

Jean Cavailles
Philosophy, Logic and Resistance
International Conference

Saturday, April 16th
Swift Theater, Trinity College, Dublin
Arts Building, College Green, Dublin 2
Dublin, Ireland

MORNING

Part I : Presentation

9.30 a.m : *General Introduction* by Jean-Baptiste Fournier (Ecole Normale Supérieure, University of Paris I, Trinity College, Dublin)

10.00 a.m : Mr. Tommy Murtagh (French Department, Trinity College, Dublin)

PAUSE

Part II : Philosophy and action

10.45 a.m : Pr. Hourya Bénis-Sinaceur (CNRS, University of Paris I, ENS Ulm), *Philosophie, histoire, éthique*

11.30 a.m : Dr. Joseph Cohen (Philosophy Department, University College, Dublin), *Abnegation in philosophy and action*

LUNCH

AFTERNOON

Part III : Testimonial

2.00 p.m : Mr. Pierre-Yves Canu, *Jean Cavailles*

PAUSE

Part IV : Phenomenology

3.00 p.m : Pr. Dermot Moran, (Philosophy Department, University College, Dublin), *Jean Cavailles and Husserl: The Phenomenology of Reason*

3.45 p.m : Pr. Dominique Pradelle (University of Clermont-Ferrand, France), *Cavaillès et la pensée transcendantale (Kant, Husserl)*

PAUSE

Part V : Logic and mathematics

5.00 p.m : Pr. Jean-Jacques Szczepaniak (University of Paris VII), *Title to be confirmed*

Conclusion and discussion

Conference organized by Jean-Baptiste Fournier (ENS/TCD).
With the support of the French Department of Trinity College, Dublin
With the support of the French Embassy in Ireland



Presentation and objectives

Jean Cavailles was born in Western France in 1903 and died in Arras in 1944. He is considered today as one of the most important and influential French philosophers in the 20th century and has been widely studied in France. Our objective is to present Cavailles's philosophy and action and to help give an alternative image of 20th century French philosophy to an English-speaking audience.

Cavaillès was brilliantly received at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. He studied philosophy, logic and mathematics. He taught in Amiens, where our guest Pierre-Yves Canu attended his classes, and then became a lecturer in General and Logical Philosophy at the University of Strasbourg. He spent a lot of time in Germany, where he met Husserl in his old days. He was present at one of Hitler's speeches, which made him realize the potential danger he represented. During that time, he wrote and published several essays on logic, mathematics and the philosophy of science. He would never stop writing on those matters, even in prison during the war.

Cavaillès was mobilized in 1939 and honored for bravery twice, but he was captured on June 11, 1940. He escaped and fled to Clermont-Ferrand where his colleagues from Strasbourg had gathered. He then began to enter the Resistance. He met Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie with whom he created a group of resistance fighters, and created a newspaper which was to become Libération. He then was appointed at the Sorbonne where he helped form the "Libération Nord" group, and was invested with the task of forming an intelligence network group.

Cavaillès was arrested in 1942 and wrote an important essay on logic in prison, *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science*. In this most interesting book, Cavaillès argues that the traditional transcendental account of the foundation of mathematics by the "philosophy of consciousness" is not satisfactory. Through a critique of both Kant's and Husserl's transcendental philosophies of logic and mathematics, Cavaillès establishes that "a doctrine of science cannot be provided by a philosophy of consciousness, but only by a philosophy of concepts". This opposition between two kinds of philosophies, and the correlative opposition between an account of logic and mathematics in terms of *activity* on the one hand and a conceptual account in terms of *dialectics* on the other hand, are the leitmotives of Cavaillès's philosophy. His ambiguous relation to phenomenology, his interest for Spinoza and many other aspects of Cavaillès's thinking are related to this two-fold opposition. This conference will explore the consequences of this opposition, and its relevance in 20th century French philosophy.

Moreover, there seems to be an intimate link between Cavaillès's rejection of the I in philosophy and logic, and his early and unambiguous engagement in the French Resistance. As his friend Georges Canguilhem puts it, Cavaillès's engagement in the Resistance was a matter of logic and not a question of personal choice. Cavaillès thought that the consideration of the I had to be excluded from action as it was from mathematics, logic and philosophy. He was, as Canguilhem once said, "a philosopher-mathematician loaded with explosives, lucid and reckless, resolute without optimism. If that's not a hero, what is a hero?" This heroism contrasts with Sartre's as much as their philosophical systems contrast with one another. Cavaillès did not write about heroism but his engagement is obviously inseparable from his I-free philosophy. This unthematized but profound coherence constitutes one of the most demanding lessons of philosophy ever taught.

When he was betrayed and caught on a sabotage of the Kriegsmarine, he was arrested, then tortured, imprisoned and shot in Arras, on February 17, 1944.

During his whole life, he kept writing on philosophy and logic – without any allusion in it to his personal fight against the Nazis. Nevertheless, his philosophy remains impinged with his life and death.