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**IRVING MARMER COPI /
UH PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR**

COURTESY PHOTO

Retired University of Hawaii philosophy professor Irving Marmer Copi, shown here with his daughter Margaret, was world-renowned for his textbooks on logic. Copi died Aug. 19 at 85.

Educator earned worldwide fame for work in logic

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By Helen Altonn
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Irving Marmer Copi, retired University of Hawaii philosophy professor who was world-renowned for his textbooks on logic and early work on computer developments, died Aug. 19 at his Honolulu home. He was 85.

"He was a towering figure in the history of 20th-century philosophy," said Kenneth Kipnis, UH professor of philosophy. "Irving was blessed with both a powerful mind and enormous clarity."

A UH professor from 1969 to 1990 when he retired because of ill health, Copi wrote the most widely used textbook in America on logic. Titled "Introduction to Logic," it was translated into many languages, including Hebrew, Kipnis said.

"And he wrote new editions every few years, which killed the used-book market. I doubt that any philosopher since (Bertrand) Russell, and maybe not even Russell, has sold more books than Irving Copi."

Kipnis also thinks of Copi as "laying the groundwork for the upsurge of computers in America."

Thomas Jackson, associate specialist in the UH philosophy department, said Copi "was at the cutting edge of the computer age, explaining theoretically what this whole thing was about and laying the foundation for what happened to our world."

Bertrand Russell, Copi's teacher at the University of Chicago, said in his autobiography that Copi (whose last name originally was Copilowish) was one of his most impressive students.

Copi was educated in mathematics and philosophy and devoted his life to study, teaching, writing and research. His bibliography includes 160 books and articles, with works translated into 10 languages.

"(Copi) confessed to me at one time he thought of himself as an aspiring metaphysician -- one who explores the nature of reality and human existence in the very broadest terms," said Eliot Deutsch, UH philosophy department chairman.

Copi had great integrity and wry humor, Deutsch said, recalling when a student asked Copi what to expect on a logic exam. Copi told him to ask the secretary to look at some recent exams.

The student complained to Copi after the exam that the questions hadn't changed, Deutsch said, and Copi replied, "Yes, but we changed the answers."

Growing up with such a brilliant father had its challenges, said Copi's daughter, Margaret, a Honolulu psychiatrist.

"He would demand that we support our assertions," she said. He would change a decision if reasons were convincing, she said.

Former students recalled Copi's unique traits as a teacher at services Aug. 23 at Temple Emanu-el, his daughter said. "He was popular, but ... you had to work very hard in his class and he never succumbed to grade inflation."

He won many academic honors during his career, which included teaching at the University of Michigan from 1958 to 1969 and appointments at the University of Illinois, the Air Force Academy, Princeton University and Georgetown University Logic Institute. He was involved with research at the University of Michigan and consulted with the Office of Naval Research.

Asked to teach logic at the University of Michigan in the early 1950s, Copi "looked at all the textbooks and none were any good, so he wrote one," Kipnis said. "The publisher told him it was too big, to split in two, and so he did."

He said the text was "head and shoulders above anything else out there, which is why people talk about Copi as being, in a sense, the father of logic courses now taught at every university.

"As logic courses boomed, philosophy departments hired more logicians, who were doing more publishing, and all of a sudden by the 1960s and 70s there was a huge number of people with background in logic when computers started taking off," Kipnis said.

"One of the real pluses for people who know logic, it is an easy translation to artificial languages that make computers work."

Copi co-authored several books and produced other writings concerning computer developments, artificial languages and "logical nets."

He and his late wife, Amelia, were Jewish community leaders here and in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Copi is also survived by sons Thomas of San Francisco, and David and Bill of Ann Arbor; and four grandchildren.

Interment was at Mililani Memorial Park. Donations in his honor can be made to Sof Ma'arav congregation of Temple Emanu-el.