

GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

Jean Gayon: historian and philosopher of biology (Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, June 15, 1949 – Paris, April 28, 2018)

On April 28 of this year, Jean Gayon left us: he died in Paris after a long illness, the first episode of which occurred in the year 2000, but which returned with unexpected vengeance in 2016. These were circumstances that, I have to admit, did not prevent Jean from continuing to be dedicated to academic life and intellectual activity until a few weeks before his death; maintaining, even, a quirky good humor and his well-known taste for chatting pleasantly, but also with order and rigor, on the most diverse matters that are part of the philosophy and history of biology. I refer to the latter for two reasons: first because I want to give an idea of how were, not only his last days, which were really tough, but also the last months of his life; and I also refer to it to recall the conditions under which I established my friendship with him. I will never forget the last talk of that kind we had. The circumstances in which it was staged reveal, moreover, how Jean Gayon was throughout his life and also in those last months that preceded his death.

Our meeting, which was not the last, took place in December 2017 and was not in the context of a café in Paris: neither La Rotonde, nor Le Select. It was in a ward of the Saint Jacques Hospital, while Jean received treatment designed to alleviate one of the many complications of his illness. For a couple of hours, we forgot all that and we engaged, long and quietly on the notion of correlation and its links, in the domain of the biological sciences, with the notions of cause, form and function. Oblivious to a probe through which insulin was administered to him, he was as lucid and as interested in the subject as he always was on such occasions; he did not seek to impose his accurate and precise observations over mine, but to contribute so that we could both go deeper in our reflections. With Jean, the philosophical dialogue was never a dialectic that could be reduced to vulgar wordplay; it was, as Jorge Luis Borges presents it in his poem "The beginning," a conversation between friends who do not wish to compete but to assist each other in the quest for the truth.

Jean Gayon was born on June 15, 1949 in Saint-Maur-des-Fossés in the department of Val-de-Marne. He studied philosophy at the Sorbonne and began his teaching career at the Lycée Dumont d'Urville in Maurepas, Yvelines. Later, at the beginning of the 1980s, he would return to the university, in this case to Paris-VII, to complement his training with a DEA (diplôme d'études approfondies – Master of Advanced Studies) on evolutionary biology that he completed in 1983; and that already anticipated the direction he would take in his PhD in philosophy. He did it at the Sorbonne, under the direction of François Dagonet, defending his thesis in 1989, which was entitled *La théorie de la sélection naturelle: Darwin et après-Darwin*. It was not just a thesis: it was a milestone in the historical-epistemological studies on evolutionary biology

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It was a crucial contribution to the understanding of the development and conceptual structure of the theory of natural selection, especially as regards the relationship between the new synthesis and the positions of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. Under the title of *Darwin et l'après-Darwin* the work was published in 1992, in Paris (Gayon, 1992); in 1998 it was also published in English under the title of *Darwinism's struggle for survival* (Gayon, 1998). The repercussion of that edition in the English language was very broad and cemented a great part of the international prestige that Jean could so deservedly conquer and, happily, enjoy. It consoles me to know that the appreciation, respect and admiration that we can express today for Jean, were not alien, or unknown. That prestige, on the other hand, was repeatedly ratified and reinforced by all his subsequent extensive work.

Whatever the case, his career as a university professor began before his work became so well known, which was at the end of the 1990s. In 1985 Jean entered as Maître de Conférences at the *Université de Bourgogne*; being promoted to professor, the highest degree in university teaching, in 1989. He remained in Dijon until 1997, namely the year in which he joined the University of Paris-VII. He worked there as a professor of the doctorate in epistemology and history of science, also joining the *Rehseis* team that was coordinated by Michel Paty at that time. It was there that I met him and was privileged to assist his unforgettable classes on the philosophy of biology. Shortly after that, in 2001, Jean was transferred to Paris-I where he was promoted to the status of emeritus professor in 2016. This culminated 15 intense years presiding over the Sorbonne philosophy doctoral school, from 2002 to 2016, and in the last six years he was also director of the *Institut d'histoire et de philosophie des Sciences et Techniques* of rue du Four, created in 1932, the same center that was once directed by Georges Canguilhem.

It is worth mentioning the above fact because the greatest legacy that Jean leaves to the philosophy and history of science is the renewal of the tradition of historical-epistemological studies, the main headquarters of which has always been that institutional space that he ended up directing. Like Dagonet, Gaston Bachelard, Alexandre Koyré, and like Canguilhem himself, Gayon assumed that epistemological philosophy and history of science are an integral part of a single philosophical endeavor aimed at understanding why, under what presuppositions, and according to what fundamental conceptual options the different sciences developed in the way they did, leading us to the current ways of thinking. He knew, moreover, that the arduous and laborious grammatical elucidations, on which the philosophy of Anglo-American science was committed, could always be assisted, and better directed, if they were referred to the conceptual evolutions actually occurring in each domain of scientific research. His works show that very clearly. But, without questioning the motivations and guiding ideas of the French epistemological tradition, Jean also knew that historical-epistemological studies could be greatly benefited, and enhanced, if their practitioners accepted to avail themselves of the analytical resources developed by the Anglo-American philosophy of science; even accepting part of their results as starting points for historical-epistemological investigations.

In that sense, *Darwin et l'après-Darwin* is an exemplary text. With a way of exposing and arguing that harks back more to Koyré than to Canguilhem himself, Gayon traces

the epistemological history of the theory of natural selection in the work; though it does so in a way that can serve as a model, which is more instructive than many others, with respect to what epistemological history in general is, what its objectives, its modes of analysis and argumentation are, and what its relevance and capacity for clarifying genuine epistemological problems is. But, I think it is also worth making an effort to perceive how, throughout the implicitly and elegantly discreet text, Jean is using his many readings of the philosophy of Anglo-American biology. There he obtains the resources and the conceptual tools with which he individualizes the twists and turns of that history that he is reconstructing. As in his conversations, in his works he always concentrated on the convergence of ideas: in the search for consensus and common denominators from which to reach further, minimizing sterile and inconclusive oppositions. Cooperation and friendship over competition and rivalry: Jean was like that and that is how we will remember him.

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ERRATA

Na Carta do Editor Convidado (DOI 10.1590/S0104-59702018000400002) publicada em *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, v.25, n.3, jul.-set. 2018:

- Na página 631, no título “Jean Gayon: historiador y filósofo de la biología (Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, 15/6/1940 – Paris, 28/4/2018)”, onde se lê “1940”, leia-se “1949”.
- Na página 631, terceiro parágrafo, primeira linha, onde se lê “1940”, leia-se “1949”.
- Na página 634, no título “Jean Gayon: historian and philosopher of biology (Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, June 15, 1940 – Paris, April 28, 2018)”, onde se lê “1940”, leia-se “1949”.
- Na página 634, terceiro parágrafo, primeira linha, onde se lê “1940”, leia-se “1949”.

No artigo “A resposta em Coimbra à epidemia de pneumónica de 1918-1919 sob o olhar de um periódico local” (DOI 10.1590/S0104-59702018000400005), de Ana Maria Diamantino Correia, publicado em *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, v.25, n.3, jul.-set. 2018:

- Na página 693, acima de “NOTA”, leia-se “AGRADECIMENTO O trabalho foi realizado com apoio da Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (SFRH/BD/130169/2017).”
- Na página 693, nas Referências, na primeira e na sexta linhas, onde se lê “ALMEIDA, Maria José Pires de”, leia-se “ALMEIDA, Maria Antónia Pires de”.

No artigo “Coimbra’s response to the 1918-1919 influenza epidemic, seen from the viewpoint of a local newspaper” (DOI 10.1590/S0104-59702018000400005), de Ana Maria Diamantino Correia, publicado em *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, v.25, n.3, jul.-set. 2018 (disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-59702018000300679&lng=pt&nrm=iso&tlng=en>):

- Na página 14, acima de “NOTES”, leia-se “ACKNOWLEDGMENTS The Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (SFRH/BD/130169/2017) supported research for this article”.
- Na página 15, nas Referências, na primeira e na sexta linhas, onde se lê “ALMEIDA, Maria José Pires de”, leia-se “ALMEIDA, Maria Antónia Pires de”.

