



Endel Tulving, PhD

Dr. Endel Tulving has arguably had the greatest impact of any single scientist on the understanding of human memory. A Canadian icon and major international figure in experimental psychology, Tulving's theories have provided the foundation for the whole field of memory research. His work has not rested on theoretical shelves but has led to an increased understanding of neurological disorders such as stroke and Alzheimer's disease.

At age 17, near the end of World War II, Tulving escaped his native Estonia before it was occupied by the Soviet Union. In 1949 he immigrated to Canada. After a short stint as a farmhand near London, Ontario, he enrolled in Honours Psychology at the University of Toronto. This marked the beginning of an incredibly productive career that has spanned over half a century.

Tulving's early work on "subjective organization" in free recall led him to the study of retrieval processes that had been largely neglected by previous generations of memory researchers. This work culminated in the "encoding specificity principle." In 1972 he introduced, and later elaborated, the theory of "episodic memory." This theory, now generally accepted, has played an important role in the evolution of the concept of "multiple memory systems." In recent years, with the advancement of technology, he has been studying the neural correlates of encoding and retrieval processes in different memory systems.

Tulving has influenced several generations of students who now hold prestigious posts in universities around the world. Almost humble to a fault, and with a kind manner and dry wit, Tulving has had a profound effect on both the research and practice in cognitive neuroscience, psychiatry and clinical neurology.

Recognition of Tulving's work has been reflected in many ways. His publications are highly cited; he has been elected to six national academies of science worldwide; and he has received numerous prestigious awards, including the Gairdner Award in 2005. He was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2006. At age 80 he continues to publish groundbreaking work at the Rotman Research Institute of Baycrest in Toronto.