

IN MEMORIAM MIGUEL SANCHEZ-MAZAS

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Ladies, gentlemen, dear colleagues, friends:

please let me, first of all, briefly contrast a circle and an ellipse (I mean, a non-circular ellipse), both in themselves and as paths -a contrast. I think, which would have pleased almost numerologically-minded young Miguel. As figures, an ellipse may be considered *plain*, in that the relation (as to length) between its two axes, while indeed showing a specific value, has nothing special to it. In a circle, though, the axes (in fact, of course, any axes) are identical; and identity, being such a unique relationship, confers a circle -perhaps contrary to present-day lay intuition- the *remarkable, whimsical, puzzling* nature so pungently perceived of old and still alive, although rather feebly, in phrases such as "a perfect circle".

Consider on the other hand how circles and (non-circular) ellipses behave when they play a path's role. The (nearly) circular course along which a planet moves provides a virtually unchanging, familiar, eventually routine sight -even of the magnificent Jovian planet. In sharp distinction to it, the highly elongated elliptical journey of a comet now shows it dazzlingly glowing, now keeps it unseen in its swift return to its native place (in Kuiper Belt, in Oort Cloud?), even though, if not hurtling away towards some dusty abyss in deep space, it will surely reappear afire again somewhere else, not less incandescent and astounding than before.

I would like to suggest that, while most academics, regarding their careers, range from Mercuries to Neptunes, if not to dark Plutos. Miguel Sánchez-Mazas' ways may aptly be compared to the blazing trail of a powerful, fiery comet that, relentlessly pursuing its own aims, changes in appearance, reaching one after the other the goals it set for itself and unceasingly zeroing in on new ones. But always in a peculiar, unpredictable, even startling fashion.

I first met him, back in 1945 or so, when he (with other common friends, Francisco Pérez Navarro and poet Jose M^a Valverde) established in *Gambrinus*, a Madrid bar, cafe and restaurant, what they quite fittingly named *Gambrinus' Free University*. For there they and other young people were to meet every saturday, for hours on end, trying to clear their minds from the uninteresting, obsolete, mind-stilling teachings from the regular, official Spanish University of the time, and to nourish them with appetizing, illuminating scientific and philosophical work, most times freshly published (in Spain). We jointly read and commented from plain mathematical textbooks (Rey Pastor's) to essays written by historians and philosophers of science (Couturat, Eddington, Russell), by students of language (Bühler), by philosophers in the phenomenological tradition (Ortega y Gasset, Heidegger, then Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, etc.), and many others. But

Miguel soon discontinued attending our weekly meetings: he was getting acquainted with actual philosophically-minded scientists, older people that showed widely divergent political views (e.g. Laín Entralgo, Cerdón, García Bacca), as well as with other young, brilliant fellows, mostly interested in the formal disciplines -several of them through his collaboration with the Philosophical Institute branch of the Spanish Council for Scientific Research.

A couple of examples. I still remember a mathematician from Argentina -Miguel was much in contact with Latin America students and young professors- who intrigued, exhilarated, and tantalized us by delivering two or three informal lectures on number theory. And when Manuel Sacristán -one of the most talented and well-learned left-wing young scholars that struggled against Franco's regime- entered a public competition for a professorship in Logics at Madrid University, it was Miguel who introduced me to Manolo. (Against all justice, the professorship was won by an intellectually mediocre and logically uneducated man -he was assessed as not politically menacing. I regret to say that, even though most times it does not stem from political considerations, but from an old friendship, a petty personal or local interest, and similar reasons, the habit of unmindfully granting teaching positions, even full professorships, to second-rate, incompetent people, is quite noticeably operating to this day in Spanish University. Unsurprisingly, it results in dire consequences.)

These new personal contacts and scholarly friendships kept Miguel mostly out of my sight, so it was with some surprise that I learned about his launching *Theoria*, in 1952. It was the outcome of his strenuous efforts, and he kept it alive for several years through his wonderful zest: a less bouncy, energetic man would never have been able, in addition to the editorial tasks, to write virtually every issue by himself, as in fact he did (but for a few collaborations by some prominent scientists and by some of his scientifically and/or philosophically minded friends). As to the publishing chores, most if not all of them were also assumed by Miguel.

This spirited activity, though, did not prevent him from developing other, even more vital and enjoyable ones. I was at the time a comparatively new member of the pleasurable, adventurous group of friends that called ourselves The Order of Globetrotters: a highly ritualistic, fake-baroque speech prescribing bunch of young men -and later, also of a few girls-, having as its main activity to engage in rather protracted treks (a trek ordinarily went on for two or three days, usually in the spring or in summertime, and we walked about 30 to 35 km a day, most times not far from Madrid). Now, the eccentric 'Order' was originated a few years before by Miguel himself, Francisco Pérez Navarro and a third young man (they walked a single day from Madrid to Toledo -70 km in one go- with no advance training). And every time I shared in one of its central activities, i.e. engaged in a trek with Francisco and other 'brethren', there it was also Miguel, walking for hours at a terrific speed, singing, devising all the time new challenges -either mental, verbal or physical- to be playfully overcome. He was tireless and inexhaustible.

Miguel was soon more and more involved, though, in the political struggle against the dictatorship. The flaming comet accelerated its pace and vanished most of the time from my field of vision, to reappear only now and then for a short while; in other words, Miguel almost entirely quit from the philosophical-scientific groups he had so critically

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helped to create. Finally, in 1956 or 1957, being legally prosecuted because of his criticism of Franco's regime, he fled to Switzerland. From then on it was only rarely that I had an opportunity to see him - and María Luisa, and the children. (Space travel, even in order to engage in a flyby around a comet, was not a matter-of-course undertaking in the late fifties and the sixties!) I managed to visit them in Geneva a couple of times. Later, though, I almost lost contact with them, as they firmly established themselves in Switzerland.

Then, some time after Franco's death, I learned that he was bestowed a full professorship. You all know better than I do how the powerful, passionate Comet landed ablaze in this University of the Basque Country, how much he did to create and strengthen his Department, our Department. And you also know how two of his sustained science-promoting dreams became real: first, resuscitation of *Theoria*, and second, creation of an interdisciplinary Research Institute of Logics and related disciplines. I would like to end these words pointing out how our dear Comet not only devoted for years his best efforts (aided by not less enthusiastic collaborators) to the editorial and publishing tasks needed in order to issue the resuscitated *Theoria*. Even now, several years after our university Publishing Service took up a part of the Journal publishing chores, Miguel kept financially supporting *Theoria* -a quite amazing, in fact dramatic behaviour in a scientific and philosophical editor. (Should it be translated by saying that the Comet burned its very sustenance so that the trail could shine?)

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