



Jerome Kagan: February 25, 1929–May 10, 2021

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We note, with sadness, the passing of Dr Jerome Kagan, a pioneering researcher in the field of developmental psychology. Dr Kagan was the Daniel and Amy Starch Research Professor of Psychology, Emeritus, at Harvard University, and was listed by Haggbloom et al. (2002) as 22nd on the list of the 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century.

Dr Kagan's research examined how children's behavior and traits develop from infancy through adolescence, with a particular focus on the roots of anxiety. He conducted longitudinal studies that showed 15% of babies who exhibited signs of shyness, which he termed *behavioral inhibition*, retained this trait throughout childhood. Further, he discovered the importance of parental intervention in easing this inhibition: When parents of children with anxiety took steps to help their children become comfortable in unfamiliar situations, this helped to mitigate the children's anxiety, whereas failing to do so was associated with an increase in anxiety.

Steven Pinker, Harvard Professor of Psychology, stated, "[Kagan] challenged the common view in developmental psychology that children are interchangeable blank slates...He emphasized the interaction between inborn temperament and maturational timetables and the child's experience with parents, peers, schooling, and adults."

Dr Kagan was committed to exploring new ways of thinking and acted as a mentor as well as a teacher. One of his colleagues, Moira Dillon, Assistant Professor of Psychology at New York University, stated, "[Kagan] expected his interlocutors to be just as engaged, generous, and reflective as he was...He fostered a sense of not only equality, but also mutual respect." Another colleague, Martha Minow, Harvard Law Professor, said, "He recognized that we learn in part by disrupting what we knew in the past, and that can be dislodging to our stability and sense of what we understand, but that's how we grow. For me, it's such a lesson in boldness and humility."

Dr Robert (Bob) Stewart, Editor-in-Chief of *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, worked closely with Dr Kagan as a Research Assistant during his postgraduate studies at Harvard University. The project with which Bob was associated was a study of impulsivity and reflectiveness in preschool children. Bob found this a most stimulating and encouraging experience.

In the six decades of his career in developmental psychology, Dr Kagan served on numerous committees and wrote dozens of articles, reports, and books, the latest of which, *A Trio of Pursuits: Puzzles in Human*

Development (Kagan, 2021), was published earlier this year. Among the many honors Dr Kagan received were the Hofheimer Prize from the American Psychiatric Association and the G. Stanley Hall Award and Distinguished Scientific Award from the American Psychological Association.

Outside his research work, Dr Kagan enjoying playing tennis and reading, and he was also an active member of the Harvard Faculty Club.

He is survived by his daughter, Janet Kagan; granddaughter, Leah Kagan-Riznick Tyner, and her husband Jon Tyner; and great-grandson James Emerson Tyner. His wife of nearly 70 years, Cele, passed away in 2020.

References

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