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OBITUARY

ERNST SIMMEL: 1882–1947

Another member of the early, great generation of psycho-analysts has passed away in Los Angeles, California. On November 11, 1947, Ernst Simmel died of a coronary occlusion.

He was only sixty-five years old. His friends had earnestly hoped that his span of life might have been prolonged to permit him to complete the several undertakings in research and institutional work he had charted, and to enjoy an old age free from worry about the exigencies of daily life. In addition to the physical suffering caused by his heart ailment, adversity made his last few years increasingly bitter. These undeserved trials sprang, ironically, from Simmel's idealistic and trusting character.

Nowhere has Ernst Simmel, the man, been more appositely described than in the paper read by Frances Deri at the Memorial Meeting[1] in Los Angeles, California, on December 13, 1947. She pointed out that Simmel was possessed of personality qualities that made him more than an average man, traits that raised him to eminence among analysts, to the status of leader, of pioneer, gifts that produced a physician at once intellectually and intuitively perceptive, a helper in the broadest possible sense. His integrity of character; his absolute fearlessness (which did not fail him even when he was in the clutches of the Gestapo); his brilliant wit were familiar not only to his close friends, but also to the larger circle who learned to know him at the annual meetings of the International Psycho-Analytic Association.

His friends were aware of his shortcomings, most of which were merely shadows of his virtues. His ethical code kindled in him a constant readiness to assist others in every way, whether their problems were professional, economic or personal. In his unselfish giving, he disregarded his own interests to such an extent that his last year of illness was an unmerciful struggle for survival in every respect.

Ernst Simmel was born in Breslau, the youngest of nine children, and grew up in Berlin. His pungent wit, particularly when expressed in German, had the dry humour characteristic of the common man of that metropolis. For it was the common man who appealed most strongly to the socially-minded Ernst Simmel, and whom he strove at all times to help.

He received his medical training in Berlin, and in Rostock, Germany. Although Simmel's interest in psychiatry was aroused early, he did not immediately engage in the practice of this branch of medicine, but worked for several years in other fields, including pathology. In 1913 he began his private practice in general medicine. He chose a modest suburb of Berlin, because he was not interested in a lucrative practice.

His doctor's dissertation (1908), the first of a long list of scientific papers, bore the title: 'A Critical Contribution Concerning the Psycho-genesis of Dementia Praecox.' When one considers the status of scientific thinking about mental disease at that time, the title had remarkable implications. It is noteworthy that the young physician, whose medical thinking had been shaped by the exclusively organic and descriptive teaching then prevailing, was sufficiently alert and open-minded to recognize the validity of the Freudian approach and its application to Dementia Praecox, as suggested by Jung. He foresaw that these theories were to open new vistas for research and an understanding of mental phenomena.

During World War I, he was at first a general medical officer with combat troops. In 1916, he was placed in charge of a special military hospital for war neuroses. It was here that his career as a psychotherapist and psycho-analyst was initiated. He launched upon a trail-blazing activity, using hypnosis in combination with comprehension of psycho-analytic dynamics in the treatment of soldiers suffering from war neuroses. In essence, the methods used in World War II were identical with those initiated by Simmel twenty-five years earlier. It is a striking commentary on Ernst Simmel's vision, skill and courage that he employed these techniques at a time when this area was truly terra incognita.

His experiences in World War I were summarized in his paper: 'The Inter-relationship of War Neuroses and Mental Trauma—A Hypno-Analytic Research.' For this work, he was awarded the Freud Prize in 1918.

After the war, he returned to Berlin and resumed

[1] Mrs. Frances Deri, 'Simmel, the Man'; at this meeting other papers were given by Dr. Max Horkheimer, 'Simmel, and Freudian Philosophy'; Dr. Emanuel Windholz, 'Simmel's Scientific Contribution to Psycho-Analysis'; Judge Atwell Westwick, 'Simmel's Work in Criminology'; Dr. David Brunswick, 'Simmel, the Organizer'; Dr. Ralph R. Greenson, 'Simmel's Influence on the Younger Generation of Psycho-Analysts.'

private practice. From that time on, his career branched out from his own practice of psychiatry and psycho-analysis into research, teaching and organising on an extensive scale. Except for the brief interruption caused by the ascent of Nazism and his emigration to the United States, this aspect of his work remained unbroken.

Simmel was one of the founders of the Berlin Psycho-Analytic Institute. He was instrumental in developing some of the fundamental principles for training psycho-analysts; through participation in the establishment of the first education committee in Berlin, he worked out the initial training curriculum. In this connection, he introduced the plan of supervised analyses and case seminars.

In 1927 at Schloss Tegel, near Berlin, Ernst Simmel founded the first sanitarium operating on psycho-analytic principles. As its medical director he not only treated patients psycho-analytically, but also devised methods of occupational therapy based on metapsychological principles. Cases admitted for treatment at this institution included patients suffering from somatic diseases, addictions, borderline schizophrenia, and sexual criminal offenders.

Simmel was invited to come to Southern California in 1934 to establish an institute to train psychiatrists in psycho-analysis. Here he became the official representative of the Chicago Psycho-Analytic Institute. He organized the few trained analysts then in California into the Psycho-Analytic Study Group of Los Angeles, and later he was the organizer of the San Francisco and the Los Angeles Psycho-Analytic Societies. He introduced and conducted the first psycho-analytic seminars for teachers and social workers, and eventually evolved a programme to train psychiatrists in psycho-analysis. It was largely due to his efforts that psycho-analysis achieved scientific approbation in the eyes of the public and of the medical profession in California.

For years he tried to establish a Psycho-Analytic Institute in Southern California for training and teaching, as well as for research based on data gathered in a psycho-analytic hospital and a free clinic. Unfortunately, circumstances permitted only the establishment of a single department of such an institute, namely, a school to train psychiatrists in psycho-analysis. It was one of the disappointments that darkened the last months of his life that his dream of an institute to further and safeguard the psycho-analytic movement in Southern California was not realized.

Although Ernst Simmel did not belong, chronologically speaking, to the early group of students of psycho-analysis, who formed the first round table in Freud's house, he must be regarded as one of the men who helped to build the basic structure of the science and art of psycho-analysis. He was among those who had the ability to carry out the important tasks of cementing the foundations and of putting in the supporting beams and girders.

Simmel had a truly original and creative mind, a pioneering spirit. Despite his thorough understanding of and adherence to psycho-analytic theory and his mastering of its technique, he was not inhibited in his desire to experiment, nor in his attempts to open new paths into hitherto unworked areas where psycho-analysis could be applied. His intellectual independence was not, however, distorted by residues of an unsolved Œdipus Complex, and did not take the form of disguised rebelliousness or diadochal rivalry. He was too thoroughly mature and mentally too well disciplined to let his sharp vision be dimmed by unrecognized emotional factors. He preferred to wait and see what others had to give, rather than prematurely to make definite formulations about new or deviating theories that occurred to him. He did not blindly accept every word of the master as unalterable truth. On the other hand, he did not find it necessary to be original at any cost, to throw overboard well-established structural components of our science. Nor did he succumb to the 'return of the repression'. Although some of his successful experiments in therapy were most 'unorthodox', he did not have the urge to found a new school or to invent a new nomenclature. He was able to integrate whatever new ideas he had with the body of psycho-analytic theory as it had developed organically. Moreover, he was dissatisfied with the growing tendency to regard psycho-analysis as merely a branch of medicine, as another therapeutic technique.

Simmel's scientific publications number more than sixty. The problems with which he was chiefly concerned can be classified under the following headings: war neuroses; institutional psycho-analytic treatment; therapy for psychoses; the psychogenesis of organic diseases, and what is now generally called psycho-somatic medicine; and the application of psycho-analysis to criminology. In addition to these topics, there are a number of papers on a variety of subjects.

Some of his metapsychological papers bring into sharp focus certain difficult and controversial concepts and theories about the origin of the libidinal and the destructive drives. For many of us, his bold vision seems to provide a satisfactory answer to questions that everyone interested in the metapsychological aspect of psycho-analysis has asked himself, questions probing into those early stages of development where libidinal and destructive instincts apparently still form primeval chaos. Simmel's understanding of the oneness of the psychic and the physical aspects of the human being, especially as evidenced in organic diseases, went beyond the analysis of the dynamics of the individual into interesting attempts to work out a more general metapsychological formulation.

When a great person dies, one almost always

feels that he has died too young. This was especially true of our friend, Ernst Simmel. He was called away from a desk full of unfinished work. It was his ardent wish to pour out his stream of ideas, to bring to fruition his far-reaching plans. Three days before he died—this is the painful memory I carried away from my last visit with him—he told me of numerous papers that, in the course of the years, he had read at various meetings and had then put away and forgotten to publish. It was deeply distressing to see the anguish beneath the controlled calm of his countenance, to sense his realisation that his urge to give his work to the world, to mankind, might be frustrated.

Ernst Simmel used himself up prematurely. During the last year of his life, he ate his heart out in working for psycho-analysis. It was grief that killed him years too soon.

Ernst Simmel's friends and students, the members of the Los Angeles Society and of the Los Angeles Psycho-Analytic Study Group, as well as all those throughout this area who are interested in psycho-analysis, feel his loss most deeply. For they know it will be a difficult, an almost insurmountable task to find another such leader and teacher.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

SCIENCE AND BELIEF[1]

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Throughout the whole period of civilization which, one is almost constrained to say, has just ended, matters of belief have been the central focus around which human life has orientated itself. We regard ourselves as the heirs of a Christian civilization, and for centuries it was accepted without question that the fundamental cultural boundary was between the Believers and the Heathen. Within each realm, the differences which divided men into more or less exclusive and often hostile groups were usually expressed in terms of belief in certain formulated doctrines. Some of the most ferocious of all wars have raged between people who considered that their most important characteristic was a belief in Catholicism or Protestantism, in the Divine Right of Kings, in Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, or some other such ideal. Many modern historians would wish to look behind the dividing lines drawn in terms of belief, and claim that one can discover other factors, usually economic in the broad sense, which separated the various groups, and of which, they argue, the consciously held beliefs were mere rationalizations couched in the fashionable religious terminology of the age. That may well be largely true; but it must still be recognized that, as far as an individual man attempted to control his own behaviour, and act as a conscious agent, it was by such beliefs that he was influenced. The religious martyrs did not, consciously, die on behalf of a rising class of entrepreneurs or bourgeois middlemen, but for points of doctrine. And even those who did not in fact believe anything deeply enough to die for it, seem for the most part to have considered beliefs as things to which it was quite proper to give such attachment, were not everyday human nature all too weak for such devotion.

In speaking of beliefs in this way, I am not, of course, referring to comparatively trivial theories concerned with the details of behaviour. A man may believe in the wisdom of the editors of his daily newspaper, in the existence of ghosts, or the value of boarding schools for boys, for any of a number of reasons, most of which are likely to be related to the satisfaction of his conscious or unconscious wishes. Such convictions are not of the first importance even for moulding the believer's own character, let alone for the history of civilization. But a much greater importance must be attached to the ultimate general beliefs or fundamental ideals which provide the guiding principle on which men try, somewhat intermittently perhaps, to direct their lives, and which are the aspiration towards which they feel they ought to strive. It is these major ideals—such things as Christianity, Reason or Communism—that I shall be referring to when I speak of beliefs.

At the present time, a very large and influential body of people within our civilization—perhaps the majority of its members—no longer regard religious dogmas as worthy of complete devotion. In fact, we do not now find it intellectually satisfying to base our actions on any belief, however intensely held, for which objective evidence cannot be produced. But the older attitude of mind persists, not only among those unused to precise thought, but in many places where one would have expected a fuller appreciation of the implications of recent psychological investigation. For instance, a few years ago I wrote an essay which attempted to relate man's ethical ideas to the nature of organic evolution, and particularly to the characteristic human mechanism of evolution. A number of scientists, and others, engaged in a discussion of

[1] The second Ernest Jones Lecture delivered to the British Psycho-Analytical Society on November 19, 1947.