

Unconventional Man

V. Mukhanov

ASC, Theoretical Physics,

Theresienstr. 37, Munich 80333, Germany

E-mail: mukhanov@physik.lmu.de

POS (HRMS) 014

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During the past month I have been trying to begin these memories many times, but after 20 minutes I was always giving up, each time I ended up very angry with myself and completely unsatisfied with what I wrote. Nearly every day on my way home I was recalling the numerous conversations with Hector on every possible topic, from music to politics and science, and tried to think about the most relevant things, which would give a reader some feeling of who Hector was and how much he meant for me. Every time I started to write and read back, what I wrote looked so irrelevant, official and absolutely not reflecting even a little part of Hector's great personality. I felt ashamed. In addition, there was an obvious language problem. No doubt that Hector would not only forgive, but also understand me if I had told him in advance that I would not write anything in case of this tragic necessity, but I did not tell him this because I never wanted to believe that it would ever happen.

When on August 8, 2009 I received the news from Enrico Balli that Helen, Hector's wife, just called and Hector had passed away, I several times repeated the same idiotic question: "Are you sure?" I had some reason to repeat this question. As a matter of fact, in 2005 I received a similar call from Daniele Amati, who said that Hector had collapsed in Sao Paulo on his way back to Europe and chances that he would be back were negligible. By accident, right at the moment when Daniele called I was writing Hector's address on the envelope holding a copy of my book, which I just got from Cambridge University Press. When I gave this envelope to my secretary I thought to myself that now it would have nowhere to go. A few days later I got an e-mail "They did not admit me to Hell. What is going on there young man?" Hector was back! As he repeatedly told me after, he did not find anything interesting on the other side and therefore decided to turn around. Perhaps this sounds a bit biting, but those who knew Hector will recognize his typical style. In essence Hector was not cynical at all, quite the opposite, he was extremely sensitive to any injustice and untruth. He would always take things personally regardless if it was about politics, or about personal relations. He was sharp and never politically correct. I believe that he intentionally did not want to know what this "political correctness" means. His priorities were honesty, truth and logic. Quite often he was addressing me as "young man" although in spite of our substantial age difference I never felt this way, quite the opposite sometimes : especially when I tried to moderate the "too emotional" discussions of Hector with Daniele Amati on topics where they had some disagreement. Hector was proof of the fact that the real age of a man is determined by the state of his mind. In this sense, he was always very young in the most positive sense of this word, nearly always enthusiastic and full of energy. After the accident in Sao Paulo Hector lived on medicines, taking an infinite number of pills every day. However, this did not affect his behavior and the level of his activities remained nearly the same as before the accident. He did not want to give up, and never did, up to the last day when I called him and we had a long conversation about grandchildren, magnetic fields and mushrooms, which he loved to collect. He promised he would call me back the next day and tell me about the missing reference I had asked. A few hours later Hector died.

Unfortunately, I have known Hector personally only for a short time. The first time I met him at the Nobel Symposium in 2003 to which, as I learned later, I was invited mostly because of him. He told me afterwards that he was curious, because someone was strongly against inviting me and therefore he insisted. I was smoking outside the building when some man (Hector!) approached me and in ten minutes we had a very lively discussion about the troubles of particle physics. Amazingly for myself I found that I agreed with each word this man was saying. At this symposium Hector turned seventy and I remember the bottle of champagne signed by all participants to the symposium as a birthday present for him (I can recall it was initiated by Lars Brink). During the symposium I had some very unpleasant discussions with a number of colleagues about questions related with the obvious priority. These discussions nevertheless were getting more than they deserved on my nerves and my blood pressure went above any

reasonable level. I do not know how I would have survived were it not for Andrei Linde and Hector, who were extremely supportive, even though I had just met Hector. After the symposium there was the Klein lecture given by S. Hawking at Stockholm University. Hector left the dinner very early telling me he was feeling very bad. As I learned later one of the reasons for that was that someone, who was giving a speech about the history of Klein lectures, never mentioned his name, although Hector played a crucial role in establishing Klein lectures and was in fact the main initiator. It was an obvious injustice. Equally painful for Hector was any injustice regardless to whom it concerned. A month later I called Hector and wanted to invite him to visit Munich. He told me “you are too fast young man, first you have to come to Stockholm”. It was the beginning of our friendship, which lasted until his last days and has influenced me in an extremely positive way. A good friend of mine once noticed: “After you talk to Hector, you change completely and get in a much better mood. He has a very positive influence on you”. Our conversations, besides the constructive business part, were mostly consisting of negative remarks from both sides, perhaps it is like in mathematics, two minuses equal a plus. I would not say that Hector saw everything in a negative light, but rather he had a very realistic attitude. He loved physics and therefore it is completely understandable why he took it personally when he felt that experiments in physics were sometimes substituted by media press releases and sociology. To one of my messages, where I asked him about his health he replied: “My health is not great, but physics are in even worse shape. The whole LHC inauguration is a cynical media exercise.” Hector had the courage to switch to astroparticle physics when he wasn't so young anymore and already a very established particle physicist. He wrote an influential paper on the origin of primordial magnetic fields in the universe. The last paper he wrote with me (and my graduate student) was also about magnetic fields. Without Hector and his stimulating remarks this paper could never have been written and I was glad to hear from Adam Schwimmer, that Hector was proud of it. As one can learn from Lars Brink's memories, Hector played a crucial role in establishing the whole field of astroparticle physics in Sweden. Hector was often making very critical remarks about physics in Sweden, especially about nuclear physics, and told me numerous stories about his experiences after moving to Sweden. However, one of the things, which he always admitted, is that Sweden is the best country for awarding Nobel Prizes because Swedes are panicky afraid to make mistakes and therefore are not even influenced much by political considerations. Hector was the most outspoken person I ever met. His openness was often getting him into trouble, but it seems the truth was much more important for Hector than a comfortable co-existence with his colleagues. As Hector told me once, when he was in the hospital with a heart problem one of his colleagues sent him the following telegram: “I am sorry that you did not die”. Only ten years after this (equivalent to a life sentence according to Hector) did he talk to this person again. Hector could change his opinions very easily under the influence of logic arguments, but he never gave up on principles, although sometimes he could make little compromises. I recall that once I ironically noticed: “Hector, but what about that principle we decided to follow?” and immediately got my answer: “Anyhow, no go theorems always have a loophole”. In any case I recall it was about something that was not really essential. When it was about essential things, Hector did not even want to hear about compromises. Perhaps sometimes it was not very productive, especially concerning our journal business with the Institute of Physics, but it was extremely hard to convince Hector that we had to be softer in implementing our basic principles.

Hector played a crucial role in the physics publication business. For many years he was Editor in Chief for Nuclear Physics, which became thanks to Hector one of the best journals in particle physics. Once, long before I met Hector, a good friend of mine complained: “This guy Rubinstein is ridiculous. He rejected our paper even though all referee reports were very positive”. Many years later Hector confirmed that it really happened and justified his decision saying that the paper was about mathematics, not about physics. I think that his “dictatorial”

decisions in most cases were balanced by his extremely high feeling of personal responsibility for the things he was doing. As everybody else, sometimes he made mistakes, but in general the outcome of his strategy was very positive. When Hector decided to quit Elsevier (because he had a principle disagreement with the company concerning earning profits from scientific publications) and became the Director of the Journal of High Energy Physics (JHEP), he was so efficient that in just a few years this journal became the best one in the field, with the highest impact factor. I think the main reason for success was again personal responsibility. Hector kept everything under his personal control. To increase the number of good submissions he contacted his numerous friends asking to submit their papers to JHEP. This strategy worked very well. In 2002 Hector started the Journal of Cosmology and Astroparticle Physics (JCAP). This journal, during the 7 years of its existence, also became the leading journal in the field of astroparticle physics (with the highest impact factor among physics journals). I do not exaggerate by saying that in the success of both journals the role of Hector was crucial. After the accident in Sao Paulo, Hector decided that he had to pass both journals on to younger colleagues, and so asked Mark Henneaux and me to take care about JHEP and JCAP respectively. Even after that he monitored our job, and was extremely helpful for us. Each time he thought that something was wrong he gave very good advice, without putting too much pressure and leaving the final decision to us. It is really very hard to overappreciate his very valuable advice. He also played a dominant role in developing a general strategy for the journals. When I came up with the idea that not only editors, but also referees should be paid, Hector first was strongly against it, though finally he not only accepted the idea, but became very enthusiastic about it. As I already mentioned, Hector could not resist logical arguments and if needed he could easily change his opinion. Sometimes he blamed me for having a too capitalistic approach and vice versa I told him that his was too socialistic. Sometimes it was the other way around, and all debates we had I recall with pleasure, because they were always flavored with the sense of humor so typical for Hector. As far as I can recall, only once Hector was really furious with me. I was writing the bibliography for my book on cosmology and asked Hector for a reference to the paper by Symanzik on asymptotic freedom. He gave me the reference. I went to the library to check it and found it had to be the wrong reference. I called Hector and told him that in the paper he suggested I did not find anything on asymptotic freedom. Hector became furious: "You do not believe me?" I answered: "I believe you, but I also believe my eyes» Hector did not even reply, but in half an hour I got the correct reference.

During a Memorial Conference someone mentioned that Hector had a very peculiar attitude about classical music, affirming this is just triviality. No doubt that under the spur of the moment, depending on his mood, Hector could have said so, but I never heard anything like this from him. Quite the opposite, every time I visited his office, during his frequent visits to Munich, or when I met him in a hotel lobby, he always had his iPod with earphones on and was listening to classical music. Once I needed to wait at least for ten minutes, because he did not want to interrupt the music. It was Rossini "Il barbiere di Siviglia". After he finally paid attention to me, he expressed in a very emotional way how beautiful it is. Without Hector I perhaps would have never discovered Bartok, Britten and Telemann myself. I recall "torturing myself» for several days with Bartok, thinking that Hector cannot be wrong, before I finally got the point. Another story is related to the time Hector visited Munich to meet people from the Institute of Physics. Even during the meeting it was obvious that Hector did not feel very well because he was unusually silent. After spending an awful night in the hotel he left for the airport at seven in the morning hoping to change his flight to an earlier time. We were very worried and were calling him continuously for 6 hours, trying to find out what is going on. Only in the late afternoon he finally answered. What happened is that Hector did not get on the early flight and spent the whole day in the airport listening to classical music. Therefore, he did not even hear our calls. Fortunately, Helen was never made aware of this really good exercise for our nerves. I

also discussed with Hector a lot about literature, but here I would like to mention only Jorge Luis Borges, who was one of the favorite of Hector's writers. During the last year Hector changed quotes from Borges nearly every day on his skype account. He also told me the story of how, while still being in Argentina, he received from Borges a letter of support for his studies. Unfortunately, I forgot the details of the story, the only thing I can recall is that when Hector presented this letter to the official, this official told him «Normally we do not do these things for Jews, but on the other hand we cannot say no to Borges».

When I went to Hector's funeral, besides his family members, I met very many of his friends. Even more friends could not make it that day. Therefore, in spite of the character, which, according to one of the most close of Hector's friends, «was sometimes hard to swallow», Hector kept all his real friends until the end, who I believe now miss him very much.

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