

Chapter 2

Adolescence

High School

It has been said that childhood is shorter in the underdeveloped countries than in the affluent ones, because in the former most children start earlier to fend for themselves: they have no pocket money, and their parents are too busy to spend time on them. They are on their own at around age 12 years. My own childhood ended at the beginning of the autumn of 1932, when I moved from my friendly and protective elementary school to the high school attached to the University of Buenos Aires. This was the old and prestigious Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, which occupied a huge building in the French academic style, characterized by fake stonework. It was just one block from the Plaza de Mayo, the main civic square of the republic, born there in 1810.

From the start I viewed my new school more as a correctional facility than as a learning center, because of its emphasis on discipline and tests scores. This regime was enforced by about ten professors, one for each subject, mostly stern and elderly men, as well as a by a whole corps of prefects, sub-prefects, wardens, and monitors who spied and reported on us as if we were potential delinquents. That strict regime did not prevent the cheeky student who sat at the first desk in the front row from masturbating every morning year after year.

Our teachers and guardians instilled in us more fear than respect, and obviously did not realize that we were children going through the most difficult phase of life. Very few of our teachers tried to make learning a pleasant experience: most of them saw their task as that of taming us, rather than stimulating our curiosity and creativity. For example, the flawless recitation of a mediocre poem, or of a page of a dull textbook, was rewarded, whereas questioning, or even asking teachers for clarification, was out of the question. That was standard procedure the world over, except in the U.S.A. and in a few experimental schools in Germany and the U.S.S.R. where memorizing was not compulsory while dialogue was encouraged.

Near Expulsion

Used as I was to the freedom I had enjoyed at home, as well as to the gentleness of my elementary teachers, I rebelled against the jail-like regime of the high school. For instance, when the calligraphy professor started his course by asserting that his was the most important of the subjects we were to study, I laughed up my sleeve and drew a cartoon that portrayed him as a dressed-up chimpanzee. I placed this cartoon on the front page of my *Magazine against the Professors*. This title might have pleased Sextus Empiricus, but he was no longer around to defend me.

My magazine had an ephemeral existence, for the teacher confiscated it promptly and demanded my immediate expulsion from school. The chief inquisitor, Señor Amoroso [sic], and his minions, agreed that this troublemaker had to be expelled. The principal reduced the penalty to a 14-day suspension, that is, exclusion from classes. This was serious, because a single missing day would have sufficed to expel me without appeal.

Even I was surprised at my irreverence, because I had behaved well in my elementary schools. But I was put off by the solemnity and self-importance of most of my professors. I was also repelled by the disciplinary regime, which I regarded as medieval – as I told the principal when he asked me why I felt unhappy at school. Dr Juan Nielsen – a tall, thin, and dry individual – seemed amused by my insolent reply because he smiled at it – perhaps for the first and last time in that school term.

Given that schools run by mediocre martinets and that measure success only by test scores only breed able yes-men (Golan 2015), who could have expected that only a few decades after my time mine would become co-educational, offer lessons in tango dancing, or that its student body would be mobilized by left-wing militants four decades later? Perhaps deviance is the norm in a culture of amateurs.

Our Teachers

I was a mediocre student because I was neither motivated nor fond of most of my teachers. The exception was Osmán Moyano, our French literature teacher. He was a competent, dedicated, and sensitive man who stimulated and respected us. Having heard about my socialist leanings, he suggested that I read the iconoclastic Villers de l'Isle Adam. As a prize he gave me a copy of the *Petit Larousse Illustré*, which I have used until recently. I remembered Mr Moyano affectionately every time I enjoyed reading one of my favorite French classics: Molière, Diderot, Balzac, Maupassant, Anatole France, Romain Rolland, Marguerite Yourcenar, and Le Clézio.

Juan Batana, the engineer who taught us physics, was competent and dedicated, but his lessons were flat: he had not heard that, as Einstein and Infeld put it, physics is “an adventure in thought.” By contrast, his colleague Enrique Butty – regarded as a great scientist because he had claimed to having proved Einstein wrong – was

lively and friendly. However, he only came when his many jobs allowed it: he was director of National Public Sanitation, professor of elasticity theory, and dean of the Faculty of Engineering. Fortunately, Jorge Cordero Funes, a talented and generous classmate, tutored some of us once a week at his home.

Most of our professors were not interested in teaching, and some of them were frankly incompetent or even grotesque in their behavior. For example the aesthetics professor, who wrote *sainetes* (vulgar comedies), was always in a bad mood and decorated the floor with huge gobs of phlegm. He claimed to teach us philosophy of art just because he repeated over and over the formula “The sublime, the beautiful, the pretty, and the ugly.” He never told us that beauty might be in the eye of the beholder, let alone that aesthetics does not contain any universal principles.

The art professor, an uneducated man, made us copy plastic casts, such as one of Voltaire’s famous head, and his own blueprint of a miserable dwelling. His highest praise was “Perfet, no defet.” The botany professor taught us only some systematics and nothing about plant physiology, let alone evolution, but warned us several times that the decorative plant that florists called *asparagus* is no such thing, but *Asparagus sprengeri*. The chemistry professor did not explain the synthesis of water out of hydrogen and oxygen, but told us repeatedly that water is “the universal solvent”. The lugubrious Señor López was expected to teach the elements of Spanish grammar, but he only succeeded in making us yawn. And the mathematics professor, an engineer who doubled as a Conservative alderman, was stern and demanding but incapable of motivating the learning of algorithms, whose point escaped us. He and his subject terrified me.

Other Strange Teachers

The physical education professor came to the sports field clad in fedora, jacket, vest, and spats. His paunch prevented him from bending, which is why he asked me to go to the front of the class and demonstrate some of the calisthenics exercises that my private gymnastics instructor had taught me. This was Edmundo Blum, a competent, educated, and charming German expat, strong and nimble, but not a muscle builder.

Señor Blum and his family were good friends of ours. His wife Elsie made it clear that, unlike her husband, she was not Jewish. I was close to their two sons, Edgardo and Gerardo. The latter ended up as a colonel in the American air force, whereas Edgardo managed to graduate from medical school. But he was a passionate philatelist, so he neglected everything else, and died young from blood infection. In geography we had to memorize the names of mountains, lakes and rivers – even dry ones, as I discovered when traveling. We got neither geology nor human geography: our professor, the editor of an important daily who got the job because he had traveled as far as Moscow, taught us about territories, not nations. This was in tune with the idealist split between the natural and the “cultural” (social) sciences.

In history we had to memorize the histories of the Spanish, French and British dynasties. Only political and military history seemed to matter. Thus, we were told that the Magna Carta had been the earliest European democratic document, rather than a constitution that enshrined the subordination of the king to the landed aristocracy. We were never told about the war crimes committed from the siege of Jericho on. Nor were we told how many people gathered in the assembly that had proclaimed the independence of our nation: was it 100, 1,000, 10,000?

In Latin we were required to read Cicero's impassioned Catiline Orations. We were not told why Cicero had delivered them: we had to accept that Senator Catiline was wicked, and when one of us misbehaved, the teacher quoted to us Cicero's famous imprecation *Quo usque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra?* How much more we would have enjoyed Lucretius' immortal poem *De rerum natura*, Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, or even Plautus's popular comedies! The lively teacher of history of the Americas told us about the mythical Prester John, the search for whose kingdom may have motivated some of the explorers, but did not tell us how many Amerindians each Spanish "settler" exploited. Nor did he tell us how many Europeans came to "populate" the Americas during the century following "discovery." (According to Fernand Braudel, there were only about 1,000 men per year.) And it was only much later that I learned that the Spaniards sent more executioners than teachers to the New World, and that the monarchs who had financed Colón's expeditions spent all the gold and silver exacted from the Indians on the mercenary armies they employed to loot what are now Belgium and the Netherlands.

In short, the history we were taught was "dry as dust" and superficial, even though the French school of the *Annales*, of "histoire totale," had started more than a decade earlier. To this day, the vast majority of Argentine historians are either chroniclers or biographers. This may explain the success of *Todo es historia* [*Everything is history*], the semi-popular monthly sold in kiosks since 1966.

Classmates

We were a mixed crowd. The first in every subject, Oscar Andrieu, had neither preferences nor friends, and never expressed any emotions – except for the time he shed copious tears for having got an 8 instead of his customary 10. He ended up as a translator of classical Greek. Héctor Genoud, the second in rank, was good-natured and an excellent classmate, always ready to lend a hand. He urged me to join his club, where we played water polo, and I injured my back in overrating my ability at high trampoline jumping. I also made friends with Martín Noël, a member of the wealthy family who owned the factory that manufactured popular evil-tasting chocolate. He was unpretentious and irreverent like me, and became an expert in Argentine literature. I was also close to Jorge Pena, the son of a Socialist alderman, and the only one of us who had heard the admirable slogan of the 1789 French Revolution: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*. I lost touch with all of them when I was

forced to leave that school. But I had friends in other circles, and soon formed my own gang. Besides, I shared most of my parents's friends.

At 17 years I took up rowing, sitting first on a small carriage moving on rails, and later in light cigar-shaped boats that rowed much faster. My favorite excursion was to one of the many islands on the widest branch of the powerful Paraná river. There I would explore the thicket, and would be bitten by mosquitoes with white legs, as befit skillful surgeons who start by injecting an anesthetic. I would also read novels, poetry, history of science, physics, and philosophy under the curious eyes of wild furry otters. Sometimes I would take along new friends interested in subjects quite distant from my favorites. Once, when fast asleep under a full moon, my friend and I felt wet. The river had risen 1 m in a few minutes. We gathered our belongings, jumped into the boat that we had tethered to a tree and, half asleep, drifted back to my club. Our breakfast consisted of tinned condensed milk and plums bought earlier from an itinerant fruit seller. To secure a permanent rowing companion, I submitted my membership application, along with that of my close friend David Jacovkis, to a less fancy rowing club. We were both promptly blackballed. Jews belonged in a rowing club of their own – which, of course, was just as selective and exclusive as the others.

By contrast, the YMCA was open and secular – and welcoming of Jews. My Argentinian sons and I have fond memories of it, particularly of our summer camps in its hilly and wooded Sierra de la Ventana estate, which had a river as well as clouds of voracious gnats. The camp leaders, such as Señor Vignes, organized our activities and assigned us responsibilities but otherwise left us alone. Thus, the Y was a leadership school in addition to a sports club.

Many years later, when I married Marta, who had a safe Italian family name, we were admitted into the *América* rowing club. In good weather, but in all seasons, we rowed to a quiet island, where I would help her with mathematics, and we would eat a box full of delicious sandwiches prepared by my mother. She doted on Marta, knit beautiful sweaters and gloves for her, and cooked us delicious dinners every Friday night.

Girls

Back to my early youth. The Bivort, Corti, and Miserachs families had very beautiful daughters who could be admired only from afar. The same held for the delicious Anglo-Argentinian schoolgirl who travelled standing, exhibiting her white blouse, in the train carriage that took us downtown. By contrast, I exchanged visits with Mary, the most attractive and daring of the girls in our neighborhood, who tried in vain to teach me to dance. Her father was in jail ostensibly for embezzlement, but actually for having been a member of the party unseated by the 1930 military coup. Mary's mother, who welcomed me, worked at the post office where I deposited my savings, which I made by running to school instead of taking the streetcar or the bus. Mary was eventually seduced by a friend of mine, with whom I exchanged fisticuffs over her.

I also had a secret love affair with another pretty girl, with whom I played squash in the street. I jilted her the moment I saw Teba Bronstein, my first serious, albeit unrequited, love. She was charming and very interested in music, literature, and politics. Besides, she treated me, 4 years her junior and still in high school, as if I were grown-up. She was both moved and amused by my long written list of reasons for loving her. We attended together many concerts, lectures, and parties – serious affairs where young people conversed and made music, but abstained from alcohol and hanky-panky. Teba's senior admirer, an advanced medical student, must have taken me as a serious rival, for he once invited me to dine, to discuss our respective territories. We agreed to let Teba choose. I was besotted with Teba for a couple of years, until I made very different friends. The other great loves of my life were Julia, with whom I spent ten good years, and Marta, with whom I have been married for 56 years. I may be called a *serial monogamist*.

My Mother's Most Interesting Friends

My mother was serious and reliable, usually tense, often worried, and sometimes depressed. She relaxed, and occasionally even laughed, only in the company of her dearest friends, most of whom were old colleagues or former patients. I loved them too, and enjoyed their company, which was always brightened by cakes made by my mother or bought at the famous Steinhäuser bakery in town. Once Tití, our affectionate monkey, feasted on cakes, and quenched his thirst putting his head in the milk jug but needed my help to get out of it.

My favorite among Mariechen's friends was sweet Ellie, who lived with Herr Lüpnitz, a typesetter and feuilletonist with the democratic German daily. When I asked him what would happen in the next episode, he amazed me by saying that he did not know it beforehand: he would learn it as he wrote. Did the same happen with his more eminent colleagues, Balzac, Dickens, and Dumas *père*?

Paula, another close friend, was a very competent and serious nurse with advanced ideas. Once she laughed at me because I was wearing a patriotic cockade. I was shocked to hear her say that the flag was just a piece of cloth. But a few years later, when the Nazis rose to power, Paula dropped her internationalism, and we never saw her again. Finally, there was Marta Bereny, a pretty and affectionate Hungarian married to an architect who drove her about in his car – an event that invariably caused a stir in the neighborhood.

My mother had a dramatic streak and often felt very sad. I phoned all three friends every time she suffered a severe depression attack, but they always told me that it would soon pass. I tried to console her, but her hospital etiquette forbade her to kiss, hug, or hold hands, so I confined myself to soothing her and leading her to sleep. I blamed my father for neglecting her, but poking at ashes won't start a fire.

El Ombú's *Habitués*

Every Sunday we were visited by people who wished to talk to my father, from neighbors asking for advice to members of his party, journalists, political exiles, or just curious individuals. My favorite was the young and charming economist Raúl Prebisch, who accepted to be my lay godfather, and was later nominated for a Nobel prize. Other close friends were the amiable Roberto Giusti, a prominent literary critic, with whose daughters I had played, and who sat comfortably on his favorite armchair, caressing his Chianti bottle. Every time my mother served fish, Alfredo Bianchi, Giusti's partner in the direction of the influential *Nosotros* magazine, asked her whether it was fresh. He was also known to shed a *furtiva lagrima* when contemplating a beautiful sunset. The poet Juan Burghi, aka Juancho, made a living buying and selling scrap iron, and was duly impressed when my father read a poem he had just written to show him what non-trivial poetry looked like. The prestigious and fearless journalist José P. Barreiro married a girl of the wealthy Cantoni family of wine growers and politicians. Less frequent but equally welcome friends were the fat and friendly Uruguayan Socialist leader Emilio Frugoni, who, even after 10 years, had not forgotten the day the communists took over the newspaper he had founded; and the dermatologist Adolfo Muschietti, whose doctoral dissertation, on prostitution and poverty, had been supervised by my father. He always presented my mother with a box of her favorite bonbons, which she consumed much faster than I.

All these friends treated my mother and me affectionately, and the three *littérateurs*, as well as my father, patiently read my literary productions, which they subjected to constructive criticisms. And they made fun of my father's tendency to take charge of everything. Juancho said that Augusto would even instruct and correct his own funeral director's operations.

In addition to the above-mentioned friends, there was always some other occasional visitor, like Luis Reissig, expert in Anatole France, now unjustly forgotten. In 1930 Reissig organized the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, the Argentine version of the Collège de France, founded four centuries earlier with the same goal: to study and teach new ideas that the universities ignored or neglected. The idea of the CLES had been Aníbal Ponce's. Ponce, who made a living as a clinical psychologist, was a high-level amateur who succeeded José Ingenieros as the head of his *Revista de Filosofía*, a non-partisan intellectual review. Ponce surprised everyone when he gave a learned lecture in praise of the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels. He later founded *Dialéctica*, a short-lived review of Marxist scholarship that reprinted Marx's deplorable encyclopedia potboiler on Simón Bolívar, aka El Libertador, whom he treated with Eurocentric arrogance. *Dialéctica* did not publish anything original. Marxism had long ceased to inspire original research.

I was a frequent visitor at the Colegio, where I followed the course on dialectical materialism taught by the distinguished clinician Emilio Troise, as well as that of Rodolfo Mondolfo – just exiled from Italy – on Renaissance philosophy, and a few others. And in the *Revista del CLES* I read Juan Valencia's lectures on genetics, as

well as Vicente Fatone's about Indian philosophers. In the same journal my father published in 1933 his well-documented study on Argentine oil and the international oil trusts. The universities would touch neither of these subjects. The Colegio's lectures on genetics had such an impact that my friend Goyo Aráoz, a lawyer, spoke of nothing else.

Once we were visited at *El Ombú* by the professional excentric Omar Viñole, a veterinarian and prolific writer who expressed his contempt for the contemporary Argentine politics by writing incomprehensible books and taking his cow on a leash for a walk in downtown Buenos Aires, which earned him the nickname The Cow's Man. Another occasional visitor was Elsa Jerusalem Widakovich, Einstein's wealthy hostess when he came in 1925 to give a few lectures. She had become famous for her novel *The Golden Scarab*, about a Berlin madam. It was said that this book was autobiographical, which I could not believe because she seemed to me the ugliest woman I had ever encountered. In any event, Einstein expressed his disgust and contempt for the wealthy and otiose ladies and gentlemen who fêted him in Buenos Aires.

One of the strangest unexpected visitors was Otto Strasser, the leader of the Black Front, the left wing of the Nazi movement, murdered in the 1934 purge. (Incredible as it may seem, Hitler belonged to the centrist wing of his movement, whereas Himmler led the right wing.) My father did not waste time on him.

Another surprising visit was that of the wealthy rancher and Conservative boss Antonio Santamarina and his right-hand man Alberto Barceló, the owner of the brothels, gambling dens, and votes in Avellaneda, the industrial town next to Buenos Aires. They had come to offer a parliamentary seat to my father, whose congressional period was about to end. Of course, he declined the offer, but did not foresee Barceló's revenge – a police visit to our home. (It was said that once, referring to a son-in-law he disapproved of, Barceló remarked to his henchmen: "Look at that young man. He looks so wasted, that I fear for his life." The next morning the man in question was discovered mysteriously stabbed to death.)

The Sunday Lunches

Nearly every Sunday we had about a dozen guests for lunch. (Never 13: that was my father's only remaining superstition.) Our guests were strictly divided into political associates and close friends. The politicians came only once a summer to eat a delicious lamb roasted slowly in a fire lit in the early morning by an expert garbed in a splendid gaucho outfit. These lunches, for which I prepared a fruit punch that I did not drink, took place in the cool shade of the *ombú*. These guests, all of them parliamentarians or cabinet ministers, were only interested in the political issues and intrigues of the day. My father, basically an intellectual, was a bit out of his element in those gatherings, though always the gracious and highly respected host.

I was much more interested in the regular Sunday lunches with my parents's closest friends. During those affairs many subjects were discussed, particularly

books, such as Leonhard Frank's moving antiwar novel *Man Is Good*, which my father had translated, and Emil Ludwig's thick yet popular *Napoleon*. Other often-discussed authors were Anatole France (ingenious), Sinclair Lewis (realistic), Marcel Proust (boring), Romain Rolland (courageous), George Bernard Shaw (socialist), and Stefan Zweig (tragic). D. H. Lawrence was discussed only when his *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (erotic) was banned. I don't recall anyone in that circle mentioning Thomas Mann, Luigi Pirandello, Eça de Queirós, or even Leo Tolstoy. The Spanish and Latin-American writers were ignored or bashed, except Rubén Darío, a great innovator for some, but kitschy in my view. And everyone would have been shocked if told that Roger Martin du Gard (such a bore!) and François Mauriac (so frivolous!) would eventually be awarded Nobel Prizes, or that Jorge Luis Borges (who?) was repeatedly nominated for it.

A book that provoked spirited discussions was Julien Benda's *La trahison des clercs*, (1927), the earliest and harshest denunciation of the prominent French and German intellectuals – among them the physicist Max Planck, the philosopher Henri Bergson, and the sociologist Max Weber – who had supported their respective governments during the Great War. Benda rightly accused them of betraying the intellectual's commitment to truth. Nobody foresaw the silence of the vast majority of the German (and Argentine!) men of culture when confronted with the coming fascisms.

But of course the most popular cultural novelty of the time was the film. The children filled the local theatre, popularly known as "The fleabag", where we cheered loudly at the deeds of the cowboy Tom Mix and the German shepherd Rin Tin Tin, as well as at the doings of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. In my father's circle, *Intolerance*, *Doctor Caligaris's Cabinet*, and the films of the German expressionists, such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, were often discussed.

I had a recurrent nightmare after watching the scene in *Metropolis* where a worker is crushed by a gigantic gearwheel. And I watched several times *Emil and the detectives*, with the evil-looking Peter Lorre. This popular film was based on a novel by Erich Kästner, who had dared call his fatherland "The land where cannon blossom" – a parody of Goethe's name for Italy, "The land where lemon blossom."

We were also occasionally visited by foreign politicians or political exiles, such as the Peruvian Víctor Haya de la Torre, founder of the anti-imperialist movement APRA. I befriended the Mexican journalist Fernando Robles, a friendly, lonely and pious ex *cristero*, or soldier in the bloody and long war that the Catholic Church had waged against the constitutional government (1926–1929). He was shocked when I said that the Mexican landowners, starting with the biggest of all, the Church, treated the peasants like feudal serfs. He saw feudalism as a sequence of colorful tournaments among chivalrous knights. José Vasconcelos, who had been the education minister of the government born from the 1910 popular revolution, came once. I took him for a long walk through the garden and, to my surprise, he expounded on the Nazi doctrine that the telluric, the soil, dominated the life of the peoples. Years later I learnt that such irrationalism was part of the reaction against the oppressive

regime of Porfirio Díaz, which called itself ‘scientific’ just because it had adopted the political philosophy of the later Auguste Comte – a parody of scientism.

I was a frequent participant in those discussions. My father never held me back, unlike his own, who had forbade his eight children from speaking at the table. Once, the young Augusto was severely reprimanded for blurting out “Watch it, Dad!” When, at the end of the meal, his father asked him what he had wanted to say, he replied: “There was a worm on the salad leaf that you were about to eat.”

Those entertaining and instructive Sunday lunches, my week’s dessert, ceased abruptly in mid-1936, when all of our guests lost their appetite and their thirst overnight. Let us see why.

The Spanish “Civil” War

On July 18th, 1936, the Spanish general Francisco Franco and his staff, who had sworn loyalty to the democratically elected Republican government, revolted, starting a horrendous “civil” war that lasted nearly 3 years. The German and Italian governments participated decisively in this conflict, as did the antifascist International Brigades composed of foreign volunteers. Among them were the 2,800 Americans who composed the Lincoln Brigade – of whom President Reagan later said that they had been “on the wrong side.” The war cost half a million dead, an unknown number of “red” prisoners executed by the “nationals” after their victory, and about a million exiles. That war divided not just Spain but also the rest of the West into two sides. Nearly all the intellectuals and artists supported the Republican cause. Franco’s only outstanding sympathizers were the excentric Salvador Dalí, one of my favorites painters, and the poets Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

Most of the prestigious Argentine writers, starting with Borges and his circle, kept a prudent silence. The few intellectuals and artists who dared pronounce themselves in favor of the Republicans formed the association AIAPE (Asociación de Artistas, Intelectuales, Periodistas y Escritores), which met at a large basement near the Congress palace, which I visited often.

Franco’s uprising emboldened the Argentinian fascists, in particular Manuel A. Fresco, the fascist and clerical governor of the Buenos Aires province, where we resided. The evening of the very day that Franco started his war, a squad of provincial police entered our home and arrested my father, me, and more than a hundred guests, who had come to raise funds to assist jailed political and trade-union activists. The gathering had been peaceful and non-political, without speeches and with nothing to eat or drink. My father, oblivious to the noise, kept working at his desk. His guests, mostly unknown to him, did nothing but engage in conversation and visit the garden. But it is true that about half of them were guilty of having Jewish names. The people under arrest were taken by bus to the jail in La Plata, the provincial capital, about 100 km away. On arrival we were offered wooden benches and a nauseating stew, which I did not touch. All, except me, were set free 24 h later.

Although I was a minor, I had insisted on staying with my father. The next morning, Uncle Jorge came for me and took me to the train station, where he treated me to the most delicious turkey sandwiches I ever tasted. When we arrived in Buenos Aires, he took me to the apartment of my aunt Delfina and her husband Manuel Gálvez, the famous novelist – neither of whom came to greet me. Uncle Manolo, who in his youth had been a leftist and a dear friend of my father's, had become a clerical and a fascist sympathizer. Like a plague victim held in quarantine, I was confined for several hours to a bare room without reading materials. Eventually Uncle Jorge took me to his architect's office, where I stayed alone and worrying about my parents. At sundown Jorge took me to the train station where my father and his jail companions finally arrived, looking triumphant because the authorities had found no incriminating documents on them. *Crítica*, the popular evening paper with circulation of a million, carried a picture of the caravan on its front-page.

We were welcomed by my mother, our cheerful and motherly housekeeper Kathy, and her sullen husband Jakob. Our beds were smeared with the mud left by the policemen who had slept on them with their boots on, after drinking all the fine liqueur they found. Several shelves in my father's library were emptied: the police took away the Baedeker travel books and Edgar Wallace's thrillers because they were bound in red, and this is what they had been ordered to do: to find and take away all the red publications. But they also took away my beautiful Corona typewriter, my alarm clock, and my valuable coin collection, which included some ancient and medieval items, as well as a doubloon that an English corsair had stolen from a Spanish caravel, and where the British mint had overprinted with English words. They also confiscated all the letters I had received, and separated those written in Esperanto, on which they pinned a piece of paper saying "Cypher?"

The Friends' Reaction

Our old friends kept silent and never returned to our table. They did not even phone. This disloyalty crushed my father. But it should not have surprised him, because the provincial government headed by Manuel A. Fresco had intimidated nearly everyone. Fresco, who in his office exhibited signed photographs of Hitler and Mussolini, had invented the *voto cantado*, or oral ballot, and put into practice the educational reform designed by the fascist and Thomist philosopher Jordán B. (né Giordano Bruno) Genta, which included a reduction in the duration of primary school. Fresco's police also kept the tradition of torturing with an electric prod initiated in 1930 by Matías Sánchez Sorondo, the minister of the interior of the continent's first fascist government, headed by General José F. Uriburu. That minister too kept photos signed by Hitler and Mussolini, as Ramón Columba (1947), the senate's chief stenographer, attested in his memoirs. Thus, this "enhanced interrogation" technique, as it is called in the USA, came straight from the slaughterhouse.

The vanished friends were soon replaced by the faithful friends of my father's youth: Vivaldi, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms came

uninvited with greater frequency, and gradually new friends joined us to our delight: Bruckner, Chausson, Delius, Fauré, Mahler, Milhaud, Prokofiev, Sibelius, and a few others. We did not care for jazz, which seemed frivolous to us, but I liked some of the old tangos. With my father we played at solving such cases as: Is it old Haydn's or young Mozart's? Brahms's or Beethoven's? These games diverted us from the political news, which was seldom good during that period of the worldwide ascent of fascism.

My father was a Stoic, and kept a copy of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* on his bedside table. He was uninterested in gossip, and never discussed personal problems, whether his own or other people's. Every time I started to criticize one of our friends he cut me short, saying "One must take people as they come." But he was always ready to help friends in need, and complained that our close friend Duncan Haymes never told us anything about his own travails and troubles in his regular letters from wartime Washington.

One night, when my father seemed to be in a particularly somber mood, and we were about to play records of his favorites, Beethoven's last quartets, I summoned my courage and asked him what his greatest ambition was. He replied that his aim was to attain peace of mind. I was puzzled but did not dare pressing the matter any further.

I never found out what was troubling him at the time, but suspect that it was to do with the fruits of his 20-year long parliamentary career. His learning and integrity had earned him the respect of his colleagues in all parties, but no one's friendship. And his pet project, of national health insurance – far more advanced than the one Senator Ted Kennedy proposed half a century later – lied buried in the Record of the National Deputies' Congress.

I regarded *Papi* as my very best friend despite our frequent tiffs over trivial problems. His clamming up about his own troubles was due not only to the Bunge stiff upper lip, but perhaps also because he did not wish to unload his burdens on my young shoulders. This must have helped me try and solve my various problems on my own. Thank you for being my role model, *Papi*, and also for helping me develop a similar harsh outer shell, which proved handy in that environment, which was anything but nurturing.

High School

However, back to my high school studies. I had arrived at 1936 in jolts. At the end of the year my school let me "free" because of the low grades that I had gotten in most subjects. I did not feel offended or sad, because I realized that I had been just as bad as the school. Love, politics, and my literary essays had distracted me excessively. The only F I got was in Spanish Literature for failing to memorize Becquer's rhymes angered me, for I thought that my numerous poems, short stories and essays were worth far more than memorizing the verses of a third rank poet, now deservedly forgotten. (I learned only the other day that Borges called "imperceptible" that

professor.) My parents did not reprimand me, but trusted that I would find a way to graduate from high school on my own, which I did in 1937, as will be seen later.

One of my closest friends was René Corti, son of the professor of Italian literature mentioned earlier. René was a fascist like his father, and a member of the Legión Cívica Argentina. This was the fascist militia dedicated to beating up anti-fascists and Jews. (This militia, founded by a certain Patricio Kelly, eventually joined the Peronist movement, and was outlawed after Perón's downfall.) Once René taught me how to manufacture a stick with a leaden head, but I doubt he ever used it. We were always on friendly terms, and argued rationally, both face to face and by mail, on a host of subjects. René and I befriended Lorenzo, the newspaper vendor at the Retiro train station, who kept us up to date with the news and corrected our Italian pronunciation. Our conversations with him were so interesting that René and I missed some trains, so as not to cut them short.

Another dear friend was Luis Bertolino, the level-crossing guard who loved "classical" (i.e., Baroque and Romantic) music. He worked by night and lived humbly with a colleague in a wooden cottage next to the train level crossing in their charge. They could not afford eating anything but fruit, bread, and pasta with tomato sauce. Luis spoke low Spanish, but had good manners and always wore a clean shirt and a tie under his immaculate blue blazer. We first met at the train station, where I had accompanied my father as usual. When the train left, Luis introduced himself and asked me whether it was true that we had large collection of classical music records. I responded affirmatively and invited him to come home and listen to some records.

Thereafter, Luis visited us frequently and played records while I did my homework. When he met my father, both conversed learnedly about music and interpreters. We never found out how his passion for classical music had arisen, but the fact is that, at that time, one could attend for a dollar or less some of the best concerts in the Colón theatre, still world-famous for its excellent acoustics. When Italian operas were offered, the theatre filled with Italians, whereas Wagner's operas attracted not only Germans but also half of the music-loving community. I found opera ridiculous, but enjoyed some arias of Verdi's and even Wagner's.

Luis introduced me to the claque's boss, who allowed me to enjoy the best music for 50 cents – albeit standing in the gods, known as chicken coop. Once, the boss expelled me for failing to applaud a pianist, perhaps Alfred Cortot, or Arthur Schnabel, whose performance I did not admire.

One summer Luis and I traveled third class (wooden benches) to Bariloche, at the feet of the Andean cordillera, in upper Patagonia, and then by truck to the marvelous Mascarcardi Lake. We camped in my tent on its shore, and befriended Benito Vereertbrugge, popularly known as "Brujo" (Wizard), the owner of the only hotel in the region and grandson of a legendary physician. Doctor Vereertbrugge had come via Canada from his native Belgium at the beginning of the twentieth century. He rode on horseback to see his patients, scattered throughout a 100-km- radius circle. He exchanged mounts once in a while and charged in kind, particularly horses, for the settlers seldom saw money: theirs was a barter economy, where trust replaces notarized documents and collaterals.

Patagonian Lakes

When I turned 16 years, my parents presented me with an organized tour of the Andean lakes and forests in and around the Patagonian town of Bariloche. My travel companions were a couple of haughty but uneducated landowners. I fell in love with Mascardi Lake, across the Tronador peak, to which I returned several times. In that trip I met veterans of the atrocious southern African Boer war, as well as Scots who had traveled there just to fish for salmon and trout. Two decades later, the only time I tried fishing at a rapid mountain river, I caught without bait 25 trout in so many minutes. They were eaten by the chemistry students camping on the shore of El Bolsón lake.

I also met a friendly young American woman whom I told, with my usual tact, that she resembled Beethoven. There was also a Uruguayan businessman who mailed me several books by Count Hermann Keyserling, much fêted in Argentina, who seemed to me to be a charlatan. The daughter of my new friend, only 16 years old, was serious and beautiful, and looked down on me because her high school taught infinitesimal calculus instead of Latin.

A few months later I took the overnight boat to Montevideo carrying only 50 pesos and a useless and annoying umbrella. I slept in cheap boarding houses, ate meals for 25 cents, talked to restaurant waiters about the latest feats of the ruling dictatorship, and learned that Uruguay had set up the first welfare state on the continent. Gilberto Bellini, who had painted my father's portrait, introduced me to several ladies who invited me to their tables in terraces where they danced for money with handsome young men. I was delighted with the unassuming Uruguayans, as well as with their grapes and watermelons, that tasted better than ours.

Politics

My real adolescence began in 1935, when I exchanged short pants for long ones, and started my fourth school year. That year, my brain was flooded by hormones, and my neurons were radically rewired. These brain changes led me to make several fascinating discoveries: the self, romantic love, literature, classical music, and Marxism.

At that time, communism was rapidly spreading throughout the world, fanned by the persistent economic depression and the economic success of the Soviet Union – the only country without unemployment. There were three additional factors: The crimes of Stalinism were unknown or disbelieved; Marxists claimed to be on the side of science; and the communists were everywhere the main enemies of fascism. For example, in 1935 the Brazilian leftists, led by the legendary lieutenant Luis Carlos Prestes, led a military attack on the fascist *Estado Novo* [New State] led by Getúlio Vargas and inspired by the journalist Plínio Salgado and the clever legal philosopher Miguel Reale, whom I met at congresses two decades later. By contrast,

in Argentina, ultraconservative since the 1930 military coup, the communists constituted a minute group that could not even elect an alderman.

The Argentine communists followed the orders of the Communist International (Comintern), though sometimes with remarkable delays. For example, in 1935 a large wall in our neighborhood appeared painted with the slogan “¡All the power to the Soviets!,” which the Petrograd communists had proclaimed in 1920. Another communist slogan of that time was directed against the socialists, whom they called “Social fascists,” the idiotic and suicidal insult that the German communists had used on the eve of Hitler’s ascent to power in 1933. However, the blindness of the local communists was no worse than that of Winston Churchill, who in 1939 praised Mussolini for being a wall against communism, nor that of Pope Pius XI, who, besides colluding with Mussolini, called General Franco a “Knight of Christendom.” The fascist’s heinous crimes favored the spread of communism and made many people, my father and myself included, discount the news about Stalin’s crimes as sheer bourgeois propaganda. Last, but not least, the Marxists promised to solve all the social ills without having to study them – which was not exactly what Marx and Engels had done.

I joined the communist movement in 1935 but was never a member of any cell, because I had no workplace and did not even participate in the student movement. Once in a while a comrade would contact me and ask me to solicit donations for such ghostly organizations as the Association Against Argentina’s Participation in the Olympic Games, to be held in Berlin in 1936. I visited various possible donors, none of whom gave me a cent for this ghostly cause. I was increasingly baffled by a number of episodes. I suffered my first shock when Manuel Sadosky, my occasional mathematics tutor and a fervent communist, criticized my essay on the repression of the Patagonian workers in 1920: he told me that we should not criticize the government of the time because it had been progressive. To him, as to all sectarians, all things political were either black or white: none was gray.

I got my second shock on reading the program of the Comintern: I was struck by the difference between its lofty ideals and the miserable reality I was acquainted with. A third shock was the rejection, by the communist monthly, of a book review where I claimed that, because Rousseau had preferred feeling to reason, and had trashed science, he did not belong to the Enlightenment. Then came the party’s attempt to control the workers’ school that I had founded without consulting the party – but this will be dealt with in the next chapter.

In 1939, the year that the Second World War started, communists the world over were ordered to study Stalin’s *Short History of the Bolshevik Party*, and to fight Trotskyism above all. I found that book boring and of no interest at all outside the USSR, so I did not read it. As for Trotskyites, I had met only two of them, who seemed to be totally harmless: a bookish friend of Dr Emilio Troise, my father’s friend, and Liborio Justo, the son of the president of the Republic. This obscure engineer got his celebrity minute when he shouted “Down with the dictatorship!” from the Congress’s gallery. I could not believe that these two solitaries could threaten anybody, particularly when fascism was advancing everywhere, particularly at home. Thus, little by little, I lost my faith in communism, until I was finally

expelled from the party in 1947. I had a single loss: the desertion of a former student and friend who eventually became a professor at the Imperial College of Science and Technology, and whom I recovered only recently.

The Local Communist Intellectuals

During the 1930s and 1940s I got to know a handful of communist intellectuals, none of whom did research of any kind, or even read international journals. My closest friend among them, Manuel Sadosky, whom I mentioned before, studied mathematics and eventually became a well respected if mathematically unproductive university professor, the vice-dean of the Faculty of Science of the University of Buenos Aires and, half a century later, Argentina's first Secretary of Science and Technology. I used to consult him and his wife, Cora Ratto, on mathematical and personal issues. Manuel opined on everything and dispensed advice on anything. He was a great believer in authority. He sided publically with the charlatan Lysenko against genetics; he advised me to read the great Leibniz's *Monadology*, which I found absurd and backward; and he adopted John Bernal's *Social Function of Science* (1939) as his lifetime bible on science and technology policy. The eminent crystallographer had confused both domains to the point of supporting the planning of scientific research, thus earning the well-deserved criticism of Michael Polanyi.

My father was a friend of Emilio Troise, a well-respected clinician and Marxist scholar who, unlike his fellow Marxists, did not quote Marx and Engels at every step. But Troise had nothing to say about the philosophical presuppositions and implications of current science, which was the center of my own philosophical attention.

I also befriended the brilliant journalist Rodolfo Puiggrós, who had started studies in economics and written a couple of books on the economic interpretation of Argentine history. I appointed him professor of Argentine history at the workers' school I had set up. I cut him when, all of a sudden, he converted to Peronism and launched a Peronist magazine. During Perón's third period, Puiggrós was made rector of the Buenos Aires University, which he renamed Universidad Nacional y Popular. He devoted the rest of his life to fighting the military dictatorship as part of a motley group that included Eva Perón's confessor and a number of self-made intellectuals like himself. Some of them fled the country for their life and others, like Rodolfo Walsh, were murdered by the dictatorship. Had I not left the country at the beginning of 1963, I would have been murdered either by the dictatorship or by the *montonero* guerrilla.

Finally, there was Paulino González Alberdi, the Party's economist, who prophesied an imminent economic crisis just at the time when the nation's industry started to grow exponentially. He was deeply offended when, in the company of some fellow prophets, I asked him in a loud voice: "When is your crisis due, Paulino?" Regrettably, Marx and Engels too had engaged in prophesying: every time the

London Stock Exchange dropped brutally, they toasted the coming revolution (Hunt 2009).

In short, the Argentine communist intellectuals were a mediocre coterie. None of them studied seriously the society they lived in or published in scholarly magazines: they were too busy reading old books or the boring *informes* (reports) written by professional activists who followed the Comintern slogans hatched in far-away Moscow. How different were their French, German, British, and even American comrades, who could boast of including some eminent scientists like J. B. S. Haldane, John D. Bernal, and Edward Thomson, as well as the Nobel laureates Frédéric Joliot-Curie and Robert Fogel!

Ethical Intermezzo: The Committed Intellectual

My father, who worked along with some communists at the Federation of Societies to Aid the Allies, had a similar experience: he complained of their authoritarianism and lack of culture. He only respected Cora Ratto, Sadosky's wife and the head de the Junta de la Victoria, the feminine wing of the aid movement. Once both were summoned together by Chief Inspector Kussel, head of the political police and a famous torturer. Cora recalled that, on leaving the infamous police station, my father, a physician who boasted of his "clinical eye", told her: "Cora, this vermin won't last more than 6 months." Actually the monster lasted only half that time. But my father died shortly after him from a massive stroke, probably caused by police harassment, which had worsened his chronic high blood pressure.

When I asked my father why he did not join the Communist Party, he answered: "Because I want to retain my freedom of thought." (Antonio Gramsci would have said that my father refused to become an "organic intellectual.") He told me this in 1935, a couple of years before a number of "old Boksheviks" were executed for "deviationism" – among them Nikolai Bukharin and Jan Sten, who a decade earlier had tutored Stalin in dialectical materialism, a subject that, to his credit, had found hard to learn (Medvedev 1969).

The surrender of free inquiry is not the only price to be paid for joining a sect. The distinguished British historian Eric Hobsbawm (2002), communist to the last, mentions the conflict between party loyalty and personal loyalty, as in the duty to inform about "deviations" incurred by personal friends. But there is much more: the good sectarian is also an irrationalist, since he must allow passive acceptance of dogma to trump rational debate and free original inquiry. For example, the faithful communist must swallow the mysteries of dialectics along with the confusion of socialization with statization, and must suppress all exploration of peaceful ways to building socialism.

Besides, despite their praise of science, loyal communists must either ignore all unfavorable evidence or disguise it as confirmation – as when a brutal government repression is "interpreted" as a sign of its weakness. Last, but not least, the Marxist-Leninist philosophy involves a radical utilitarian ethics, which is an oxymoron, for

it amounts to jettisoning all moral scruples. In short, the dogmatic Marxist is just as inflexible and hostile to research and innovation as the pious religious believer, and just as ready to pillory the dissenter as a religious inquisitor. This attitude explains in part the current worldwide crisis of Marxism, as well as the search for non-Marxist socialisms (see, e.g., Bunge 2009; Bunge and Gabetta 2013). For better or for worse, although I had become interested in politics at age seven, I never saw myself as a political activist, and I avoided politics from the moment I chose an academic career. But before doing so I had to finish high school.

High School: Change of Gear

My parents did not reprimand me for my Spanish Literature failure or for other disappointing results, but trusted that I would find a way to graduate from high school on my own. In fact, I transferred to the Colegio Nacional Sarmiento, where I took exams as a “free student”. I got hold of the standard textbooks and made up a timetable that I followed consistently, most of the time in our garden. I finished the year 1936 having to complete only trigonometry, a subject in which I was deservedly flunked twice. These failures were fortunate because they forced me to adopt the proverb “If you can’t beat it, join it.” In this task I was initially helped by two tutors who quickly became close friends: Manuel Sadosky and David Jacovkis. Manuel was a math student and a born teacher, but could not devote as much time to me as I needed, so I hired David, who was then finishing high school.

David was disciplined and fearless. He would tackle serenely any of the problems that baffled me even when he was only a jump ahead of me. When he met a formula he did not understand, he resorted to the English trick of lighting a cigarette to gain time. At the same time, I also took private English lessons from beautiful Señorita Rubinstein, which helped me to read a pile of books in English.

But the decisive factor was tackling by myself Isaac Todhunter’s dusty *Plane Trigonometry* (1859), which I discovered in a second hand bookstore. I studied it conscientiously and solved all the exercises it contained. When I finished it, I passed the examination easily and got my baccalaureate certificate. More importantly, I stayed in love with math for life. So much so that my next project was to study by myself Silvanus P. Thompson’s *Calculus Made Easy* (1910), recommended to me by my father’s economist friend Ramón Lequerica. That bestseller had been written in the intuitive style of Leibniz and Newton, which prevailed until the Epsilon-Delta Revolution effected by Bolzano, Cauchy and Weierstrass in the mid-nineteenth century. This manual, much maligned by modern mathematicians, taught me to differentiate and integrate some elementary functions. I was exhilarated by calculus.

Mastering Thompson’s calculus book gave me confidence and widened my horizon. But it also hindered my access to rigorous mathematical reasoning, which does not involve infinitesimals, or “very small quantities approaching 0,” that the philosopher George Berkeley had derisively called “ghosts of defunct quantities.” The revolution operated in mid-nineteenth century by Bolzano, Cauchy and Weierstrass

eludes infinitesimals, and is thus immune to Berkeley's sharp criticisms, as well as free from the paradoxes that made Marx waste much time trying to master the calculus (Struik 1948).

That profound change translated intuitive expressions of the form " $f(x)$ approaches a when x approaches b ", that misleadingly suggest motion, into timeless expressions of the form "For every number ϵ , there exists a δ such that $|f(x) - a| < \epsilon$ if $|x - b| < \delta$." The conceptual change was radical, but the calculation methods did not change, and scientists and engineers kept thinking in terms of infinitesimals.

Despite this banning of time and change from pure mathematics, Friedrich Engels and other Marxists believed that mathematics, like the other sciences, mirrors the restless universe – which is why there is no adequate Marxist philosophy of mathematics. I swallowed Engels's dialectical interpretation of mathematics until being disabused by my mail friend José Luis Massera, a Uruguayan mathematician famous for the theorem named after him. He was also one of the earliest to push for the updating of Marxism, and a major victim of the American-supported military dictatorship evoked by Costa-Gavras in his film *State of Siege*. However, let us go back to my adolescence.

The first day of 1937, at age 18 years, I made a New Year's resolution: to study serious intellectual matters. But which ones? I was equally attracted by physics, psychology, and philosophy. Physics, in particular astrophysics and cosmology, dazzled me thanks to the popular books by the eminent British astrophysicists Arthur Eddington and James Jeans.

Psychology had intrigued me since, at 16, I read some of Freud's books, which sold for a few cents at subway kiosks. Through common friends I befriended the psychoanalyst and graphologist Federico Aberastury, whose sister Aminda had recently imported Freudian psychobabble into the country. Federico, charming and persuasive, exchanged a couple of letters with me, and invited me to attend a consultation with a young couple whom he greatly embarrassed. Shortly thereafter he was interned in a psychiatric clinic because he had attempted to fly from his fifth-floor balcony.

I fell in love with philosophy when I read Bertrand Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* (1912). This book persuaded me that psychoanalysis was sheer fantasy. I also read, in no particular order, as is usual with amateurs, many books in the history of philosophy. I was duly impressed by the pre-Socratics, and later on by Spinoza and the philosophers of the French Enlightenment. My father's library had a good edition of Voltaire's complete works, which amused me but did not teach me about the philosophy-science connection.

Encounter with Dialectical Materialism

In my father's library I also found a collection of essays about dialectical materialism. I was immediately attracted to this philosophy because it seemed to explain it all. I was particularly intrigued by dialectics. When I asked my father what this was,

he replied: “Master Justo [the neurosurgeon who had founded the Socialist party as well as the first cooperative in the country] thought it is just *hocus-pocus*.”

This reply did not satisfy me, so I started a search that was to take far too many years. In 1937 I attended a course on dialectical materialism taught by Emilio Troise. Unlike Lenin, who had criticized Joseph Dietzgen for holding that “thinking is material,” Troise – in keeping with the Hippocratic tradition – expounded and exemplified the materialist view that the mental is cerebral. He would have been surprised and shocked to learn that the philosophy of mind official in the Soviet Union was psychoneural dualism.

That year of 1937, so critical for me, I read more than at any other time in my life. In particular, I read some of Hegel in Molitor’s French translation, as well *From Hegel to Marx* by the brilliant American pragmatist Sidney Hook (1936), whom Bertrand Russell later called “the CIA philosopher.” And, having no filters, I also read piles of rubbish. But luckily I lacked Borges’s uncanny ability to discover and read some of the most useless documents ever written – those about the brutalities and betrayals of tenth century Icelanders, and the arcane theologies conceived of by mad scribes.

But I did read lots on the secular theology of the day: Marxism. In particular, I was most impressed by *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Lenin 1909), in which Lenin had criticized the idealist interpretations of the new physics. As I learned much later from an American Jesuit philosopher, Lenin had been right for the wrong reason, namely, for taking Engels’s word – a mark of scholasticism. It took me a decade to understand that dialectical materialism contained only two unpolished nuggets, epistemological realism and ontological materialism, under a mound of confused Hegelian verbiage. In time, I also learned that it is not enough to criticize: one should also attempt to invent viable alternatives.

Back to the problem of career choice. My vacillation between the three disciplines that attracted me – philosophy, psychology and physics – did not last long. I soon found out that psychology did not exist in my country as a career, and I discarded professional philosophy after attending a few lectures by Coriolano Alberini and others at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. They followed the neo-Hegelian Gentile and the intuitionist Bergson, whose main target was science, whereas I professed scientism before quite knowing what science was. So, after a week I fled from that Faculty to that of Science.

To Physics Through Chemistry

Finally I decided to study physics at university and philosophy at home. Such a combination of profession with vocation is quite common in underdeveloped nations, where biology enthusiasts study medicine, and youngsters attracted to the social sciences enroll in law schools. In those countries higher culture is largely in the brains of dilettanti. The main trouble with this split is of course that the amateurs study what they like, not what they need, so that their production is full of holes and

lacking in rigor. They have access only to popularized works, do not sit for exams, do not work in labs, and do not participate in professional communities, so they are neither controlled nor stimulated by experts. That is how nearly all philosophers of science learn about science: from afar. I wished to do better, so I studied and conducted research for 14 years to earn a PhD in physics while studying philosophy on my own and doing odd jobs to pay the bills. My first physics paper appeared in 1944 at age 25 years (Bunge 1944a, b), and my latest 70 years later (Bunge 2015a). And I philosophized for two decades, and tucked a couple of books in English and a dozen papers in good journals under my belt before regarding myself as a professional philosopher.

In 1937 I could not enrol as a physics student because I still had to pass my trigonometry exam. Besides, my father warned me that I would be unable to make a living as a physicist – which was true before the first nuclear bombs were exploded. So, I chose the closest field, chemistry, which my friend David Jacovkis had just began to study. I bought a white lab coat, a copy of Joseph Mellor's *Modern Inorganic Chemistry*, and did the lab work of general and inorganic chemistry. The course was taught by Alfredo Chiodín, a professor incapable of smiling but an excellent expositor respected by everyone.

I crashed the lab with David's help, who made room for me on his bench. The lab director – a certain Angel Bombelli, who during Perón's years acted as the faculty's dean and stole all the movable instruments – expelled me every time he noticed me. During his brief inspection I hid in the balcony, smoked a cigarette, and returned to work when the coast was clear. I was exhilarated when repeating some classical experiments, like Joule's on the equivalence of heat and mechanical work, using the same clever contrivance. I was also moved when watching the traces left by charged particles in a Wilson cloud chamber. At the end of the year I persuaded my father that chemistry bored me, whereas I was still in love with physics and philosophy. I lost no time in registering as a physics student to attain my goal: to join philosophy with science.

New Friends

During that transition year I befriended many students across the fields of physics, chemistry, biology, engineering, and architecture, all lodged in the same old building at the back of my old high school. We used to take coffee breaks at a cafe nearby, and when my father was traveling as a medical consultant, I invited up to ten of my friends to *El ombú*, to chat and listen to music. We also attended plays together at the amateurs' Teatro del Pueblo, rowed on the Paraná, and had delicious meals for 50 cents – roughly an American dime – at *The Hunter's Horn*. None of us drank alcohol, but some smoked. (I had started smoking at age 5, incited by a gardener, and was able to quit only at age 33.)

Among the new friends were Julia Molina y Vedia, my future wife – a recently graduated architect – the engineering students Isaías Segal and Jorge Ruberti, the

architecture students Alberto Le Pera and Simón Ungar, the biology student Delia Ingenieros, and Estrella Mazzolli, the only physics student in Buenos Aires. We were all leftists but we seldom discussed politics, and I was the only one interested in Marxist philosophy. David quipped that I even ate with dialectical materialist cutlery.

Delia, perhaps the most interesting of the lot, was tall and bony, did not use make-up, and boasted about her modernity. Her father, the polymath and well-known writer José Ingenieros, was the earliest biological psychologist in the country and, although generally regarded as a positivist, was actually a scientific materialist. Delia studied biology but never graduated. She went around carrying *La crise du transformisme* (1909), one of the many books by the popular embryologist and materialist philosopher Félix Le Dantec, which she never finished reading. She was friendly and witty, and liked masculine company but abhorred matrimony. She had invented the formula “Function + Variety = Enjoyment.” Eventually she became a stage magician, and later a member of Borges’s inner circle. With Estrella, who was beautiful and charming, though somewhat slow, I studied a book on calculus in the library. Later on she married Enrique Mathov, a pioneer allergy specialist, who became a very close friend of mine, and taught biology to his two children as well as my own.

I noticed Julia reading Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* on a bench in the courtyard of the faculty’s old building. This, and the fact that she asked for donations to the Spanish Republicans despite being a fervent Catholic, were enough for me to be attracted to her. Her svelte figure, dressed in Paris fashions, may also have been a factor.

Combining Callings

At the end of 1937 I got my high school certificate at the same time as the estranged classmates of my first high school. I registered as a physics student at the Faculty of Physico-Mathematical Sciences in the La Plata National University, located in the planned city of La Plata, graced by beautiful parks and wide, leafy avenues. I thought it was better than its Buenos Aires counterpart, 80 km away, because it had research laboratories, where the few mathematics, physics and astronomy students studied alongside hundreds of engineering students. Most of my classmates were local or had come from provincial towns, and were free from the arrogance of us *porteños*, or inhabitants of the cosmopolitan Buenos Aires port area.

The young La Plata University was perhaps the most advanced in Latin America, because it assigned priority to the basic sciences. Indeed, instead of being a factory for producing lawyers, physicians and bookish engineers, it rested on three scientific pillars: the Natural Science Museum, home of the extraordinary collection of fossils dug up and studied by the Ameghino brothers; the Physics Institute founded by the German physicist Emil Bose, who on his premature death was replaced by the experimental physicist Richard Gans; and the Astronomical Observatory

inspired by Benjamin Gould, the American astronomer hired by President Sarmiento to install the National Observatory, the earliest in the Southern Hemisphere.

I became a regular *platense* student, but went on visiting the University of Buenos Aires, where I met old friends and attended the odd lecture by the mathematician Julio Rey Pastor and the physicist Teófilo Isnardi, as well as all the presentations by foreign visiting scientists. I also befriended Alberto González Domínguez, an analyst interested in physics and engineering, open to new ideas and ever ready to help with some mathematical problem or other and offer us a cup of coffee. He introduced us to cybernetics, game theory, and the theory of distributions.

Getting Rid of Freud and Ready to Start University

During my last free summer of 1937–1938, I took delight in studying a beautiful physics textbook on the Paraná Delta, where I often went rowing. During that time I also wrote a small book against psychoanalysis titled *Marx vs. Freud*, which I did not attempt to publish. It was little more than a detailed critical review of Reuben Osborn's *Freud and Marx: A Dialectical Study*. This book, which made quite a stir, had just been published by the Left Book Club, to which my father subscribed, and whose monthly releases he and I devoured. Osborn agreed with Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich, whose attempt to combine Marx with Freud was continued by the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, and some French postmoderns starting with Louis Althusser and his protégé Michel Foucault.

I remember only two of my objections to the fashionable creed of psychoanalysis. One was that Freud ignored the biological psychology suggested by Pavlov's experiments, and that my future colleague Donald Hebb was to revive two decades later in his epochal *Organization of Behavior* (Hebb 1949). My second objection was that the Oedipal account of social rebellion (hatred of the father or the father-figure) was not only false but also reactionary, for presenting social strife as caused by a personal issue rather than as a conflict of economic interests. Years later I added that psychoanalysis is not an ongoing scientific endeavor but a sect of fantasists who had not even learned that mind and sexual drive occur in the brain (Bunge 1978a, 1979a, d, j, 1980a, e, 1981a, d, 1985b, c, e, 1987a, c, 1990b, 1991a, 1999c, 2010a).

This essay got lost along with two novels and *Espartaco*, a long drama in free verse. Fearing a police search, I collected the lot in a bound volume, which I confided to my good friend Enrique Mathov. Years later, driven by the same fear, Enrique got rid of that adolescent leftover. Good riddance! Adolescence is to be enjoyed and suffered, not published. Mine finished in March of 1938, when, high with expectations, I entered the Faculty of my choice, where two decades later I was to return as a professor.

<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-29250-2>

Between Two Worlds

Memoirs of a Philosopher-Scientist

Bunge, M.

2016, XVIII, 496 p. 54 illus., 35 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-29250-2