IN MEMORY OF...

INSTITUTION BUILDER, GENTLE ACADEMICIAN,
NATIONAL SCIENTIST

ALFREDO V. LAGMAY
1919-2005

By F. G. David

He was about 43 years old when I first met him 43 years ago in June 1962. He looked younger than his age. His hair was cut, neither short nor long, combed for good, showing his forehead half-crowned atop his gentle gaze. His face looked fresh, without a trace of sweat, reflecting life that coped with stress. He wore a tie on a white shirt, tucked into a pair of Ivy League-style trousers. He was formal, sitting at his large desk; yet he came on with equipoise. Equanimity is a better word. He was the chairman of the Psychology faculty which was then occupying a room at the east end of the second floor in the College of Education. A divider that reached up to the ceiling separated his office from the three desks of the other faculty members. His office, with book-filled cabinets, opened to the north end. A large divider that fanned in and out like a door or window gave one a view of the university oval of serene acacia trees and greens beyond.
A first impression lasts, especially if it comes strong or well. It kind of sets the mode for any ensuing enterprise. Chaos theory phrases this as sensitive dependence on the initial condition.

Dr. Lagmay, 18 years my senior, came to know about me through a junior member of the Psychology faculty. He himself had known me a little before but only by name, because both he and I were members of the U.P. Writers’ Club. Once I had sat, he said he was inviting me to join the Psychology faculty, first as an interim teaching assistant. I had a BA degree in English and Comparative Literature, with a year of teaching English at the U.P. Department of English a year before, but never had a class in Psychology. At that time, I was the operator of the audiovisual equipment at the U.P. Listening Center on the second and north floor of the U.P. Main Library, playing poetry readings and classical music for students in Humanities. The Center was a project of the U.P. Writers’ Club, with equipment and volumes of long-playing records donated to the university by the Rockefeller Foundation. I was enjoying a year of reading philosophy, science, and mathematics, deciding whether I should proceed to Law or to Science like Physics while I was having a rhapsody with classical music and poetry reading. Psychology was not in my plan or on my mind. I had only an informal intimacy with it, out of my reading of some volumes of Jung, Freud, and a few like them.

I told him I liked his invitation but I needed some two weeks to think about his offer. I had to read of Psychology beyond Jung and Freud, especially of areas in the very science of the discipline. I said I could get interested only in the science of Psychology. Jung and Freud were literature to me. He replied with a shade of smile that he would be pleased if I chose the experimental and physiological area of Psychology, since the Department at the U.P. is designed to be a science. I did not know that he had a PhD from Harvard, and that he specialized in Experimental Psychology under the tutelage of Burrhus Frederick Skinner. I did not know that he had a BA and an MA in Philosophy and that he had studied under the late Dr. Ricardo Pascual, the academic who brought logical positivism into Philippine academe and who had studied under Bertrand Russell at the University of Chicago. I did not know. Did I say a mouthful? I did not know. I was young at 25 and Socrates should overlook my self-assurance and ignorance.

Dr. Lagmay had a ‘streak’—to say a ‘vision’ would be self-serving to me—he took me in, despite my being a tabula rasa in worthy areas of Psychology. He could only go by my unknowing commitment and by the weak fact that Skinner himself came from English Literature. He took a gamble, most likely a bad one. He perhaps went by good faith or shear
obstinacy to make a case of me. I knew he made a strong case through the academic channel to the Board of Regents. Now, looking back, I am sure that many a one then took his action as foolhardy, especially someone who was very much more qualified than I was and who had really liked to join Psychology. But Dr. Lagmay would not take no for an answer or yield to objections to action he took with apparent deliberation. He had been that kind of man—gentle, non-combative, unlike some academic baboon, but nevertheless resolute to push on his cause. He had been that kind of an academic man who had built the Department of Psychology from a fledgling discipline with four or five faculty members, squatting at the College of Education. Now, after only a half-century or so, the Department of Psychology, if by size it were a college, outranks the lower 50% of some 23 colleges on the Diliman campus. In this respect, it is unique among the many academic departments. It has more than 32 regular members in its faculty and 500 or so students in its AB, BS, MA, and PhD curricula. Alone among the academic departments in the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, it sits secured in its own edifice. How much more established the Department of Psychology could have been, had Dr. Lagmay not been given respite from administering the Psychology Department after 22 years of sitting in its chair, between 1955 and 1977. After all, he was some institutional builder—a builder as he had built himself.

Selected Works by A. V. Lagmay:


(1991). Science and Siddhartha: Confluence in Two Difference World Views. In Ravindra, R. (ed.) *Science and Spirit*. New York: Paragon House, pp. 227-239. (Being a paper on experimental research on occipital SEG-alpha and the relaxation response, research work on which was funded by the National Research Council of the Philippines and the National Academy of Science and Technology, and which was invited to be read in the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences held in Los Angeles, Nov. 24-27, 1988.)


**Fredegusto “FG” David**, born 1938, passed away on July 13, 2007. He served as Chair of the Department of Psychology several times. Until his death at age 69, he remained the only professor of Physiological Psychology or Biopsychology at the University of the Philippines. F.G. David had read this ‘Eulogy for A.V. Lagmay’ at the necrological service held on December 20, 2005, Palma Hall, University of the Philippines, Diliman. It was provided to *Social Science Diliman* by the Department of Psychology.