



OBITUARY

John Philippe Rushton, 1943–2012

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John Philippe (Phil) Rushton, Professor of Psychology at the University of Western Ontario, died of cancer. He was 68 (born December 3, 1943; died October 2, 2012).

Phil became one of the most controversial figures in the recent history of psychology for his views on race difference in intelligence, although his work embraced many other important and sometimes controversial issues. As a courageous scholar, he addressed some of the most contentious questions in the field of psychology, and as a consequence risked his career and endured many criticisms from both the scientific community and the general public.

Phil was born in Bournemouth, England to an English father and a French mother. When he was 4 years old, he emigrated with his family to South Africa where he lived until age 8 (1948–1952). He spent most of his formative years in the United Kingdom and Canada. As a teenager he was fascinated with Hans Eysenck's books, which led him to study psychology at Birkbeck College of the University of London where he earned a BSc with First Class Honors in 1970. He received a PhD in social psychology at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1973. During the 1970s and 1980s, while many psychologists focused on negative traits of human beings, Phil asserted the importance of also studying positive aspects of human nature such as altruism. Indeed, he fell in love with the study of altruism while a graduate student. His doctoral dissertation was the first result (Rushton, 1973). After he completed his PhD, he moved to the University of Oxford and continued his work on altruism as a post-doc. In 1974, Phil returned to Canada and taught at York University (1974–1976) and the University of Toronto (1976–1977), and then joined faculty at the University of Western Ontario where he worked until he died. Phil was made a Fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in 1989, and earned a DSc in psychology from the University of London in 1992. He was an elected fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Psychological Association, American Psychological Society, British Psychological Society, Canadian Psychological Association, and the Galton So-

ciety. He served the journals *Developmental Psychology*, *Intelligence*, *Scientometrics*, and *Population and Environment* as an Editorial Board member. He became President of the Pioneer Fund in 2002 and headed the Fund until he died.

Phil's scientific interests spanned a considerable range. For example, when a major debate took place in the area of personality assessment over the 'consistency versus specificity' of behavior (Mischel, 1968), while many personality psychologists had a pessimistic view of finding stable personality traits, Phil demonstrated that consistent patterns of individual differences in personality traits were to be found when composite measures of the traits were used (Rushton et al., 1981, 1983).

Phil's early papers on altruism were mostly laboratory and field experiments based on social learning theory. He conjectured that empathy and moral judgments are motivations that activate altruistic behaviors. Later, inspired by the theory of evolution and the emerging field of social biology, he argued that altruism is an inborn part of many species-typical repertoires and attempted to explain altruism by the principles of 'inclusive fitness' and 'kin selection', where organisms can recognize their kin and act to benefit kin depending on how closely related they are (Hur, 2012).

Phil's genetic similarity theory (Rushton & Russell, 1985; Rushton et al., 1985) has implications in many areas of psychology, although it generated controversies like many of his other theoretical formulations. Phil postulated that people tend to associate with, befriend, marry, and help others who, although not blood relatives, are genetically similar because by liking, becoming friends, and mating with those who are genetically similar, we help to ensure that our genes are maintained and transmitted to future generations. He collected evidence to support the theory over the years. In one of his papers, he found that the overall correlations on personality and attitude items were 0.32 for spouse pairs and 0.20 for pairs of friends, and that partner similarities were more pronounced on the more heritable items (Rushton & Bons, 2005).

In recent years, Phil was very much absorbed in the general factor of personality (GFP). As opposed to the Big Three or Big Five models of personality, the GFP model suggests that both narrow and broad personality traits are hierarchically organized with a single general factor at the apex in the same way as 'g' occupies the apex in the organization of cognitive abilities (Rushton & Irwing, 2009). This view remains controversial. More evidence, perhaps at the molecular genetic level, may be necessary to resolve the issue of whether a single common factor exists across a broad array of personality traits.

In 1981, Phil spent January to June as a Visiting Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, where he met Arthur Jensen. It was Jensen who sparked his interest in race difference in intelligence and other traits. Arthur occupied an office one floor up from Phil's office, and Phil often visited Jensen's office for lengthy discussions on 'g', behavior genetics, race differences, sexual maturation, and the like. Phil became the focus of intense media attention in the late 1980s for his research on racial group differences in intelligence. He demonstrated that East Asians averaged higher and Africans lower for intelligence, while Europeans' average scores fell in between. He argued that genetic factors were likely involved in these differences. These views generated student protests on the streets and sparked heated debates in the media. Since this firestorm in the late 1980s, behavior geneticists have added much evidence for genetic influences on intelligence and other traits in Europeans. More recently, such investigations have been extended to East Asians, and Phil has encouraged studies of whether genetic factors influence intelligence in native Africans to a similar degree. The results of these latter studies are still inconclusive. In 2005, together with Jensen, Phil reviewed several lines of research on intelligence conducted over the past 30 years and concluded that 50% of genetic and 50% of environmental factors may explain the mean African–European difference in cognitive abilities (Rushton & Jensen, 2005).

Phil left five books and over 200 scientific papers. In 2012, the journal *Personality and Individual Differences* published a special issue in honor of Phil's lifetime work for science (Nyborg, in press).

Personally, Phil was very approachable, gentle, social, warm-hearted, generous, and had a great sense of humor

and understanding. We exchanged e-mails many times, especially in connection with ongoing twin studies in Nigeria. In his e-mails, Phil often showed much sympathy with Africans. Regardless of the eventual outcome, we believe that Phil will be remembered as someone who played an important role in opening up to scientific investigation the question of cognitive ability differences between Africans and other populations.

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