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## A Personal History of Hans Delbrück

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May 1989

They were typical; they were extraordinary. This paradox is an accurate description of Hans Delbrück and his family prior to World War I. The surface of this German bourgeois family appeared quite typical from the large villa in which they lived to the family activities inside where the two parents and their seven children noisily carried on. The house has its own history spanning 40 years until its destruction in 1945. The family on closer inspection fulfills the typical and extraordinary paradox to perfection being typically patriarchal with a strong flavor of Victorian gender roles and work ethic. The extraordinary aspect reveals itself in the accomplishments of the family members, of Hans Delbrück in particular. His life's odyssey took him from the battle field to the Prussian royal court as a tutor to Prince Waldemar to a comfortable life as a university professor, historian, journalist, political and military critic, and father. Examining his achievements (specifically after his appointment to the faculty of the University of Berlin in 1880) and writing a personal portrayal are two entirely different tasks. Difficulties in this latter task arose from the language barrier and the obscurity of primary sources. All this withstanding, this sector of the Delbrück family was typical in format but possessed an extraordinarily accomplished and prolific patriarch in Hans.

The house in which the family resided was built at the insistence of Hans' wife, Lina, upon the birth of their seventh child. Lina maintained that there was no apartment in Berlin large enough for a family with seven children. The house was quite large; 18 rooms to be exact with a four room apartment designed into the basement to accommodate a live-in policeman for protection. The policeman subsequently committed suicide by shooting himself. This basement apartment was then occupied during World War I by a man who dealt on the black market. Occasionally, Lina would get a pound of butter through him. After the war and unbeknownst to the Delbrücks, this black marketer was also running a gambling salon from

out of the apartment. One night, the family woke to the sound of gun shots coming from their basement. They watched as forty men or so streamed out of the apartment and fled into the night. Above these colorful episodes in the basement, the family occupied the remaining three stories of the house. The first floor was definitely the hub of family activities. Especially the dining in the winter and the veranda in the summer where the family ate all meals and entertained "from the earliest morning breakfasts to late evening conversations." The dining room was the largest in the house; it opened into a formal parlor. The parlor held Lina's desk; big with many pigeon holes and even a secret hidden compartment which was no doubt a source of fascination to the little Delbrücks. From this desk, Lina ran the household (no small task considering it was comprised of Lina, Hans, their seven children, two maids, a cook, and a nursemaid) and composed verses honoring special occasions. The study, also on the first floor, faced the street and was well lit by three windows. Here Hans would work daily from 8:00 AM until midnight with an hour long siesta after lunch. At this time the bedrooms were all on the second floor and in the attic. The house was much like the family: large, straightforward, comfortable and extremely practical.

The garden and the neighborhood surrounding the house is remembered by the children as paradise. Before World War I, the family had a gardener to maintain the grounds. It was possible for the children to race around the entire perimeter of the house in an unobstructed garden path. Villen-Kolonie was a somewhat affluent neighborhood lined with chestnut trees. It was a suburb of Berlin "just crawling with professors with large families: the Bonhoeffers around the corner and the Planck family a little ways down." The Harnack family was their closest relative; they lived next door. Adolf von Harnack was Lina's brother in law; he was director of the Prussian State Library and named president of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft in 1911. It might sound like Who's Who of Prussian history but it was a basic residen-

tial neighborhood with all the trappings. Max Delbrück, child number seven of Hans and Lina, used to steal cherries from Max Planck's garden. Sunday evenings with the Bonhoeffers was a tradition that added up to twenty-two children in one house. Emmi Delbrück, the youngest daughter of Hans and Lina, eventually married Klaus Bonhoeffer. Of course it required a degree of economic stability to maintain these large households and gardens but Max remembered the surrounding villas of their family and friends as "straightforward accommodations for large families, nothing very fancy about them." The Delbrücks were amidst an intellectual community with whom they socialized regularly establishing significant relationships personally and professionally.

Lina Delbrück (1864-1943) was the daughter of Carl Thiersh (surgeon general of the allied armies in the Franco-Prussian war), granddaughter of Justus von Leibig (known for introducing mineral fertilizer and developing theoretical and agricultural chemistry). She was 15 years younger than Hans and in fragile health after the ordeal of bearing seven children in 16 years. They were Lore (Laura) in 1890, Waldemar in 1892, Hanni (Johanna) in 1896, Lene (Helene) in 1898, Justus in 1902, Emmi (Emilie) in 1905, and Max in 1906. She possessed a marked devotion to her family and husband and fit the profile of a pious, pure, domestic, and submissive turn of the century matriarch. She was described by Max as having "a very sweet disposition," a "willingness to take directions" and as "completely loyal" to Hans. She was sensitive to her children as well. During World War I, Max was expected to and did engage for a while in what he recalled as "dismal patriotic games;" something like a compulsory German Boy Scouts. Lina managed to extricate Max from this unfortunate situation without too much disgrace. This heroic deed is evidence of the supportive relationship between mother and son. Another illustration of the joint parental attitude toward their young son is told here by Max:

*I really made myself a tremendous nuisance. I had my telescope set up on a little balcony which was adjacent to my parents bedroom and then my bedroom was adjacent to that, so during the night to get to this telescope I had to go through their bed-*

*room. I remember a number of winter and summer nights where it was necessary for me to look at my telescope at 2:00 in the morning. Of course I had a sleep that could only be awakened by the loudest of alarm clocks, so I had this enormously loud alarm clock which awakened everybody in the house except me. And then finally I roused myself and crawled through my parents bedroom thinking they were asleep- I'm sure my mother was worrying herself stiff that I would freeze to death out there. I spent an hour at the telescope and then crawled back to bed. So that's what I mean. They were very tolerant, and she made me a special very warm dressing gown or something.*

The children had their share of sibling rivalry too. Boys being boys, Justus and Max would sometimes prove their courage by climbing out onto the dangerously high and steep roof of the villa through an opening in the attic and playing a game of chess there. This activity was most likely unknown to the parents. Lina's devotion to her husband is marked not only by having and raising seven children with him but also by her monumental accomplishment in organizing his papers after his death. She also wrote two commemorative essays between his death in 1929 and hers in 1943; they were the 134 page long "Hans Delbrück in Briefen" covering 1848-1880 and "Hans Delbrück Leben für seine Kinder aufgezeichnet" covering his entire life in 14 volumes, hundreds of pages. He must have been quite extraordinary to inspire a tribute of this proportion even after 40 years of marriage.

The stock from which Hans Delbrück (1848-1929) sprung was no less distinguished than his wife's. Johann Friedrich Delbrück, number one in the Delbrück family tree and Hans' grandfather, was a tutor to the late King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia and also to Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany. Rudolf von Delbrück, an uncle of Hans, was a conspicuous figure in forming the Northern German Confederation and was appointed to head the Reich Chancellor's Office in Berlin in 1871 under Bismarck. Hans' cousin, Heinrich, was president of the supreme court and his brother, also Max, was an industrial chemist

known for founding and directing a large research institute in Berlin. The Delbrück family was well connected even before Hans' legacy. His relationship to his immediate family, in particular to his daughters is described here by Max, "My sisters of course, again in standard, all loved and admired him and were very, very fond of him." He seemed to be able to inspire the female family members to write about him as did his wife and also his daughter, Lene (Helene Hobe), in an essay about the five years during which she was his secretary from 1919-1925. His relationship with his oldest son, Waldemar, is not clear. Waldemar was sent to boarding school, then to university, then to war where he died on May 5, 1917 in Macedonia; this obviously a very dark time for the family (Waldemar's portrait was kept on top of Lina's desk in the center of a collection of photographs of friends and relatives that were killed in the war, almost 20 in all). Justus and Max were four years apart and Hans was 58 when Max was born. This is typically grandfather age; there was bound to be difference between the relationships of the older and younger sons if solely based on the seasoning of 16 years of practise Hans had parenting Max's older siblings. (Interestingly enough, Max was 54 and 57 when his youngest children were born; this following an 11 year interlude after his older children. He claimed he liked the show so much the first time that he wanted to see it again.) At any rate, the timing was definitely right, as Max described his relationship with his father as classically Freudian, "subconscious hatred and jealousy mixed with admiration and respect." All the elements were there for a typical German bourgeois family: authoritative father, devoted and submissive mother, sibling rivalry and Oedipal complex. One can safely conclude that no matter what the difference between the individual siblings, Hans' relationship with his family was that of a typical patriarch of the time but affected to some degree by the intensity of his character.

The seeds of Delbrück's career were germinal when he was appointed in 1874 as a tutor to Prince Waldemar, the second son of Prussian Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm. This appointment would bear fruit for Delbrück long after his departure from the royal court in 1879 in the form of correspondence with the contacts he made there

in the royal family and military community. An examination of his life's work astounds even the most obsessed workaholic. Aside from his position on the faculty at the University of Berlin (this appointment came in 1880) he was an amazingly prolific historian. Not only did he publish 11 volumes on history but he single handedly edited a monthly journal, the *Preussische Jahrbücher* (PJ), for over 30 years. Add to this a number of topical essays published throughout his professional life and finally his unpublished papers; it amounts to a tremendous volume of work. He experimented politically with one term in the Prussian Parliament (1882-1885) and one term in the Reichstag (1884-1890); he never made a speech but was critical of imperial decisions anyways. His first published work after his dissertation in 1873 was a biography of Fieldmarshal Count Neidhardt von Gneisenau in 1880; Delbrück was second author on this project with Georg Heinrich Pertz. Originally in six volumes, Delbrück's *History of the Art of War within a Framework of Political History* was published over a span of 20 years from 1900 to 1920. This all encompassing material examination of war throughout the ages is now out of print. His five volume *World History* was from a course of the same title which he taught at the University of Berlin. The PJ he coedited with Heinrich von Treitschke from 1883 to 1889; from then until 1919, he edited it himself. The circulation of this journal was about 1800 copies and Hans wrote a political column of 16 printed pages for each issue. The other essays he published both in and outside of the PJ varied in topic from the feminist movement to the Dreyfus Affair to all politics in general but the common denominator to most of his work was criticism. "Ludendorff's Selfportrait" was an 80 page critical analysis of the strategy and politics of Erich Ludendorff during World War I. "Die Polefrage" was a 50 page essay outlining Delbrück's position regarding Prussia's historical relationship with Poland; he suggested that Germanization policies were harmful to that relationship. "Kautsky and Harden" was a 50 page piece drawn from the PJ criticizing those two journalists from a historical point of view and supporting Hans Delbrück's understanding of the outbreak of World War I. He was definitely not seeking to win friends with these works. Amidst the hardships dur-

ing and after the war, he continued to work, to criticize what he thought deserving, and write about history with seemingly unflagging interest and devotion.

Portrature of a German historian dead for 60 years presents its own obstacles. Not only are the primary sources in a different language; they are in a different country as well. The incredible volume of correspondence from his life are now located at Handschriftenabteilung, Literturarchiv, Unter den Linden 8, Berlin. This collection of unpublished papers contains 155 separate parts. Part IX contains 1500 letters which Delbrück sent out between 1868 and 1929. Part X contains some 25,000 letters received by him between 1872 and 1929. This collection of his unpublished papers is not in its entirety. From this raw data no personal insight can be gleaned except for speculation about the personality of someone who could produce, inspire, and save so much mail. Secondary sources need translation for the most part as well and/or they require skepticism. Family recollections might be misted with sentimentality or distorted by time and affection. The manuscript by Max Delbrück written on the occasion of Lina Delbrück's centennial (December 10, 1964) is a touching remembrance of his childhood and an invaluable source for investigating the atmosphere of their household but is inevitably suspect in this regard. This is not ingratitude to the Delbrücks for their helpfulness and

generosity with personal papers but a critical analysis of the sources available. Perhaps Hans Delbrück would agree. His life, his work, his family and friends are of a different era. His contemporaries are not available for comment. Timidity about making conjectures about Hans' personality might lend itself to solid regurgitation from secondary sources. If this is the case then documentation will have to compensate for limited originality.

After recounting Hans Delbrück's ancestral connections, his professional achievements, his address, and his offspring, what can truly be discerned about his personality? Does working 14 hours a day constitute a workaholic? He felt no qualms about being critical of the military community and political leaders. Was he this critical of his family? He kept two busts in his study: Hegel and Ranke; this must reveal something about him if only that he admired their type. He was a conscientious paper saver and would take notes on all sorts of scraps from advertisements to invitations to University functions (This tradition still goes on in the Delbrück household in Pasadena.) His family was obviously important to him or he would not have reproduced with such conviction. What profile do these bits and pieces of information conjure? In conclusion, Hans Delbrück was a man who inspired devotion and admiration from some and probably the intense wrath of others.