

ERNST SIMMEL--CREATIVE SCIENTIST

by

Jerome and Ruth Lachenbruch

Ernst Simmel made many significant contributions to psychoanalytic theory and to the psychoanalytic movement; in fields tangential to psychoanalysis he was a stimulating and interested participant. His feeling for problems of mental health was foreshadowed in his doctoral dissertation on dementia praecox. Both in Germany and in the United States he made and fostered contact with educators, social workers and jurists. The wide range of his theoretical and practical knowledge of psychoanalysis is shown in the titles of papers published in both countries:

- Zur Psychoanalyse des Spielers. 1920  
Grundsatzliches zum Kampfe gegen Par. 218. 1925  
(Anti-abortion legislation)  
Die psychoanalytische Behandlung in der Klinik. 1928
- The "Doctor-game," Illness and the Profession  
of Medicine. 1926  
Psychoanalytic Observations on the Origin and  
Progress of Disease. 1922  
A Case of Exhibitionism. Report to Probation  
Department. 1939

During World War I, as an army field doctor, Simmel developed a technique in the handling of combat fatigue, then

called shell shock, which he described in his paper, "War Neuroses and Psychic Trauma." That paper created a sensation at the International Psychoanalytic Congress in 1918. During World War II a succeeding generation of therapists employed a similar treatment for combat fatigue, except that they replaced hypnotherapy by Pentothal.

In 1927 Simmel founded the first psychoanalytically oriented sanitarium in Tegel, near Berlin. Its principles still serve as guidelines for present day mental hospitals. He introduced ideas such as the basic study of the patient's total psychic history; he recognized the need for hospital treatment of compulsion neuroses, phobias, somatic problems as well as gambling, impulse disorders, certain adolescent problems and addictions of all kinds. For the patient there was daily psychotherapy; for the staff, professional and non-professional, training in specific methods and attitudes. Simmel's ultimate goal: all hospital workers to have personal analysis. The entire atmosphere at Tegel was pervaded with warmth; and the harmonious physical surroundings provided a further therapeutic innovation. Despite Simmel's brilliant thinking and planning for the sanitarium, and the initial enthusiasm expressed by many supporters of Tegel, it was doomed to failure. The economic crisis in Germany and the rise of Nazism limited its existence.

Simmel's progressive, socialist activities made him

suspect to the Nazis, and it proved necessary for him to leave Germany. His sanitarium as well as his scientific writings had become known to psychoanalysis in Los Angeles, who had established the Psychoanalytic Study Group in the late twenties. Their need for an experienced teacher and organizer prompted them to invite Simmel to settle in Los Angeles. Soon after his arrival he enlarged the scope of the Study Group and made it a real forum for the exposition of Freudian analytic principles. He organized stimulating meetings of the group and seminars for educators and social workers. He was a frequent lecturer at universities and before professional groups.

The Study Group evolved by steps into the Los Angeles Institute for the psychoanalytic training of physicians. At first this work was carried out under the aegis of the Chicago Institute, later under the Topeka Institute. Eventually the number of psychoanalysts on the West Coast increased so that a California organization could qualify, according to the requirements of the American Psychoanalytic Association, as an autonomous training institute. Simmel, who had been in close touch with the Menningers of Topeka even before coming to the United States, was instrumental in initiating the move toward the establishment of training facilities. From the founding of the auxiliary institute in the late thirties until the time of his death Ernst Simmel conducted seminars for and supervised candidates.

Among the original, creative papers Simmel wrote in the course of his career in Germany the following must be mentioned:

War Neuroses and Psychic Trauma. 1918  
(Awarded the Freud Prize)  
Psychoanalytic Viewpoints for the Treatment  
of Psychoses. 1929  
The Psychogenesis of Organic Disturbances and  
their Psychoanalytic Treatment. 1931

He was one of the founders of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, was a therapist in its polyclinic. He was recognized by the pioneers Abraham and Eitingon as well as by Freud for his excellence in organization and for his creative, intuitive therapeutic perception.

Ever since Simmel's death there have been sporadic attempts at bringing out a collection of his most important papers. It would be highly appropriate for the Society/Institute to sponsor the publication of Simmel's writings. It would also be a mark of distinction for the present generation of analysts to give recognition to the founder of the Los Angeles organization by making funds for the work of translating and editing these papers.

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