

Gerrit Mannoury: concept-criticism as a means of better understanding



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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PHILOSOPHY

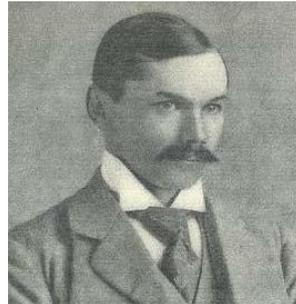
- 1917: International Institute for Philosophy in Amsterdam.
- Founders: Henri Borel (sinologist, man of letters), L.E.J. Brouwer (mathematician), Frederik van Eeden (psychiatrist, poet), Jacob Israël de Haan (jurist, poet) and Gerrit Mannoury (mathematician).



Borel
(1869-1933)



Brouwer
(1881-1966)



Van Eeden
(1860-1930)



De Haan
(1881-1924)



Mannoury
(1867-1956)

- Reaction to the misleading slogans WWI.
- Philosophical reflection needed to bridge differences between people.
- The founders strived for unity and international co-operation.
- The Institute had to be initiated in a neutral country.

SIGNIFICS

- Many contradictions between people caused by language usage.
- Enhance human communication and understanding by clarifying words and concepts.
- New science of words and meaning: significs.
- Discipline launched by Lady Victoria Welby (1837-1912), friend of Van Eeden.
- Before significs (1917): Mannoury already had concept-critical idea's.

MANNOURY AND SOCIALISM

- Mannoury was attracted to emerging socialism around 1900.
- Feeling to stand on the threshold of a new era.
- People focus more on community life than individual life.
- 1900: member 'Dutch Labour Party' (SDAP).
- Many intellectuals joined the SDAP: Herman Gorter (1864-1927), Henriette Roland Holst (1869-1952), Hendrik Berlage (1856-1934), Anton Pannekoek (1873-1960).
- 1901: Co-founder Social Democratic Study Group (SDSC); promote interests of the SDAP.

WORLD LANGUAGE

- SDSC: topic of 'world language' had Mannoury's special interest.
- The use of this language would be of great benefit for international socialist congresses.
- It could make possible equal communication between people all over the world.
- 1906: Louis Couturat (1868-1914) sent papers and books about 'auxiliary language' to Mannoury (SDSC).
- Couturat was one of the advocates of the Auxiliary Language Movement since 1900.

AUXILIARY LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

- At the time of the World's Fair in Paris (1900):
Second International Congress of Mathematicians
and First International Congress of Philosophy.
- Attended by important scholars like Couturat,
Guiseppe Peano (1858-1932), Bertrand Russell
(1872-1970).
- Obvious disadvantage of language differences were
sharply felt.
- Leopold Leau's (1868-1943) solution: an auxiliary
language constructed on scientific principles.

DELEGATION AUXILIARY LANGUAGE

- 1901: Leau and Couturat founded the Delegation for the Adoption of an International Auxiliary Language.
- Their idea was that till then the question of the international auxiliary language was too "much in the hands of Utopians, fanatics and enthusiasts".
- The Delegation "consisting of literary and scientific men of eminent reputation" had to take the matter up and decide which international auxiliary language had to be chosen for international use.
- 1907: a simplified form of Esperanto (Ido) was chosen as the new auxiliary language.

COUTURAT AND MANNOURY

- Couturat's idea: international language could multiply international relations and exchanges;
- Increase understanding and unity the academic world.
- Also develop sympathy among people all over the world. 'Consciousness of Mankind'.
- Mannoury's idea: scientific exchanges can develop;
- Especially, scientific expression could be enhanced.
- The meanings of words are chosen intentionally, so they have a greater stability and objectivity than the words of our natural language.
- Some of Mannoury's articles or summaries written in Esperanto.
- Congress of The Unity of Science Movement (Cambridge, 1938) he proposed to use Esperanto at international congresses.

SOCIO-BIOLOGICAL EQUILIBRIUM

- Mannoury: not only enhance scientific expression, but also expression in daily life.
- Connected to his socialist ideal of an improved balance between individual and community: the socio-biological equilibrium.
- He had a strong feeling that he lived at a turning point in history, where the attention would be more focused on common interests.
- The improvement of language was an attempt to stimulate such development.

UNITY OF OPPOSITES

- Important: individual and common interest are opposed to each other, but together they form an unity.
- Mannoury's main philosophical notion: the unity of opposites. Two opposites always belong together (e.g. hot would not be hot without cold).
- Relativistic philosophy: the distinction between two polarities is not an absolute but a gradual one (principle of graduality).
- Any boundary line between them is arbitrarily chosen.
- His fundamental problem: the continuous interaction between 'absolutism' and 'relativism' (in language, thought and culture).

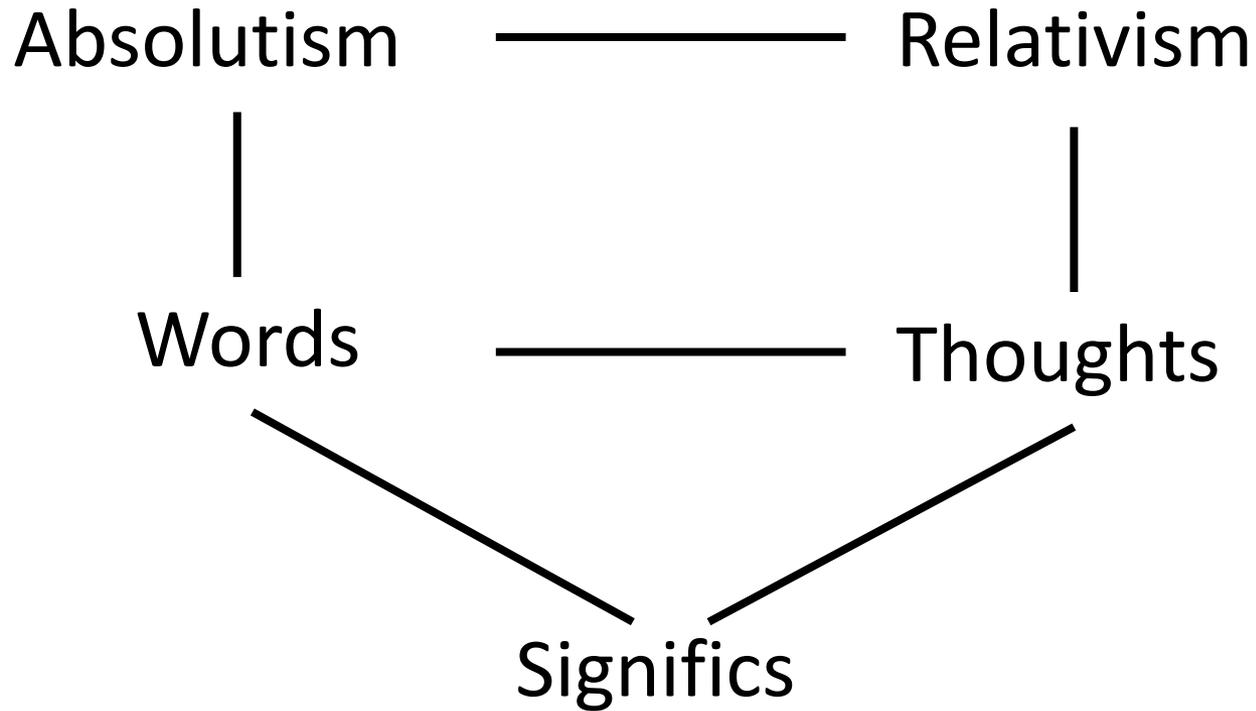
EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

- Mannoury: probably inspired by Buddhism and Taoism.
- Eastern philosophy was a trendy topic around 1900 in the Netherlands (also Brouwer and Van Eeden).
- 1907: Mannoury edited the 'Manual of Indian Buddhism' (1896) of Hendrik Kern (1833-1917).
- In this context he also studied other books about Indian and Chinese philosophy.
- 1911-1913: corresponded with the sinologist Paul Carus (1852-1919) about this topic.

WORDS AND CONCEPTS

- Mannoury's general problem: continuous interaction between absolutism and relativism.
- A special case of this problem is the interaction between the two opposites 'words' and 'thoughts'.
- According to Mannoury our words can never fully describe reality.
- Main question: "To what extent are our concepts covered by our words?"
- Main aim: establish a more narrow connection between thoughts and words, than is automatically achieved in our daily use of words.
- Means: significs.

DIAGRAM KEY CONCEPTS



MEMBERS OF THE INSTITUTE (1/2)

- Each Dutch member of the International Institute for Philosophy had to choose two foreign members.
- In accordance with 'the unity of opposites' idea, Mannoury proposed Guiseppe Peano and Gerard Bolland (1854-1922).
- Peano and Bolland each represent one of two polarities.
- Bolland used emotional (poetical) language; Peano used indicative (mathematical) language (pasigraphy).
- Both languages had to be brought into balance (significs).

MEMBERS OF THE INSTITUTE (2/2)

- The other Dutch members did not agree with Bolland's membership. Now, instead of Bolland, Mannoury proposed Paul Carus.
- Idea behind this: The Institute asked for a connection between the "exact methods of western science and the self-reflection in Eastern philosophy".
- Carus was a proponent of the latter and he was also interested in the unity of both methods.
- However: none of the invited foreign members reacted (in time) to The Institute.
- Peano reacted two years later and suggested that The Institute could cooperate with his own *Academia pro Interlingua* (involved in The International Auxiliary Language Movement).

TASK OF THE INSTITUTE (1/2)

- Primary task: the composing of a new vocabulary on the basis of five levels of language.
- General idea: as the needs of man require more differentiated actions, language too should be more differentiated and more stabilised to that purpose.
- Stabilisation is furthered by establishing the (syntactic) connection of a word to other words (e.g. evident in definitions).
- Basic Language: in this level the connection of words exerts no influence. Each word speaks straight to the imagination. E.g. children's language or prehistoric language.

TASK OF THE INSTITUTE (2/2)

- Emotive language: word connections are perceptible, without having become rigid. Words evoke emotions in themselves and by association with other words. E.g. ordinary language.
- Functional language: word connections are essential, so the words hardly ever have an independent effect. E.g. language of commerce and traffic.
- Scientific language: words are connected rigidly and are based on explicit agreement or prescription.
- Symbolic language, such as logic and mathematics, is founded exclusively on preconceived rules of combination.

BASIC AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE

- Important feature of this construction: language spoken on lower levels and understood by nearly everyone has to be flexible and adaptive.
- It makes no sense to strive for specific meanings and interpretations. That would destroy the flexibility.
- Basic and ordinary language are necessarily ambiguous and vague.
- One can strive for clearer and unique meanings. The number of people who can share this language decreases.

ADVANTAGE OF LANGUAGE LEVELS

- The relativity and changeability of words would make itself apparent.
- The discrimination between the emotive and the indicative value of words is of help for unraveling misunderstandings in almost every domain of human mental activity.
- Basic language: most emotive language.
- Symbolic language: most indicative language.
- These two levels represent again Mannoury's distinction between 'relativism and absolutism'.
- The two opposites 'Level 1' and 'level 5' only differ gradually.
- Notice: each higher step is embedded in the lower steps.

IMPACT OF THE INSTITUTE

- The Institute came to an end in 1922.
- The program was not carried out at that time.
- However, it contained valuable directives for later significant groups:
 - The Significant Circle (1922-1926).
 - The International Group for the Study of Significs (1937-1945).
 - The International Society for Significs (1946-ca. 1963).

