


News and Notes

Eugen Bleuler's anniversary

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German E. Berrios, Editor

The centenary of the publication of Eugen Bleuler's book on 'Schizophrenia' (1911a) has been celebrated this year. *History of Psychiatry* is publishing a charming vignette below, specially written for our journal by Frau Tina Joos-Bleuler (Bleuler's granddaughter). Eugen Bleuler was born on 30 April 1857 at Zollikon (Switzerland), at the time a farming village and now part of the Zurich conurbation. Of peasant stock, Bleuler's family seems to have been involved in the struggle for peasants' rights that culminated in the foundation of Zurich University in 1833.¹ It is said that the sight of professors of psychiatry arriving from Germany and unable to understand the local dialect inspired Bleuler to become a psychiatrist. Trained under Burckhardt and Schaefer at Waldau, Charcot and Magnan in Paris, the von Gudden Institute in Munich, and Forel at the Burghölzli, Bleuler became director of the Burghölzli in 1898. He retired in 1927 and died on 15 July 1939. Abraham, Binswanger, Jung, Brill, Minkowski and others were his students. In 1923 a *Festschrift* in his honour was published carrying, *inter alia*, papers by Kurt Schneider, Hermann Rorschach, Ernst Kretschmer, Hans Grühle and Ludwig Binswanger.²

Scholarship on Bleuler can be roughly divided into research on: (a) his contribution to the concept of schizophrenia, and (b) the rest of his writings. Until not long ago, publications on the former far outnumbered those on the latter. Of late, this difference has been corrected and an integrated *Bleuleriana* is beginning to emerge.

Earlier work on the history of schizophrenia was of indifferent quality and was mostly carried out by clinicians wanting 'schizophrenia' to have a long past (Berrios, Luque and Villagrán, 2003). More recently, non-medical historians have started joining in, and their detached perspective has generated questions about the ontology of schizophrenia that clinicians may feel shy to ask (e.g. Gilman, 2008).

Bleuler has not been neglected by his fellow countrymen. Starting with the useful pamphlet on his work written by Wyrsh (1957), there has been a series of important publications: for example, the excellent set of papers dealing with Bleuler's concept of schizophrenia and with other contributions by the Zurich school (Bleuler, 1979); a book dedicated to Bleuler's thinking (Hell, Scharfetter and Moller, 2001); a paper on Bleuler's concept of schizophrenia (Scharfetter, 2001); and more recently a first-class book by Scharfetter (2006) wherein a serious analysis is undertaken of the multiple strands of Bleulerian thinking.

In addition to his interest in schizophrenia (and perhaps on account of it), Bleuler showed much conceptual curiosity and early on became associated with members of the Psychodynamic Movement. His concern to explain mental disorder in terms of emotions and psychogenesis³

accounts for his complex relationship with C.G. Jung (Möller, Scharfetter and Hell, 2002) and with Freud (Dalzell, 2007; Falzeder, 2007). In the event, neither of these associations bore fruit but the ideas he learnt from both Jung and Freud⁴ modulated the manner in which he thought of mental illness in general, and of schizophrenia in particular. His interest in the psychopathology of emotions also showed early in his work.⁵ Indeed, one of his best books is about how affectivity, suggestibility and paranoia might interact (Bleuler, 1906/1912). Other books seem to have developed in the context of his work on schizophrenia, such as his monographs on Negativism (1910/1912) and Autistic thinking (Bleuler, 1921b). The importance and originality of later books such as *Naturgeschichte der Seele* (Bleuler, 1921a), *Die Psychoide* (Bleuler, 1925) and *Mechanismus-Vitalismus-Mnemismus* (Bleuler, 1931) are yet to be determined.

Notes

- 1 For biographical details see: Berrios, 1987; Ellenberger, 1970: 285–8; Graf-Nold, 1991; Klaesi, 1956; Müller, 1973.
- 2 It first appeared as an issue of the *Zeitschrift für der gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1923).
- 3 Interesting in this regard is Bleuler's paper on the distinction between physiogenic and psychogenic (Bleuler, 1930).
- 4 In an early paper published in the short-lived journal that he edited with Freud, Bleuler (1911b) felt the need to set out his differences with the Viennese writer.
- 5 For an account of Bleuler's psychopathology, see Kuhn, 2004.

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Being a member of the Bleuler family

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I didn't know my grandfather, Eugen Bleuler (1857–1939), personally. He died a number of years before I was born. Everything I know about him was told to me by my father, Manfred Bleuler, Eugen's eldest son. He not only told me, but he also wrote it down: every Christmas I would receive a new chapter about our family history. In that way, I got to know and to treasure my grandfather.

Eugen Bleuler came from a long established Zollikon family. At that time, Zollikon was a rural community, more than an hour away from the city of Zurich. Today, Zollikon has become part of Zurich. For two or three centuries, Eugen Bleuler's forebears – and even his parents – lived modestly, as did most people in Zollikon. They earned their living partly from the land (wine-growing and live-stock), and partly from processing silk. The city-dwellers used to buy the raw material, and until the nineteenth century they were the only people allowed to sell on the produced silk. At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, the simple people living on the lakeshore took an increasing interest in the developing sciences, and this was also the case for the Bleuler family. Eugen's parents lived very frugally so that they could enable their children to have a good education. Furthermore, both his parents' families were actively involved in public life and regularly took on administrative positions in the Zollikon community. However, after their only daughter, Eugen's sister, became ill, they were completely occupied with taking care of her.

Until 1830, when a liberal revival movement began in Switzerland under the influence of the French Revolution, Zollikon was still dominated administratively by the city of Zurich. Until that time, third-level education was hardly possible for citizens living in the country communities. Only with the introduction of compulsory schooling and the founding of the university in 1833 was it open to all male citizens; women had to wait another 30 years. A university education was unusual

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until the time of Bleuler's youth. The professorships were mostly occupied by foreigners. This also meant that the first professors of psychiatry, and the first directors of the psychiatric clinic, were German academics (Wilhelm Griesinger, Bernard von Gudden, Eduard Hitzig). The locals were disappointed that 'their psychiatrists' could not speak with patients in their mother tongue (Swiss dialect). Moreover, the first directors of the clinic were more concerned with research and academic teaching, and, in the eyes of the local people, too little with the individual patient. It was out of this dissatisfaction – and so that he could give more help to his schizophrenic sister – that my grandfather's wish to become a psychiatrist arose, and indeed to be a psychiatrist who would look after his patients in a more personal way.

Eugen Bleuler conducted his research with untiring diligence. Where he got the desire and skill, it is difficult to say. Maybe it was from the yearning of the country people for education and an academic career, which for so many years had remained unfulfilled. In his childhood, his whole existence revolved around the down-to-earth and yet intellectually stimulating life of his extended family, which had a great regard for science and whose homes were well stocked with good books. It is said that, as a boy, he was very spirited and boisterous. At the *Gymnasium* he had excellent teachers who motivated him, and classmates who came from an intellectual milieu and who considered themselves born to be scientists. As a teenager, Eugen is said to have been outgoing and active. He was a member of the student gymnastics club. His university friends gladly visited him at home, and he found the dance evenings, especially after the grape harvest, good fun. It was only after he had completed his studies that he became serious, conscientious and devoted to his work, and this lasted until the end of his life. He also felt a lifelong responsibility towards his own family. He took care of his sister (after the death of his parents) in the Burghölzli, as part of his own family and a patient until she died.

Before this he had been director and chief physician for 12 years at the Rheinau psychiatric clinic which he was unhappy to leave when he was nominated director of the Burghölzli university psychiatric clinic in Zurich in 1898. It was typical of his attitude that he did not want to accept this appointment, for he had been very close to his patients at Rheinau and left them reluctantly. A principal reason for his accepting the offer in Zurich was the serious illness of both his parents whom he could scarcely visit from Rheinau. They lived near the Burghölzli, and after his father died he organized a room for his mother in the Burghölzli, although she never used it because she died shortly after her husband.

In 1901 Eugen Bleuler married Hedwig Waser, whom he got to know as a fellow campaigner in the abstinence movement. Then, alongside his commitment to his work, his obligation to his wife and five children was very important to him. Although the interests of the couple were so different, my father describes the marriage as fulfilled and happy: his mother's moods were changeable – lively and gregarious, sometimes jolly, sometimes sad, always depending on the circumstances – whereas his father was serious, controlled, restrained, calm, always somewhat worried, and rather quiet. He was very exact and a lover of order, whereas she was quite volatile. What they had in common was an interest in people, psychology, social issues and, especially, abstinence. Both loved literature, and they adored and treasured nature, the mountains, the sea, flowers and animals. Nature walks were a great pleasure for them. Until my father started school, his parents used to go for holidays by themselves in the mountains. My father always remembered their radiant faces when they were welcomed back, their excitement in describing the scenery they had experienced, and their handing over little mementos such as butterflies, feathers, pressed flowers, and fruit. Later they used to spend their holidays together with the children, often in Quinten. In 1913 they undertook their longest journey and their only 'world tour', which lasted about two months. Bleuler had been invited by Adolf Meyer – who was Swiss and also, at that time, a leading psychiatrist

in the USA – to the opening of a clinic in Baltimore. Thanks to the invitation and to some consultations, the Bleulers were able to afford the long journey: from Calais by ship to Barbados and Jamaica, and then by train through Central America to Panama, and by train and banana boat to Baltimore. After the speeches at the clinic, they travelled by train to Niagara and then by ship back to Holland, where they visited some more towns. The children, who were still young, stayed behind in the Burghölzli in the care of maids, and they greatly enjoyed the many letters they received from their parents.

During his whole time at the Burghölzli (1898–1927), Bleuler lived, first alone and then with his wife and family, in the apartment designed for the director from the outset of clinic's construction, on the first floor of the main building – and in which I, many years afterwards, also grew up. The apartment was large and spacious. But good use was made of it, when one thinks that Bleuler made one room available to a junior doctor, and that he employed, at his own expense, a secretary, whose office, bedroom and living room were also in the apartment.

Family life in the Burghölzli was modest and simple, and it ran along regular lines. Bleuler passed through the apartment several times a day on his way to the doctors' office and back, from the ward on the women's side to the ward on the men's side. If his children met him in the apartment, he never stopped, but would utter kind and encouraging words – occasionally also chiding ones – to them. The whole family came together at mealtimes, and there were often lively discussions at table. Even in their schooldays, the children used to hear about Sigmund Freud and his teachings. Otherwise, because Bleuler also worked on Sundays, his children saw little of him. They were all the happier, therefore, on excursions made together or on rare holidays away. To save time, Bleuler always walked briskly, and he used to skip a step on the stairs. He used to carry a notebook in which he noted down what he wanted to talk about in his morning report. In another pocket he kept little sheets of notepaper on which he recorded observations and thoughts, so as to put them in order later and use them as a basis for his scientific works.

My father learned from his own father an exceptional way of dealing with patients, trying to understand them fully for as long as they were together. Both his parents had handed on to their children a certain frugality and a disdain for luxury goods. They were economical, but not austere. On the contrary, they were an example to their children of the ability to take pleasure in small, material things. My father and his siblings found Eugen Bleuler tender and kind. His subordinates in the Burghölzli, however, sometimes characterized him as severe and strict. He had clear and precise ideas about life and morality. He had little interest in the Church and religion; Eugen and Hedwig Bleuler did not usually go to Church, and there were no prayers said in the family. Both lived under the influence of the Enlightenment: one should live in this world, seek beauty and help others. Eugen Bleuler was critical of the time when theologians rather dogmatically imparted religious education, and children had to learn the catechism by rote and without any understanding of it. He perceived the religiosity of many people as hypocrisy, although it never occurred to either of them to leave the Church: membership belonged to the order of things and to tradition. Bleuler deemed it all the more his duty to do right and to fulfil his responsibilities towards his family, patients and country. Socially, he was reserved, but he had life-long friends from his school and university days. Among the arts, poetry was, above all, closest to his heart, and classical literature meant a lot to him.

Through this account of some details from my grandfather's life, I have become close to him – even if I never experienced him personally. I marvel at his untiring diligence and dedication to his patients. I have not included an appreciation of my grandfather's scientific works, and I leave that to others who understand them more than I do. I often imagine to myself how difficult it must have been to work academically with only a typewriter and no computer, although with considerably

less red tape and bureaucracy than today. But perhaps that was exactly the secret of his success: Eugen Bleuler took the time to devote himself completely to his patients – without thereby neglecting his family.

What does it mean to me to be descended from two distinguished psychiatrists? Quite deliberately I decided long ago not to study medicine, but agronomy. As a psychiatrist I would have found it difficult to be independent, and I could scarcely have fulfilled the high expectations. The pressure would have been a burden. Of the nine grandchildren of Eugen Bleuler, only one became a psychiatrist. But, as a child growing up in the same, albeit smaller, director's apartment, I felt at home in the Burghölzli. The farm attached to it, with its cows, horses and pigs, already fascinated me. I have fond memories of our garden, of the park belonging to the clinic, the Burghölzli hill, and the huge building, where there was always something to discover. We celebrated festivities together with the patients and all the staff, and I felt part of it all – it was like an extended family. I learned from my father to treat people and, above all, mental patients, with dignity and respect. On the other hand, I used to completely repress justified and unjustified criticism of psychiatry and its difficulties. I felt too personally attacked by it.

I myself have been living for years as a mountain farmer in a little mountain village in the Bündner Alps. This rather different world has removed me, in terms of my interests, from the realm of psychiatry, but I still have many pleasant memories of my childhood and youth.