



Vrije
Universiteit
Brussel



Solvay Colloquium

“The physicist and the historian. Perspectives on the early Solvay conferences in physics”

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Abstract



The history of the Solvay conferences in physics has been the object of three different presentations: the two talks given by Niels Bohr and Edoardo Amaldi, respectively at the 12th Physics conference in 1961 and at the 17th Chemistry conference in 1980, and the 1975 book by Jagdish Mehra “The Solvay Conferences on Physics”. Each one in his own way, and with different depth, these scientists have looked at the history of the conferences from a distinct “physicist’s” viewpoint, emphasizing the conceptual

issues discussed at the meetings and the role they played for the advancement of the discipline. In the colloquium I will discuss, focusing on the early conferences up to the late twenties, aspects of these reconstructions, presenting the main issues that they have discussed on the subject, and a few that they have ignored and would on the contrary have been raised by an historian not solely concerned with disciplinary aspects. One is led, starting from this specific example, to consider the issues of the different retrospective look on history that is typical of the scientist and of the historian, of the way scientific communities elaborate their collective memory, of the complementary role that these stories play to the general historian’s perspective, and finally of the availability and use of the different kinds of sources that such a reconstruction demands.

Tuesday 30 March 2010 at 16h00

COFFEE AND TEA WILL BE SERVED AT 15H45 IN FRONT OF THE SOLVAY ROOM

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