

Laudatio

Professor Aaron Temkin Beck graduated summa cum laude from Yale Medical School but was almost “lost” for cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) since he was drawn at first into the field of Neurology because of its preciseness, clarity and robustness. Eventually, he entered the field of Psychiatry, in particular Psychotherapy. In collaboration with many colleagues, amongst them his daughter Judy, Director of the Beck Institute, he reshaped the face of psychotherapy. In a survey among practicing psychotherapists he is considered one of the most influential authors in the field. Professor Beck developed a treatment approach with roots in classical philosophy as well as the works of Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger, undoubtedly based on his own experiences privately and professionally, shaped by his ideal of precision, clarity, and robustness, well-grounded in developments in cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics and in the empirical tradition, and far away from the mentalism of which he was accused in the beginning years when civil war raged in the field. Moreover, he succeeded in integrating his approach with the behavioral tradition, and put topics on the therapeutic agenda, thus far “not-done”: existentiality, acceptance, mindfulness. The notion is emerging now, based on accumulating empirical evidence, that continuation of CBT after remission, affects the probability of relapse significantly. Apparently it changes the cognitive “depth”-structure in vulnerable individuals.

His research interests include depression and suicide prevention, the efficacy of cognitive therapy in other psychopathological disorders, including psychotic disorders, and assessment techniques. The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), for instance, is one of the most widely used instruments in the assessment of depressive symptomatology. His many books reflect this wide interest with topics including anger, hostility and violence; chronic pain; personality disorders; substance abuse; and, anxiety disorders and phobias. It is particularly in the latter area that Dutch researchers, members of the Dutch Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy, are having the highest impact ratings internationally.

As a recognition of his influence in psychotherapy, Professor Beck received many awards and honours from prestigious gremia: the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy. It is appropriate that the Dutch Association of Behavior and Cognitive Therapy (VGCT), on her 40th birthday, decided to offer Professor Beck the honorary membership as a token of respect and recognition as the architect of present-day CBT. We are proud that Professor Beck decided to accept this invitation.

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