

Hayward Alker – An Intellectual Remembrance

From Thomas J. Biersteker

I would like to offer a brief intellectual remembrance of Hayward Alker. Hayward was my teacher, my thesis advisor, my mentor, my co-author, and my friend.

It's hard for me to imagine anyone who encountered Hayward who was not struck by his intellectual engagement and dynamism.

When I think of the intellectual legacy of Hayward Alker, a number of phrases come immediately to mind – enormous intellect, insatiable curiosity, exuberant enthusiasm for ideas, intellectual breadth, extraordinary generosity, and most of all, immense vitality.

He had an encyclopedic knowledge, and was so widely read that you could come out of a meeting with Hayward with weeks, or perhaps months, of reading you had never before thought relevant to the subject (but would, once you'd read them).

He was genuinely open to different perspectives, traditions of thought, and ideas. In part, this was a product of his intense curiosity, and he imparted this very effectively to his many students, myself included.

But while he was unusually open to different traditions, he was not without perspective on them. He had a firm commitment to science, but his conception of science was not of a traditional sort. His was a broad, complex, multi-layered, inclusive, and clearly post-Newtonian conception of science.

He had a brilliant mind, and he typically operated at several levels of abstraction above the rest of us. He would accommodate us, and come down to our level, as any effective teacher would. But he would never allow us to stay at mundane levels of comprehension and conversation. He prodded us to think more abstractly, more creatively, and to see the subject differently and at a higher level of abstraction.

It was truly a sight to behold when Hayward became really engaged with a topic, particularly when he was operating at full throttle. He would wave his arms, raise his voice, pace back and forth, shake his head back and forth, and run his fingers through his hair. A meteor shower of ideas, new phrases (we used to call them "Alkerisms"), and analytical insights would come flowing out at an incredible pace. It was impossible to scribble down any more than a fraction of them, but it would be an incredibly productive experience nonetheless.

As a student, it was exhausting, intimidating, and at the same time, extraordinarily helpful. Not everyone could take it. Even though Hayward and I collaborated and wrote together for more than twenty-five years, I must confess that I still had to find ways to break away from the intensity of the interactions – perhaps taking a walk or starting to prepare one of our many dinners together (which were always collaborative affairs).

Hayward was always ahead of his time. He was so far ahead of his time, that he was not always adequately appreciated by all of his colleagues in the profession. Many scholars of international relations could not be troubled with the complex formulations, the alternative conceptualizations, and the profound challenges often contained in his comments. They were more comfortable residing within

their existing intellectual traditions and were hesitant to make the effort to try to comprehend the often profound implications of his analyses.

He made major contributions to concepts and methods of international relations, did pioneering work on the North-South dynamics within the UN (a decade and a half before the North-South divide was discovered by the rest of the profession), worked on computational linguistics, mathematical modeling in the social sciences, the analysis of complex systems, social theory, peace research, path-breaking work on bringing humanistic traditions back into the study of international relations, and on the analysis of the dialectics of world order. Most of us can only pretend to have mastered one or two of these intellectual domains. Hayward made major contributions to them all.

Hayward had an influence on the profession and scholarship of international relations that went far beyond the small number of us who were fortunate enough to have been his students at MIT or USC. An entire generation of scholars across the globe were influenced, inspired, or challenged by Hayward's published works, his commentaries at professional meetings, and his insightful critiques of their works. Just over the course of the past few days, I have received testimonies from prominent scholars at Oxford, Brown, and the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva – from individuals who were never formally students of Hayward's – about his impact on their work. The category "students of Alker" is far broader than those of us who were directly enrolled in his courses.

Where the impact of some can be measured by citation scores, Hayward's impact was in his ability to challenge and inspire, and in his core humanity. He will be sorely missed.