

Michael's questions

“What do you mean by ‘continuous probability’? Is it ‘non-atomic,’ or continuous in some topology? And can you extend your results to measures with countably many atoms?” Even today I vividly remember Michael Maschler’s questions when I presented my master’s thesis at the Game Theory and Mathematical Economics Research Seminar in Jerusalem. It was my first time at that famous seminar (I was then a student at Tel Aviv University), and I was surprised how such a distinguished person could ask such “simple” questions. Didn’t he understand? But that was Michael. He wanted to get right to the bottom of things, and leave as few stones unturned as possible. Michael was always the true scholar.

In time I came to appreciate Michael more and more, both as a scientist and as a person. He made path-breaking contributions to game theory; stimulated and excited many people, all over the world, with his ideas and suggestions; and did so, above all, in a most unassuming way. He was a very open and friendly person, with a keen sense of humor (I have a good collection of jokes that he e-mailed me over the years).

Maschler was a strong believer in his work, not necessarily following the latest “fashions” (and yes, these exist in science as well). Bob Aumann once fondly said that there are three kinds of game theory: cooperative game theory, noncooperative game theory, and . . . “Maschlerian” game theory (many probably recall Michael’s arguments such as “player 1 owes this amount to player 2, who owes that amount to player 3, and so on—and in the end everything clears and the right solution obtains!”).

When I came to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Michael’s support and valuable suggestions were instrumental in the establishment of the Center for the Study of Rationality. When the Game Theory Society was founded, Maschler served on its First Council. Again and again, most characteristically, he never sought the limelight. Yet one could always count on him—extremely helpful, supportive, and full of new ideas.

Michael Maschler will be sorely missed.

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