

## **MEMORIAL RESOLUTION**

### **ROBERT B. ZAJONC**

**(1923-2008)**

Robert Zajonc, who joined the Stanford faculty in Psychology in 1994 after a distinguished career at the University of Michigan, died December 3, 2008 at the age of 85, after a courageous struggle with pancreatic cancer.

Zajonc (whose name, when pronounced correctly, appropriately rhymes with Science) was born November 23, 1923 in Lodz, Poland. Both his life and his career were truly remarkable. In 1939, upon the Nazis invasion of Poland, he fled with his parents to Warsaw, where their building was bombed, killing his parents and seriously injuring him. After recuperating, he was sent to a labor camp in Germany. He escaped from that camp not once but twice, the first time being recaptured but the second time successfully walking at night all the way to Paris, where he joined the French Resistance and briefly studied at the University of Paris. Arriving in England in 1944 he served as a translator for American forces in Europe.

Zajonc began his long association with the Department of Psychology at Michigan in 1948 when he was intrigued by what he heard about provocative new work there on the study of attitudes. He remained at Michigan, successively as undergraduate, graduate student and faculty member for almost half a century, serving as Director of the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Institute for Social Research from 1983 to 1989 and as Director of the Institute itself from 1989 to 1994. Then, after retiring from Michigan, he accompanied his wife Hazel Markus to Stanford University where he held the title of Professor of Psychology. In the years that followed, he continued to do important work as researcher, scholar, and mentor.

Recognized as one of the most distinguished social psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zajonc made contributions that were profound, wide-ranging, and marked by creativity and a unique ability to forge unexpected connections between processes and phenomena. Early in his career he established that the mere presence of other members of one's species (whether humans or cockroaches) increases arousal, thereby improving performance of simple or well-learned tasks but interfering with performance of new or difficult tasks. Later, he demonstrated that simply being exposed to an object is sufficient to increase liking for it. This work has become a theoretical mainstay of affective science and of marketing and consumer behavior research. Zajonc also pioneered the study of the links between family configuration and intelligence. He developed a theoretical model that explained why first borns and those in smaller families often outperform later borns and those from larger families. Later in his career, Zajonc revolutionized the study of judgment and decision-making, establishing conclusively that factors of which the individual is not consciously aware can guide choices—i.e., that “preferences require no inferences.” He also played a major role in reinvigorating psychology's concern with affective processes in

ground-breaking work demonstrating what he termed the “primacy of affect”. Colleagues marveled at his brilliance both as a theorist and methodologist, but they also appreciated his qualities as a friend and mentor. Warm, humorous, incredibly well-read, and a great conversationalist, he made any event that he attended at Michigan or Stanford richer for his presence and diminished by his absence.

Throughout his career, Zajonc was the recipient of major awards including the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology and the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award from the American Psychological Association. He also received the American Association for the Advancement of Science Award for Social Psychology and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. However, It was not just American psychology that benefited from his leadership. Fluent in several European languages including French, German, Russian, and Italian, Zajonc played a major role in the post-war rebirth and development of psychology on the continent. He was a Fulbright scholar, a fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation at the Centro Culturale della Fondazione, a Guggenheim Fellow, and de la Directeur d’Etudes of the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Paris on two different occasions. He received honorary PhDs from the University of Louvain and from University of Warsaw, where he established a partner institution with the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research.

Professor Zajonc’s first marriage, to Donna Benson, ended in divorce. He is survived by his second wife, Hazel Markus, their daughter, Krysia, and his sons from his first marriage Peter, Michael and Joseph, all of whom provided comfort, and were comforted by him, during his final illness. He is also survived by grandchildren Jonathan, Oliver, Zoe and Lucy.

Stanford University was indeed fortunate to have enjoyed the intellectual gifts and personal qualities of this singular man. Robert Bolesław Zajonc was a scholar, statesman and gentleman, whose life and works constitute for us a durable and inspiring legacy.

Committee:

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