

History and the history of science in the work of Hendrik De Man

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Hendrik De Man (1885-1953) is remembered as one of the most significant innovators in the Marxist tradition during the interwar period. An indefatigable and widely travelled theoretician, he emerged as a major political leader in the 1930s and then became best known for his accommodation with the German occupier during the Second World War. De Man's intellectual and political influence spread far beyond the borders of his native Belgium. His cordial relationship with the historian Henri Pirenne (1862-1935) has been observed. Indeed, De Man was one of Pirenne's most brilliant pupils. De Man's connection with scholars also extended to historian of science George Sarton (1884-1956). In the following pages, we discuss what De Man drew from both Pirenne and Sarton.

Henri Pirenne, by virtue of his social and economic history – which led directly into Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre's *Annales* – provided a major intellectual impetus for the discipline of history as it is practiced today (Lyon & Lyon, 1991). George Sarton, through his epistolary and promotional enterprise and his editing of the journal *Isis*, breathed life into the discipline of history of science during the first half of the 20th century. As scholars, both Pirenne and Sarton are known as medievalists, and it was for their medieval insight that De Man drew upon their work. More generally, De Man embraced Pirenne's understanding of history and Sarton's understanding of history of science. Pirenne was old enough to be a father to both De Man and Sarton, but we contend that all three men were modernists. They shared, that is to say, a critical realism about the world, and they both sought and welcomed innovation. Critical realism is present in Pirenne's understanding of the role of external accident as a determining force in history, and in De Man's and Sarton's belief that action was required to set the world aright. Innovation is represented in Pirenne's view of the bourgeoisie continually reinventing itself, in Sarton's anchoring progress in scientific discovery, and

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in De Man's self-conscious revision of the Marxist tradition. The sympathy of all three men for innovation is revealed in their strong attraction, before 1914, to the German social historian Karl Lamprecht. Pirenne was sympathetic to Lamprecht's attempt to

"rescue 19th-century positivism from asphyxiation by merging cultural and 'total' history, based on natural laws with a socio-psychological basis" (Boone, 2008; see also Warland, 2004).

De Man attended Lamprecht's lectures in Leipzig between 1905 and 1909, and in 1912 Sarton recruited Lamprecht for the original editorial board of *Isis*.

The three modernists also found a common interest in medievalism. Such an obsession might seem an odd attribute of a modernist, but, as Louise Blakeney Williams emphasised, modernists found the Middle Ages

"a beautiful but also exciting world of deep spiritual fulfilment to which they might escape the drab ugliness of the present day" (Blakeney Williams, 2002, 45).

Many modernists, Michael T. Saler contended,

"sought unifying mythic and spiritual values that would remedy the perceived excesses of bourgeois liberalism, rationalism, industrialism, urbanism, and secularism" (Saler, 1999, 10).

De Man was certainly not an early adopter of the idea that the Middle Ages constituted the cradle of modern capitalist democracy (Tollebeek, 1997, 60-62). From the first half of the 19th century, the Middle Ages offered an enormous reservoir of inspiration for thinkers operating in a wide range of ideologies, notably Romanticism and *Historismus* (Alexander, 2007; Miltenburg, 1996; Utz, 1998). Both Catholics and progressive liberals absorbed the medieval past into the present. The Modern continually grappled with the Medieval, whether in the Gothic architectural style or the scholarly identification of the 12th-century renaissance. This tension was acute in Flanders, where the medieval cities of Bruges and Ghent inspired anti-modernist painters like James Ensor and symbolist writers like Maurice Maeterlinck and Georges Rodenbach. For these and other intellectuals, including major representatives of Art Nouveau architecture and applied arts, anti-modernism was both an expression of and a response to the modern world, and principal among their reactions were primitivism, nostalgia, and Georgic celebration (Hirsh, 2004; Aubert, Fraiture, & McGuinness, 2007; Ogata, 2001). Furthermore, self-conscious planning for a better world – to

which modernists were committed – required grounding in the local past. George Sarton, as a young man, followed the medievalism of the Pre-Raphaelites and their Romantic fellow-travellers, for example Eugène Fromentin, Richard Wagner, and above all Thomas Carlyle. Sarton's mature, scholarly work focused on the medieval world. Hendrik De Man wrote his doctoral dissertation on the medieval cloth industry in Flanders, a focus of Pirenne's scholarship, and the celebration of socialist corporations at the centre of his mature revision of Marxism derived from Henri Pirenne's writings on the history of capitalism in the Middle Ages.

Hendrik de Man cast himself as a unique spirit:

"I believe that I have not fallen under the decisive influence of anyone; life itself made me what I am".

If he had to mention any influence, he wrote, politician Jean Jaurès came to mind.² Indeed, De Man's archives present the picture of a self-educated man.³ Yet Henri Pirenne was decisive for De Man, and, as we shall see, so was George Sarton. In 1927, Henri Fuss, a contemporary and acquaintance of both De Man and Sarton, reviewed the French version of De Man's *Psychology of socialism* for the first volume of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre's *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*.⁴ Fuss described De Man as a brilliant pupil of Henri Pirenne and

"one of the principal Belgian representatives of the intellectual generation that has today attained its maturity" (Fuss, 1929, 452-453).

Henri Fuss referred, in his review, to an entire generation: his own generation.

However the 'spirit of the times' may be evaluated, social formations – especially personal networks – seem to be essential in establishing generational solidarity; they are what might be called carriers of semantics (Corsten, 2004, 250). In any consideration of generations, it is important to

² Interview in *Les nouvelles littéraires*, 1935, quoted in Hancké (1975, 17-18).

³ Large deposits of Sarton's papers are located at the Houghton Library of the Harvard College Library (hereafter Houghton), the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, and the Carnegie Institution of Washington. De Man's archives are spread over several locations. The most important collection is preserved in the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam (hereafter IISG). In the present text, we refer consistently to Hendrik De Man, rather than to other variations of his name which he used when writing in French (Henri de Man) especially, or also in English (Henry de Man).

⁴ Henri Fuss was a pupil of anarchist Elisée Reclus. After the First World War he became a representative in the International Labour Organisation. He was one of the architects of the modern Belgian social security system (Jaumotte, 1985, 180-183).

distinguish between intellectual climate and social networks on the one hand, and direct and indirect influences on the other hand. The word influence is in disrepute today, as Peter Schöttler has emphasised in a recent study of the early *Annales* (Schöttler, 2004, 115-116). We endorse his plea for a contextual approach to the filiations of ideas, which emphasises transnational intellectual networks.⁵ It nevertheless seems to us that there are prime movers in history, just as there are well-defined encounters, whether by chance or by intent, that can determine the shape of a publication or genesis of an idea. In the present text, we are mindful of both points of view.

1. MAKING AND REMAKING OF A MIND

De Man and Sarton both grew up in a progressive, secular, bourgeois environment.⁶ De Man inherited substantial cultural capital from his family, resources that Sarton worked hard to accumulate, but, as young men, both dreamed largely. Their paths crossed for the first time in 1904-1905, when they studied in Ghent (De Mey, 1984, 43). De Man arrived in Ghent as an anti-militarist and anarchist student. Both De Man and Sarton joined *Ter Waarheid* (In the Name of Truth), a radical student association (Verbruggen, 2008). There they met Irénée Van der Ghinst, an internationalist and future pivotal figure of the Belgian branch of the Pan-European Union (Duchenne, 2007). *Ter Waarheid* assembled people with diverse ideologies and politics, including anarchists, Marxists, and Flemish nationalists, and the association played an important role in the intellectual development of De Man, contributing to transforming him from an anarchist to a Marxist (Defoort, 2000).

The Russian revolutionary wind blew west to Belgium. Russian university students kept in close contact with their Belgian compatriots, among whom were Sarton and De Man. Sarton corresponded with a sometime student at Ghent, Max Maksymilian Horwitz (alias Walecki), who was befriended by Lenin and Trotsky and became one of the leaders of the Comintern. Victor Alter can also be added to the peer group of De Man and Sarton. Alter was a significant advocate for ethical, intellectual socialism and planism in the Jewish Socialist Labour Bund (Erlich, 2006, 42). Within this European climate of rebellion, socialist students in Ghent sought to create a new

⁵. A reflexive and transnational approach has become widely accepted in the field of the history of intellectuals and intellectual history. For an overview: Vincent (2007).

⁶. For Sarton, see Pyenson (2007). For De Man's youth, see Claeys-Van Haegendoren (1972).

proletarian spirit; for example, they received encouragement from Peter Kropotkin (Pyenson, 2007, 55, 179, 212). Members of *Ter Waarheid*, led by De Man and Sarton, organised lessons for workers during the Ghent cotton strike of June 1905. *Ter Waarheid* was also connected with a group of young intellectuals in and around the *Université Nouvelle* in Brussels, including Henri Fuss. Following the advice of the anarchist Elisée Reclus, they combined their study at the university with manual labour. The subjective foundations of socialism and the prominent role of intellectuals in the future publications of both De Man (Pels, 2000, 131-155) and Sarton can be traced back to this time and place. Sarton's view of socialism featured intellectuals as leaders of the proletariat, and De Man's ethical perception of socialism was "expressed most clearly in his conception of the intellectual" (Pierson, 2001, 45; Pels, 2000; Pels, 2002).⁷

Sarton and De Man's generation was open internationally and thematically. In 1905, De Man went to Leipzig, where he became close with Karl Kautsky and Karl Liebknecht and where he wrote for the socialist newspaper, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, while studying for a doctorate at the university. Also in 1905, and following the example of several Dutch societies, Sarton breathed life into an association devoted to self-improvement for students and their fellow-travellers, *Reiner Leven*, or 'a purer life'. Domestic and foreign speakers were invited to speak to the association about biology, vegetarianism, art and literature, women's education, and feminism; Henri Pirenne, significantly, addressed *Reiner Leven* on the ancient Germans (Pyenson, 2007, 34). Sarton's organisation preached widely, to the Belgian Workers Party and elsewhere. Sarton and De Man resumed contact around 1909, when Sarton created a new association of socialist students in Ghent (Verbruggen, 2008, 112-113). At about this time, Sarton was seduced by the British Fabians, while De Man became one of Belgium's most orthodox Marxists, but both Sarton and De Man, by 1905, had already rejected the path of anarchists and anti-militarists like Jean Grave and Gustave Hervé (Brélaz, 1974, 218-219; Pyenson, 2007, 189). Sarton, having completed a doctorate on the mathematical physics of Isaac Newton, wrote a manifesto, dated October 1911, for the socialist students in Ghent. There he emphasised the importance of creating a new society with individual freedom as well as personal dignity and security. He proposed an intellectual elite who would guarantee the social compact. The moral side of socialism was especially important. It was based on

⁷ For example, Sarton's novella, *La chaîne d'or* (Ghent, 1909), under the pseudonym Dominique de Bray; see Pyenson (2007, 90-92). For De Man and his conception of the intellectual see De Man (1974, 240; 1926).

"the feeling of human solidarity, combined with a sort of pride, self-respect, at the joy of being useful, and of doing good work".

People would gladly continue "the great work undertaken by humanity". Socialism would

"replace a soup of disorganisation, anarchy, and decomposition, the hunger for gold, by progress, order, beauty, and synthesis".

He added, "And it seems that this is the goal of a long evolution of humanity" (Verbruggen, 2008). Within 15 years, De Man embraced Sarton's vision.

The German educational system suited De Man's ambitions well. At Leipzig, De Man followed a wide range of courses and seminars. In his autobiography, he mentioned three scholars whom he admired there: Lamprecht, psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, and historian Karl Bücher (De Man, 1974, 125-129). De Man followed Lamprecht's seminar on the comparative history of civilisations. Bücher supervised his doctoral dissertation, but in an expression of the distance then often separating professor and student, between 1906 and 1909, when he received the degree of doctor of philosophy, De Man did not once see Bücher. Informally, Henri Pirenne advised De Man about his topic, the medieval cloth trade in Ghent. There was a good reason for De Man to avoid his actual supervisor, since in his dissertation he followed Pirenne's view about the rise of capitalist structures in medieval Europe, which Bücher disputed (Brélaz, 1985, 129). De Man discerned a dialectic between the conditions of production and an emancipatory bourgeois spirit in medieval Ghent, evolving during the 14th century into class struggles and anti-capitalist, collective identities. He was not alone in drawing on Pirenne's work. The perspective of De Man's Belgian *Doktorvater*, focusing on class struggle and on socio-economic themes generally, was highly esteemed by both Marxist intellectuals and socialist politicians (Vanschoenbeek, 1997, 244; Deneckere & Welskopp 2008, 144-145). When socialist politicians attended the homage for Pirenne held in Brussels in 1912 at the *Palais des Académies*, both Sarton and De Man helped pay for the event (*Manifestation*, 1912, 220). Moreover, the French edition of "The stages of the social history of capitalism", an essay of 1914 in which Pirenne supported historical materialism over Max Weber's thesis on capitalism and Protestantism, was republished by the socialist *Librairie du Peuple* in 1922, rather than by an academic publisher. De Man's dissertation, which never appeared in print, was possibly under discussion when he

corresponded with Pirenne in 1923 about a publication in the series "Recueil de travaux publié par la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres".⁸

During the months prior to the First World War, Hendrik De Man acted as an interpreter in negotiations between Jean Jaurès and representatives of the German Workers Party to maintain peace (Brélaz, 1985, 15-29). The day of the mobilisation, following the murder of Jaurès, De Man joined the *Union sacrée* between socialists and the Belgian government, and he volunteered for the army. Late in the war, his service at the front was interrupted for a short mission in post-revolutionary Russia, where he witnessed "socialism without democracy". If it came to a choice, he declared, he would prefer the American situation, "democracy without socialism" (Bevernage & Deneckere, 2007, 106-117). In *Remaking of a mind*, a book about the psychological consequences of the war in general and for him in particular, he justified taking up arms against Germany.⁹ One of De Man's pre-war ambitions had been to become a citizen of the world: "My ideal was not cosmopolitanism but an eclectic internationalism", he wrote. His internationalism was not based on a denial of nationality or even patriotism (De Man, 1919b, 2; Boehme, 1998, 193).

"The only way in which I ever felt any Belgium patriotism in the real sense of the word is by loving Belgium as a microcosm of Europe".

Moreover, he continued, "being a Belgian was thus only a step towards becoming a European". As a consequence, his national duties during the war coincided with his self-declared international duties.

Henri Pirenne figures in De Man's line of reasoning. The 'historical function' of his internationalist responsibilities had roots early in the Middle Ages, for as early as 1911 he had summarised Pirenne's thesis about the foundations of Belgium (De Man, 1911).¹⁰ *Remaking of a mind* also extracts from a discussion between Pirenne and the local population of Kreutzburg, Germany, where Pirenne had been interned for several months during the war. According to Pirenne (in a letter to De Man), Belgian serfdom ended in the 13th century, but the German people were still marked by the serfdom of "their grandparents". This observation strengthened De Man's conviction that

⁸ Henri Pirenne to Hendrik De Man, February 2 1923 (IISG). De Man could not pay Pirenne an honorarium, the usual fee for publishing a dissertation. For a discussion of his doctoral thesis, see Oschmann (1987) and Brélaz (1985). George Sarton, too, never published his doctoral dissertation, defended in Ghent in 1911 (Pyenson, 2007, 151).

⁹ Published in 1919 in New York by Scribner's Sons.

¹⁰ In this contribution, Hendrik De Man criticised the Belgian Workers Party for being too moderate and insufficiently Marxist (Stelling-Michaud & Buenzod, 1974, 276).

the German people had the "soul of slaves", a soul entirely distinct from the Belgian soul (De Man, 1919a, 125). For him, the First World War was a civil war against the last bastions of tyranny and medieval feudalism, an interpretation he repeated in a letter to Pirenne.¹¹ It was the prelude to his revision of Marxism, which appeared three years later, after a second stay in the United States and Germany (Defoort, 2000). Sarton thought that *Remaking of a mind* was the best book to come out of the war (Verbruggen, 2008, 119).

2. THE TRANSATLANTIC CONNECTIONS

Near the end of the war, in spring 1918, the Belgian government-in-exile sent a mission to the United States to study the organisation of labour, industrial production, and American society as a whole. The mission included social worker and internationalist René Sand as well as Hendrik De Man (Amara, 2000, 200-202). The Belgian mission was welcomed by Leo Baekeland, a chemist-industrialist who counselled and supported Belgian intellectuals visiting the United States. Baekeland had received George Sarton and his family in 1915, and Baekeland helped fund a two-year lectureship at Harvard for Sarton in 1916. Baekeland reconnected Sarton with De Man.¹² In the report that he produced for the mission, *In the country of Taylorism*, De Man emphasised technological and scientific progress and the improvement of productivity (De Man, 1919b). Europe needed to be "able to compete with capitalistic America on the world's market", he wrote to Baekeland.¹³ The United States became a reference point for De Man's personal dreams and academic ambitions. De Man prolonged his American stay when he became involved in the propaganda offensive launched in Belgium by President Woodrow Wilson under the umbrella of the Committee on Public Information, better known as the Creel Committee (Axelrod, 2009). De Man was invited to write and to lecture on the psychological consequences of the war and the political balance of power. He was sacked after only a few months, by his own account, because of his pro-German attitude (De Man, 1974, 190-193). After he returned to Europe in December 1918, De Man pondered the differences between the two continents in general, and between

¹¹ Hendrik De Man to Henri Pirenne, 1920, ULB.

¹² Hendrik De Man to George Sarton, 23 April 1918 (Houghton).

¹³ De Man understood that this viewpoint would not be shared by most of the "Party people". Hendrik De Man to Leo Baekeland, 18 February 1919 (Houghton).

Belgium and the United States in particular. His "most pessimistic forecasts" had come true: "The bourgeoisie is still vulgarly egoistic, even more so than before, the working class is profoundly demoralised", he wrote to Sarton. A big change was the seclusion of intellectual life from the rest of the world.¹⁴ The international circulation of ideas became one of his primary interests. He was enthusiastic about one part of the Creel Committee, the war-time Foreign Press Bureau. In line with his own activities as an intellectual broker, he asked whether Sarton (back in Belgium for a few months) might remain in Europe as the permanent secretary of an extension of the bureau, the Foreign Press Service:

"The idea is to facilitate exchange of information and views between the American and Belgian progressive press and periodicals".¹⁵

But both he and Sarton shared the same ambition: returning to the United States as soon as possible. De Man hoped that Baekeland, Sarton and Henry Suzzallo from Seattle could help him organise a series of lectures about the psychological consequences of the war.¹⁶ Revolutionary socialist Hendrik De Man imagined succeeding in America as either a history professor or an employment manager in a large factory, and he requested advice from Leo Baekeland. Notwithstanding his 'red' reputation, he believed he could be objective about "the history of the labour movement in Europe and many connected subjects", and also offer "more universal viewpoints" absent from American scholarship.¹⁷

To advance his academic dreams in the United States, in May 1919, with the help of Pirenne who was then rector of the university, De Man obtained a (non-German) doctoral degree in history at Ghent. It was clearly a courtesy degree *ad eundem*, because Pirenne required De Man neither to follow courses nor to write another dissertation. The *expériences préalables* were

¹⁴. Hendrik De Man to George Sarton, 7 January 1919 (Houghton).

¹⁵. Hendrik De Man to George Sarton, 10 September 1919 (Houghton); De Man wrote again on 10 July 1919 about the Service under the direction of Paul Kennaday, which connected European writers with American readers. As early as 1915, Sarton hoped to set up an American information centre in post-war Brussels (Pyenson, 2007, 253).

¹⁶. Henry Suzzallo (1875-1933) was a professor of philosophy of education. He became president of the University of Washington at Seattle and served during the First World War as an advisor to the National War Labor Board. Suzzallo had an ambiguous relation with leftwing intellectuals at his university. In 1919 he supported some of the demands of the unions during a general strike in Seattle, but he also expelled radical scholars from his university (Farrell, 1999). Suzzallo knew Baekeland, and De Man contacted him during his mission of 1919.

¹⁷. Hendrik De Man to Leo Baekeland, 31 January 1920 (Houghton).

considered fulfilled at Leipzig before the war.¹⁸ Academic counter-certification from a neutral country, De Man probably reasoned, would improve his allure in America, where he was a known quantity. Early in 1920, the Workers Union in Seattle did invite him to create a proletarian educational system, but nothing concrete resulted from De Man's schemes, and eventually he was forced to settle permanently in Europe. In a long letter to Pirenne (from Toronto) De Man talked about his experiences in the New World. Hatred of the Germans had created an atmosphere that was too elitist and nationalistic for a "citizen of the world" like himself. It was too late to become an American, he wrote to Pirenne:

"I am too much of a European in spite of everything, or rather, too 'international'. And the best way for me to be a citizen of the world is still to be and remain a citizen of my microcosm, tiny Belgium. Here I am, a patriot. Who would have believed it?"¹⁹

Situated in Europe, De Man sought to become a trans-Atlantic intellectual broker. In 1924, De Man contacted American publishers with a proposal to write a book about German historians, sociologists and philosophers: "The production of philosophical ideas is still one of Germany's chief national industries", something few Americans knew. His book about "Germany's new prophets" would consist of at least eight or nine examples:

"Frobenius the ethnographer, Max Weber the sociologist, Vaihinger the philosopher, Troelsch the theologian, Keyserling the ethicist, Steiner, the anthroposophist, Spengler the historian, Gustav Landauer the socialist who heralded the ethical reaction against Marxian determinism, Rathenau the business man and philosopher" (De Man, 1924, 666).

The outcome was an article treating only Spengler and Keyserling. De Man firmly opposed Spengler's cyclical history, although with Spengler he was sympathetic to highbrow culture. In De Man's view, Hermann Alexander, *Graf* Keyserling was a pragmatic pacifist and spiritualist who recognised the value of non-Western philosophies and cultures, in particular Oriental ones (Brélaz, 1985, 389).

De Man not only informed his American audience about Germany's new intellectual prophets, but in 1923 he also presented the controversy about Flemish nationalism (Boehme, 1998). De Man wrote for an American readership about the growing conflict between the Dutch and the French-speaking communities. The University of Ghent, during Pirenne's term as rector,

¹⁸ His certificate is reprinted in Brélaz (1985, III).

¹⁹ Hendrik De Man to Henri Pirenne, 1920 (ULB).

"threatened to disrupt the unity of the traditional [political] parties in a permanent way", he emphasised. The question concerned whether the university would become a Dutch-speaking, a French-speaking or a bilingual institution. Pirenne was in favour of the latter, perhaps following his colleague historian Paul Fredericq. As a student De Man and his fellow students from *Ter Waarheid*, including George Sarton, participated in 1905 in a famous debate with the socialist leader Edward Anseele (Balthazar, 1976; Van Ginderachter, 2005, 265-266; Verbruggen, 2008) which raised this very topic. In his memoirs, De Man claimed to have convinced Anseele to advocate a Dutch-speaking university. For nearly 20 years he had not changed his opinion. In his 1923 publication, De Man emphasised that, for Dutch speakers excluded from privileged economic circles,

"to demand a Flemish university ... means to challenge the position of the French-speaking bourgeoisie as the only class whose language gives it access to higher learning".

From the Middle Ages, French had been the "symbol – and in many ways the instrument" of social supremacy in Flanders, something Pirenne also acknowledged. De Man offered that the transformation could be gradual and reasonable: the University of

"Ghent has become the symbol of higher culture in Flanders, and its continuation as a French institution is felt as an injustice and a slighting of the Flemish people's language".

Whether "the state born in 1830 actually embodied a 1000-year-old spiritual community", however, was a question for 'real' historians. De Man then moved to compare Belgium and Ireland. He concluded:

"Most national problems arise primarily out of social antagonisms and their real solution consists much more in the slow shifting of social frontiers than in the violent cutting of boundaries" (De Man, 1923, 118).

Hendrik De Man's fundamental break with Marxism came several years before the final transformation in 1930 of the University of Ghent into a Dutch-speaking institution. In 1926, he published, in German, *The psychology of socialism*, which makes a moral case for socialism and for intellectuals as the socialist avant-garde. It marks De Man's final rupture with two foundations of Marxist theory: rationalism and determinism (Pels, 2002). Following Pirenne and reformist thinkers such as Vandervelde, Hendrik De Man did not deny the importance of the class struggle as a sociological and historical phenomenon, but, in his book, he abandoned class struggle as a

revolutionary strategy. It was Pirenne himself who had confronted De Man 15 years earlier with the insight that a mechanical and rational interpretation of class solidarity was inadequate. De Man recalled that his "master" Henri Pirenne told him:

"I am too familiar myself with the economic interpretation of social facts not to know how important economic interests are in mass movements that dominate history. But from my use of this method of study, it should not be concluded that I am Marxist. I do not believe above all that it is possible to transform a mere instrument of research for understanding the past into a prophetic law for the future".

If Marx was right and socialism replaced capitalism,

"there will not be any class interests to guide it [the working class]; whence would come new motivations?" (De Man, 1927, 95).

The interaction between individuals manipulating the levers of state authority on the one hand, and people subject to state authority on the other hand, was central to Pirenne's vision of history. Lucien Febvre expressed the problem concisely in a letter to Pirenne at this time, accentuating the conundrum that "historical materialism" tried to eliminate, by a childish negation that sociology also laboured to hide, the conundrum that faced the historian of Reform as well as the historian of Revolution: the problem of the relationship of the individual in charge and in power with the collectivity who followed, judging and sometimes rebelling.²⁰ Marxism confused causes and conditions in history, just as Darwinism confused them in biology. Darwin stated a relation of dependence between the evolution of animal species and their adaptation to the environment by natural selection, just as Marx stated the dependence of the social order on the economic order (*Ibid.*, 246).

The French historian and economist Henri Sée, author of *Les origines du capitalisme moderne* (1926), warmly greeted De Man's *Psychology of socialism*, which he took to be confirmation of their mutual inspiration from Henri Pirenne and Karl Marx (Sée, 1927).²¹ Although no direct reaction from Pirenne to De Man's book is preserved, socialist Emile Vandervelde reported Pirenne's opinion. (Pirenne and Vandervelde were both members of the *Classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques* of *Académie Royale de Belgique*.) Vandervelde wrote to De Man:

²⁰ Lucien Febvre to Henri Pirenne, 1 March 1930 (quoted in Lyon & Lyon, 1991, 124).

²¹ However, Sée continued to emphasise the importance of economics in history. See Henri Sée to Hendrik De Man, 24 May 1927 (IISG).

"Your book is filled with very interesting things, and Pirenne and I spoke about it the other day in the park. We agreed that it was without doubt the most important book about socialism to appear since the war".²²

Vandervelde both criticised and praised the book in lectures, articles, and a book (Vandervelde, 1928). Vandervelde feared an abrupt rupture with Marxism and cautioned that "to substitute the transcendence of a group of intellectuals for the triumph [*imminence*] of a class movement" was an "aristocratic conception" (Vandervelde, 1927, 414-415). De Man indeed had high expectations from intellectuals. Six years earlier, in 1920, he wrote to Pirenne that he expected positive action from the intellectual, artistic and literary elites of the world. They should take the lead in moral healing "with the creation of a new ideal, both humanist and optimistic", which was already manifest in the USA and in England.²³ This view he shared with his old comrade George Sarton.

In 1926, De Man informed Sarton of his book and implicitly asked for a review in Sarton's periodical, *Isis*. An established author with a new point of view may try to elicit support from old friends, but even in Hendrik De Man's fertile mind, his lines reveal genuine sympathy and warm remembrance. De Man's letter to Sarton is remarkable, in that he identifies Sarton as the inspiration for the new direction in his thought:

"I think that the book will interest you from many points of view: 1) it is strongly influenced by Fabianism. However, I have not forgotten (even though it made a faint impression on me then) that it was you who, in 1905, spoke to me for the first time about Bergson and the Fabians. Is it not gratifying to have acted in this noble role of sémur? 2) I approach, more and more, to my emancipation from Marxism, a conception of historical evolution 'centred' on the evolution of ideas and consequently of the neo-humanism [New Humanism] that you preach more or less in deserts. May you find a consoling voice [symbole consolant] in the verdant oasis that I have growing and that, twenty years ago, was also for you only a sterile desert! All joking aside, and to move from flamboyance to all seriousness, I am so glad to observe this progressive convergence [of our thought], and the fact that I am interested more and more in the field of intellectual history. (Just now I am looking into the history of mathematics and Einsteinian metaphysics!) I conclude that I will have more pleasure and profit in meeting with you".²⁴

Here we see an allusion to Sarton's New Humanism, his notion from the war years that the academic discipline of history of science, his specialty, would

²². Emile Vandervelde to Hendrik De Man, undated letter [1926] (IISG).

²³. Hendrik De Man to Henri Pirenne, 1920. ULB.

²⁴. Hendrik De Man to George Sarton, 5 January 1926 (Houghton).

form the centrepiece of modern education. Sarton wrote back enthusiastically:

"Where will I see you? Alas! I would give much to have several hours of conversation with you".²⁵

For more than a decade Sarton had rejected revolutionary Marxism in favour of social democracy and, in the pages of *Isis*, he promoted something of a ministry of kindness. Three months later, having finished De Man's book, he informed De Man that it "is a powerful review, and I basically agree with you". Sarton suggested a revision of De Man's affirmation of orthogenesis, the notion that biological evolution exhibits a tendency to develop in a particular direction; theories of orthogenesis were no longer accepted. "Bergson supports them, but Bergson carries no authority in biology". Henri Bergson's notion of creative evolution, popularised before the war, indeed promoted orthogenesis (Vaughan, 2007, 22; Bowler, 1983, 55-56). Its broad success contributed to Bergson's selection as the first president of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations. Bergson's emphases on intuition over natural knowledge and intelligence over reason were also themes in De Man's *Psychology of socialism* (Winock, 1997; Gillies, 1997; Renoliet, 2000; Canales, 2005). Sarton brought scepticism to Bergson's scientific conceits. He urged De Man to abridge the text in its English translation, because

"there have never been real Marxists in England, even among the ones who claimed to be so".

Then to the main point:

"The pages about the moral influence of socialism, which gives to the working class the best way of raising itself above where it is now, gave me great pleasure. I would never have thought of this aspect of the question. It is very, very true. I completely agree with you about the necessity of emphasising the moral significance of socialism. But it was scarcely possible to do so earlier: first vivere...".²⁶

In the 1920s, social democrat George Sarton remembered rubbing shoulders with a proletariat demanding bread. He reviewed *Au delà du marxisme* (*Psychology of socialism*) for *Isis*: "De Man's account seems to me excellent. It is based upon considerable experience and it is thoroughly thought out. I am glad to say that I share, essentially, his conclusions" (Sarton, 1927b).

²⁵ George Sarton to Hendrik De Man, 20 January 1926 (IISG).

²⁶ George Sarton to Hendrik De Man, 21 March 1926 (IISG).

3. PROGRESS IN HISTORY, PESSIMISM AT LAST

The notion of social progress has endured, with modification, since the Enlightenment (Spadafora, 2003; Nisbet, 2009; Angenot, 2003). Although progress is often presented in a linear fashion, it can also manifest cyclical and spiral variations. Pirenne encapsulated progress in a theory of stages, while Lamprecht used the image of an ascending spiral. Stage theories of civilisation, traced to Condorcet, fill the 19th century, but popularity of the spiral analogy may stem from a late 19th-century Leibniz revival (Pyenson, 1985, 137-157), stimulated by the philosopher of evolutionary optimism Ludwig Stein (Haberman, 1995), who was a member of the original editorial board of Sarton's *Isis*. In his classic study, *The Idea of Progress*, historian John B. Bury saw progress precisely as an expression of optimism:

"This idea means that civilisation has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction" (Bury, 1920, 16).

Bury perceived that the "new humanism" of George Sarton also implied a faith in human progress, although Bury was less optimistic that

"the history of man's intellectual advance is more than interesting antiquarianism".²⁷

For Sarton, "the history of science is the only history which can illustrate the progress of mankind" (also quoted in Nisbet, 2009, 346). He was optimistic about scientific development, departing from strong reactions against science and technology in De Man's second homeland, Germany.

In this way, Hendrik De Man came over to Pirenne's and Sarton's understanding of history. In 1931 Sarton asked De Man whether he might be interested in the second volume of the *Introduction to the history of science*. De Man responded quickly:

"For three or four years I have been dealing with the history of ideas in the 12th and 13th centuries; for I realise the importance of this period for the formation of the key ideas of our civilisation. My work (not yet published) on these years seeks to place socialism in this civilisation and its evolution".²⁸

During his years in Germany (in 1929 he became professor of social psychology at the University of Frankfurt), De Man felt that the ethical foundation of socialism implied a pertinence for socialism beyond the

²⁷. John B. Bury to George Sarton, 16 July 1921 (Houghton), in Pyenson (2007, 347).

²⁸. Hendrik De Man to George Sarton, 2 September 1931 (Houghton).

working class, a view that needed a broader historical and philosophical perspective. In his book, *Die sozialistische Idee*, which appeared in 1933, De Man described the evolution of Western humanity in stages or revolutions of ideas: (1) ancient Greek rationalism, (2) Christian morality, (3) bourgeois humanism and (4) a future socialist synthesis. For someone who was interested in the "connectedness of the bourgeois era, capitalism and socialism," there was only one possible method: Marx's dialectical historical materialism, which was opposed to linear progress (De Man, 1975, 82).

In *Die sozialistische Idee*, De Man again devoted much attention to the pre-capitalist and proto-capitalist bourgeoisie, using insight stemming from his pre-war Leipzig doctoral dissertation and Karl Lamprecht's historical seminars. He believed that the spirit from the proto-capitalist bourgeoisie did not disappear when capitalists separated from the working class. According to De Man, intellectuals such as Marx inherited the humanism of these proto-capitalists. The time had come to supersede the bourgeois epoch by "the realisation of socialism". For De Man, the republican, bourgeois values of liberty, equality, and fraternity were probably realised in the city republics of the High-Middle-Ages echoes of Pirenne's famous essay of 1910, *Les anciennes démocraties des Pays-Bas*, which still resonates with scholars (Murray, 2005). De Man started his chapter on the origins of capitalism with a quotation from Pirenne:

"That history [of the successive classes of capitalists] does not present itself to the eye of the observer under the guise of an inclined plane; it resembles rather a staircase, every step of which rises abruptly above that which precedes it" (De Man, 1975, 121).

No doubt the reference was a *captatio benevolentiae*, for one year prior to publication, Hendrik De Man had asked Henri Pirenne to read his chapter about the origins of capitalism. Significantly, in view of De Man's interaction with Sarton, in *Die sozialistische Idee* De Man held that technology was incapable in itself of stemming the decline of modern civilisation. Rather, a qualitative leap was required. Rejecting Oswald Spengler's notion of an inevitable decline for all civilisations, De Man identified Einstein's physics as a source for revolutionising culture (Stelling-Michaud & Buenzod, 1974, 285). De Man differed fundamentally from Spengler, although he shared with Spengler the notions of a *Kulturseele* (soul of a civilisation) and the flourishing of Western civilisation in the High Middle Ages (De Man, 1975, 102-103; Hancké, 1975, 48-54).

It is unknown whether De Man corresponded with Pirenne's counterpart, the great Dutch historian Johan Huizinga. De Man knew Huizinga's close

friend, the socialist poet Henriëtte Roland Holst. De Man used the phrase "autumn of the middle ages" several times in *Die sozialistische Idee*, and he quoted Huizinga about the foundations of capitalist spirit and its decline, which was the "sin of the era" (e.g., De Man, 1975, 197). De Man did not share Huizinga's clear rejection of cyclic patterns in history, however. In a sensitive essay, Sven Stelling-Michaud and Janine Buenzod contended that, here, De Man opposed a linear philosophy of progress to a biologically-inspired framework where the cyclical evolution of humanity was compared with a living organism that grows, flourishes, and then declines (Stelling-Michaud & Buenzod, 1974, 287). Nevertheless, as we have seen, De Man at the height of his powers rejected Spengler's pessimism. The loyal student of Pirenne, De Man held that history exhibited a non-cyclical process with ups and downs. De Man aligned himself against "reactionary cultural pessimists", who wrongly arrayed culture against civilisation (De Man, 1975, 109).

By the late 1920s, George Sarton expressed the same view. He wrote in the first volume of his introduction to the history of science:

"The intellectual progress of mankind would not be correctly represented by a constantly increasing function, but rather by a sort of sinusoidal curve moving steadily upward" (Sarton, 1927a, 646).

In an edition of an unpublished *éloge* of the great 19th-century historian of science Paul Tannery by Pierre Boutroux, Sarton recaptured the notion that progress in science was irregular, containing

"periods of crisis which, in certain epochs, break the continuity of the development of science and which have, as an effect, the creation of new disciplines and methods" (Sarton & Boutroux, 1938, 702).

We see here the notion of the epistemological breaks popularised a generation later by Gaston Bachelard, Thomas Kuhn, and Michel Foucault.

There was one more significant break in the life of Hendrik De Man. Having rejected a materialist basis for socialism in favour of an ethical basis, De Man became the leading European advocate of technocratic state planning across class lines, known in democratic Europe during the 1930s as *planisme*. In 1940, when Belgium fell to Germany, De Man remained in his country as a minister of King Leopold III. By this time, De Man, who expressed sympathy for *völkisch* interpretations of life, saw the invasion as a signal for the end of capitalism and as a catalyst for the possibility of a new socialist order. Zeev Sternhell has contended that De Man's turn embodied "the classic conceptual framework of a fascist revolution against 'materialism'". Sternhell continued, in a teleological vein:

"This desire to 'pass beyond Marxism by substituting a method of psychological analysis for historical materialism, or, in other words, by seeking behind economic facts the psychic realities they express', is one of the main routes for going from left to right and from the extreme left to the extreme right" (Sternhell, 1987, 382).

Yet it is clear that, in the 1930s and 1940s, De Man consistently denounced nationalism, a vital part of fascist ideology (Pels, 2000, 116-118; Brélaz, 2000). For all his pains, Hendrik de Man was convicted *in absentia* of treason after the Second World War.

While in exile in Savoie in 1941-1944, Hendrik de Man wrote about the prosperous 15th-century French merchant and minister of state, Jacques Cœur. His study appeared in 1950, and Sven Stelling-Michaud and Janine Buenzod observed that the last chapters of the book recall Karl Lamprecht's style of teaching. Another critic highlighted his innovative use of psychology but also commented that he had not kept up with the progress of economic history. De Man's interest in the topic seems clear: Jacques Cœur, loyal to his king, Charles VII, was accused of treason, stripped of his wealth and power, and forced to seek refuge in Rome (Edler De Roover, 1951, 307-309; Reyerson, 2005).

In the 1950s, the future was uncertain for the former minister of state Hendrik De Man. Even though it requires unusual presence of mind for writers at the end of their career, even militantly progressive writers, to focus on the promises of coming generations, De Man had more reason than most senior intellectuals to abandon himself, in the end, to nostalgia. Modernity was not as he had imagined. Lutz Niethammer emphasised that, in another of his writings, *Vermassung und Kulturverfall*, Hendrik De Man advanced the doctrine of post-history, in his case characterised by an elitist critique of mass culture shared by his colleagues from the Frankfurt School. In Niethammer's view, partisans of post-history located themselves in "a tradition of the production of meaning for which they no longer see any social future," and they avoided dealing with "the danger that modern civilisation will annihilate itself and the world". (Niethammer, 1993, 1-3). There De Man imagined a new and unpleasant stage of human existence, in opposition to Oswald Spengler's notion of the cyclical exhaustion of civilisation. *Vermassung und Kulturverfall* was originally written in English. He intended to find an American publisher, but none would take on the project.²⁹ Almost nothing is left in the manuscript of the De Man's profound admiration, after the First World War, for American society and culture. In his book, he used

²⁹. The book was under review by Macmillan, he wrote in 1947 to Sarton. Hendrik De Man to George Sarton, 1 December 1947 (Houghton).

"Americanisation" as a synonym for the mass-culture of the Western world. The old De Man was not alone in his pessimistic assessment. This outlook especially attracted intellectuals who had experienced two world wars, from writer Hermann Broch to physicist Max Born. De Man, an emblematic modernist, shared the feeling of many other modernists "of a utopia gone sour and ... dreams destroyed". In effect, as Robert Wohl, observes in a contribution on modernism and its historians,

"modernist culture was unable to deliver the anti-bourgeois utopia whose revolutionary promise attracted many intellectuals and artists" (Wohl, 2002, 593).

Hendrik de Man cited George Sarton several times in *Vermassung und Kulturverfall*. The Second World War left Sarton compromised in health but enjoying a reputation as the world's firmest advocate for viewing history in terms of developments in science. He was close with optimistic younger colleagues, including the biologist Julian Huxley and the biochemist and Sinologist Joseph Needham, both of whom enjoyed a term as a senior administrator of UNESCO. A single widower in the 1950s, Sarton mourned his life's companion, an artist with whom he had disputed mightily, while finding an anodyne in writing, as De Man also wrote, about the remote past. Sarton did not contend in the political sphere as De Man did, and Sarton did not end his life feeling, as De Man felt, the opprobrium of one big transgression. Nevertheless, both Sarton and De Man may have realised that their thoughts would not be taken up by a new generation of writers.

Influence is certainly a vague word to use for the causal explanations we sometimes seek to construct from documents of the past. It is evident, however, that Hendrik de Man drew some of his crucial ideas from Henri Pirenne and from George Sarton, and also that Sarton deferred to both Pirenne and De Man. Historians have emphasised that Pirenne was the guiding spirit for Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre as they developed their epoch-making journal, the *Annales*. By considering De Man in the context of Pirenne and Sarton, we are able to see his inspiration from modernist medievalism and history of science.

ABBREVIATIONS

IISG

International Institute for Social History

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Archives ULB, Avenue F. Roosevelt 50, 1050 Bruxelles
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Geschiedenis en wetenschapsgeschiedenis in het werk van Hendrik De Man

CHRISTOPHE VERBRUGGEN
LEWIS PYENSON

SAMENVATTING

Hendrik De Man (1885-1953) is gekend als een socialistisch denker en politicus waarvan de geschriften tot ver buiten België gelezen werden. Hij ging er

zelf prat op een unieke geest te zijn en weinig of geen beslissende invloeden te hebben ondergaan. Invloed (direct en indirect) is een vaag concept voor wie het wil gebruiken in de geschiedschrijving. Toch is het duidelijk dat Hendrik De Man een aantal cruciale ideeën ontleende aan Henri Pirenne (1862-1935) en zijn modernistische leeftijdsgenoot George Sarton (1884-1956), respectievelijk een historicus en een wetenschapshistoricus.

Na een korte passage aan de Gentse universiteit trok De Man naar Leipzig om er geschiedenis en sociale wetenschappen te studeren. Hij bleef wel in contact met Pirenne, die vanop afstand zijn proefschrift begeleidde. De Man bestudeerde de middeleeuwse lakenhandel en het ontstaan van kapitalistische sociale en economische structuren. Na de Eerste Wereldoorlog en een lang verblijf in de Verenigde Staten (*au pays du taylorisme*), schreef De Man zijn ontgoochelingen en desillusies van zich af in *Remaking of a Mind*. Het essay luidde zijn breuk in met het orthodoxe Marxisme en de ontdekking van een ethisch intellectueel socialisme dat nauw aanleunde bij het op de wetenschapsgeschiedenis gefundeerde neohumanisme van Sarton.

De Man ging steeds meer aandacht besteden aan de intellectuele geschiedenis van de westerse beschaving en herontdekte de middeleeuwen. Ook Pirenne bleef lang na de 'Gentse' periode van De Man een bron van inspiratie evenals een gewaardeerd klankbord. De historische onderbouwing en de notie van historische vooruitgang en evolutie in het in 1926 verschenen *Die Psychologie des Sozialismus*, verschenen pas na het symbolische fiat van zijn oude leermeester. Ook nadien bleven ze corresponderen en ideeën uitwisselen.

Histoire et histoire des sciences dans le travail d'Hendrik De Man

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RÉSUMÉ

Hendrik De Man (1885-1953) est connu comme un penseur et politicien socialiste dont les écrits ont été lus bien au-delà des frontières de la Belgique.

Il se targuait d'être un esprit unique et de n'avoir subi que peu voire aucune influence décisive. L'influence (directe et indirecte) est un concept vague pour quiconque souhaite l'utiliser dans l'historiographie. Il apparaît toutefois clairement qu'Hendrik De Man a emprunté certaines idées cruciales à Henri Pirenne (1862-1935) et à son contemporain moderniste George Sarton (1884-1956), respectivement historien et historien des sciences.

Après un bref passage à l'Université de Gand, De Man est parti à Leipzig pour y étudier l'histoire et les sciences sociales. Il est cependant resté en contact avec Pirenne, qui l'a conseillé à distance lors de la rédaction de sa thèse. De Man s'est intéressé au commerce drapier médiéval et à l'apparition de structures sociales et économiques capitalistes. Après la Première Guerre mondiale et un long séjour aux États-Unis ('au pays du taylorisme'), De Man a mis sur papier ses déceptions et désillusions dans *Remaking of a Mind*. Cet essai annonçait sa rupture avec le marxisme orthodoxe et la découverte d'un socialisme intellectuel éthique étroitement basé sur le néo-humanisme de Sarton fondé sur l'histoire des sciences.

De Man a accordé de plus en plus d'attention à l'histoire intellectuelle de la civilisation occidentale et a redécouvert le moyen-âge. Pirenne est également resté une source d'inspiration et une caisse de résonance appréciée longtemps après la période 'gantoise' de De Man. Les fondements historiques et les notions de progrès et d'évolution historiques dans le *Die Psychologie des Sozialismus* publié en 1926 ne sont apparus qu'après le consentement symbolique de son vieux maître. Ils ont ensuite continué à correspondre et à échanger des idées.