

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS BERENT ENÇ, 1938-2003**

For over thirty years Berent Enç was at the center of philosophical life and community in this university, a deeply respected and widely loved figure. A year has passed now since he died, in the early morning of the eighth of January of 2003. He had retired only a year earlier after a distinguished career spent entirely in the Wisconsin Department of Philosophy, twice serving as its chair. During the year which was left to him, he was diagnosed with both Hodgkin's disease and ideopathic pulmonary fibrosis. He soldiered on nonetheless through a course of chemotherapy, to finish the work of a decade and more on the philosophy of action. His book *How We Act* was published by Oxford University Press in August of 2003. His death was due to respiratory failure owing to fibrosis, exacerbated, or so he thought, by treatment for the cancer. Two weeks after he'd written a note to his colleagues to announce the apparent success of the chemotherapy he wrote us another, to say that his good news had been "a bit premature." He died six days later; at Meriter Hospital, his wife Jennifer Vaughn Jones and his family at his bedside.

Berent was born in Istanbul, Turkey, on May 24, 1938, the only child of his parents Rakim and Fahriye. They were a prosperous family; Rakim Enç was one of the first practicing actuaries in Turkey. Berent maintained ties with his native Turkey throughout his life, though he became an American citizen in the nineties. He was educated at Robert College, Istanbul (now Bogaziçi University), where he was an actor and director of some celebrity with the respected Robert College Players. It was during a theatrical production that he met Murevet Somuncuoglu whom he would marry in 1966. Upon graduation from Robert College, he briefly attended Princeton University, where he studied electrical engineering, and then Oxford University, to pursue his interest in philosophy. He received his doctorate from Oxford in 1967. It was then that he came to Madison, with Murevet, to take up his first appointment at Wisconsin. After returning to perform two years of national service in the Turkish army, he returned to Madison on a permanent appointment, and settled into the routines of academic and family life. His daughter, Defne, was born in 1977.

Berent's first field of specialization was the philosophy of science. His Oxford D.Phil. thesis, written under the supervision of Rom Harré, was concerned with the inter-dependency of theory and taxonomy, and the classification of phenomena generally. Against the seeming circularity of this, he developed a notion of a 'spiraling' dependency of each upon the other, both in the historical development of a theory and in the structure of its semantics and epistemology. He would often return to questions about the meaning and reference of scientific terms.

From these beginnings, he brought the convictions of scientific naturalism and a vestige of engineer's mentality to his later work in the theory of knowledge, mind, and action. His unwavering aim was to contribute to a philosophical understanding of the subjects that concern exclusively framed in terms belonging to, or consonant with, the science of that phenomenon. He understood very well the difficulty of making good his naturalist convictions. He was too good a philosopher to think it would do just to stand back and throw a piece of science at a philosophical question; nor did he have any time for the view that philosophy should retire from the arena, e.g. of the theory of the mind and leave the subject to neurophysiology. He understood that such theorizing is beset with problems of an essentially conceptual and logical nature, and how difficult these problems are. His attempts to contribute to their solution were sober, meticulous and ingenious. His philosophical work was informed by an appreciation of the history of his subject, scientific and philosophical. His study of Hume's views on causal necessity from the perspective of his theory of the passions is one of his finest works.

Much of Berent's work took shape in league with that of Fred Dretske, Dennis Stampe and Elliott Sober, who in the seventies and eighties produced a body of work that came to be thought of outside the walls of this university as having a characteristic Wisconsin flavor. Some will remember as the best of philosophical times the after seminar discussions over martinis at The Grotto, which went on from the mid sixties to the demise of the place, Berent (and Fred) always in the middle of it. The common core in the work of

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this group was an approach to questions in the philosophy of mind and action and meaning that sought to reduce these phenomena to their basis in natural law and in the patterns of causation and biological functioning that underlie them.

Berent offered, for instance, 'A defense of the identity theory' —the theory according to which mental events and properties are nothing but events in and properties of the brain. In this he effectively challenged a standard criticism of the identity theory by looking more accurately at the paradigms of scientific reduction upon which both the theory and this criticism had depended. Another paper, 'Intentional states of mechanical devices,' contains a paradigm of the kind of idea that was admired in this circle. 'Intentionality' (the traditional 'mark of the mental') is the directedness of mental states to objects, 'objects' being defined with a precision that seems to defy logic. The proposal of this piece is this same intentionality is found in a perfectly intelligible form in the states of such a simple device as a thermostat. The analysis drew on the differential causal and nomic relations of the properties of the intentional object to the state in question, and upon the fact that the device subserves a particular function. The structures revealed in these simplest manifestations of intentionality, were then to be traced back through the complexities of fully human thought and deliberate intentional action.

The ambitious program adumbrated in these papers occupied Berent throughout his career. *How We Act* now contains his final contributions to the advancement of that program, building upon and extending his earlier work, and putting forward a sophisticated 'causal theory' of action. It advances from his earlier papers on the notion of *function*, specifically of the mechanisms of the mind underlie the mental states that generate human behavior and even fully deliberate and free action. It advances also from his painstaking work on the question of 'deviant' causal chains that many have thought unanswerable. The book is distinguished by the characteristic generosity with which he treats the efforts of other writers, not excluding those with whom he heartily disagrees.

Berent was a superb and widely loved teacher. It was a pleasure to listen to him lecture, in his rich and urbane voice. (Lecturing, he maintained, needed something of the actor's art.) He was as good a teacher of freshman, and as serious, as he was of graduate students. He greeted his students' efforts with enthusiasm and generous interpretation. He liked to guide students to see things for themselves, and to make them feel proud of their efforts.

No one contributed more to the life of his department. In the counsels of the department he represented mature good sense, and he wielded his considerable authority with a certain shrewdness. No one was better trusted. He hosted countless departmental receptions and celebrations. He engaged new members of the department warmly and welcomed many into his close friendship. In Colloquia, he was a masterful dialectician, as penetrating in dialogue with visiting philosophers as he was unfailingly gracious.

Berent was the most civilized of men. He was a devoted lover of music and drama, and especially of opera. (So that, in retirement he had planned to learn Italian.) Few chances to attend the Lyric Opera and have a French dinner in Chicago were missed. He took great joy in things he liked. He was a serious bridge player and an audiophile and an oenophile and a great gourmand. He loved traveling in Europe following detailed itineraries designed to maximize evenings at great restaurants. He enjoyed showing off the delights of Istanbul to his friends and family, and other Turkish sites, which he did with tireless attention to the happiness of everyone in the entourage. He was a storied cook of great range and skill, especially in the French tradition—the kind who makes his own puff pastry—and a wonderful Turkish cook as well. He was exceedingly kind and generous, and his manners, while entirely natural, were well described by a friend as nearly courtly. Berent's company was delightful. There was simply nobody one would rather spend time with.

In 1993, he married Jennifer Vaughn Jones, and settled into a newly happy life with her on Adams Street. The years that followed were good ones. Evenings at Berent's, in the warmth of his and Jennifer's hospitality, will be remembered with special fondness. Few people can have held and been held by so many in such friendship, and the loss of him to his friends cannot be made good.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE
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