

# PROFESSOR JAN STRELAU (1931–2020)

One of the numerous merits and achievements of the late Prof. Jan Strelau is establishing *Academia* magazine, which he launched during his tenure as Vice-President of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The pages of this magazine, therefore, are perhaps the most appropriate place to commemorate him.

Jan Strelau's scientific research sought to establish a catalog of basic individual human traits. Similarly to the physical traits of various individuals (height, eye color), their psychological traits are basically unchangeable during their lifetimes and to a large extent hereditary. However, unlike physical traits, psychological traits are subject to significant environmental influence. Thus, in the course of human life, the manner of their expression changes – how they manifest themselves in action – but the traits themselves often in practice remain constant. This does not apply to all of them, but only to a few basic psychological traits, which are called temperament traits.

Jan Strelau and his colleagues' research on the structure and essence of temperament led him to formulate the "regulatory theory of temperament." The main claim of this theory is that temperament regulates a person's relationship with his or her environment. For example, an active person with a high need for stimulation will organize his or her professional and social life so as to frequently experience something new and unpredictable. Conversely, a sensitive person with a high level of reactivity to stimuli will tend to prefer predictable and orderly situations. Temperament therefore regulates our social and professional relationships, as well as the ways we spend our free time. Research by Jan Strelau's team has also shown that a certain set of temperament traits is a moderator of a person's response to stress. The regulatory theory of temperament maintains that personal traits influence our actions, but not in a deterministic way, but in interaction with our environment.

Many factors contributed to Jan Strelau's scientific success. Certainly, at the foundation was his impressive diligence, reliability, and self-discipline. However, these individual qualities, which in his case were very important and served as a model for colleagues and associates, were a necessary but not sufficient condition. This success was also in part due to the atmosphere of the Warsaw psychological community, which was intellectually vibrant and open to the world. Strelau himself often emphasized how much he owed to his mentor, Prof. Tadeusz Tomaszewski. Moreover, Jan Strelau's success was also a product of his ability to cooperate and organize team research. His consistent striving to be included in the worldwide scientific community was also important. Thanks to this, his works are widely known and often quoted all over the world. As a measure of his scientific success, his two most important monographs (*Temperament, Personality, Activity and Temperament: A Psychological Perspective*) were first published by international publishing houses and only shortly thereafter in Poland. Jan Strelau knew how to combine scientific work with participation in the organization of scientific life in Poland. Psychology and related sciences owe him a great debt, not only for important research and publications, but also for his promotion of good models of doing science. We will greatly miss his eminent authority, always complemented by a gentle smile and kindness.

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## Recollections of a Teacher and Friend

Prof. Jan Strelau's scholarly output, measured by the number of publications as well as citations, is impressive. His publications on the role of temperament in human behavior, behavioral genetics, stress and techniques of coping with it have had a significant impact on the direction of research in these fields in the world. His first works were carried out within the Pavlovian school of temperament research, focusing on the search for determinants of temperament. However, the breakthrough in Prof. Strelau's research came with a shift in focus to the functions of temperament, its influence on personality development and on behavior in situations differing in stimulation. The distinctiveness of the work by Jan Strelau's team ultimately led it to be dubbed the "Warsaw school of temperament research." Work within its framework formed the basis for Prof. Strelau's formulation of the regulatory theory of temperament, now a major reference-point for temperament researchers all over the world.

Strelau's scientific achievements were recognized with numerous prestigious awards and accolades. Mentioning just the most important of these illustrates the Professor's great scientific standing.

Among the awards he received in Poland are:

- the Prize of the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP) (2000),

- the Polish Prime Minister's Award for outstanding scientific achievements (2010), and
  - honorary doctorates from the University of Gdańsk (1996) and Adam Mickiewicz University (2006).
- His most important foreign distinctions include:
- the Humboldt Research Award to Eminent Foreign Academics (1990),
  - the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft Award (1992),
  - the New Europe Prize for Higher Education and Research, an award established by six advanced-studies institutes: Stanford, Princeton, Chapel Hill, Berlin, Uppsala, and Wassenaar (1997),
  - and
  - the Lifetime Achievement Award, given by the European Association of Personality Psychology (2012).

I would like to note that his colleagues were greatly pleased with each successive award that he gained due to respect for his great achievements as well as admiration for the attitudes he showed in various areas of life. We are deeply saddened by the passing of such an extraordinary person.

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