

Parviz Mehraein

15.11.1931 – 16.10.2009

We are all travelers

*- what a wonder that the caravan
mourns the man who has reached the
goal*

(from his obituary notice)

Parviz Mehraein, formerly the Professor of Neuropathology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich, Germany, was a highly educated man. An authority in the diagnosis of neurodegenerative diseases, he also exhibited a remarkable philosophical attitude towards life. This was most apparent in his great personal modesty and essentially complete lack of interest in the limelight that has become second nature for many contemporary medical academics (some believe a necessity). It is very hard if not impossible to imagine Parviz Mehraein becoming aggressive or losing temper. It never happened in my presence and I never heard about an event. One major reason may have been the daily encounter with the central subject of his professional life's interest, the human brain in disease. Like hospital work, such activity can have a humbling effect on those who are susceptible. Parviz Mehraein examined more than 22,000 brain autopsy cases during his career as a neuropathologist and was one of the most experienced clinical neuropathologists worldwide. This made me choose him as my mentor in diagnostic neuropathology upon my return from Boston (Harvard) to Munich in 1992.

Parviz Mehraein was born on 15 November 1931 in Mashhad/Iran as son of the military officer Ghodratollah Mehraein and his wife Soraya, née Dorri. From 1938 until 1950 he attended the primary and secondary school in Mashhad and subsequently began his studies in medicine (1950-1951). In 1952 he moved to what was then West Germany to continue his studies in medicine and psychology at the University of Freiburg (1952-55) and in medicine at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich (1955-58). He passed the state exam in 1958.

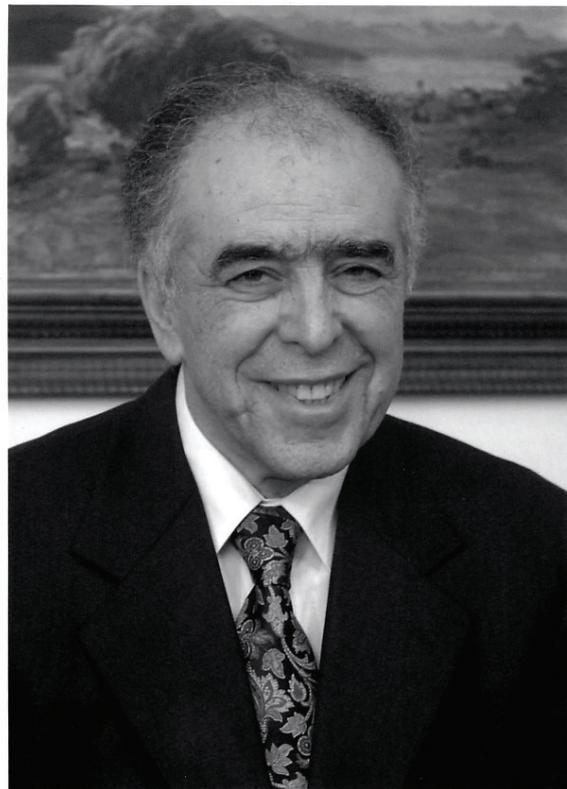


Figure 1 Professor Parviz Mehraein on 26 December 2006

In 1959, Parviz Mehraein married his beloved wife Liselotte (née Hauer). They were married for more than 50 years and have four daughters, Susan, Yasmin, Annabelle and the late Natascha.

Between 1958 and 1962, Parviz Mehraein worked at different Munich hospitals as a Medizinalassistent (medical assistant) observing the clinical training scheme at the time. During this period he completed his dissertation under Professor Joachim Ernst Meyer at the Nervenlinik of the University of Munich, which is the same hospital where Alois Alzheimer once worked. The topic of his thesis was „Epileptische Wesensveränderung und EEG-Befunde” (Epileptic personality changes and EEG findings). In 1962, Parviz Mehraein took up the position of Wissenschaftlicher Assistent (scientific assistant) and was later promoted Oberassistent (senior assistant) and group leader in the Department of Neuropathology at the Max-Planck-Institute of Psychiatry. Its director at the time was Professor Gerd Peters, author of the first and most important German textbook of neuropathology. His 16 years at the Max-Planck-Institute of Psychiatry were very fruitful and allowed Parviz Mehraein to submit his habilitation thesis in Neuropathology to the Medical Faculty of the University of Munich (1978). In the same year he was offered the chair of neuropathology and directorship of the newly created Institute of Neuropathology at the Medizinische Hochschule Hannover, Germany. Parviz Mehraein stayed in Hannover for five years before he was appointed full professor and director of the Institute of Neuropathology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich (1983-1997). After he had reached retirement age, he continued to lead the institute as acting director into the new millennium (1997-2000). Between 1995 and 2000, Professor Mehraein was also head of the

Reference Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases of the German Society for Neuropathology and Neuroanatomy (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Neuropathologie und Neuroanatomie).



Figure 2 Parviz Mehraein in the common room of his Institute at Thalkirchner Str. 36, Munich, Germany (photo taken in the mid-1990s). Walther Spielmeyer's large portrait shown in the upper left which he donated to the author for his London Department is now at the Brain and Mind Research Institute of the University of Sydney, Australia

Neuropathology in Germany had traditionally been very strong and was very well developed compared with other countries when Parviz Mehraein accepted the Munich chair. This was due in large part to the influence of the Munich school: Alois Alzheimer – Walther Spielmeyer - Willibald

Scholz - Gerd Peters. Professor Gerd Peters was Parviz Mehraein's clinical teacher. In the early 1980s, most chairs of neuropathology in Germany were occupied by Peter's former students but Parviz Mehraein had an especially close personal relationship to him which lasted until Gerd Peter's death in 1987 (4).

Although not a Christian and not a native of Germany, Parviz Mehraein was offered and accepted the only chair of neuropathology in catholic Bavaria in 1983 which speaks volumes of his reputation as a clinical neuropathologist, his affable and most pleasant personality, and equally his political astuteness. But it was Parviz Mehraein's genuinely positive and warm attitude towards fellow men and women combined with great personal generosity that made him truly stand out amongst colleagues.

Tragedy struck the Mehraein family in 1986 when the third daughter Natascha died in an accident. This event affected Parviz Mehraein deeply and until the end of this life but he would not become embittered. He continued to stay the warm and generous gentleman he had been, and that had made him so likable and unique. It was my impression that his Baha'i Faith provided great consolation to him. He had a relaxed and humorous view of his own death. On more than one occasion and with a smile in his eye he spoke of the fact that his "shelf-life was limited".

The Persian poets Saadi and Hafiz were among Parviz Mehraein's favoured authors, and he often quoted them in conversations both in Persian and German. From microscope sessions the author remembers, "*Reveal not every secret you have to a friend, for how can you tell but that friend may hereafter become an enemy. And bring not all mischief you are able to upon an enemy, for*

he may one day become your friend." (Saadi). He also occasionally quoted from the Qur'an in Arabic. Parviz Mehraein had absorbed the influences of his new environment of decades, and became a proud German citizen. While there was a remaining distinct accent in spoken German, Parviz Mehraein had a very fine sense for the German language and a rich vocabulary. In contrast, he was not keen to speak English.

Walther Spielmeier, who succeeded Alois Alzheimer as head of the famous neuropathology laboratory at Kraepelin's clinic (2), moved the tradition of the early Munich School of Neuropathology to Kraepelin's new institute, the Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie where Spielmeier became Institute Director in 1926, soon after Kraepelin's death. Following the Second World War, the institution was renamed the Max-Planck-Institute of Psychiatry. The Institute of Neuropathology at the University of Munich was not part of the Munich School of Neuropathology because it was newly created in the 1960s by Professor Otto Stochdorph. Thus, Parviz Mehraein brought the Alzheimer-Spielmeier tradition back to the University of Munich and he also received (rescued) the historical material which was later found to include Alzheimer's original cases (2). Walther Spielmeier's 1913 inaugural lecture has also been preserved because Parviz Mehraein received it on the occasion of his Hannover inaugural lecture in 1978 and he passed it on to the author for his London inaugural. This historical document is now at the Brain and Mind Research Institute of the University of Sydney, Australia.

Parviz Mehraein was a member of a number of professional societies including the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Neuropathologie und Neuroanatomie e.V., the International Society of Neuropathology, the German

Society of Pathology, the Executive Committee for dementia research of the International Society of Neurology, and founding member of the scientific advisory board of the German Society for Skull Base Surgery (Gründungsmitglied und wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Schädelbasis-Chirurgie). Professor Mehraein was also a member of the editorial board of *Neuropathology*.

The habilitation mentioned earlier was a formal requirement for promotion to the rank of professor in the German academic system until very recently. A habilitation thesis had to be supervised by a professorial chair and Parviz Mehraein was extraordinarily successful in this role (1). He further developed collaborative ties with a number of international colleagues, especially from Japan (3, 5, 6). His own habilitation thesis was on the topic of morphometric investigations in Alzheimer's disease and senile dementia (1), and his most highly cited publications are in this scientific field (5, 6).

We will remember Professor Parviz Mehraein with great affection and respect.

Acknowledgements

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*Professor Manuel B. Graeber MD PhD
FRCPATH
Neuropathologist
Barnet-Cropper Chair of Brain Tumour
Research
The Brain and Mind Research Institute
University of Sydney
94 Mallett Street, Camperdown, NSW 2050
Australia
Email: manuel@graeber.net*