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Obituary

J. Philippe Rushton: Eminent scientist, pioneer, and gentleman, died 2 October 2012

It is with deep regret we acknowledge the death of Psychology professor J. Philippe Rushton from the University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. Rushton died peacefully October 2nd 2012 from Addison's Disease, a condition compromising the immune system. His death marks the day when Psychology, Behavior Genetics, Genetic Similarity, Life History Theory, and Evolutionary thinking lost one of their prominent sons.

Rushton leaves behind him his brother Peter Rushton, son Stephen Philippe Rushton and daughter Katherine Vanderzwet, and grandchildren Jasmine, Aundrea, and great-granddaughter Paige.

Rushton was born in Bournemouth in England in 1943 in the middle of World War II (1939–1945), at a time when his father repaired damaged Spitfires for the Royal Air Force and his mother worked for the Fire Services in London. His brother, Peter, came to the world as the war ended.

The Rushton family was often on the move. It first emigrated to South Africa in 1948, but returned back to the UK in 1952. Here young Phil joined grammar school, but 4 years later the family moved to Canada, where his father took up a position at Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in Toronto as a scenic artist and designer. Rushton went back to England and earned a B.Sc. in psychology in 1970 with First Class Honors, and then a Ph.D. on one of his favored topics: Altruism. In 1973–74 Rushton spent a post-doc at Oxford University, UK, with the eminent late Professor Jeffrey Gray. Then, in 1974 Phil returned to Canada to take up teaching positions, first at York University, then at the University of Toronto. In 1985 he moved to University of Western Ontario, where he became full professor of psychology. The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation made Rushton a Fellow in 1989, and in 1992 he earned a D.Sc. degree from the University of London, England.

Rushton originally (ca. 1970–1980) believed, as did most behavioral scientists at that time, that social learning theory would not only explain generosity in young children, but also could be engaged to improve the human condition. His first book – *Altruism, Socialization, and Society* – from 1980 naturally identified *Empathy* and *Internalized Social Norms* as primary motivations. However, after reading E.O. Wilson's 1975 tome – *Sociobiology: The new synthesis*, Rushton became swayed to adopt the over-arching structure of evolutionary *r-K* life history theory for his future research. This shift solved several tribulations he encountered in social learning theory. First, Wilson demonstrated that altruism exists also in animals, which spoke in favor of an evolutionary explanation. Pro-social parents often beget pro-social children (and abusive parents, abusive children); this suggested to Rushton that perhaps genes could explain altruism as well or better than socialization. Finally, the outcome of behavior genetic studies convinced him that altruism is not a fluid state but rather a trait embedded in genes and personality.

While in such a sensitive phase of major internal paradigm-shift, Rushton paid a brief visit to Professor Arthur Jensen at the School of Education at Berkeley University (January–June, 1981). This completely changed his future career. Jensen's works, views, and impressive person inspired him to take up studies of race differences in general intelligence, behavior and physiology. He now began to combine this with his growing interests in sociobiology. It all culminated with successful implementation and extension of E.O. Wilson's *r-K* life history theory and William Hamilton's altruism theory based on kinship, for use as a framework for understanding the evolution and development of individual and group differences.

One important result was that Rushton could confirm and extend Jensen's 1973 idea that the three major racial groups form a developmental continuum. He established a three-way hierarchy of traits, where East Asians scored highest (or lowest, respectively) on 60+ different traits (including general intelligence), Blacks lowest (or highest, respectively), and where Whites are found in between the extremes. This impressive achievement dovetailed with parallel ranking of races according to brain size. Rushton ended up by concluding that only a gene-based evolutionary theory – his Genetic Similarity Theory – could explain the totality of the trait patterns in his racial hierarchy, including differences in assortative mating, ethnic nepotism, and inclusive fitness.

A sabbatical leave in 1982–83 allowed Rushton to work together with the prominent late professor Hans Eysenck and others, on the University of London Twin Register. They demonstrated that individual differences in altruism, empathy, nurturance, aggression, violent crime, and human kindness had heritability up to 50%.

Rushton cultivated several other scientific interests during his highly productive career. Inspired by Hans Eysenck, he inquired into links between creativity and Sybil and Hans Eysenck's Psychoticism dimension. Inspired by Davison Ankney, and Richard Lynn, Rushton studied sex differences in brain size and general intelligence. He examined scientific eminence, and spent much time in the latter part of his career on developing and materializing the concept of a General Factor of Personality (GFP). Rushton even found time and energy to preside over *The Pioneer Fund* and establish and direct the *Charles Darwin Research Institute* in London, Canada.

Already in the early phases of discussing *r-K* life history, Rushton began to suspect that a basic personality dimension (today called the General Factor of Personality, GFP, but then represented by the *K*-dimension) might explain socially relevant aspects of personality – such as its “good” and “difficult” sides. He ended up concluding that GFP reflects a general dimension of social effectiveness, a product of natural selective Darwinian forces.

Shortly before his untimely death, Rushton affirmed in an interview (Nyborg, 2012) that “... Darwin and E.O. Wilson were correct. Human social behavior is best understood as part of a life

history – a suite of traits genetically organized to meet the trials of life, survival, growth, and reproduction”.

Rushton's metamorphosis from social learning theory to evolutionary, socio-biological, and behavior genetics theory, was unsettling to most post-modern academics, as they found that Rushton's ideas about race differences, evolution, inheritance, and bio-physiological influences clashed head-on with their superior moral ideal of social equality. This made Rushton a subject to repeated vicious attacks during most of his career. Rather undisturbed, he nevertheless continued to the end to collect new data, discussing alternative hypotheses, and theorizing without excluding alternatives.

Phil always responded to attacks in a manner suitable for a serious scientist. A TV confrontation between Rushton and geneticist David Suzuki from 1989 illustrates this point. After Rushton presented his data, Suzuki and others elicited a veritable firestorm of moral outrage over his head. When Suzuki called for Rushton to be fired, he calmly responded: “That is not a scientific argument.” When accused of being a racist, Phil answered: “I am an academic”.

Rushton always stressed that moral incentive doesn't add to science. In a scientific response to critique, [Rushton and Jensen \(2005\)](#) joined forces and lined up the massive evidence from 30 years of research on race differences in abilities and behaviors, but Alas, again leaving little impression on skeptic colleagues. Obviously, critique is essential for science, but it has to be informed and fair. The frequent lack of both these latter aspects made J. Philippe

Rushton's life and professional career flip between greatness and seclusion.

Phil – the lone gentlemen – tried hard the scientific way. For this many ought to be eternally grateful. He will be missed as a scientific pioneer moving in troubled waters in the search for the origin of individual and group differences in important social traits and fundamental personality dimensions.

I certainly will miss him as a good friend, colleague, and enthusiastic defender of academic freedom. It seems to me that Phil all the time worked towards the completion of the dream he set forth in his early works: To promote generosity among children and thereby improve the human condition in general.

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Helmuth Nyborg
 University of Aarhus (1968–2007), Hørning, Denmark
 * Tel.: +45 87680456.
 E-mail address: helmuthnyborg@msn.com

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