Paul B. Baltes (1939–2006)

Paul B. Baltes died in Berlin, Germany, on November 7, 2006, after a battle with pancreatic cancer. In character, he succeeded in hiding the severity of his debilitation for a long time behind a daunting intercontinental travel schedule. Even in his last week, commitment reigned as Paul worked his Blackberry and his cell phone from his hospital bed in Charlottesville, Virginia. We said a final good-bye when he boarded a plane accompanied by his wife, Christine Windbichler, his son, Boris, and one of his doctors, Hermann Steffens, fulfilling a desperate wish to return to Berlin. Paul made it home with three days to spare. He is survived also by his daughter, Anushka Baltes.

Paul was born in Saarlouis, Germany, on June 18, 1939, the youngest of four children of Johann and Katharina Baltes. He lived through the privations of World War II and its aftermath, but he developed a joie de vivre that he retained throughout his life. He was smart, smooth, and sophisticated, and subsequent to earning a 1967 doctorate from the University of Saarbrücken with Professor Ernst Boesch and additional mentorship from Gunther Reinert, he developed into one of the premier researchers, scholars, and academic administrators in behavioral science. He was probably the most influential developmental psychologist on the international scene at the time of his death. His broad scientific agenda was devoted to establishing and promoting the life-span orientation of human development—an area that he, more than any other scholar of modern times, shaped into its current form.

The obvious part of Paul's scientific legacy resides in over 250 publications covering various aspects of developmental psychology. Their impact is attested to by his numerous awards and honors, including election to some of the most prestigious scientific organizations in the world. He was a founding member of the European Academy of Sciences, a member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, and a member and vice-president of the Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina. In 2000, Paul became a member of the Order Pour le mérite for scientists and artists. He was also a foreign member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Honorary doctorates were bestowed on Paul by the Universities of Geneva, Jvyäskylä, and Stockholm and by Berlin's Humboldt University. His international awards included the American Psychological Association's Award for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology and the Novartis Prize for Gerontological Research awarded by the International Association of Gerontology.

Paul's writings embraced theory, method, and substance. In the last few years of his life, he added a new activity, involving himself with the popular press via interviews and essays dealing with aging and culture. His substantive works on wisdom, adaptation to age-related change (with his wife Margret Baltes, before her untimely death in 1999), the elaboration of old age, the permanent incompleteness of human architecture, and the biocultural co-constructivism of the human brain all reflect his visionary quest to understand human development. He recognized the interdependence of theory and method and promoted their joint improvement with such concepts as the multidimensionality and multidirectionality of change and the simultaneous regard for gains and losses. The published version of Paul's doctoral dissertation became a citation classic and had a dramatic effect on shaping developmental research design. The Berlin Aging Study (BASE) and the ADEPT (Pennsylvania State University) and PRO-ALT (Berlin) projects are markers for excellence in empirical research that Paul leaves behind.

Paul's amazing program-building successes were the products of a rare combination of matchless scientific and administrative expertise. While playing a key role in shaping the Life-Span Developmental Psychology program at West Virginia University (1968–1972), leading the Human Development and Family Studies Division at The Pennsylvania State University (1972–1978), and serving as a director at the Max Planck Institute (MPI), which paid off in the emergence of a first-rank research institution—The Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, Germany (1980–2005), Paul labored effectively, both by precept and example.

As an MPI director, Paul fostered numerous scientific and scholarly interactions among the universities of Berlin, American universities, and the MPI in order to advance the national and international visibility of all. He was appointed Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Advanced Study Fellow at the University of Virginia (UVA) in 2003 with the special charge to build and strengthen UVA's international relationships. His efforts brought UVA into the Max Planck International Research Network on the Behavioral and Social Sciences of Aging (Max-Net Aging) and the International Max Planck Research School on the Life Course (LIFE) with the MPI, the University of Michigan, and Berlin's Humboldt and Free Universities. Paul was in Charlottesville, participating in a LIFE Academy, when the last stage of his illness overtook him.

Paul cared deeply about the next generations of behavioral scientists. He was one of the founders of the Junge Akademie, a joint project of the Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy for promoting exceptionally talented young scholars. At each opportunity, he gave generously of his time and energy to promote younger scientists. These contributions were recognized officially in 1990 when he was awarded the Distinguished Mentorship Award of the Behavioral and Social Sciences Section of the Gerontological Society of America.

Paul's scientific work was not finished and will never be finished according to his own theory of the permanent incompleteness of human nature. But he leaves behind a legion of well-trained, ambitious intellectual descendants who are fully committed to the life-span orientation and will continue to push the knowledge envelope. Paul understood well the incremental nature of science and leaves an enduring legacy of words, ideas, and doers to further the study of human development.

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