

Paul Rom

Criminals are Discouraged Persons

Cesare Lombroso, an 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, 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 'menatal faculties' by feeling the 'bumps' which were their assumed seat under the cranium. We find phrenologists today only on fairgrounds.

Lombroso finally admitted that a criminal may also be influenced by a bad environment, yet his theories are now discarded, as well as the later one which sees the 'cause' of criminality only in poverty and its corresponding circumstances. Recent research work could not verify them. Elementaristic and atomistic views have given way to holistic and humanistic ones.

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

A criminal is usually more active than a neurotic; however, as he does harm to others, we cannot consider him as courageous. Also a neurotic who speaks much about his love of neighbour (or mankind, or God) but does not act for the common good, is not courageous.

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 without becoming aware of it. By encouraging our neighbours we contribute to their social health and happiness - as well as to our own. But too often we are discouragers . . .

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

Courageous, useful and helpful people can be considered as 'normal'; discouragement, however, gives the child a wrong opinion about himself and the belief, that he or she cannot overcome the difficulties of human existence. Not feeling secure in a proper

self-esteem, discouraged children will on the 'useless side of life' (Adler) win an unrealistic imaginary feeling of power and superiority. Their 'successes' are empty, without social value and reinforce their feeling of 'not belonging'. Neurotics, psychotics, addicts as well as criminals are, as discouraged beings, a burden for society.

A neurotic symptom, created unknowingly but purposefully, may help discouraged people to keep a certain self-esteem without their offering a valid achievement. They consider the symptom as an excuse for their social failure and not understanding themselves could not admit that with their symptom they aim at irresponsibility and at dominating their fellowmen. With the still general opinion that they are not irresponsible misfits but victims of a 'mental illness', they can have a good conscience. And how 'high' may not a neurotic feel if one psychiatrist after the other fails 'to cure his symptoms'? How 'high' may not a criminal feel if he can think that he is more clever than the police who do not find him out and when he sees how newsworthy are misdeeds.

If we succeed in making a neurotic understand that his 'symptoms' are clever tricks or games to avoid effort and responsibility, created by him with a great but 'private' intelligence; if we can make him aware that these are means to an unworthy end yet, in so doing respect him as a human being and thus encourage him - then he may develop a more valid behaviour pattern. His new life-style will be determined by the goal: to be great through good deeds and through contributing to the betterment of our human condition. And the same holds true for addicts, delinquents, and criminals.

Adler liked to tell the story of the man whose extraordinary achievement it was: privately to produce silver coins which looked so genuine that even the experts from the mint could not find out that they were forged. So he never could be brought to justice. Nonetheless, this forger gave up his 'job', explaining that it was not worth while for it gave him more trouble than an ordinary job.

Our social system based on competition and striving for profit fosters people's discouraging attitudes to others and reinforces neurotic and criminal leanings. The task appears to be: enlightening misfits about the erroneous ways which, as discouraged beings, they have chosen to meet life's demands. Without mutual respect and cooperation we seem to be lost.

I have long roots	Of the world's beginning.
But they are dreams	
Holding me to the past,	The dreams grow faint,
Tenuous but nylon-strong,	The past crumbles,
They are the story	I am free.

Anne Coghill

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