

General Foreword

Henri Lauener and the Lauener-Stiftung*

Mr. President of the University of Bern, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you very much for taking part in this great event. For this is the first presentation of the Lauener Prize by the Lauener-Stiftung.

Well, what is the Lauener-Stiftung, and first of all, who is Lauener?

Of course, this question is somehow wrong; it should be reformulated either as:

* “Who *was* Henri Lauener? ”, or as:

* “Who *is* Henri Lauener *to me*? ”.

Well, I do not intend to answer the question “Who *was* Henri Lauener? ” right here and now; for that would be somehow like a belated obituary.

And, in any case, you know him: You are familiar with what he did for developing philosophy in Switzerland, and for opening this beautiful country’s philosophical activities to the philosophical world of the 20th century in several respects: by the results of his own research, presented in impressive publications, by his teachings esp. at this central university of Switzerland, and – last but not least – by the numerous conferences he organized in Switzerland. He invited important colleagues from over its borders to these conferences. Thus he gave students and colleagues of this country the opportunity to become aware of the way these guests philosophized as well as the opportunity to establish contact with them and remain in contact with them.

By the way: I am sure, you are aware of the fact that Lauener and his contributions to contemporary philosophy are considered absent – from California to India – at least [to be repeated: *at least*] as much as in his native country.

* Address of the President of the Lauener-Stiftung at the Lauener Prize Award Ceremony 2004.

But let me try to give a short answer to the second question: "Who is Henri Lauener to me?"

Well, when he died, I lost a friend, a real close friend, a comrade! Of course, he was not my *only* friend, by far not. But, by far, he was my *best academic* friend, or, to be more precise: He still *is* my best academic friend. Of course, with regard to his body, he is dead. But with regard to his mind, in some sense he is still accompanying me.

Maybe, in *some* respects it seemed *very hard* to become his friend as well as discussing with him. But, as *I* see it, it was *very easy* to become his friend and also to discuss with him. For his behaviour was not unpredictable, by far not.

To Henri Lauener, philosophy was not a mere job, a Beruf, but a Berufung, an inner call that he had to obey. And to him, therefore, presenting philosophy was much more than holding some position at the university. For him, philosophizing did not stop when he left his office; on the contrary: he insisted that a philosopher never ever must be thinking A, speaking B, and doing C. In this way, by continuously *practising* this *basic attitude*, his way of life was straightforward. And therefore, it was very easy for me to become his Freund, since in this respect we were on the same wavelength. In *this* way – and, of course *only* in this way – it was very easy to be his Freund.

How to be kind and firm at the same time is what I learned from him in being a Freund. And especially in *this* sense and in *this* aspect, Henri will still be with me as long as I am alive.

Along with that basic attitude, it was very easy to discuss with him: starting during early evening in some small restaurant at the Lac Léman, and ending that discussion perhaps sometime late after midnight. But, while it was easy to discuss with him, it was by far not easy to in the end win such a discussion. Of course, he did not use any rhetoric just for the sake of winning; nevertheless, his voice was somehow powerful. But things of that kind do not impress me.

What *was* indeed impressive to me was the following: During these discussions regarding the relations between philosophizing and developing one's way of life he presented the sounder arguments almost every time – well, *not* exactly *every* time; in the few cases when my arguments turned

out to be more profound he eventually accepted them.

Also, it was easy to discuss with him detailed problems of philosophy, despite occupying slightly different standpoints. For his epistemological point of view was something like an undogmatic holism, whereas my position is a strictly non-holistic one, accepting of course the *accurate* results of holism as being helpful. Differences of that kind never ever became obstacles within our discussions or conversations.

Living and philosophizing, these two things were indivisible for him, like the two sides of the same coin; and he maintained both at least up to that time when he lost his beloved small daughter, his beloved wife, his beloved mother, and his beloved dog in rapid succession.

Up to that time he regarded accurate philosophizing as being most valuable to life in general and to his own life in particular, and vice versa. Of course, after the above mentioned bereavements he still regarded philosophizing and living, both being firmly interrelated, as most valuable. But with regard to his own life, an unfortunate pessimism began to arise and settle within his mind. Contrary to all that he had done and effected, he increasingly clung to the misconception that his work and therefore his life were without any value.

This was the first and, according to my experiences, the only time where he became inaccessible to well-founded rational arguments and attempts to encourage him.

Nevertheless, the *value* of *accurate* philosophizing, *this* he continued to promote and to support with all his heart. Therefore, in his last will, he decreed that all his mobile and immobile properties should be sold after his death, and that a Stiftung – a foundation – for the purpose of promoting accurate philosophizing was to be his legacy. While visiting him at Alexandra hospice, where he spent the last period of his life, as well as during telephone conversations, he explained the objective and procedure of his will:

The objective of this Stiftung is twofold: on the one hand the objective to present deserving representatives of accurate philosophizing to the younger talents so as to encourage them; on the other hand the objective to support these young talents themselves. This is to be done in the following manner:

In the 1st, 3rd, 5th year etc. the prize winner will be a deserving philosopher honoured for his life's work.

In the 2nd, 4th, 6th year etc. the prize winner will be a young talent in *accurate* philosophizing.

In exactly this sense the Stiftungsrat of the Lauener-Stiftung decided unanimously that the prize winner of this year – and therefore also the first prize winner – is to be Professor *Patrick Suppes*.

Wilhelm K. Essler

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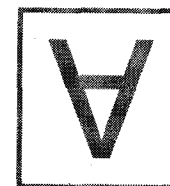
Edited by Wilhelm K. Essler and Michael Frauchiger

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and Justification

Themes from Suppes



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Livraison pour la France et la Belgique:
Librairie Philosophique J.Vrin
6, place de la Sorbonne; F-75005 PARIS
Tel. +33 (0)1 43 54 03 47; Fax +33 (0)1 43 54 48 18
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