

Criminals Are Discouraged Persons

Paul Rom

Cesare Lombroso, the Italian scholar who lived from 1836-1909, was the founder of the Anthropological School of Criminology. In his main work, *L'Uomo Delinquente* (1876), he held that criminality is an inborn characteristic which has certain physical signs or stigmas of degeneracy like a receding forehead, a small skull, or projecting ears. His concept of the "born criminal" made Lombroso famous; it had, however, the same narrow basis as, for instance, phrenology, which tried to identify over 30 "mental faculties" by feeling the "bumps" which were their assumed seat under the cranium. We now find phrenologists only on fairgrounds.

Lombroso finally admitted that a criminal may also be influenced by a bad environment, yet his theories are now discarded. So is the later one, which sees the "cause" of criminality only in conditions of poverty. Recent research work could not verify them. Elementaristic and atomistic views that isolated parts of man have given way to holistic and humanistic ones: We now see the person as an indivisible whole in a social bedding.

The writings of Sigmund Freud, and later of Alfred Adler, had a great influence on newer studies of criminals as persons. Adler considered "courage" as a central concept in his understanding of and helping people, whether they are "normal," "neurotic," or "criminal." The Jewish-Christian "Love your neighbor as yourself" would read for an Adlerian: "Encourage your neighbor and be courageous yourself!" Adlerians understand courage as activity plus social interest, or active interest in the interests of others.

Criminals are usually more active than neurotics; however, criminals have no social interest. Since they harm others, we cannot consider them courageous. A neurotic who *speaks* much about love of neighbor (or mankind or God), but does not *act* for the common good, can also not be considered as courageous. Courage is a total positive attitude to life in all its forms.

As children in a family and as pupils in school, we have all been more or less encouraged or discouraged by those around us. In our transactions as adults, we now discourage or encourage others. Most often we are not aware of it. By encouraging our neighbors, we contribute to their social health and

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happiness, as well as to our own. But too often we are discouragers, out for domination, prestige, and gain.

Children who have not been discouraged when growing up will gladly imagine themselves, and later act as, good friends, workers, and, in due course, parents. They will overcome their common and normal feelings of inferiority by training themselves in cooperative human relationships. They will one day hold satisfactory jobs and eventually raise courageous children. They compensate their inferiority feelings usefully and do not develop neurotic or criminal complexes.

Courageous, i.e., useful and helpful, people can be considered normal; discouragement, however, gives the child a wrong opinion about him or herself: the belief that he or she cannot overcome the difficulties of human existence. Not feeling secure of themselves, lacking in a realistic self-esteem, discouraged children will, on the "useless side of life" (Adler), win an imaginary feeling of power and superiority. Their "successes" are empty, without social value; they reinforce their feeling of "not belonging." Neurotics, psychotics, and addicts, as well as criminals, are, as discouraged beings, a burden for any society.

A neurotic symptom, created unknowingly but purposefully, may help discouraged people to keep a certain self-esteem without achieving something of real value. Misunderstanding themselves, they may consider the symptom as a justification for being a social failure. Not understanding this, they cannot admit that with their symptom they aim at irresponsibility and at dominating their fellow human beings. With the still general opinion that they are victims of a mental illness, they maintain a good conscience. And how high might a neurotic feel if one psychiatrist after the other fails "to cure the symptoms!" How high might criminals feel if they think themselves more clever than the police who fail to discover them. Criminals also see how newsworthy are criminal actions, which are, however, only boring events, however glamorous they may appear through the news media.

If we succeed in making neurotics understand that their symptoms are clever tricks or games to avoid effort and responsibility, that they created the symptoms with a great but "private" intelligence; if we make them aware that these are means to a unworthy end; and if, in doing this, we yet respect them as human beings; if, furthermore, we encourage them, then they may slowly transform their neurotic behavior pattern into a more valid one. Their new lifestyle will be determined by the goal: to become great through good deeds, to feel happy through contributing to the betterment of our miserable human condition. The same holds true for addicts, criminals, and all other human misfits.

Adler liked to tell the story of the man who was able to produce silver coins that looked so genuine that even the experts from the mint could not

recognize them as a forgery. So he never could have been brought to justice. Nonetheless, this forger gave up his "job," explaining that it gave him more trouble than to hold a position for an ordinary salary.

Our social system, based on competition and striving for power and profit, fosters people's discouraging attitudes to others and so reinforces neurotic and criminal leanings. The task appears to be giving up our own striving for power and enlightening misfits about the erroneous means which, as discouraged beings, they have chosen to meet life's demands. Without mutual respect and cooperation we seem to be lost, you and I and all humankind. Of course, there is also the immense challenge of transforming the world's competitive economy into a cooperative one, planned by democratic people who respect each other.