

BOOK REVIEW

Psycho-Professionals in Criminal Places

'Correctional Psychology: Themes and Problems in correcting the Offender' Robert J. Wicks. (c) 1974, Harper and Row £3.25

The undeniable direction of most social and psychological research, during this century, has been in perfecting techniques of social control. In the private sphere, according to Peter Berger, institutionalized psychology has emerged 'as one of the agencies supplying a population of anxious consumers with a variety of services for the construction, maintenance and repair of identities. In the public sphere, it lends itself with equal success to the different economic and political bureaucracies in need of non-violent techniques of social control.' And in 'Law, Liberty and Psychiatry' (1963), Thomas Szasz has noted how the U.S.A. has become a 'therapeutic state'. Psychologism has permeated welfare and educational organizations, personnel and business administration, and has become firmly entrenched as an orthodoxy of veiled psycho-manipulation. This makes it very easy to define away 'social problems' as 'anti-social behaviour' or 'maladjustment,' implying that the individual rather than the society is sick, and of course, a battery of therapeutic techniques is available to 'readjust' the individual.

'Correctional Psychology' aims to provide 'a general basic text' in this newly discovered field, and it is concerned with the total correctional setting'. The goals of correctional psychology, adumbrated in the preface by Robert J. Wicks, place this book squarely in the mainstream of adjustment psychologism;

they are: 'learning to understand offender behaviour, helping offenders to function more effectively on an intellectual, social and emotional level, and thus assisting offenders in adjusting successfully to society' (page xiii). The tools of correctional psychology, alongside those of human engineering and psychiatry, will be guided in their use by the traditional model; i.e. the contrast between the SICK patient and his environment which is assumed to be 'normal'. The tacit characteristic of criminal as well as of psychiatric diagnosis is that it locates the sources of aberration within the individual and only rarely within the complex of stimuli that surrounds him; and in addition, as Steven Rose notes:

(1) *'There is ample evidence . . . that the borderline between 'illness' and 'criminality' in the eyes of society has been a shifting one; in the past century, it has moved extensively so as to reduce the area of criminality and extend that of illness.'* And as this occurs, the

importing of para-medical practitioners and psycho-consultants, appears increasingly 'humane'. But, as Rose goes on to say: 'Hanging over the entire criminal justice system of the United States, there is the threat of psychiatric incarceration which could not possibly be accomplished through the judicial process. Lock up for 'mental observation' is commonplace in American police practice. But a specific

jail sentence is preferable to an open-ended psychiatric commitment to a mental institution, because jail terms are finite, whereas, once in the clutches of the psychiatric apparatus, a prisoner may be held almost indefinitely. 'The fate of McMurphy in Ken Kesey's novel (2) is more poignantly and objectively penal, than many 'behaviour modifiers would care to admit.

In Chapter 1, Wicks calls for more efficient prisoner classification, based on more sophisticated intelligence and personality measurements by psychological professionals. To expedite the management of the 'correction facility,' the chief jailer 'should be able to answer questions about each confinee such as: Is he sentenced? Does he have a high school diploma? . . . What, if any, are his major psychological problems?' The theory is that, armed with such knowledge, more specific 'ad hominem' therapy will be possible, conducted by discerning professionals. But power-knowledge will also provide a wide array of labels, until eventually, all the defects and perversions of the prison as a social system will be explained away as a labelled prisoner disorder. And further, when prisoners are slotted into such systems as the 'Interpersonal Maturity Classification System' (The 1-level), which ranges through seven levels 'from the least mature to the ideal of social maturity' (page 8), the hardened categories tend to develop a life and an influence of their own, and perhaps the cunning prisoner can collaborate with the authorities in moving towards 'the ideal stage seven' and in vindicating the classification system. Playing this intricate game is an indication of deference and obedience to authority: the hierarchial authority of the wardens, and the 'sapiential' authority of the correctional

psychologists, all, presumably, located at the ideal stage seven. If, perchance, the prisoner finds the game tedious and absurd, the labels can easily be used as an objective basis for subtle remedial tyranny, no less demoralizing for being psychologically-'informed'. For example, the levels two through four of the 1-level are broken down into nine sub-types: a-social, aggressive; a-social passive; conformist, immature; conformist, cultural; manipulator; neurotic, acting out; neurotic, anxious; situational emotional reaction; and cultural identifier. Each no doubt exhaustively defined and reinforced by a battery of tests (like the 566-item Minnesota Multiphasic Inventory---MMPI, quoted by Wicks on page 10), and all reading kinks and contrived peculiarities into the 'client,' with not even the slightest acknowledgement of the psychopathogenic brunt of the institution itself. The counter-therapeutic reality of insane asylums rife with the cults of classification and categorization, so well summed up by D. L. Rosenhan (3), also applies to the prison industry. As Rosenhan says: 'Whenever the ratio of what is known to what needs to be known approaches zero, we tend to invent 'knowledge' and assume that we understand more than we actually do. We seem unable to acknowledge that we simply don't know.' The obsessional elaboration of abstruse classifications which preoccupies the career and discipline-bound mentality, dogmatically impedes the currents of anger and empathy which alone can trigger real human understanding.

In a later chapter entitled: 'Unusual Problems in Corrections,' the focus is almost exclusively on prison sexuality. The framework of this discussion accepts homosexuality as a perversion

and as a problem, with the implicit ideal of a sexless facility with a population of cabbaged neuters!

The corpus of correctional psychology knowledge in this area, is expressed in such keen insights as: (page 111), 'When alone, there is readier phantasy indulgence, compensating for unpleasant reality, and this not only provides the matrix for masturbation and homosexual phantasy indulgence, but equally incapacitates the individual for life on the outside when he is discharged.' Conjugal visits or 'passion week-ends' as an antidote to homosexuality, has many 'serious deficiencies' that the author assents to, including: 'it creates an unfavourable public impression.' 'it can corrupt prison staff.' and 'it encourages sexual immorality'—White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism reigns supreme—. The matter-of-fact, dispassionate tone, feigns profundity, but achieves only banality, and never are there any suggestions for a humanizing re-sexualization of the correctional facility. It appears that, in U.S. prisons, true lifelong homosexuals, 'who are almost entirely fellators,' have only a very minor impact because they are closely watched by the authorities. Instead, the problem 'seems to lie mainly with the aggressive sociopaths, commercial homosexuals, and juvenile recidivists, who have had former institutional homosexual experiences' (page 114). But who or what constitutes the real 'problem' here, and for whom?? Prison as a sociopathic total institution where people are forced to relate to each other as inter-exploiting sexual objects, seems to lie beyond the imagination as well as the scope of the author. His scope extends only to the conclusions that: (1) no one solution to the problem has proved totally effective, and (2) we still lack a concrete body of knowledge in this area,' and he

continues; 'probably the most effective step we can take to handle prison sexuality is to continue encouraging humanization of oppressive prison settings by establishing constructive activities in which inmates can become involved.'

Not fellatio presumably!

The more rational, productive, efficient, and pseudo-humanistic the repressive administration of prisons become, the more unimaginable the ways and means by which the administered individuals might retain their self-respect and integrity, the more anti-rehabilitative the concept of prison becomes. Reality Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Therapeutic Community and Guided Group Interaction, Behaviour Modification and the Token Economy, as described by Wicks in the core of this book, all sound vaguely 'progressive' and liberating, and each of their separate terminologies contains many syrupy terms. And indeed, as well as providing careers and bandwagons for psychologists, many gratifying 'reforms' are achieved by these programmes, in an authentic personal growth sense. But, like the 'Human Relations in Industry' movement, these trends are governed by what Jacques Ellul called 'La Technique', and Herbert Marcuse analysed as 'Repressive tolerance,' in that they can manipulate the captive to the depths of his being, and, having superficially achieved a polished rehabilitation, they leave the individual with a lifelong and ineradicable assortment of existential neuroses.

The more extreme forms of Behaviour Modification would be the worst offenders here. In this context, we can quote Edgar Friedenberg, who correctly noted that people 'will accept

manipulation that constitutes a massive threat to their being, if it is done in such a way as to alarm them less severely than the consequences of resistance would. The political implications of this are obvious, and well known to government and law enforcement officials' (4). *And* to correctional psychologists, we might add.

Collectively, these progressive techniques, convey to me a strong sense of the micro-political manipulations that are transacted in prisons, where the prisoners private space is invaded and whittled down,—'for his own good', and where the atmosphere is so fake-benign that the emotional and intellectual refusal 'to go along' appears irrational and neurotic. I am here opposing, somewhat idealistically maybe, the image of the authentic dissenting prisoner who is psychically intact, with the image of the drivelling captive guinea-pig, the tool and the victim of adjustment- oriented experimenters and the therapeutics of deception. Despite Wicks' hackneyed plea for further studies, it may be very fortunate that there is so much competitive chaos, and such a dearth of 'conclusive data' in these treatment bailiwicks. If, and when one hydra-headed technique, advertised with mellifluous humanistic epithets, became the sole new orthodoxy, prison-type social control could then more readily be extended into all sectors of mass society to forge an unprecedented totalitarianism. In the field of psychiatry, Howard P. Rome voices the new imperialism: 'If psychiatry is to avoid the cul-de-sac of

irrelevance and move into the avant-garde of meaningful social reform, it will have to greatly extend the boundaries of its present community operations. Actually no less than the entire world is a proper catchment area for present-day psychiatry, and psychiatry need not be appalled by the magnitude of this task' (5). And correctional Psychology, echoing this Promethean expansionism, can leave prisons far behind to undertake its important global role. Wicks' last lines indicate the direction: 'Correctional psychology's future possibilities are not limited; on the contrary, there seem to be no bounds to its full potential'.

John M. Raftery

References:

- (1) *'Times Higher Education Supplement,'* 23rd Nov. 1973.
- (2) *'One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest'.* Picador, 1973.
- (3) *'On Being Sane in Insane Places.'* *Science*, Vol. 179 (1973), No. 4070, pp25-28.
- (4) *'LAING'* Fontana, Modern Masters Series, 1973.
- (5) *'Psychiatry and Foreign Affairs: The Expanding Competence of Psychiatry.'* *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 125, No. 6, December, 1968.