

# **HUMAN LIFE AND DEATH FROM AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE: REPORT FROM THE 13<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE POLISH NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

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The 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Association took place on 22-23 February 2010 in Cracow, on a real spring weekend, so the atmosphere in the conference center was like the weather outside. The sessions were held in Lecture Hall B at the Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski Cracow University (AFMCU). Thanks to the cooperation of the Faculty of Psychology and Family Sciences at the AFMCU, and of the Special Education Department at the Ignatianum College of Philosophy and Education in Cracow, and to the hard work of the organizing committee (chaired by Professor Bożena Grochmal-Bach with the able assistance of Maria Masłowska as secretary), as well as Agata Krawiec, head of the Academic Conference Organizational and Promotional Department at the AFMCU, the meeting went off very smoothly.

The theme of the Congress was chosen because it is highly tempting for a scientist to try to deepen our understanding of life and death relying on sensory information. Dealing with the subject we stress the different causes of personality disintegration, e.g. under severe stress conditions, as a result of deprivation and anxiety, or after a brain injury. Multi-aspectual and multidimensional views of life and death can create a background for further consideration of different disorders occurring in the process of development, as well as the treatment of disorders. The interdisciplinary character of life and death problems, philosophical, psychological and neuropsychological, theological, legal, medical and most of all the spiritual aspects of the problem, brought together specialists and subjects from different disciplines, who seldom or never meet at one congress.

The opening ceremonies began at 9:00 AM on Monday morning, 22 February 2010. The proceedings were officially opened by Prof. Jerzy Malec, Rector of the Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski Cracow University. A welcoming address was then given by Fr. Ludwik Grzebień SJ, the Rector of the Ignatianum College of Philosophy and Education in Cracow.

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Prof. Maria Paćhalska, the President of The Polish Society of Neuropsychology awarded, on behalf of the Society, its highest honor, the Copernicus Prize, to seventh individuals who have made a very significant contribution to the advancement of Polish neuropsychology:

- Prof. Juri D. Kropotov
- Prof. Zbigniew Maciąg
- Prof. Jerzy Malec
- Prof. Ks. Prof. Ludwik Grzebień
- Prof. Piotr Lass
- Prof. Marek Moskała
- Prof. Maria Kielar-Turska



Fig. 1. Prof. Juri D. Kropotov, Director of the Institute of the Human Brain at the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Professor of the Institute of Psychology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and recipient of the Copernicus Prize 2010, delivers his lecture at the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Society.

**Prof. Juri D. Kropotov**, Director of the Laboratory for the Neurobiology of Action Programming at the Institute of the Human Brain of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia, and Professor of the Institute of Psychology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway is one of the world's leading experts on Event Related Potentials (ERP) and neurotherapy. He was the first to show that the thalamo-cortical circuits of the basal ganglia in the human brain are involved in cognitive and affective functions. He has published more than 180 papers and 7 books. For many years he served as an editor of the journal *Human Physiology*, published by the Russian Academy of Sciences, and as editor of the journal *Neurotherapy*. He is also former President of the European Chapter of the International Society for Neuronal Regulation (ISNR). He has been awarded the State Prize of the USSR's Academy of Sciences for Highest Achievement (Discovery) – for his research in the field of human physiology. Recently, in recognition of his efforts in bringing Russian advancements in neuropsychology to

a wider world readership, he has been named Russian Editor of *Acta Neuropsychologica*, the official journal of the Polish Neuropsychological Society, as well as being awarded the Copernicus Prize 2009, the highest distinction given by the Polish Neuropsychological Society as its Honorary Member, not only for his achievements in neuroscience, but also for his cooperation with neuroscientists in Poland. Among other things, he has recently undertaken to lead several short courses under the auspices of the Euroacademia Interdisciplinaria Neurotherapeutica, the Polish Neuropsychological Society, and

the Society for Applied Neuroscience (SAN). He kindly agreed to be the keynote speaker on the subject of event-related potentials (ERPs) at the Congress (see Figure 1). His active cooperation has helped to build bridges between neurosciences and neuropsychology in Poland, to the enrichment of both, and the society has the pleasure to present him with a second award, that is the Copernicus Prize 2010.



Fig. 2. Prof. Zbigniew A. Maciąg, co-founder of the Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski Cracow University (AFMCU), Director of the Institute of the Public Law, Head of the Chair of the Constitutional Law at the AFMCU, and recipient of the Copernicus Prize 2010, conducted the closing ceremony for the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Society

**Prof. Zbigniew A. Maciąg**, co-founder of the Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski Cracow University (AFMCU), Director of the Institute of Public Law, Head of the Chair of Constitutional Law at the AFMCU. He is the author, co-author, editor, and co-editor of many articles and books on public law. He completed his legal training as a judge and passed the relevant examinations; at present he works as a legal adviser. He held scholarships from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and R. Bosch, at the Universities of Göttingen and Bonn. He has worked at the Department of Constitutional Law of the Faculty of Administrative Law at the Jagiellonian University. He has compiled a number of expert analyses and opinions for the Office of the Council of Ministers, the Polish Parliament, the Senate, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education and many others. He is a pioneer in the field of forensic neuropsychology in Cracow, and a founder of the forensic section at the AFMCU.

Prof. Maciąg has been awarded the Gold Cross of Merit, and Order of Polonia Restituta for his outstanding scientific, organizational, and educational achievements. As the Polish legal system has changed rapidly since 1989, it has required a significant amount of both intelligence and diligence

to monitor the numerous codes, statutes and regulations that may involve patients with brain damage. His command of the intricacies of the law within the field of neuropsychology is most valuable and unique (see: Fig. 2).

**Prof. Jerzy Malec**, Rector of the Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski Cracow University (AFMCU). He is a full professor of law, an eminent specialist in the history of administration and feudalism. He holds the Chair of History of State and Law at AFMCU. He is the author of 120 or so publications, which include his authorship and co-authorship of several books on the history of administration, the history of legal systems, and Polish and European feudalism. An important element in this academic output has been played by studies in the



Fig. 3. Prof. Jerzy Malec, Rector of the Andrzej Frycz-Modrzejewski Cracow University, and recipient of the Copernicus Prize 2010, delivers his opening speech at the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Society.

history of science and the teaching of law in the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a scholarship holder at the University of Geneva as well as a multiple holder of scholarships at the Max Planck Institute for the History of European Law in Frankfurt-am-Main. He has also cooperated with the International Institute of Administrative Sciences in Brussels. Prof. Jerzy Malec is the author of expert analyses and opinions for the Office of Studies and Expertise at the Chancellery of the Polish Council of Ministers, where he prepared, among other things, an opinion constituting the basis for further work on the new territorial division of the Polish Republic in 1998. Since 2002 he has served as an expert for the State Accreditation Commission. He is the editor-in-chief of *Studies on the History of the State and Polish Law*. For three years from September 2005 he headed the Confederation of Rectors of Polish Vocational Schools. Following the end of his term of office he obtained the title of Honorary Chair of this confederation. He

is a member of the Organizational and Legislative Confederation of Rectors of Polish Academic Schools. In 2004 he was awarded the Order of Polonia Restituta by the president of Poland.

His active cooperation, especially during the 13<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Society, has helped to build bridges between various legal disciplines and neuropsychology (see: Fig. 3).

**Father Ludwik Grzebień SJ**, professor and Rector of the Ignatianum College of Philosophy and Education in Cracow. Ludwik Grzebień entered the Society of Jesus on 8 August 1956 in Stara Wieś, and was ordained a priest on 17 June 1967 in Warsaw. He studied philosophy at the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy in Cracow (1961–1964), theology at the Bobolanum Faculty of Theology in Warsaw (1964–1968), as well as history at the Institute of Church History of the Catholic University of Lublin (1967–1970). In 1971 he obtained the title of PhD in the history of the Church; in 1978 he gained the post-doctoral degree of *habilitacja* in Church History, while in 1990 he was promoted to full professor. He worked as a junior lecturer at the faculty of auxiliary sciences in Church history at KUL (1972–1973) and lectured on Church history at ATK in Warsaw (1979–1982). He was director of the *Apostolstwo Modlitwy* Publishing House in Cracow (1981–1985). Since 1985 he has lectured in methodology and the methods of academic work at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus in Cracow, where from 1988–1994 he was dean. He has been an academic employee of the Papal Theological Academy in Cracow. He has cooperated with

the editing board of the Polish Biographical Dictionary. His publications run to over 1000 academic works chiefly in the field of the history of the Order, including 9 books.

For his long standing and fruitful cooperation with the Polish Neuropsychological Society he was awarded the Copernicus Prize 2010, which, as stated by the president of the Society, Prof. Maria Pąchalska, though it in no way matches the magnitude of his service, constitutes a token of the Society's deep felt appreciation for his organizational work over several congresses (see: Fig. 4).

**Prof. dr hab. med. Piotr Lass** – Dean of the Faculty of Health, Gdansk Medical University. A doctor of internal medicine and specialist in the field of nuclear medicine. The author and co-author of 396 publications, including 161 articles and 23 books and book chapters appearing in academic textbooks, of which many have been published in journals on the Philadelphia List (an accumulative Impact Factor of 53). A scholarship holder of the Danish Diabetics Foundation, the Danish Neurobiological Scientific Group, the TEMPUS Program, the Batory Foundation. A visiting professor at the University of Niš (Serbia). An expert of the Polish Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Education in matters of teaching standards. An expert of the SP7 European Commission. For many years the president and at present the vice-president of the Polish Society of Nuclear Medicine. He is a member of many academic societies including the Polish, British and American Society of Nuclear Medicine. A member of the Editorial Board of *Nuclear Medical Progress*, *Acta Facultatis Medicae Universitatis Naissensis*, the *Hellenic Journal of Nuclear Medicine*, the *European Journal of Nuclear Medicine*, and *Acta Neuropsychologica*. He has been awarded the Silver Cross of Merit and the Medal of the Commission of National Education for his distinguished service to the field of nuclear medicine, as well as obtaining the prize of the Hungarian Society of Nuclear Medicine. His active cooperation, espe-



Fig. 5. Prof. dr hab. med. Piotr Lass – Dean of the Faculty of Health, Gdansk Medical University



Fig. 4. Father Ludwik Grzebień SJ, professor and Rector of the Ignatianum College of Philosophy and Education in Cracow and recipient of the Copernicus Prize 2010, delivers his speech during the "Opening Ceremony" at the 13th Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Society.



cially during the 13<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Society, has helped to build bridges between neurosciences and neuropsychology (see: fig. 5).

**Prof. dr hab. med. Marek Moskała**

– Director of the Neurosurgical and Neurotraumatology Clinic. An eminent specialist in the field of neurosurgery and neurotraumatology. The author of 138 publications, including books and academic handbooks, especially on the topic of tumors at the base of the skull and frontal-basal injuries. An innovator in the introduction of simultaneous multi-specialized operations on severe brain-face-head injuries. He implements the latest neuroimaging methods

with the use of computerised tracography and functional magnetic resonance (fMRI) in oncological operations for the minimalization of disability and improvement of the quality of life.

He has cooperated with the Cracow Polytechnic in the introduction of a stereotactical frame for the injection of brain ventricles. The President of the Cracow Branch of the Polish Society of Neurosurgeons. A member of many scientific societies, including: Euroacademia Multidisciplinaria Neurotraumatologica, and the Central European Society of Neurosurgeons. A member of the board of the Prometheus Foundation providing help for disabled children. A member of the editorial board of many journals, including *Academia Neurochirurgica* and *Acta Neuropsychologica*. His patients adore him and consider him responsible for their very life; they admire his competence, warmth and honesty (see: fig. 6). For his eminent service in making closer the bonds of neurosurgery and neuropsychology, along with his excellent lectures and presentations at the congresses of the Polish Neuropsychological Society, he has been many times awarded various prizes, e.g. *Virtuti Medicinali*. This year he obtained the highest possible award – the Copernicus Prize 2010.



Fig. 6. Prof. dr hab. med. Marek Moskała – Director of the Neurosurgical and Neurotraumatological Clinic presented his scientific film jointly produced with Prof. Maria Pachalska entitled: *Coma: A Return to Life* at the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Society.

**Prof. Maria Kielar-Turska**, head of the Stefan Szuman Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology at the Jagiellonian University, is one of Poland's leading experts on developmental psychology and psycholinguistics. She is the author of many research and theoretical works dealing



Fig. 7. Prof. Maria Kielar-Turska, Head of the Stefan Szuman Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology at the Jagiellonian University, and recipient of the Copernicus Prize 2010

with the development of speech and thought during childhood, cognitive representations, the child's Theory of Mind, the participation of children in culture (including traditional children's games), and the reception of various literary genres and film by children and young people. She is also a leader of the research team studying the development of language and communication in children. She cooperates with the Center for Children's Art in Poznań.

She is the chief editor of the journal *Psychologia Rozwojowa* (Developmental Psychology), and a member of the editorial boards of *Forum Psychologiczne* (Psychological Forum), *Sztuka Leczenia* (The Art of Healing), and *Wychowanie w Przedszkolu* (Kindergarten Education). She is a member of the Polish Psychological Society, where she acts as president of the developmental psychology section, and a member of the Polish Neuropsychological Society. She has been awarded the Gold Cross of Merit. Her active leadership has helped to build bridges between developmental psychology and neuropsychology in Poland to the enrichment of both (see Fig. 7).

In addition, a number of persons received the certificate *Virtuti Medicinali* in recognition of particular services to the goals of the Society. This year, we made a particular attempt to honour persons from other, related fields of study who have taken an interest in neuropsychology. One of the honourees was Guy Torr, who has cooperated with the Polish Neuropsychological Society for a number of years. He lives and works in Cracow, where he is a senior lecturer in English at the Jagiellonian University. For many years he has worked as a lexicographer and translator. Among various projects mention should be made of his contribution to *Wielki słownik polsko-angielski* PWN-OUP (2004) and his work for Larousse on *Praktyka metoda nauki słownictwa* (2005). His translation work has involved both technical and literary commissions, including a number of screenplays. Since 1999 he has worked as a Russian-Polish-English translator for the trilingual lexicon of Russian thought *Ideas in Russia* published by the University of Łódź. During his many years of cooperation with the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Oriental Philology, he has translated a number of volumes on the literature of the Arabian Gulf, the most recent titles being *Modern Poetry and Prose of Bahrain* (2006) and *Translating Traditions: Thurayya al-Baqsamī* (2009). His interest in history is expressed by his translation work for the University's Institute of History and the Polish Academy of Sciences' *Acta Poloniae Historica* in Warsaw. At present he is translating a series of Bruno Jasieński's

Russian short stories for the Twisted Spoon Press in Prague. Guy Torr's research interests lie within the general problem area of literary translation, while his publications include a number of papers on Chekhov in English. For many years now he has been associated with the British Council, with which he still closely cooperates (see: Fig. 8).

All the honourees fully deserved the applause they received.

The symposium brought together representatives of various disciplines (psychologists, neuropsychologists, educators, and philosophers) interested in the problem area of life and death, as well as the links between them. The delegates represented different academic centers from both Poland and abroad.

The Congress was accompanied by a poster session and an extremely interesting workshop on QEEG, ERPSs and Neurotherapy with Prof. Juri D. Kropotov and Prof. Maria Pačalska, which was attended by many conference participants.

The scientific papers delivered on Monday and Tuesday were divided into 6 sessions:

- The neuropsychology of development (from childhood to old age)
- Disorders in the life of a young person (the silent crisis, low self-esteem, the lack of a sense of purpose in life)
- Disorders in adults (the philosophical and psychological aspects of suffering, the quality of the patient's life)
- Social, psychological and moral death
- Clinical death and its consequences
- Other subjects: different aspects of human life and death

It was remarked by many of those present that this year's Program Committee had done an outstanding job on composing the sessions, as all the papers given were extremely interesting. In accordance with our long-standing policy, there were no parallel sessions. Even though the program lasted into the early hours of the evening, there was no waning of interest. An even better indication of the quality of the program is that the coffee breaks were not extended, since everyone was eager to get back in time to hear the next papers. The poster session was also very well attended.

No small part was played in the attractiveness of the program by its interdisciplinary nature. Prof. Juri D. Kropotov gave training lectures on neuroimaging and neuropsychology, respectively, which were very warmly received and much appreciated. He has promised to return for the next Congress in Gdańsk.

The broad group of eminent representatives of various disciplines hosted at this symposium fostered serious and fruitful discussions. The deliberations



Fig. 8. Guy Torr, a senior lecturer in English language at the Jagiellonian University, and recipient of the *Virtuti Medicinali* 2010





Fig. 9. General meeting of the Society's membership in the Senate Hall at the Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski Cracow University. At the table in the center sits the reelected president of the Society, Prof. Maria Pałchalska, and the reelected chairman of the audit committee, Prof. Henryk Knapik; further to the right, the newly elected honorary member of the Society, Prof. Juri D. Kropotov, and to the left, one of the Society's founding members – Prof. Bożena Grochmal-Bach.

conducted in this atmosphere of exchanges of ideas and experiences inspired the undertaking of new empirical explorations and cooperation with academics from abroad. Herein we would like to express our deep felt thanks to the authorities of both institutions of higher education for their kindness and assistance during the organisation of the symposium.

After the scientific sessions were completed on the Tuesday, there was a general meeting of the Society's membership. During this meeting elections were held, and Prof. Maria Pachalska was reelected the Society's president, while the rest of the executive board remained in their existing functions for a further three years of office.

The report of the Executive Board was presented and approved, and the Secretary gave an overview of the Society's business. The members in attendance were urged to pay their current dues, which are not onerous, since at present the treasury is so depleted that the officers are paying for most of their expenses from their own pockets. During the two days of the meeting, 56 new members were enrolled, which pushed the present membership over the 300 mark (and filled the treasury enough to at least pay the bank fees for the next half year!).

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The 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Polish Neuropsychological Society was a major success for the organizers, the Program Committee, the sponsoring Foundation for Persons with Brain Dysfunction, and especially the participating Society members. Some 42 papers were delivered to very good attendance, with much useful discussion before and after the sessions. The organizers of the Fourteen Congress next September in Gdansk certainly have a very hard act to follow.