



Lezing Boris vd Ham – Dies UvH woensdag 29 januari

It is an honour for me to speak here on behalf of the Dutch Humanist Association at the 25th birthday of this university and to stand in front of three new honorary doctorates: Amarthya Sen, Carol Ryff and Joan Tronto.

As you all know, the University of Humanistic Studies is quite a special university. There is – literally – none like it in the world. Not only is it the first and still single humanist university in the world. It is also the youngest university in the Netherlands. And it also explicitly aims to contribute to a just society and to the ability of people to live meaningful lives. That is indeed something to be proud of.

And now this university has reached the age of 25 years. An age that sounds quite ideal. That's to say, from my point of view. Last year I reached 40, and from that perspective the age of 25 brings back good memories. When you're 5 years – the whole world is an adventure, but you're not capable of having any overview. When you're 15 years old – you're in the middle of doubts, fears, a changing body, out of shape, hating the world, or madly in love with someone from TV. When I was 23 years I had a small Quarter-life crisis. Lots of students have those around that age.

I read Friedrich Schillers theatre play 'Don Carlos' and the main character cried desperately: *'Full three-and-twenty years I now have lived, and not achieved anything for immortality'*

That's 23. But with 25..When you are 25 years, you are well on your way in knowing who you are and what you want in life. You see the

world as a place of change, improvement and wonder. You are filled with energy, enthusiasm and creativity. You want to contribute to the world and help shape it to be better and more beautiful.

And since you have already lived 25 years, you know that your ideals are not realized over night, indeed, perhaps not in your lifetime or maybe never.

But you keep your ideals for they are worthwhile having. You are more proud of the things you did achieve. Being 25 years of age combines a strong will with an open attitude and strong ideals with a sense of realism. This is true for persons and it seems true for this university.

What better way to celebrate than by means of honouring three people whose work also combines a strong will with an open attitude, and strong ideals with a sense of realism. Each of you has given us new directions of thinking.

- Prof. Sen has broadened our understanding of freedom and justice, For him freedom means something very practical: a persons real opportunity to do and be what they have reason to value. Freedom is not just a right but a capability that depends on both the person itself, and its social, economic and cultural surroundings.
- Prof. Ryff deepens our knowledge of well-being, resilience and old age. She helps us to probe deeper into the meaning of well-being, inspired by a multitude of sources and by the classic ideal of well-being as realizing our human potential.
- Prof. Tronto focuses our attention on the importance of caring for others and being cared for. She made very clear, that we are interdependent to the core. We are highly relational beings and depend on the care of others to become who we are. This attitude of care should not be somewhere in the corners of our society but indeed, right in the centre.

Each of you, have added a critical and creative view to your fields of study, and the combination of critical, engaged and creative thinking is perhaps the best example any student could wish for.

And it seems to me that you have the great strength to combine your care for individual life with economic, social and cultural institutions and structures. By using a variety of theoretical disciplines you see more sharply what it means to be us, and by broaden our perspective you make us more attentive to what it means to be vulnerable. All three of you provide something that is of great importance to humanism and humanistic studies.

Ladies and gentleman

As the chairman of the Dutch Humanist Association it is a privilege to have this university as a partner. For years my organization lobbied for a place for humanism in our higher education system, and we succeeded. It is this university that keeps on inspiring humanistic thought and humanistic living, that keeps on reflecting on what a meaningful life entails, and that tries to help create the conditions that help enable such a life. All made possible by all the individuals that worked here. And now we have three professors adding their ideas.

On behalf of our thirteen thousand members and our staff, I congratulate Prof Sen, Prof Tronto and Prof Ryff with their honorary doctorate and congratulate the University of Humanistic Studies with its 25th anniversary. I wish you all the best, an inspiring day, and last but not least. I wish you all a great party.

Thank you

Boris van der Ham, Chairman of the Dutch Humanist Association

