Schizophrenia Bulletin vol. 37 no. 6 pp. 1095–1098, 2011
doi:10.1093/schbul/sbr132
Advance Access publication on September 12, 2011

EDITORIAL

Eugen Bleuler's Place in the History of Psychiatry

German E. Berrios*

Robinson College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

*To whom correspondence should be addressed; tel: +44 1223-880852, fax: +44 1223-505955, e-mail:geb11@cam.ac.uk

Like the guildsmen of old, 19th century Alienists (now psychiatrists) also realized that a pantheon of proceres would be useful to their trade and social standing: by the 1850s, national pantheons had already been constituted and by the early 20th century, a well-populated international Valhalla was in existence. Ever since it has been required that the anniversaries of the pantheonized be dutifully posted (In relation to Bleuler's anniversaries, see, for example, the note by Fusar-Poli and Politi[1] posted in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.).This notwithstanding, the rules for pantheonization remain unclear and their enactors shadowy. To do justice to Eugen Bleuler's place in the pantheon of psychiatry, this obscurity needs some illumination.

It is a common historical observation that current psychiatrists tend to select for special attention only some of the many accounts of madness developed in earlier times. Although the reasons for such selection have never been fully explored, it is customary to accept the view that no prescription is involved and that the accounts in question select themselves on account of their scientificity and truth-making power. It follows that those responsible for such accounts are considered as anticipators or pioneers of a current truth. In other words, their entitlement to a place in the psychiatric pantheon is determined not by their contemporary values but by those reigning in the present.

This way of getting into the psychiatric pantheon is perilously dependent upon the quality and stability of the said selection criteria. If, as proclaimed, the criterion in question is the "truth" of science, then the pantheonized have little to worry about; but if it is socioeconomic or political convenience, then pantheon membership becomes a precarious affair and psychiatry should be required to set in place rules for depantheonization.

Against this backdrop, what is Eugen Bleuler's entitlement? Given that this editorial has been commissioned for 2011, the answer must surely be that it means to celebrate Bleuler in relation to the current concept of "schizophrenia". Does this relationship constitute enough ground for entitlement? The answer is likely to be that if schizophrenia is a natural kind (ie, like an exotic plant in the Amazonian forest, it can be "discovered" but not "constructed),[2] then Bleuler is an echt discoverer, and that is the end of the story. However, if by some twisted fate schizophrenia turns out to be a historical construct to be discarded when useless (As an example of this interesting debate, see Brockington and Nalpas,[3] and Morgan.[4]), then what would happen to Bleuler's place in the pantheon?

In view of the above, it would be advisable to broaden the basis of Bleuler's entitlement[5] and to achieve such his life and contribution must be reexplored. Eugen Bleuler was born on April 30, 1857 at Zollikon (Switzerland), at the time a farming village, now part of the Zurich's conurbation, and during the 1950s venue for the Zollikon seminars organized by Medard Boss and occasionally attended by Martin Heidegger.[6] Of peasant stock, Bleuler's family seem to have been involved in the struggle for peasants' rights that culminated in the foundation of Zurich University in 1833 (For bare biographical details, see Berrios,[5] Klaesi,[7] Müller,[8] Ellenberger,[9] and Graf-Nold.[10]). It is said that the sight of Professors of Psychiatry imported from Germany (Griesinger being one of them) not understanding the local dialect inspired Bleuler to become a psychiatrist. Trained under Burckhardt and Schaerer at Waldau, Charcot, and Magnan in Paris, the von Gudden Institute in Munich, and Forel at the Burghölzli, Bleuler became its director in 1898. He retired in 1927 and died on July 15, 1939. Abraham, Binswanger, Jung, Brill, Minkowski, and others were his students. In 1923, a *Festchrift* in his honor was published carrying, inter alia, articles by Kurt Schneider, Hermann Rorschach, Ernst Kretschmer, Hans Grühle, and Ludwig Binswanger (It first appeared as an issue of the *Zeitschrift für der gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* for the year 1923.).

Not as busy or as deep as that of other members of the psychiatric pantheon, 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. Of indifferent quality, earlier work on the history of schizophrenia was mostly carried out by clinicians wanting schizophrenia to have a long past.[11] More recently, nonmedical historians have started joining in and their detached perspective has generated questions about the ontology of schizophrenia that clinicians may feel shy to ask.[12]

Two earlier (and dissonant) historical works set the trend about Bleuler's position in relation to the schizophrenia concept. On the one hand, there is the lucid article by Minkowski[13] where Bleuler was made to play a positive role and cast as the protagonist of the psychological approach to schizophrenia. On the other, there is the famous chapter written by Grühle[14] for Bumke's Handbuch (On the historical relevance of this volume and on German views on schizophrenia during the 1920s, see Midenet.[15]) where the author listed the usual past ''sightings'' of schizophrenia, dealt with the work of Kraepelin in extenso and barely mentioned Bleuler's. Grühle's chapter became the standard for what can be called the ''linear'' historiography of schizophrenia. According to the latter: (*a*) ''cases'' of the disease can be sighted in the pre-19th century medical history of Europe, (On the risks of making this assumption, see Heinrichs[16]) (*b*) Kraepelin was the true ''discoverer'' of ''dementia praecox'', and (*c*) Bleuler tried to recast it into a more flexible psychological garb.[11]

There is no space in this editorial to follow-up the vicissitudes of this approach to the present day (The linear view of schizophrenia invites ''presentism'', ie, selecting past views as ''valuable'' and ''anticipatory'' on the basis of their coincidence with the current definition of ''true'' and ''scientific''. For examples of this fallacious reasoning, see Stotz-Ingenlath[17] and Ritsner and Gottesman.[18]). Suffice it to say that the more a historian moves away from the linear model of schizophrenia, the more interesting and useful his work does become (For an excellent example if this approach, see Gilman.[12]). The nonlinear historical approach is well illustrated by an early article on Bleuler's concept of schizophrenia by Guiraud and Ey[19] and by later publications by Lanteri-Laura and Gros[20] and particularly by Garrabé[21] who contextualized the Minkowskian view in his subtle book on the history of schizophrenia. On the other hand, writing well within the linear Grühlian tradition, Stierlin[22] concluded that on account of its syncretic nature, the Bleulerian notion of schizophrenia was doomed to fail. Likewise, Janzarik[23] and Peters[24] barely mentioned Bleuler in articles dedicated to the concept of schizophrenia and to its arrival in the United States, respectively. More recent historical work has followed the same trend and in the otherwise useful book by Howells.[25] Bleuler is only mentioned in passing.

Fortunately, Bleuler has not been neglected by his fellow countrymen. Starting with Wyrsch's[26] useful pamphlet on his work, there has been a series of important publications including the excellent set of articles dealing with Bleuler's concept of schizophrenia and with other contributions by the Zurich school[27]; a book dedicated to Bleuler's thinking[28]; an article on Bleuler concept of schizophrenia[29]; and more recently, a first class book by Scharfetter[30] where a serious analysis is undertaken of the various strands of Bleuler's thinking.

These publications give an inkling of the strange mixture of simplicity and complexity that seems to characterize Bleuler's ideas. 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 psychogenesis (Interesting in this regard is Bleuler's article on the distinction between physiogenic and psychogenic.[31]) explains his complex relationship with Jung[32] and with Freud.[33,34] In the event, neither of these associations bore fruit but the ideas he learned from both Jung (On Jung's views on 'schizophrenia' see Giraud.[35]) and Freud (In an early article published in the short-lived Journal that he edited with Freud, Bleuler felt the need to set out his differences with the Viennese writer.[36]) 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 (For an account of Bleuler's psychopathology, see Kuhn.[37]). Indeed, one of his best books is about how affectivity, suggestibility, and paranoia might interact.[38] Other books seem to have developed in the context of his work on schizophrenia such as his monographs on Negativism[39] and on Autistic thinking.[40] The importance and originality of later books such as *Naturgeschichte der Seele*,[41] *Die Psychoide*, [42] and *Mechanismus-Vitalismus-Mnemismus*[43] are yet to be determined.

It can be concluded that Bleuler occupies a safe niche in the pantheon of psychiatry but that this is not necessarily due to the fact that he contributed to the history of schizophrenia. As the work of his fellow countrymen is beginning to show, Bleuler was a man for all seasons. However, the next stage in Bleulerian scholarship is still to come. Further research is needed into: (*a*) the religious, philosophical, and political context that inspired his writings and (*b*) the question of whether *sotto voce* (or perhaps without realizing it) he managed to develop a view of madness (schizophrenia) that in its bold newness challenged the very concept of disease that psychiatry had inherited from the 19th century and which Wernicke and Kraepelin were still sponsoring (This is perhaps what Trenel[44] sensed when he complained about Bleuler broadening the concept of disease too much, and Bleuler[45] himself when he made a spirited defense of his

concept of schizophrenia in front of a French audience. Hoenig[46] tried to resolve the conceptual gap between Kraepelin and Bleuler by proposing a hypothetic "Schneiderian space" where the objective and subjective might coexist.). If thus, it is not surprising that his ideas fell into the deaf ears of a Psychiatry that in its efforts to be a hard science happily and uncritically adopted the positivist epistemology of the interbellum period. Unable to accept the dire consequences that his view had for the notion of "mental illness", the psychiatry of his time cast Bleuler into the role of a mere renamer and continuator. We should not repeat this mistake.

Acknowledgments

The author has declared that there are no conflicts of interest in relation to the subject of this study.

References

1. Fusar-Poli P, Politi P. Eugen Bleuler and the birth of Schizophrenia. (1908). *Am J Psychiatry*. 2008;165:1407.
2. Laporte J. *Natural Kinds and Conceptual Change.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press; 2004.
3. Brockington I, Nalpas A. L'Approche clinique et le concept de schizophrénie. In: Pichot P, Rein W, eds. *L'Approche Clinique en Psychiatrie.* Vol 2. Paris, London: Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond; 1993:139–155.
4. Morgan A. Schizophrenia, reification and deadened life. *Hist Human Sci*. 2010;23:176–193.
5. Berrios GE. *Eugen Bleuler. The Origins of Modern Psychiatry.* Thompson C, ed. Chichester, UK: John Wiley; 1987:200–209.
6. Boss M, ed. *Martin Heidegger Zollikon Seminars.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 2001.
7. Klaesi J. Eugen Bleuler 1857–1939. In: Kolle K, ed. *Große Nervenärzte.* Vol 1. Stuttgart, Germany: Thieme; 1956:7–16.
8. Müller C. Eugène Bleuler 1957-1939. *Confront Psychiatr*. 1973;11:103–108.
9. Ellenberger HF. *The Discovery of the Unconscious.* London, UK: Allen Lane; 1970:285–288.
10. Graf-Nold A. History of psychiatry in Switzerland. *Hist Psychiatry*. 1991;2:321–328.
11. Berrios G E, Luque R, Villagrán J. Schizophrenia: a conceptual history. *Int J Psychol Psychological Ther*. 2003;3:111–140.
12. Gilman S. Constructing Schizophrenia as a category of mental illness. In: Wallace ER, Gach J, eds. *History of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology.* New York, NY: Springer; 2008:461–483.
13. Minkowski E. La génése de la notion de schizophrénie et ses caractères essentiales. Une page d'histoire contemporaine de la psychiatrie. *L'Evol Psychiatr*. 1925;1:193–236.
14. Grühle HW, Geschichtliches, Wilmanns K. ed. Bumke O, ed. *Handbuch der Geisteskrankheiten*. Vol 5. Berlin, Germany: Springer. 1932;1–30.
15. Midenet M. La conception de la schizophrénie dans la psychiatrie allemande des années 1920–1933. *L'Encéphale*. 1972;61:333–349.
16. Heinrichs RW. Historical Origins of Schizophrenia: two early madmen and their illness. *J Hist Behav Sci*. 2003; 39:349–363.
17. Stotz-Ingenlath G. Epistemological aspects of Eugen Bleuler's conception of schizophrenia in 1911. *Med Health Care Philos*. 2000;3:153–159.
18. Ritsner MS, Gottesman II. The schizophrenia construct after 100 years of challenges. In: Ritsner MS, ed. *Handbook of Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders.* Vol 1. Heidelberg, Germany: Springer; 2011:1–44.
19. Guiraud P, Ey H. Remarques critiques sur la schizophrénie de Bleuler. *Ann Méd Psychol*. 1926;84:355–365.
20. Lanteri-Laura G, Gros M. Historique de la schizophrénie. *Encyclopédie Médico-Chirurgicale (Paris)*. 37281 C10–9. 1982;1–7.
21. Garrabé J. *Histoire de la Schizophrenie.* Paris, France: Seghers; 1992.
22. Stierlin H. Bleuler's concept of schizophrenia: a confusing heritage. *Am J Psychiatry*. 1967;123:996–1001.
23. Janzarik W. Geschichte und Problematik des Schizophreniebegriffes. *Der Nervenarzt*. 1986;57:681–685.
24. Peters UH. Die deutsche Schizophrenielehre und die psychiatristche Emigration. *Forschritte Neurol Psychiatr*. 1988; 56:347–360.
25. Howells JG, ed. *The Concept of Schizophrenia. Historical Perspectives.* Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press; 1991.
26. Wyrsch J. *Gedanken Eugen Bleulers. Seinen Werken entnommen und eingeleitet.* Zurich, Switzerland (no publisher); 1957.
27. Bleuler M, ed. *Beiträge zur Schizophrenielehre der Zürcher psychiatrischen Universitätsklinik Burghölzli (1902–1971)*. Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft; 1979.
28. Hell D, Scharfetter C, Möller A, eds. *Eugen Bleuler. Leben und Werk.* Bern, Switzerland: Hans Huber; 2001.
29. Scharfetter C. Eugen Bleuler's schizophrenias—synthesis of various concepts. *Sweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie*. 2001;152:34–37.
30. Scharfetter C. *Eugen Bleuler 1857–1939. Polyphrenie und Schizophrenie.* Zürich, Switzerland: VDF; 2006.
31. Bleuler E. The physiogenic and psychogenic in schizophrenia. *Am J Psychiatry*. 1930;10:203–211.
32. Möller A, Scharfetter C, Hell D. Development and termination of the working relationship of C G Jung and Eugen Bleuler (1900-1909). *Hist Psychiatry*. 2002;13:445–453.
33. Dalzell TG. Eugen Bleuler 150: Bleuler's reception of Freud. *Hist Psychiatry*. 2007;18:471–482.
34. Falzeder E. The story of an ambivalent relationship: Sigmund Freud and Eugen Bleuler. *J Anal Psychol*. 2007;52:343–368.
35. Giraud JM. C G Jung et les schizophrenies. Étude chronologique. *L'Information Psychiatrique*. 1985;61:1079–1085.
36. Bleuler E. Die Psychoanalyse Freuds. Verteidigung und kritische bemerkungen. *Jahrbuch für Psychoanalytische und Psychopathologische Forschungen*. 1911;2:1–110.
37. Kuhn R. Eugen Bleuler's concepts of psychopathology. *Hist Psychiatry*. 2004;15:361–366.
38. Bleuler E. *Affektivität, Suggestibilität, Paranoia.* Halle, Germany: Carl Marhold; 1906. (translation by Charles Ricksher as 'Affectivity, Suggestibility, Paranoia'. Utica, State Hospitals Press, 1912).
39. Bleuler E. *Zur Theorie des schizophrenen Negativismus. Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift.* Vol 12 1910. Vols. 18, 19, 20, 21 (translation by W A White as 'The Theory of Schizophrenic Negativism'. New York, The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1912.
40. Bleuler E. *Das Autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken in der Medizin und seine Überwindung.* Berlin, Germany: Springer; 1921.

41. Bleuler E. *Naturgeschichte der Seele und ihres Bewusstwerdens. Eine Elementarpsychologie.* Berlin, Germany: Springer; 1921.
42. Bleuler E. *Die Psychoide. Als Prinzip der organische Entwicklung.* Berlin, Germany: Springer; 1925.
43. Bleuler E. *Mechanismus-Vitalismus-Mnemismus.* Berlin, Germany: Springer; 1931.
44. Trenel M. Le démence précoce ou schizophrénie d'après la conception de Bleuler. *Rev Neurol*. 1912;10:372–383.
45. Bleuler E. *La Schizophrénie. Congrès des Médecins Aliénistes et Neurologistes de France et des Pays de langue Française. XXX session. Gèneve-Lausanne.* Paris, France: Masson; 1926:1–24.
46. Hoenig J. The concept of schizophrenia. Kraepelin-Bleuler-Schneider. *Br J Psychiatry*. 1983;142:547–556.