

Mental Hygiene as an Academic Discipline at the University of Basle

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I

Through the efforts of Dr. Fritz Hauser, the chairman of the board of education, and the city council of Basle, a chair of Mental Hygiene was established at the University of Basle in the spring of 1937, and Heinrich Meng, M.D., was appointed to fill it. From 1928-35 Dr. Meng served as an instructor at the psychoanalytic institute connected with the University of Frankfurt-am-Main and together with Dr. Karl Landauer had been co-director of the policlinic for mental diseases at that institution. In 1933, Dr. Meng moved to Basle where he taught psychology and education in the University extension department from 1933-37. From 1933 on, Dr. Meng has been a member of the "Institute for Modern Methods of Education" at Basle. The chair of Mental Hygiene at Basle University was converted into an extraordinary professorship in 1945.

It was decided that Mental Hygiene should be taught at the University in the following manner: one hour a week was devoted to lectures to members of all faculties. A second hour was held especially for members of the medical, law, and other faculties according to the direction in which interest in the subject developed. (See section VI.)

As time went on, a demand for a special seminar arose. Students as well as young physicians, lawyers, social workers, theologians and others, wanted to discuss special topics in connection with mental hygiene. With the aid of private funds, a library (now containing over two thousand publications) and seminar room was established in 1943.

II

It was neither surprising nor unexpected that Mental Hygiene as a new discipline—like everything that is new—would encounter resistance. (It is only about forty years since the American C. W. Beers and the Swiss living in America, Adolph Meyer founded it as a branch of medicine.) The question of whether Mental

Hygiene was really a science had been enough to make its introduction into the University classroom difficult.¹ In addition there were objections to psychoanalysis which Dr. Meng considered the psychological basis of Mental Hygiene. A comment of Freud's sums up the situation:

"It is a matter of general knowledge how often in the history of scientific research, new discoveries which later turned out to be valuable and significant were at first met with intensive and stubborn resistance."^{*}

While the controversies regarding the subject were debated and still continue to be discussed, Dr. Meng proceeded to build up his new field. He was at once optimistic and critical as was Freud in his time about psychoanalysis:

"It sticks to its field of endeavour, seeks to solve the latest problems of its observation; enriched by experience, it advances always unfinished, always prepared to withdraw or change its theories. Just as Physics or Chemistry, it is ready to admit that its highest concepts are unclear, its principles only adaptations to present knowledge, and it awaits the results of future research for a clearer understanding."[†]

III

Some of the subjects treated in the lectures and seminars were: "Prophylaxis of Neurosis and Crime", "Question of Training as conditioned by Inheritance and Environment", "Problem Children and Delinquency", "Mental Hygiene at Various Ages", "Mental Hygiene in the Everyday Life and Crises of the Individual", "The Sociology and Mental Hygiene of Marriage", "Mental Hygiene and Prophylaxis of Diseases", "The Significance of Mental Hygiene for Sociology and Mass Psychology". Special attention was devoted to questions of the prophylaxis of war. Several semesters of lectures during and after the second world war were devoted to this subject.

^{*} *Die Widerstände Gegen die Psychoanalyse, Gesammelte Werke, Vol. xi, p. 225.*

[†] *Psychoanalyse und Libidotheorie, Gesammelte Werke, Vol. xi, p. 29.*

The instructor had no model to go on in teaching Mental Hygiene, and Basle can therefore be considered the first experiment in this field. Three questions arose out of this :

1. Can Mental Hygiene, as a subject, be taught ?
2. Is there enough interest to make teaching it worthwhile ?
3. Can other disciplines draw any advantages from Mental Hygiene ?

The experience of twenty-three semesters of lecturing on this subject shows that all three questions can be answered in the affirmative. It is not only possible, but now more than ever necessary to handle psychosomatic diseases, maladjustment and crime prevention—and particularly the problems of mass psychology and the prevention of war—from the standpoint of medicine and especially from that of psychiatry, psychology and sociology. An extract from a lecture given in the winter semester of 1946-47 about the prevention of war, is an example of the method of teaching Mental Hygiene.² A few sentences from another lecture portray the tone of instruction in Mental Hygiene :

“ This means pulling together for the building of the future, especially a productive future without war. For this, people with a sense of personal and social responsibility are needed in addition to a sound economy, social justice, and a truly ethical procedure.—Work and the possibilities of satisfying the mental, economic, and social needs of every individual are not *goals*, but *requirements* for a real order and freedom. One of the most urgent tasks of all peoples is to fulfill these requirements.”

We should like to add that the creation of the best “ milieu ” and the training of young people to accept the responsibility for the development and preservation of humanity in its political, cultural, social and economic activities are phases of the evolution of Mental Hygiene.

IV

The personal view-point of the instructor to these problems of a new social order is of great importance. The student, consciously and unconsciously, examines critically the instructor's view-point, convictions and personality and uses it as a means of identification or resistance in his own maturing personality. We should like to show, as far as it is possible, how the position taken by the instructor influences the

teaching of Mental Hygiene. He is of the opinion that despite many regressions into barbarism, and despite numerous standstills, it is historically possible to show that humanitarianism is on the rise.

This very moment—enriched by our experiences of the pre-war world, two world wars, and the resulting chaos—is the time to learn what caused the collapse of that world and what should be done to prevent it. The “ old world ” was unable to satisfy the mental and physical needs of the great masses. War was one of its most effective integrators. The experience of war and crisis worked against a productive peace by destroying faith and co-operation. Productive peace needs solidarity without war or the necessity for war. Mental Hygiene attacks the problem from the mental side and strives to inform the people in key positions (such as physicians, sociologists, lawyers, statesmen, and teachers) of its findings. It is not sufficient merely to describe the ills of society, but to found a scientific discipline which shall be able to correct them. In other words, scientific abstraction coupled with resolution can further the cause of humanity despite chaos, regression, and obstruction. This will not follow automatically, but will succeed through the efforts of individually and socially responsible persons.

V

Let us compare our instruction in Mental Hygiene with the requirements set forth by others in this field. Von Gonzenbach, in his contribution *Mental Hygiene as Taught at Technical Universities* considered Mental Hygiene as an educational rather than an academic subject. This line of thought has been followed at Basle University. In addition, it has been one of the instructor's chief tasks to point out the wide ramifications of Mental Hygiene, how it affects all of science as well as everyday living. It is shown how Mental Hygiene occupies a key position between scientific research and practical life. Without losing contact with medicine in general and particularly with psychiatry and psychoanalysis which are vital for Mental Hygiene, the attempt has been made to put the forces of the mind and the discoveries of science to work in order to create the right kind of living and working conditions—in short, the best “ milieu ” of which we have previously spoken. Here we see the close relationship between Mental Hygiene and Sociology which has been emphasized in the courses.

Stokvis's work in medical psychology showing mental-physical interplay has also been brought out in the lectures. Through statistics and pictures, the process of "somatization" was made clear and understandable. The findings of psychosomatic medicine are of particular significance for Mental Hygiene. Films—for instance those showing the phenomena and legal standing of—hypnotism have also been employed as a means of instruction.

VI

Since 1937 the interest of the students in Mental Hygiene has increased in a very encouraging way, considering that no examinations in this field are given as yet. The first time the course was given (summer semester, 1937), thirty-seven people took part in it—one-third students and the other two-thirds, listeners—and through the twenty-three semesters that the course has been given, thirty has been the average number of students per semester. The majority of them were from the natural science and philological faculty. The average number of listeners is forty. That medical students are so sparsely represented at the lectures can be explained through their particularly heavy schedule as well as the fact that Professor J. E. Stachelin includes Mental Hygiene in their psychiatric instruction.

Three main classes compose a study group :

1. Class composed of students and listeners who are admitted for one or both of the regular study groups each semester.
2. Class consisting of students and listeners who through many semesters, experience in the lectures and study groups, are well acquainted with the work. They meet, according to the need, to deal with scientific or practical problems of Mental Hygiene without being limited by regular

semester schedules. This group concerns itself with preparation for congresses in Mental Hygiene or related fields, with translations of articles in foreign languages, with cataloguing and making scientific extracts from books and periodicals, and with participation in or planning future courses and lectures. In addition to the scientific publications of the instructor and his associates—as for instance in the collection: *Psychohygiene, Wissenschaft und Praxis*³—there are also collaborative releases to periodicals.⁴ In common with the Swiss National Committee for Mental Hygiene we have tried to keep as many teachers, social workers, and parents, as possible in touch with our work.

3. Group made up of "corresponding" members.

Since 1943, experts in related fields or in Mental Hygiene itself have from time to time given lectures for study groups. Work in theory is considered the basis for practical work in Mental Hygiene. The varied contributions of the corresponding members ensure that the danger of the study groups degenerating into pure theorizing is avoided. Moreover, visits to educational establishments, orphanages and mental hospitals—in other word to those places in which Mental Hygiene is of practical use—serve the same purpose.

The prerequisites of Mental Hygiene are continually to test and re-define its limits and possibilities. Mental Hygiene is only one link in the chain of human endeavour. As it exists in Basle, it seeks within its limited means—scientific research and practical experiment—to help in the construction of a new society without war or social crises.

REFERENCES

- ¹ HEINRICH MENG *Gibt es eine Psychische Hygiene als Wissenschaft.* Schweiz. Medizinisches Jahrbuch, 1939 Verlag Benno Schwabe, Basel.
- ² FRITZ KAUFMAN. *Vorschläge zur Psychohygiene der Kriegsprophylaxe.* Gesundheit und Wohlfahrt, Zürich, Februar, 1948, Heft 2.
- ³ HEINRICH MENG. *Zur Prophylaxe des Krieges.* Gesundheit und Wohlfahrt, Zürich, Februar, 1948. Heft 2. The scientific work of MENG at Basle in the collected papers *Psychohygiene-Wissenschaft und Praxis* of which nine volumes have already appeared. Schwabe, Basel.
- ⁴ Collaborative work of the Study Group for Mental Hygiene at the University of Basle appeared in *Gesundheit und Wohlfahrt*, Orell, Füssli, Zürich ; *Pro Infirmis*, Zürich ; *Schweiz. Frauenblatt* ; *Elternzeitschrift für pflege und Erziehung des Kindes* (Orell, Füssli, Zürich).