

THE GENESIS OF CONCEPTS AND
THE CONFRONTATION OF RATIONALITIES

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THE GENESIS OF CONCEPTS AND THE CONFRONTATION OF RATIONALITIES

THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE, 7th-9th OCTOBER 2015

EDITED BY

JOSEPH FAMERÉE – PAULO RODRIGUES

PEETERS
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PREFACE

The *Peter Kindekens Fund for the American College*, named after the first Rector of this seminary, was set up in 2012 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in association with the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and the Université catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve) with the objective of preserving and enhancing the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the American College of Louvain (Leuven), and enabling both universities to maintain an openness towards the Catholic Church in the United States. Importantly, the funds offered by this organization to the Université catholique de Louvain can only be used to support teaching and research activities carried out by this university.

For this reason, the professors of both the Faculty of Theology and the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie of the Université catholique de Louvain (UCL) organized an exploratory trip to the United States in 2013 to meet with colleagues from several Catholic universities, including Boston College and Loyola University, Chicago. One of the fruits of these visits was the idea to organize a European-American conference that focused on the relationship between faith and science by bringing together theologians, philosophers, and scientists. After years of planning, the conference occurred on October 7th, 8th and 9th, 2015. Our ability to organize this successful event was due to the active collaboration of Professor John McCarthy (Loyola University, Chicago), who came to spend a few days in Louvain-la-Neuve in October 2014.

What is the “argument” or the topic of this conference, and, consequently, the presentations published within this volume?

The epistemological prestige of science challenges theologians and philosophers to give an account of their forms of reasoning. The universal character of scientific discourse contrasts with the multi-layered language of meaning used in both theology and philosophy. However, does that mean that the language of those disciplines goes beyond the boundaries of reason? Can theologians and philosophers justify their reliance upon rational discourse? Indeed, the epistemological status and capacity of these disciplines to enter into dialogue with the language of science depends on the rationality of their discourse. To deal with these questions, one must examine the elaboration of concepts in theology, philosophy and science, and confront their respective rationalities.

After an introduction from the Dean of the Faculty of Theology (UCL), which emphasizes the interest and importance of this rationale, the first part of this volume addresses the fundamental epistemology of theology, philosophy and sciences. Presentations by theologians Benoît Bourguine (a European) and John McCarthy (an American), by philosophers, Peter Verdée (a European) and Daniel McKaughan (an American), and by Thierry Magnin, a European scientist, will allow these experts to reflect on this topic from their own points of view. The challenge of each presentation is to articulate the rationality and genesis of concepts in their respective areas, including the problems faced by those working in each discipline. Thus, Benoît BOURGUINE (UCL) will explore the rationality of theology as an experience of the Christian Community, and its adjustment to other rationalities, which allows it to be more aware of the religious specificity of the Revelation, while also accompanying the transformation of Christian identity within Modernity. John MCCARTHY (Chicago) will reflect on “thinking God” (not just about God), and locate this theological thinking within the wider activity of human thought. Peter VERDÉE (UCL) will point out the limitations of the formal methods as argued by Jean Ladrière in order to find an alternative foundation for mathematics: the so-called pragmatic foundations intend to mediate between the formal and informal systems. Daniel MCKAUGHAN (Boston) will refine the stance (especially shared sensibilities, attitudes, and values) from within the Judeo-Christian tradition and assess its relationship with science. Thierry MAGNIN (Lyon), a physicist, will propose a new relationship between subject and object in quantum physics: one should consider the incompleteness of the physicist in search of reality.

The second and the third parts of this volume are dedicated to two cross-disciplinary themes: temporality and liberty. These case studies will allow us to test the capacity of theologians, philosophers, and scientists to enter into a cooperative dialogue.

The second part, centred on the theme of “temporality” and approached through a series of case studies, includes four presentations that correspond to the three disciplinary approaches. Geert VAN OYEN (UCL) offers “some reflections on time in the Bible”: “since everything is told as stories in the Bible, time is a metaphor used to talk about the presence of God within the world. It expresses how Israel had experienced the presence of God in the first place. Time is sacred because God is present in time. Yet, this sacredness is also linked with being or becoming a human person in a biblical perspective: there is no human life out of time. People will have to learn to live with and in time” (000). Alexander GUAY (UCL), a philosopher, asks: what is physics without time? Despite

appearances, the relegation of the notion of time to the background does not mean the end of physics. Regardless, the consequences of the question of time for personal identity and philosophical anthropology are so important that this debate could not be abandoned to the scientists alone. Dennis D. MCCARTHY (Washington) explores the question of time from the point of view of astronomy, which “has been a key element in our understanding and measurement of time”, and “continues to contribute to our understanding of time through the investigation of pulsar time scales and its contributions to cosmology” (?16). Yet, “our speculations regarding the origin and fate of our universe cause us to continue to question” (?16) whether time exists. The philosopher Denis FOREST (Paris) questions temporality from the perspective of memory and the recollection of human beings, while examining self-recognition’s duration: “what is offered as a critique of Locke is, in fact, just a different view of the self that leaves his main question unanswered” [who am I?] (?13). This contribution is also a reflection on freedom and constitutes a good transition to the third part of the book.

The final section, centred on the theme of “freedom” starts out with Susan ROSS’ (Chicago) theological reflections on freedom, autonomy, and responsibility: intelligent and free human beings “can and do find in the Christian theological tradition a way of understanding freedom that makes sense and provides avenues of conversation with other approaches” (philosophy and the sciences in particular) (?13). As both a biologist and a philosopher of sciences, Bernard FELTZ (UCL) confronts neural plasticity, determinism, and free will in their contiguities and differences: “Freedom”, he concludes, “is embodied in a system of determinations that are constraining but not completely deterministic, and which leaves room for the impact of linguistic signification in behaviour development” (?22). Two bioengineers, Renaud RONSSE (UCL) and Philippe LEFEVRE (UCL), describe their bio-inspired robotics project (from rehabilitation to human augmentation, and even substitution of human beings), and question its legitimacy: beyond modern robotics development, there is “an impressive series of ethical questions that society should urgently tackle” (?18). In contrast to this contribution, Marc HUNYADI (UCL), an ethical philosopher, vigorously criticises the technical evolution of our society: do we attend a confrontation or a fragmentation of rationalities? Do we not need a global ethics, an ethics of the world as a whole that goes beyond individual rights?

The general conclusions of this research on “the genesis of concepts and the confrontation of theological, philosophical and scientific rationalities” are drawn together by both Jean-Michel COUNET (UCL), a philosopher, and Annemarie C. MAYER (KU Leuven), a theologian. Counet

develops an epistemological reflection on the multiple rationalities and methods, and retains philosophy as a form of mediation between different disciplines: “freedom, judgement, time, reflexivity, philosophy, science, and theology”, he maintains, “have made up a set of meaningful concepts in which each term takes on an identity and sense. (...) what really matters is that all the elements remain linked together, while keeping a singular meaningful identity” (207). Mayer proposes a theological perspective on the conference as a whole and compares some contributions, especially from the point of view of shifting concepts, methods, and paradigms. She also asks what could be the common tasks of theology, philosophy and science? Thus, she again questions the theme of this publication: can theologians, philosophers and scientists understand each other, and collaborate with a mutual set of goals? Her conclusion is daring: “Theology as thinking God, philosophy (or if you want to be even broader in scope, humanities) as thinking the human being, and natural science as thinking the natural world need each other!” (209).

Paulo Rodrigues’ (an engineer and theologian from UCL) postface offers a final reflection on this demanding and stimulating confrontation of rationalities: Questioning the field of the contemporary rationalities, it is asking the question of their unity and the ultimate sense of their evolution. This requires their inscription into a field of understanding wider than the restricted space in which they unfold themselves (cf. p. 224).

To conclude this introduction, I would like to thank all of the contributors for their hard work, especially B. Bourguin, B. Feltz, J. McCarthy, P. Rodrigues and G. Van Oyen for their efforts in preparing the conference that served as the origin for the current publication. I also want to thank the *Peter Kindekens Fund*, the *Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique*, and the *Institut de recherche Religions, Spiritualités, Cultures, Sociétés* for the funding and support of this research project. Finally, we offer our sincerest thanks to the prestigious series *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* for publishing our book.

Faculté de théologie
Université catholique de Louvain

Joseph FAMERÉE

MOT D'ACCUEIL

À l'occasion de ce colloque consacré à la genèse des concepts et à la confrontation des rationalités, qu'il me soit tout d'abord permis, au nom de l'UCL et de la Faculté de théologie en particulier, de souligner l'intérêt d'une telle rencontre qui fait jouer à l'Université son rôle de mise en dialogue et de croisement entre diverses disciplines et approches du réel, et ici plus précisément de l'élaboration des concepts à l'intérieur de plusieurs domaines scientifiques. Dans cette optique, l'organisation d'un tel évènement n'est-elle pas l'expression même de l'essence de l'Université qui s'offre comme un lieu d'élaboration et de maturation, comme un «incubateur» des diverses disciplines qui progressent et s'affinent grâce au dialogue qu'elles peuvent entretenir entre elles? Un dialogue qui, soucieux de la démarche de l'autre, de sa méthode d'approche, de son épistémologie et de son langage, permet précisément la quête de la juste articulation entre plusieurs visions du monde, sans séparation ni confusion.

L'intérêt de ce colloque qui rassemble théologiens, philosophes et scientifiques, tous spécialistes dans leur domaine, est également d'avoir fait collaborer, pour sa mise en œuvre, des institutions universitaires et des collègues des États-Unis et de l'Europe. Tout en laissant le soin au professeur Joseph Famerée d'évoquer la genèse de ce colloque et l'origine du *Peter Kindekens Fund*, il convient de souligner l'importance d'un tel évènement pour les institutions partenaires, en particulier pour cette rencontre la Loyola University de Chicago, avec le département de théologie; le Boston College; Washington; notre université sœur de Leuven; autant d'institutions qui marquent leur intérêt non seulement à la thématique abordée mais à une réelle collaboration. Que les différents organisateurs et toutes celles et tous ceux qui ont œuvré à la mise en œuvre de cette rencontre trouvent ici l'expression de mes plus vifs remerciements.

L'intérêt de la problématique envisagée pour les diverses disciplines ici convoquées est important. Il s'agit bien, en effet, en faisant le détour par l'autre de se comprendre soi-même et d'approfondir en même temps que son identité propre sa relation et sa nécessaire articulation à l'autre. En permettant la rencontre et le dialogue sur le terrain fondamental de l'épistémologie, ce colloque lui-même met en jeu et opère déjà une certaine compréhension de cette discipline. Cette dernière n'apparaît-elle pas comme le terrain de rencontre ou d'entente entre plusieurs rationalités

elles-mêmes porteuses d'une certaine compréhension du monde? Il ne s'agit pas ici d'édifier une seule épistémologie en souveraine, mais d'entrer dans une démarche qui fasse droit au questionnement et au dialogue, qui honore la quête de sens et de vérité toujours tâtonnante et incertaine. E. Morin, dans son *Introduction à la pensée complexe* écrivait que «l'épistémologie, il faut le souligner en ces temps d'épistémologie gendarme, n'est pas un point stratégique à occuper pour contrôler souverainement toute connaissance, rejeter toute théorie adverse, et se donner le monopole de la vérification, donc de la vérité. L'épistémologie n'est pas pontificale ni judiciaire; elle est le lieu à la fois de l'incertitude et de la dialogique»¹.

Enfin, une citation de J. Ladrière, dont l'œuvre entière est marquée par ce souci d'articulation et de dialogue entre les diverses épistémologies, pourrait nous servir de fil conducteur et nous rappeler l'*eschaton* de nos démarches et de notre quête de sens.

Nous sommes appelés à vivre dans l'horizon exigeant d'une tâche à comprendre et d'une vérité à faire. Mais nous avançons parmi des ombres, sans savoir si nous sommes dans la lumière naissante d'une aube annonciatrice ou déjà, peut-être, dans la clarté vacillante d'un interminable crépuscule. [...] Ce que nous attendons de l'université catholique, c'est qu'elle nous aide à ne pas désespérer, à nous garder à la fois de la tentation du nihilisme et des séductions ambiguës de l'esprit prométhéen, qu'elle nous apprenne en même temps l'audace et l'humilité, qu'elle nous donne, face au doute, la force de l'affirmation, et face au délire de la présomption, le courage de la confession des péchés. Ce qu'elle doit nous faire voir, c'est le cheminement de la vérité au milieu des abîmes de l'esprit, c'est l'annonce, dans nos fragiles pensées, dans nos discours chancelants, dans nos entreprises hasardeuses, au sein même de notre naïveté, de notre faiblesse et de notre dérélition, d'une réalité à venir et déjà présente dans laquelle, dès maintenant, tout est sauvé»².

Faculté de théologie
Université Catholique de Louvain

Éric GAZIAUX

1 E. MORIN, *Introduction à la pensée complexe*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, p. 64.

2 J. LADRIÈRE, *La science, le monde et la foi*, Tournai, Casterman, 1972, p. 73.

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