



Minnesota Psychologist

May, 2004

Volume 53 Number 3

MINNESOTA
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

www.mnpsych.org

Minnesota Remembers Paul E. Meehl



Paul Everett Meehl, Ph.D.
January 3, 1920 - February 14, 2003

Regents' Professor of Psychology, Emeritus, University of Minnesota

President, American Psychological Association, 1962

Member, Minnesota Psychological Association

Executive Council, 1948-49

Excerpted from a special issue of the *Minnesota Psychologist* that included reading recommendations, remembrances from students, colleagues, and friends, and a reprinting of one of Meehl's articles.

A Special Edition of the *Minnesota Psychologist*

The Legacy of Paul E. Meehl

Unlike many psychologists in Minnesota who have been transplanted from elsewhere, Paul Meehl was a true Minnesotan. He was born in Minneapolis on January 3, 1920; he died in Minneapolis on February 14, 2003. He received a B.A. *summa cum laude* in psychology in 1941 and Ph.D. in clinical psychology in 1945, both from the University of Minnesota. His academic career was at the University of Minnesota. Although he traveled about the nation to receive numerous honors and awards and to give invited addresses, his favorite haunts were the University of Minnesota campus and its environs. Walks along the East River Road fueled his genius.

This issue of the *Minnesota Psychologist* pays tribute to this intellectual giant, and gives readers an opportunity to reflect on some of Paul's insights about our field and to learn from others who, in turn, learned so much from Paul. This issue celebrating the legacy of Paul Meehl includes:

- An introduction by Paul's student, colleague, and friend, William M. Grove, to an article written by Paul Meehl for the *Minnesota Psychologist* in 1986.
- That article, "Psychology: Does Our Heterogeneous Subject Matter Have Any Unity?" is reprinted in its entirety. Since approximately 83% of the membership of the Minnesota Psychological Association has joined since the article was printed originally, most members will not have read it before. Another article written by Paul for the *Minnesota Psychologist*, "The Insanity Defense," appeared in summer, 1983.
- Suggestions of works by Paul Meehl that you may enjoy reading. Paul's publications are extensive, and this will give you a place to start. See "Reading Meehl for Fun and Profit."
- "Paul Meehl Remembered" is a collection of anecdotes and memories from a number of individuals who knew Paul in a variety of capacities over the years....

Susan T. Rydell, Ph.D., LP
Editor

The Legacy of Paul E. Meehl: Introduction



"Psychology: Does our heterogeneous subject matter have any unity?" Paul Meehl wrote [this article] seventeen years before he was taken from us. Rereading it, I was, as usual, struck by the fact that Paul was rather decidedly a "big picture" kind of psychologist, and a very, very smart one. Who else in clinical psychology would discuss — in a single page —

Auguste Comte, conceptual reduction, *ceteris paribus* clauses in scientific theories, Dollard and Miller's 1950 book (attempting to harmonize Freud's theory of neurosis with Hullian learning theory), Skinner's "Type S" conditioning, Fenichel's advice about making psychoanalytic interpretations, Ellis's Rational Emotive psychotherapy, and the works of Epictetus, Gautama Buddha, and Bertrand Russell?

Paul notes that his piece wanders somewhat, so I thought to lay out my view of its structure. It is part monitory guidance and part rumination, as the title implies, about "how it all fits together" (and *whether* it even does!). Paul first expresses concern about whether psychologists today are less driven by the desire to "not be fooled," that is, the drive for truth, than they were when he was in training. He wonders whether scientists and practitioners are really applying the same principles. In parallel, he asks whether research psychologists really all work in the same science. The general effect of his opening is to unsettle.

The first part of the middle section discusses ways it is hard to integrate one area of psychological science (e.g., psychodynamics) with another (e.g., learning theory). He goes on to use his own theory of schizophrenia as an example to show how hard it is to tie psychological constructs (e.g., psychodynamic ones) to those of other branches of science (e.g., neurophysiology) — that is, perform a Comtean reduction. At this point, any thoughtful, scientifically-oriented reader is fairly depressed, because things don't look very hopeful for scientific integration (let alone the relatively complete scientific justification of clinical practice).

Paul then rescues the reader from hopelessness with an encouraging reminder. There are five areas of solid, cumulative accomplishment in psychology, including applied learning theory, psychodynamics, and descriptive psychopathology. He sums up by emphasizing the importance of integration, even if it is a very difficult problem. Finally, he admonishes the reader about the crucial

"distinction between knowledge that brings its credentials with it and purported knowledge that does not." The need to make practical decisions in applied work before adequate data exist to back them up, and the (oft-times considerable) value of clinicians' accumulated experiences, will never constitute fully adequate justifications or guides for psychological practice.



(Shown l. to r.) William Grove, Leslie Yonce, and Niels Waller at the Society for Personality Assessment convention in Miami in March when Dave Nichols presented the Marguerite R. Hertz Award in honor of Paul Meehl. The award is a tribute to Dr. Hertz for her long term professional contributions to personality assessment. The memorial is presented by a distinguished member of the Society in honor of a deceased eminence from the field of personality assessment. Following the presentation, Will and Niels spoke about aspects of Paul's life and work.

At the time this piece was written, I was newly appointed in Psychiatry at the University of Minnesota, having left for a year after getting my Ph.D. from Paul; I was his second-to-last student. I fondly remember discussing some of these same points with Paul, both in graduate school and after I came back. The integration, not only of psychological science, but also of philosophy, theoretical aspects of psychology and other sciences, and clinical topics was typical of Paul's wide ranging mind. He was always "on," so I got both barrels (so to speak) of his considerable intellect any time I talked to him, day or night. I had more fun, and got more enlightenment about psychology (among other things), from interacting with Paul, than I ever have had from talking with anybody else in my life. He was one of a kind, a truly amazing scholar and thinker, and I miss him terribly.

William M. Grove, Ph.D., LP
University of Minnesota—Twin Cities

Psychology: Does Our Heterogeneous Subject Matter Have Any Unity?

Paul E. Meehl, PhD.

Editor's Note: Paul E. Meehl, a former president of the American Psychological Association, was Regents' Professor of Psychology, Professor of Psychiatry and Professor of Philosophy, University of Minnesota. As a licensed psychologist, he was engaged in part-time practice of psychotherapy and his research at the time this was written was in mathematical taxometrics in relation to psychiatric genetics. In 1982, Meehl was honored as one of Minnesota's most prominent psychologists during the Minnesota Psychological Association's first Psychology Week. This article was presented as the closing address at the Minnesota Psychological Association's 50th Anniversary and Annual Meeting Bloomington MN, May, 1986. (Original publication Minnesota Psychologist, 1986 (Summer), pp. 3-8.)

"Does Our Heterogeneous Subject Matter Have Any Unity?" is #131 on Meehl's publication list at <http://meehl.umn.edu/>

Reading Meehl for Fun and Profit

Many psychologists remember reading articles by Paul Meehl for classes. They may remember a sense of glimpsing brilliance, but they probably mostly remember striving to grasp the content that would get them through exams. Here, in no particular order, are suggestions for rediscovering some of the kinds of insights Paul had. Most of these articles are posted on his publication list (<http://meehl.umn.edu>); others may be requested (pemeehl@umn.edu). Read for fun; you will find yourself profiting painlessly.

Why I do not attend case conferences. In *Psychodiagnosis: Selected Papers* (pp. 225-302). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973.

Don't be put off by the length of this; it is one of Paul's most readable works. It illustrates the systematic way he thought about everything as well as his relatively unfettered writing style. You can sample this chapter just about anywhere and find something interesting and useful. Paul knew he was irritated by what went on at case conferences, so he catalogued exactly what was objectionable and why. Read this to see what was on his mind, and you're guaranteed to be educated on at least one point.

Toward an integrated theory of schizotaxia, schizotypy and schizophrenia. *Journal of Personality Disorders* 1990, 4, 1-99.

Read this if you have a special interest in schizophrenia or for a case study in how to think about any particular area of psychopathology. This article illustrates how to observe signs and symptoms, infer causal connections and arrive at a theory, derive implications for research, and design experiments and use proper methodology and statistics to test the theory.

Credentialed persons, credentialed knowledge. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 1997, 4, 91-98.

Read this to be reminded why your training as a scientist is so important and to renew your commitment to scientific thinking to provide the best help possible to your patients.

Grove, W. M., & Meehl, P. E., Comparative efficiency of informal (subjective, impressionistic) and formal (mechanical, algorithmic) prediction procedures: The clinical-statistical controversy. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 1996, 2, 293-323.

Paul became famous for his 1954 book *Clinical versus Statistical Prediction: A Theoretical Analysis and a Review of the Evidence*. That classic [was reprinted with a new Preface in 1996, and in 2013 by Echo Point Books]. For a quick update on the issue, this article gives a synopsis of the meta-analysis by Grove, *et al.*, followed by a list of objections to the use of actuarial prediction with answers to each one. This is Paul in conversational mode. Pick your preferred objection and see if your thinking can counter his answer to it.

Psychopathology and purpose. In P. Hoch & J. Zubin (Eds.), *The Future of Psychiatry* (pp. 61-69). New York: Grune and Stratton, 1962. Reprinted in Meehl, *Selected Philosophical and Methodological Papers* (pp. 265-271; C. A. Anderson and K. Gunderson, Eds.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Did you ever wonder why some patients have great insight yet seem to resist improvement or persist in apparently irrational or self-defeating behavior? Here are some possible explanations.

Treatment of guilt-feelings. In *1957 Symposium of the American Catholic Psychological Association* (pp. 34-41). New York: Fordham University, 1960.

Practitioners (should) already know the points made here. But this short article will remind you how to parse what your patient is saying and how to handle treatment situations well for both you and your patient.

The power of quantitative thinking. [In N. G. Waller, L. J. Yonce, W. M. Grove, D. Faust, & M. F. Lenzenweger (Eds.), *A Paul Meehl Reader: Essays on the practice of scientific psychology* (pp. 433-444). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.]

Have you ever had guilt feelings about not having more mathematics in your educational background? This piece will not make you feel better, but it may encourage you to take remedial steps and/or to urge students entering the field to get as much training as possible in mathematical areas.

Law and the fireside inductions (with Postscript): Some reflections of a clinical psychologist. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 1989, 7, 521-550. Reprinted in Meehl, *Selected Philosophical and Methodological Papers* (pp. 440-480; C. A. Anderson and K. Gunderson, Eds.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

This is a good example of how to apply psychological knowledge to broad social issues. Also, it is a must-read for any psychologist involved in legal work.

Hedonic capacity: Some conjectures. *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, 1975, 39, 295-307. Reprinted in D. C. Clark & J. Fawcett (Eds.), *Anhedonia and affect deficit states* (pp.33-45). NY: PMA Publishing, 1987.

An excellent piece for all members of the helping professions. It underscores why an appreciation of differential psychology is critical for coming to terms with individual differences in reactions to minor and major life-setbacks and why individual differences in "net" psychological well-being are inevitable. Read this for a better understanding of individuality and its influence on who does or does not come for psychotherapy. Those interested in the area of "positive psychology" will find this article useful.

Autobiography. In G. Lindzey (Ed.), *History of Psychology in Autobiography*, Vol. VIII (pp. 337-389). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989.

Here is an account of Paul's intellectual development in his own words. Thinking clearly was a primary value for him from childhood. He loved debating with friends in his youth, tossing a coin to determine who would defend which side of an issue. Grant Dahlstrom reports: "When Paul and I found ourselves together, such as sharing a hotel room at a convention, a typical conversation would begin with his challenge: 'Assert something, Dahlstrom, and I'll deny it.' Arguing a scholarly point was always a major source of recreational pleasure for him."

Editor's Note: The above readings and annotations were compiled by Leslie J. Yonce, Ph.D., who maintains Paul Meehl's web page.

Paul Meehl Remembered: Anecdotes and Memories

Editor's Note: The following collection is from a mailing that Bill Schofield sent on March 4, 2003 to some friends of Paul Meehl. The appreciation he refers to can be found in *Thinking Clearly About Psychology, Vol. 1: Matters of Public Interest*, edited by Dante Cicchetti and William M. Grove, University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

• William Schofield, Ph.D., Minneapolis, MN

I have read all of the obituaries of Paul as they have appeared in the *Star Tribune*, the *Pioneer Press*, the *Minnesota Daily*, and the *New York Times*. Each of them left me with a lack of closure. They covered the essential facts, especially of his academic and professional career, but they failed to communicate his personhood. Since I had enjoyed over 40 years of association with Paul—as teacher, researcher, clinician, colleague, neighbor, friend and confidant—it is understandable that I experienced the need to share with a few special friends the core of this remarkable man as I was privileged to know him.

It was my good fortune, over a dozen years ago, to offer my appreciation in depth for Paul's life to

that point. In addition, it was my pleasure to have that eulogy offered in a medium that assured me he would know how much I valued our relationship.

Two vignettes:

I came out to Minnesota to start graduate study in psychology in the fall of 1942. Professor Donald G. Paterson was my first advisor, and in September I was in a conference with "Pat" when a young man with shoulder-length straight blonde hair stuck his head in and he and Pat had a brief exchange. I thought the young man was a music student who needed to be directed to nearby Scott Hall. After the exchange, Prof. Paterson said, "that was Paul Meehl—he's a genius." I thought this appraisal must have been based on the results of psychometric testing, but Paul's evolving career validated Pat's diagnosis.

At this time Gerri and I were living in University Court at the intersection of 10th Street and University Avenue. Paul and Alyce had an apartment on University just south of 10th street.

Late one evening I was standing out on the avenue in front of our apartment when I saw Paul striding homeward on the other side of the street. I inferred he was probably coming from a late night research session in the rat lab at the "U." He saw me, we waved to each other, and he yelled across, "I've just had six cokes and I can't sleep!"

• **Sherman E. Nelson, Ph.D., Stratford, CT**

As a student at the University of Minnesota from 1944-1952 I was, of course, influenced by Paul Meehl. For decades we corresponded, and exchanged self-recorded tapes during the last ten years (when the subject was long). It was not until the last fifteen years that it occurred to me to keep some of Meehl's letters. Unfortunately the tapes were recorded over when we traded them back and forth, so none of those survived.

Here I address a few topics, using direct quotes from Paul's letters. All of the underlining and punctuation marks are as he wrote them.

One of the most obvious characteristics of Meehl was his passion for cognitive activities. In a 1991 letter, he states, "Your point about many academic psychologists not having fun is a big thing with me... 'Many of today's academics do not really know what it's like to lead the "life of the mind.'" They think they do, but they don't. They think publishing papers and going to meetings and being on prestigious(?) committees is leading the life of the mind, which you and I know it isn't. They (a) rarely just think about concepts, and (b) do not get a big kick out of ideation. I know why Freud referred to investing the libido in the intellect. For me, thinking is charged with cathexis as intense as sex, affection, liquor, food, music."

After a 1996 psychology convention in Toronto at which Meehl received a Lifetime Award for contributions to psychology, he wrote, "It is reinforcing to get the esteem of one's baboon troupe, we are gregarious primates with nRec, nAff, nDom, etc. But I am glad I've not made it the Main Aim, even when young. That's not good for one's health or happiness, and also it is not optimal—altho often helpful—for real cognitive achievement. I believe the best scholarly work is done by persons who are largely motivated by nCog, nOrder, nPlay (Yes, quite important, don't you agree?)."

Paul averaged one publication approximately every 100 days for 58 years, with little variance from year-to-year. What is of interest is that psychology was strictly his day job. He devoted his evenings and weekends to his interests in philo-

sophy, religion, law, and literature. This is how he was able to read what he estimated to be 300 books in theology.

Despite the wide interests, there were certain areas such as politics and government to which he devoted little time. Partly this was due to his disillusionment about the Viet Nam War, for which he was a behind-the-scenes protester. In 2000, Paul wrote, "About *In Fact*, I read it for some years, but I must be misremembering when, I thought it was during the goddamn Viet Nam War, when I was also reading I.F. Stone's sheet. Or did it continue after Seldes retired from it? One had to read those guys and Quakers to get the facts, outwit the damned rulers. It was Viet Nam that led me to despise and distrust the government as a matter of course."

Meehl was objective about his talents, attitudes, and influence. In 1996 he wrote: "I refuse time to stuff that doesn't interest me. But in the past that has bordered on the unethical—when I didn't keep up on psychology journals for teaching purposes. I semisolved that by getting others to do chunks of 171-2 (the Clinical Psychology sequence) that I found boring. Lectured (last 10-15 years I did it) on 'fun' topics. I'm very lazy about literature review when I write. I *hate* the citation tasks. Could not be a historian or law prof!!"

In 1996, I asked Paul if he was serious when he was quoted in an *APA Monitor* article that there were two or three dozen psychologists of his age group who had made more contributions than he. He said that he was serious and listed as examples Cronbach, Carroll, Humphreys, and James Olds. He did admit, "I have a range that's unique—Mowrer was close to that, but not quite. If I judge by journal citations, I'm pretty high. I believe it averages around 250 annual cites." I responded that the history of psychology would be the final judge.

Paul stated that he had poor spatial relations ability, which gave him much trouble when he took neuroanatomy, which was mandatory for clinical psychology graduate students in the 1940s and 1950s. On the other hand, he said in 1991, "I have an unusual verbal memory. I remind people of things they said to me 20 years ago in certain situations, they are amazed. It's a funny trait." Also he did not demur when I told him that I thought I was objective about him and that I knew no one who surpassed him in analytic abilities.

In my next-to-last letter to Paul on October 21, 2002, I had asked him what he thought of E.O.

Wilson, in general, and of the *Consilience* book, specifically, if he had read it. His reply shows that his cognitive capacity remained very high despite all his health problems, "The *consilience* book is not as dogmatic as the sociobiology, and when he is expressing a leap of 'scientific faith,' he now has the good sense to say so. The term *consilience* is from the first treatise on philosophy of science (unless you count Bacon, who was not a scientist) by William Whewell. I am not sure that Wilson uses the term in quite the same way, but that doesn't matter. I think he is pretty smart and certainly learned, and I don't blame people for scientism since they are extrapolating from science's track record that is obviously superior to that of any other cognitive enterprise (metaphysics, theology, esthetics, ethics, history, biography, jurisprudence, literary criticism). As to Wilson's thesis of reductionism, that has a pretty good record as a research strategy, even if we doubt it as a metaphysical thesis. So I don't complain of that either, since he admits he can't conclusively prove it on present evidence."

• **Sam C. Scher, Ph.D., LP, St. Paul, MN**

I was flattered and delighted when Susan Rydell offered me the opportunity to add a brief Paul Meehl vignette for this issue of the *Minnesota Psychologist*.

One evening years ago, Paul Meehl was headed out of the psychology building at the University of Minnesota and I was headed in to teach a class, this was the exchange: "Hey Paul. Hey Sam—take care of my kids, Sam."

[Paul thought of his own mentors, he himself, and his students as carrying on a continuing influential body of argument. In his *Autobiography* he wrote: "One gratification in being a college professor is to realize that at least hundreds, sometimes thousands, of persons one has never met have been shaped, helped, and inspired by the lectures, articles, and textbooks of one's students. I have the same feeling when I reflect that there are clinical facilities scattered here and there over the world in which the care of mental patients has become more efficient because the practitioners have been influenced by my writings (however slightly!) or by academic teachers and clinic supervisors who are in the academic line of descent from Paterson through Hathaway through Meehl through Meehl's students."]

• **Joe Huber, M.A., LP, St. Paul, MN**

What I remember about Paul Meehl, besides all the obvious things, was his kindness. Over the last

few years, he always accepted me into the classes he co-taught with Will Grove and his wife Leslie. One might argue that he did that because I was a friend of both Will and Leslie. But, it was unmistakable in what has been called the "Meehl error." That is, putting the most positive interpretation on something that someone said, implying that it was original or interesting, and neglecting to point out that whatever was original probably came from him.

I, like many others, have been the recipient of this "error." I have known a few people who have actually said something original or interesting. I am not one of them, nor are most of the others whom I have met or heard. So, what has been called the "Meehl error," should have been called the "Meehl kindness."

• **Roland M. Peek, Ph.D., Inver Grove Heights, MN**

Many receive advice, few profit by it.

Publilius Syrus, Maxim 149

I am one of Paul Meehl's greatest fans and ardent pupils. His matchless humor, piercing intelligence, personal warmth, and wide-eyed curiosity about all things have been a perpetual inspiration to me. I treasure my memories of him, and am forever grateful that Mike Elliott, my first advisor, referred me to the new clinical psychology program and Paul Meehl almost sixty years ago.

As an intellectual provocateur and energizer of students Paul Meehl was unequalled. But let's face it, he was a rotten advisor, at least for me! Or perhaps I was a rotten advisee!

In the first place, he was by nature a hands-off, live-and-let-live advisor. Usually I had to find out for myself what the required courses were, and he passively allowed me to take whatever appealed to me even if it didn't fit any packaged program. As a result, my blueprint eventually included almost every psychology-related graduate course offered, which delayed my degree and added to the taxes of all those American citizens paying for the GI Bill. I have sometimes cynically stated that "my course work was so rounded that it had no point," but actually I have been grateful for the inadvertent breadth of my training which resulted from my indecisiveness and Paul's cheerfully nondirective style.

In other ways, however, his nondirection was painful. He hated paper work and administrative matters, and he routinely neglected to fill out the proper academic forms, thus delaying my training schedule, such as it was. After I complained, he solved that problem by simply signing a stack of

blank forms each quarter, leaving me to fill them out and forward to the proper authorities as needed.

At that time two foreign languages were required for a doctorate. I already knew German, and Paul assured me that some of my numerous other courses showed “ancillary proficiencies” (such as a minor in Child Development, and being qualified for a Minnesota teaching certificate, to mention a couple) that would more than substitute for the second language. Alas, he was wrong, and at the last possible academic moment, I found myself in a summer-school crash course in French with some other desperate graduate students.

My biggest problem with Paul, however, involved my thesis. I had picked a subject (a projective test) that interested me and about which I had already published some research. Unfortunately for me, it was a subject that also interested Paul, and he was generous with advice and encouraging notes: “No kidding, I am very impressed. If you want to boost your dyadic ego, take a look at [the] Bellak-Abt book on projective methods, see how the... expert is paddling in your wake! This is good stuff.” Such talk kept me laboring on my thesis, though I now had a clinical job and was supporting a wife and new son, all of which seemed much more interesting than my thesis. Even so I was near completion several times, but the thesis grew bigger and bigger because Paul would frequently summon me to say, “Wouldn’t it be interesting if you...” and he would suggest a new angle or sub-project, usually something of considerable merit but taking more time. By then, years were passing, my expanding thesis became easier to shove back on the shelf, and I was becoming one of the worse examples of the “All but [thesis]” gang of procrastinators and graduate school neurotics.

When the University finally put a limit on how long one could remain an “All but” in good standing, I knew I had to get back to serious business. I could no longer face more work on my overwhelming thesis, so I decided to chuck it and start over. I proposed an entirely new thesis subject, on an esoteric psychometric problem in which I had little interest and which I was sure was of little interest to Paul or (I hoped) anyone on my committee. Paul was startled, but acquiesced—he inveigled the approval of my committee and I barreled ahead singlemindedly with my new research. This time, however, I avoided consultation with Paul. He didn’t seem to notice—he was probably relieved not to have to bone up on my obscure topic. In a few months I presented him

with my completed thesis, and my committee’s questions at my final orals were startlingly superficial and few, followed by the usual handshakes and congratulations. Maybe they figured I had already earned a degree by the respectable psychological work I had by then demonstrated. More likely, they were probably just glad to get rid of me.

Fortunately, none of my academic problems and my end run with my thesis made the slightest dent in our friendship, at least as far as I could tell.

Paul Meehl—I remember him fondly as a great man, great psychologist, great motivator, and great friend. But advisor...?!

• Gary Schoener, M.Ed., LP, Minneapolis, MN

I came to Minnesota in the late summer of 1966 as a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology Training Program. My support would be provided by being a research assistant for Dr. Paul Meehl and Dr. David Lykken in the Department of Psychiatry Research in Diehl Hall. Paul Meehl was my advisor. Those were exciting times—Starke Hathaway was still alive and at the University of Minnesota Hospitals we had a fascinating assortment of psychologists—John Brantner, Jack Hafner, Manfred Meier, Wentworth Quast, William Schofield, and Lloyd Sines to name a few. The Psychology Department in Elliott Hall also had an impressive faculty, and Minnesota at the time was considered to have one of the top few training programs in Clinical Psychology.

Prior to arrival at Minnesota I had read a few of Meehl’s articles, but was soon to be impressed with the fact that there was an aura around him. There was talk of his having been the youngest president in the history of the American Psychological Association, his joint appointments in a number of departments (Law, Philosophy of Science, Psychiatry, etc.), and having received a number of honors. His debate with O. Hobart Mower years earlier was still legendary and several people described it to me.

Before and during this time Meehl published with an extraordinary range of prominent thinkers in a great many fields. The breadth of his work is as important as its depth. He always stayed close to Minnesota—this was very much his home—and often turned down invitations to travel and speak.

Despite having the achievements of someone who could easily have been a “guru,” he was about as “non-guru” as you could get. I found him approachable and open to question and debate from the beginning as did the other research assistants in the unit. Two of us, Malcolm Burdick

and Ian MacIndoe, were to become lifelong friends and are still in touch today....

As focused as he was on a variety of intellectual pursuits, and as willing as he was to engage in discussion and debate with graduate students, he was not much into many of the responsibilities of an advisor. This combined with his obsession with “g”—general intelligence—brought about an interesting experience for me just prior to my preliminary oral exam.

Meehl and I had not been able to talk about my upcoming oral, and so the morning of a day in December of 1969 when my oral was scheduled, I approached him to discuss what was to happen. His first comment was a question: “Am I your academic advisor?” I responded “yes” and ended up settling that question with showing him a document to prove it. Needless to say, my anxiety was rising. Meehl then asked how I had done on the Miller Analogies Test. He had an obsession with that test and claimed that it was THE best measure of “g.” I truthfully responded that I hadn’t scored that highly on the test—a response I quickly regretted. His anxiety rose, and he quickly asked me if I knew what my general intelligence was? Had I been tested with a WAIS? I told him that I didn’t remember the exact score but it wasn’t that high—again quickly regretting my response. Now highly and visibly anxious, he asked, “Well, how did you do on prelims?” I told him that I had “aced them” and he began to calm down. Enough time had been spent reassuring him that we had no more time to prepare. The oral was to begin. Fortunately it did go well and during the oral he was appropriately supportive!

...Paul Meehl had an analyst’s couch in his office and was very proud of it. He was very taken with psychoanalytic thought and practiced a “Midwestern Eclectic” type of therapy combining dynamic approaches with cognitive-behavioral ones. There is no question that the dynamic thinking predominated from everything I heard him discuss about his private clinical work. He saw people in his office in Diehl Hall and some years later was on the staff of the Nicollet Clinic in Minneapolis. I was never clear on that arrangement.

When he attended psychiatric case conferences at the University of Minnesota Hospitals, he often had useful perceptions. As might be gathered from his research and publications, diagnosis and the taxonomy of psychiatric illness were of a great deal of interest to him. He believed that, given its lack of scientific grounding, our field needed to

“pull itself up by its bootstraps” via using construct validation. This “bootstrapping” was well described in the paper “Detecting Latent Clinical Taxa by Fallible Quantitative Indicators Lacking an Accepted Criterion.” Someone once asked me what this title meant and I replied: “Making something out of nothing.”

...Being a research assistant at this particular point in both history and Meehl’s career was fascinating.... One of my first special projects was to do defense research for testimony he and Dr. Carl Malmquist were preparing for the defense in the Hoskins murder case. This case was similar to the story in “The Fugitive”—a wife murdered, claims of outside intruders, etc. I ended up going out to Stillwater prison to research the MMPIs of murderers, and also consulting with people like Aaron Beck around issues of depression. The next project related to Albert Ellis’ list of irrational ideas, and it provided me with my first contact with Dr. Ellis who himself has always been accessible....

Although few knew of Meehl’s interest in parapsychology, someone in the CIA did. We were discussing my work on the assassination of John Kennedy and he told me of an interesting experience of his own. One day a colonel in uniform made an appointment to see him. The man began asking questions about his experience in developing the MMPI and interest in measurement and taxonomy, and then his interest in ESP.

The man asked if it would be possible to construct a test which would “separate from the population ESP-sensitive individuals,” to which Meehl responded, “Yes, in theory at least.” Then the man asked if it would be possible to “train these people to work as a team to tune in on someone’s thoughts,” to which Meehl again responded “yes, in theory at least.”

The man then asked if Meehl would be willing to run such a project, noting that money would be unlimited, and Meehl decided to play along and said “yes.” He still didn’t know who the officer represented. He gave Meehl a CIA job application which Meehl filled out and sent in—again, out of curiosity. Well, on it he acknowledged that for about 6 months when he was an undergraduate he had edited a socialist student newsletter. According to Meehl, this “taint of pink” was sufficient for the offer to be withdrawn. He wondered, however, if such a project was undertaken with some other project director. [Many years later I was to learn of a related project in a book by NY Times reporter Howard Blum (1990).]

The fact that he played along with this man was also typical. He did have a side which was not only curious, but at times mischievous. Beyond his queries about salvation and meaning, I am sure that he is now further satisfying that endless curiosity as he explores the great beyond. For me, beyond his intellect and brilliance, he was someone who helped more than a few of us see beyond some more narrow horizons, and who reminds me of a statement made by Sir Isaac Newton before his death in 1727: "I don't know what I may seem to the world. But as to myself, I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than the ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

Editor's Note: The remaining impressions and anecdotes were collected by Will Grove.

• **Robert R. Golden, Ph.D., Glenwood, MN**

As a new graduate student, I had just read a paper by Meehl using a conditional probability method to estimate latent validities. I was trying to better understand the method by using some real data—data where the actual validities were known. To my surprise, the method estimates and the actual values did not agree because of method assumption departure.

While I had enormous respect for Meehl, I had never met him, but I somehow developed the courage to approach him regarding the matter. Friends had warned me that Meehl could be temperamental and might not take kindly to my comments.

When I arrived at Meehl's office, I was scared to death—what in the world was I thinking? I was tongue tied. First, Meehl put on his clinical hat, then his statistical hat to try to settle me down enough to make some sense. Finally, Meehl went thru my notes and looked up with a big smile and said "I never thought of doing that. I'll have to think more about this. Thank you. Can you come back next week?" Still in shock, I said, "Sure."

When I returned, Meehl said I was right and I might like to comment on a draft of another paper he was working on. I was thrilled. A week later he called me at home and gave me a research assistantship.

Subsequent years of friendship have confirmed that Meehl was a very kind man.

In our house, out of great love and respect, he was always "Meehl," except to our then three-year-old son, he was "The Meehl." Meehl for several decades was my mentor-cum-colleague in the

study of taxometric statistics, as well as my compassionate and ever-supportive friend. Meehl's brilliant bootstrapping taxometrics, an astonishing statistical methodology for detection of taxonic clinical entities, has given us as exciting and enduring an example of a conceptually elegant and strong methodology as can be found in all of statistical science. In the course of this work and later, Meehl, the father of taxometrics, didn't just stimulate my intellect but he touched my soul.

• **Robyn M. Dawes, Ph.D., Pittsburgh, PA**

I was enthusiastic about Paul's work and about him personally. I read all his later work, and he sometimes modified it (a bit!) at my suggestion. Also, I kept receiving copies of those wonderfully acerbic letters and memos.

Our collaboration was based largely on a fluke. There was a snowstorm in Ann Arbor, Michigan that was so bad one day that the Commissioner of Public Safety said that we should all avoid the roads if we could, and all I had at home was a mimeographed version of a speech Paul was to give at Michigan, at the invitation of the late Professor Warren Norman, who had been a student of Paul's at Minnesota. I spent the day alternating between shoveling snow off my driveway and reading Paul's paper. It dawned on me that what he was proposing was a special case of a more general principle, and that led to a joint 1966 paper on "mixed group analysis" (*Psychological Bulletin*). It turned out that Leo Goodman had proposed basically the same model two years earlier in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* in Great Britain, where he had lines converging at a point rather than points lying on a line. (Later, I realized that the points on line version was superior, because it was possible to evaluate and test for deviations from linearity, whereas there is no standard method for deciding how well lines do or do not converge on a point.)

Paul had to be convinced of the value of mixed group analysis, but he was very open to mathematical arguments, and once persuaded, he insisted that I be senior author. Later, he had similar hesitations about the Dawes, Faust, and Meehl *Science* article, but here David Faust smoothed things over, both with Paul and with the editors of *Science*, who, despite inviting the article, were influenced by reviewers who had all the same objections to its conclusions that some psychologists in the late 1950s and early 1960s had to Paul's original 1954 gem of a book. Aside from the two episodes of second thoughts, my interactions

with Paul can be described as “harmonious” (my term, Paul insisting he was not much into music).

• **Grant Dahlstrom, Ph.D., Chapel Hill, NC**

Both Leona and I first encountered Paul Meehl in a course in clinical psychology at Minnesota (back when the entire MMPI literature could be covered in a lecture or two). When I took the class, Paul was a guest lecturer in Howard Hunt’s course; later he took it over and Leona was one of the students.

When my efforts to devise a test for aphasia proved to be far too ambitious for a doctoral dissertation, Meehl suggested a research topic for me. His idea of carrying out a factor analysis of psychiatric symptoms proved more workable, although a yet-to-be-invented computer would have been a great help.

Meanwhile, Leona had finished a master’s degree under Paul’s direction and had taken a position as a research assistant in the MMPI office located in the Medical School. Paul and I had begun work on the diagnostic signs in the MMPI profile that best separated neurotic from psychotic configurations in the test (the Meehl-Dahlstrom Rules). (The clerical workers in the MMPI office found this tabulating very tedious, frequently complaining about working on those “Mealy-Dahlberg” numbers.)

After we left Minnesota, we made frequent trips back to see family, but also to reconnect with friends like the Meehls.

Paul’s lively interest in so many different areas was always a delight. One persistent challenge he had was trying to train his cats. We vividly remember his efforts to teach a cat to retrieve objects, behavior far removed from its basic repertoire. Simple Skinnerian “shaping” could not approximate this patterning so appropriate to most dogs but quite unnatural to felines. To Starke Hathaway, such species-specific patterns were virtually a given, although many Minnesota-trained psychologists considered such a concept as contrary to Behaviorism.

Meehl also had a lively interest in other approaches to personality assessment. He had already taken a course in Beck’s approach to the Rorschach when, in 1947, Paul and I traveled together to Bard College in New York for a seminar offered by Klopfer on his scoring techniques.

When Paul and I found ourselves together, such as sharing a hotel room at a convention, a typical conversation would begin with his challenge:

“Assert something, Dahlstrom, and I’ll deny it.” Arguing a scholarly point was always a major source of recreational pleasure for him. His publications from the University of Minnesota Press on prediction and on psychodiagnostics stand as landmarks on the way to a quantitative basis for clinical psychology.

• **Neal Viemeister, Ph.D., Minneapolis, MN**

In addition to having many lunches with P. Meehl and colleagues, I had the privilege of being the next door neighbor (in the house formerly owned by J.G. Darley) to P. Meehl and L. Yonce for about a decade during the 1970s. Fine neighbors, but there were times when I wished that P. Meehl were more ordinary. On weekend early mornings I strolled our backyard enjoying its small, quiet beauty. That often was short lived. P. Meehl, from his perch either on their porch or in their kitchen, saw me, put down his book of the day, and called me over to the five-foot fence between our properties. Then he would unleash a riveting intellectual discourse about whatever—usually something related to his current reading—but inevitably heavy stuff, usually philosophy, frequently Freud (prefaced by an apology), and it would often end with a diatribe about “soft psychology,” usually laced with expletives that were incredibly effective because of their contrast with the thick scholarship surrounding them. (I’m a good guy because I work on auditory psychophysics and am not a “softie.”) Towards the end of these wonderful, overwhelming episodes, P. Meehl became so agitated that he shook the fence and, if it were few a feet lower, I’m sure he would have leapt over and would have been no more than one foot from my nose. To calm him down I tried deflecting the conversation to something I could contribute to. Like Helmholtz, Fechner, etc. He bit for a few milliseconds, but then we were off into physics, Germans, genes, etc. He never leaped that fence.

“Brilliant” is not adequate to describe P. Meehl. He was the most impressive intellect I have met, including many Nobel Laureates.

• **David Lubinski, Ph.D., Nashville, TN**

From a letter (October 10, 2000) supporting Paul’s Doctor of Science award from the University of Minnesota:

“My first remembrance of an evaluation of Paul Meehl’s reputation came from my undergraduate advisor, Kenneth MacCorquodale. After signing off on my permission slip to take Paul’s graduate course, Philosophical Psychology, MacCorquodale looked at me, and said: “Brace yourself, David;

you are about to hear a first-rate mind at work!" Little did I know that MacCorquodale was, at the time (and yet again), exercising his skill at British understatement. Because indeed, Paul E. Meehl is a professor's professor. Regents' Professor of Philosophy Herbert Feigl was so impressed by Paul's contributions to philosophy of science that he offered to write him a letter of recommendation, if he should ever decide to change professions. One of the most distinguished methodologists in psychology's history, Donald Campbell (National Academy of Science member, and former APA President), wrote, 'I am 3 years Paul's senior, but Paul has in many ways always been my teacher.' Don Dulaney, the distinguished experimental psychologist (University of Illinois), tells graduate students (in their required seminar on Philosophical Psychology): 'among the top five psychological articles produced during the past century, Paul Meehl has his name on two of them (MacCorquodale & Meehl, 1948; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955).'

"...After engaging Paul on matters of intellectual substance, one is assured with great certainty that Sir Francis Galton was indeed characterizing a meaningful class when he wrote, '[N]o one who has had the privilege of mixing in the society of the abler men of any great capital ...can doubt the existence of grand human animals.' Those are the exceedingly rare and extraordinary intellects who brilliantly illuminate the frontiers of their discipline and, through the richness of their intellectual products, cast clarifying lights on a number of others.

"Paul E. Meehl is such an individual, and I cannot imagine a more worthy candidate for an honorary Doctor of Science."

If there is a solitary vertex on the contemporary psychological pantheon, Paul Meehl occupies its place.