



Jack Block, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California at Berkeley and a leading figure in personality and developmental psychology for the past sixty years, died on January 13 at age 85, in his home in El Cerrito, from complications of his neurologic injury. Professor Block's intellectual fascination, first articulated as a teenager, was with "why people turn out the way they do." He was passionate about the rigorous application of science to deep human questions. Professor Jens Asendorpf of Humboldt University in Berlin summed up the impact of Block's work stating "Personality psychology has lost a lighthouse in the dust of mainstream research."

Professor Block conducted his most influential work in collaboration with his late wife, Jeanne Humphrey Block. He was widely known for longitudinal research projects, spanning decades, examining the factors that influence development. He explored the impact of divorce on children, effects of early childhood experiences on political values, antecedents of drug use and abuse, the genesis of depression, and differences in the development of boys and girls. He was known as a rigorous methodologist and an incisive critic who engaged in vigorous debate and made major contributions to key theoretical issues in psychology: the continuity/discontinuity of personality over time, conceptual models of personality, sex-role development, and improving the reliability of clinical judgments about character and personality. Professor Block was widely admired for his demanding approach and desire for simplicity in theory. Upon his passing, Professor Lew Goldberg of the University of Oregon, wryly commented, "Jack believed that anyone's theory must not have more dimensions than there are syllables in his or her name."

Professor Block was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1924 and raised in a single-parent home. His parents were Lithuanian and Russian immigrants. He went on to graduate from Brooklyn College, attended New York University and the University of Wisconsin, and received his Ph. D. in psychology from Stanford University in 1950, completing a joint PhD thesis, with his wife, Jeanne Block. Early in his career, he gained experience with experimental manipulation of personality and character through scientific investigations of psychedelic drugs. After working for several years at the Langley Porter Clinic and the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research at U.C. Berkeley, he joined the faculty at U.C. Berkeley in 1957.

His career was devoted to new discoveries about a central issue in personality development: continuity versus change over the lifespan. Theorists who focused on the impact of environmental circumstances on behavior concluded that people changed radically across situations and over time. In contrast, Professor Block, drawing on his monumental study in which he tracked 500 children from birth through adulthood, showed that people were remarkably consistent in different environments and highly predictable over long periods of time. These insights were summarized in his 1971 book, *Lives through Time*. Subsequently, with Jeanne Block, he developed and nurtured the Block and Block Longitudinal Study, which has followed 128 nursery school children for the past forty years. He is the author of hundreds of published articles and five books. His long-time colleague and former student, Prof. David Funder of UC Riverside noted that Prof. Block, "combined, in a unique way, analytical depth, life-spanning wisdom, and a dense but beautiful style of writing."

Prof. Block lost his beloved wife and collaborator, Jeanne, in 1981, but continued to lead their longitudinal study. He was significantly disabled for the last ten years of his life. Nonetheless, he remained devoted to his research, writing an ambitious theoretical book, *Personality as an Affect-Processing System*, participated in the intellectual life at Berkeley, and continued to make

numerous contributions to the psychology literature. Indeed, Prof. Block submitted a manuscript on the day of his final hospital admission, a paper that will appear later this year in *Psychological Inquiry*.

Professor Block was passionately interested in politics and considered himself a socialist throughout his life. He was a three-letter athlete in college and a polymath; his knowledge spanned culture, music, aesthetics, art, literature, mathematics, and physics. He read broadly in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and sociology; in the last ten years of his life, he became a serious student of the neurosciences.

Prof. Block is survived by four children: Susan Block of Cambridge, Massachusetts, Jody and David Block, of El Cerrito, California, and Carol Block of Ashland, Oregon; and by four grandchildren: Brian Block, of Brookline, Massachusetts, Robert Block of El Cerrito, California, Josh Billings of Oxford, England, and Gabriel Billings, of Stanford, California.

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