. In the idiom of individuals as well as of groups, even of groups of scientists, connotations which are not translatable into any other idiom, often play an important rôle.

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Although Mannoury's intellectual inheritance contains a wealth of scientific information, consequently a wealth of new ideas, yet we think his activities, albeit those of an outstanding scholar, have not led and will not lead to the foundation of a "school" in the traditional sense of the word. On the contrary, notwithstanding his personality and his lectures were highly stimulating and fascinating, he himself did not aim at cultivating a circle of followers who would be echoing the words of their master. Some of Mannoury's friends will remember in this connection his own words: "May Heaven guard me from a school of Mannouryans!" But there is every appearance that individual scientists and groups of scientists will build on on the foundations laid by this eminent thinker: in the field of mathematics, in the field of significs, in the field of the social sciences.

Behind this sparkling wit there lay a strong conviction, and in the scale of values he used to point out the deepest emotional values underlying this conviction as the most valuable.

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Mannoury had a great influence on his friends and his pupils. That his works have been hitherto limited mainly to a restricted circle of admirers may, besides to reasons of a more practical nature, be mainly attributed to the smallness of the territory of the Dutch language as well as to his characteristic terminology with which one should make oneself familiar when studying his writings. In a somewhat paradoxical way one might say that to understand Mannoury's work one should "know" Mannoury, and the latter task was not an easy one. It goes without saying that this remark does not refer, or at least to a minor extent, to his purely mathematical writings.

Although Mannoury originally was a mathematician, he gave a strong impetus to studies in the field of the sociology of science, fully realizing that "ideological" elements might have crept also into his own writings on foundations problems. His conception of mathematics, pointing towards the study of other disciplines, paved the way to his psycho-linguistic and sociological studies. He has laid the foundation for investigations in the Netherlands for what later has been termed occurrence analysis, content analysis, slogan analysis, subsumption anal-

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ysis and the like in the field of the psycho-sociology of language.

Synthese has lost in Mannoury one of its most skilful and loyal advisers and contributors, who from the very first has published regularly his studies in this journal. And the *International Society for Significs*, which has been associated with *Synthese* for many years, also regrets the irrecoverable loss of its mentor and one of its founders, who made the words of Ernst Mach his own:

„Auch ist noch zu bedenken, dasz bei jedem Gedanken in hervorragender Weise die ganze Menschheit beteiligt ist. Sie hat an dem Gedanken mitgedacht, sie denkt mit und wird weiter mitdenken”.

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