

Brendan A. Maher, 84, transformed study of schizophrenia with laboratory focus.

Dr. Brendan A. Maher, a world-renowned Harvard University psychologist whose writings and scientific contributions revolutionized the search for the causes of mental illness, particularly schizophrenia, died peacefully on Tuesday at his home in Durham, North Carolina. He was 84.

The cause was a reoccurrence of prostate cancer, his colleagues said.

Dr. Maher was known throughout psychological science as both a scholar, who transformed the study of psychopathology from a descriptive enterprise to a laboratory science as editor and author, and a leading voice for graduate education in psychology.

He contributed extensively to the empirical study of psychopathology, particularly schizophrenia. He is viewed by many as the primary architect of the discipline of experimental psychopathology, a laboratory approach to research on mental illness. Indeed, his pioneering classic 1966 monograph, *Principles of Psychopathology: An Experimental Approach*, is widely viewed in the field as the landmark publication that articulated the meaning of an experimental approach to the study of psychopathology. *Principles of Psychopathology*, reprinted numerous times and in multiple languages, is still regarded as the seminal statement and vision that established the post-World War II field for both psychiatry and clinical psychology. Importantly, this approach laid an important part of the foundation for contemporary efforts to link specific genes for schizophrenia to quantifiable constructs mediating the disease on the paths between genes and prodromal symptoms, termed endophenotypes.

“At a time when most psychiatrists and clinical psychologists were content to merely describe the symptoms of mental illness and speculate psychoanalytically about the roots of disorder,” commented Mark F. Lenzenweger, Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York at Binghamton, “Dr. Maher emphasized the need to use the methods of the experimental laboratory to further our understanding of the basis of mental illness.” “He taught the field to count rather than simply rate or describe. Although straightforward this was a paradigm shift, a transformational moment for clinical psychology.”

Dr. Maher’s insights into the nature of disorganized thinking in the clinical presentation of schizophrenia remain a standard reference point for students of the illness and his focus on quantitative analysis of these disturbances continued with scientific advances until shortly before his death.

He also advanced the understanding of psychotic symptoms through careful dissection of delusional processes and the formation of delusional beliefs, the firmly held false beliefs that are common in schizophrenia. Maher’s account of delusional formations that follow on anomalous experiences provides one of the few accounts of the processes or mechanisms that both seeks to explain the emergence of delusional thoughts and is amenable to experimental research.

Dr. Maher, over his entire career, maintained an intellectual passion, namely, the examination of problems of method and measurement in psychopathology research in general, including a concern for understanding the patient’s experience.

He held professorial posts at Ohio State University, Northwestern University, Louisiana State University, the University of Wisconsin, as well as Brandeis University, where he served as Dean of the Faculty. He smiled his smile when recollecting his former status as an Irish Dean of Jewish-

founded Brandeis, and how he had nicely fitted that post. After two sabbaticals at the University of Copenhagen, his love for Danish culture was rewarded with an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1998. The vast majority of his career was spent at Harvard University. At Harvard, Dr. Maher twice served as the Chair of the Department of Psychology as well as Dean of the Graduate School. The program in experimental psychopathology in psychology at Harvard was a labor of love for him. While much of graduate training in clinical psychology was (and still is) focused on treatment of mental disorders, Maher trained generations of students to ask about the causes of mental illness. Perhaps, most importantly, his fabled “Brendan stories,” which were laced with clever observation, good humor, and Celtic wisdom, as well as his encouraging attitude and gentle manner are remembered by many students and colleagues.

“In addition to his impact on scientific training, Maher was known throughout the Harvard community as a statesman of first rank,” commented Dr. Lenzenweger, “those faced with the thorny and sometime fractious complexities of academic life often sought out Brendan for guidance and wisdom, which he shared generously.” He was the “go-to guy” for obituaries of the Harvard faculty – a task in which he took solemn but wry pride.

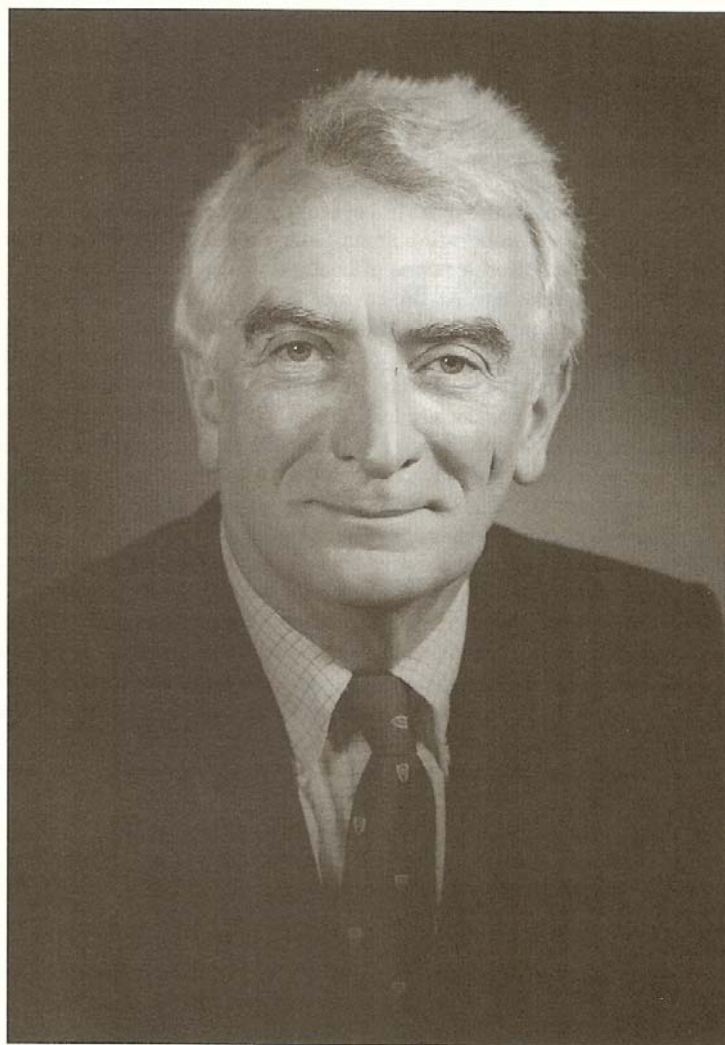
Dr. Maher was an able navigator in the complicated straits of academia and provided wise counsel to many at Harvard and beyond when a colleague, department chair, university administrator, or student found himself or herself in turbulent seas. Ever the keen and kindly observer of the eccentricities of academic life, Maher wrote, while Dean of the Graduate School at Harvard, a contemplation on the meaning of quality in humanities scholarship titled “*Facts, Irish Facts, Mythofacts, and Interesting Possibilities*” – an essay that has become “required reading” for administrators and others seeking to shepherd their faculties.

Brendan A. Maher was born in Widnes, Lancashire, England, on October 31, 1924. His parents had come from the County Tipperary in Ireland. During WW II, Maher volunteered to serve in the Royal Navy, enlisting as an Ordinary Seaman in 1942. He was promoted to the commissioned ranks and was discharged in 1947 as Lieutenant. He was the navigation officer in the leading minesweeper in the assault on Sword Beach in Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. He was later severely wounded sweeping mines in Holland and spent more than a year in the hospital before his discharge from the service. As a true hero, he was one of the fabled iron men in wooden boats lauded by the Allied Forces. He recounted this period in an autobiographical monograph, *A Passage to Sword Beach: Minesweeping in the Royal Navy* (Maher, 1996). Only near his death, exposed to an MRI scan, did he and his physicians learn there was still shrapnel in his body.

He is survived by his wife, Winifred (Barbara) Brown Maher; his five children; and five grandchildren. Maher was the Edward C. Henderson Research Professor of the Psychology of Personality in the Department of Psychology at Harvard. As one of his granddaughters observed on his passing, of course he would choose St. Patrick’s Day.

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