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THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER STUDY IN CRIMINOLOGY¹

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A major sociologic problem in which there is developing an increased scientific and popular interest, due largely to the organized energies of "The National Committee for Mental Hygiene" and "The American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology," as well as to the applied energy of devoted scientists, is that of the diminution of criminality. A subsidiary and contributory problem in the province of prison physicians, and to be attacked by no other scientific workers so logically by them is that of assisting offenders to self-reformation. Prison physicians have access to excellent clinical material and are equipped with the special training for the solution of this problem.

Let us outline this baffling proposal of inducing offenders to attempt self-reformation and canvass a possible method of procedure. A step of analysis shows that the reformation of an offender consists in changing his anti-social behavior into action in conformity with recognized social, moral and legal standards. Psychologically behavior or action is the product of character rather than of intelligence, as thought or one's thinking is the product of intelligence rather than of character. Intelligence and character, though different mental functions, are not distinct in functioning and are not separable, but are inextricably interrelated and blended. In assisting in the moral rehabilitation of a prisoner, his thinking must be appealed to and guided, re-educated perhaps—a sufficient reason for taking its measure; but his character, the spring of his behavior, may not be ignored, for his feelings, instincts, emotions, passions, whims, will-power, self-control, or the lack thereof, all referable to character rather than to intelligence, have been involved in his behavior. To inspire him to attempt reformation by the most promising method within his capacity then, one should proceed from the evaluation of his intelligence to a study of his character.

As the purpose of our thesis is to emphasize the importance of character study of offenders in addition to ascertaining their grade of intelligence, we will attempt to contrast and define these interrelated mental functions.

¹Read on October 22, 1919, at the Annual Congress of the American Prison Association, New York City, Prison Physicians' Section.

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"Innate tendencies to thought and action constitute the native basis of mind."

Responsibility is referred to behavior rather than to intention or planning. This tacitly recognizes that which we have called character as integral.

Character is the immediate determinant of adult behavior and makes for personality efficiency not less than does intellect.

Instinct, emotions, conscience and sentiments are subsidiary mental functions referable to character rather than to intellect.

The intellect dictates control of emotional expression while character exerts such control—effectually or ineffectually.

Intellect and character are synchronous in mentality development, but are neither coincident nor coextensive in either time or rate of development. Their relative importance is inconstant at any age level.

Personality study of those of childhood physical ages is concerned less with character than with intellect, since the former is then relatively rudimentary, and is concerned more intently with character as it dynamics increase.

Innate intelligence deficiency is stationary and irremediable, while character deviations are theoretically susceptible of correction while plasticity remains.

The recognition of character as a primary mentality function makes for clarity in psychiatric case study and terminology, and may perhaps hasten the discovery of methods of metric treatment.

Sociologically, a personality is more inimical whose character deviations are grave than is one which exhibits a grave intelligence deficiency.

In psychiatry and sociology as well as in legal and popular usage character with its subsidiary fields is immanent in personality evaluation both objectively and subjectively.

The eugenic and sociologic aspects of a population survey are more intimately seen, more clearly apprehended and recorded and more transparently represented when character deviations are recognized as an integral categorical entity.

Offenders are convicted of anti-social behavior, not of anti-social thinking. A man may think whatever he pleases, and so long as his character does not permit anti-social behavior he is not arraigned. Therefore energy expended to induce self-reformation in offenders would better be directed to character reformation and building than to intelligence reformation or rebuilding.

Another psychological consideration indicating character as the mental function determining behavior, and therefore of dynamic interest to the prison physician, is the judicial assumption that character is susceptible of improvement or correction.³ The law assumes that one who has been anti-social in behavior need not continue an

³The psychological validation of character as an integral function of mentality has been submitted in "Character As An Integral Mentality Function," copies of which may be obtained from the author.

offender, but may improve his behavior, and the law holds him responsible for his so doing unless he is demonstrably intellectually incapable, i. e., knows not right from wrong.

The penal institution laboratory, then, having determined the mental age level of an offender, need not be content therewith, but may address itself to the essential individual problem of how reformation may best be accomplished in the prisoner and by the prisoner. The offender may need to know something more regarding himself than just what his weaknesses are. He may lack a conviction that he needs to try to reform his behavior. He may not wish to try to change his behavior. He may not intend to change his behavior. Or, having a worthy intention and an efficient intelligence to plan his self-reformation, he may not be characterially equipped to act on his plan persistently enough to succeed. The laboratory may assist at this point and make clear the characterial obstacles and the best way of surmounting such, and the cost thereof. While the prison laboratory may not be able to supply prisoners with the intelligence needed for correct self-determination, it may determine this quality in individuals and it may supply the needed characterial stimulus, a flip the prisoner will hardly encounter elsewhere.

The real reformatory influence of a penal institution with a psychopathic laboratory is of two kinds, namely: (1) The constantly exerted influence born of the community knowledge that the institution exists for the sole purpose of pointing each individual to his best course of action, and (2) the critical hours in the laboratory where the psychiatrist presents the case to the prisoner constructively on the basis of the ascertained and checked-up facts.

In the laboratory interview the sincerity, candor, expert knowledge, and a special knowledge of the case are matched on the part of the interviewer against the habitual craft, suspicion, secretiveness, and clannishness of the offender. To gain the man's thoughtful attention and focus it on his own essential secular problem of how to live successfully and happily, to win from him an expression of regret for the damage done his life, to gain his honest assent to the proposal that he intends to do better, and to map out with him a plan by which he might practice his good intentions till new habits of thought and action shall begin to form and the pursuit of progress shall begin to displace the too exclusive habit of seeking gratification—these and other steps indicated for the special case, if skilfully taken, cannot fail to assist, as much as any external and secular agency may do, in the rehabilitation of a personality.

No numerically scored tests of character are available. But neither are numerically scored tests available for the psychiatrist seeking to restore "the mind diseased." Character is the resultant of the transmitted and acquired traits, qualities, feelings, instincts, tastes, etc., of life. To induce a personality to attempt to change his manner of life, the scientific problem is to suggest the surest method and obviously a full knowledge of that life is a fundamental essential. So the case record of an offender which shows no more than the grade of his intelligence is inadequate.

The energy expended in devising methods of intelligence evaluation has been productive of worthy results and has given us the means of measuring the efficiency of intelligence, and it is essential in the study of a personality to know the intelligence capacity—for reformation, for instance. But having ascertained an offender's intelligence capacity, there still remains the problem of how the personality's intelligence and character may best effect his own rehabilitation. Not every intelligence that academically recognizes the importance of reformation is sustained by a character capable of realization in action or behavior.

The direct responsibility for behavior rests with the individual offender, of course. The prison physician is responsible not for the prisoner's reformation, but for doing all that his province may do to assist and direct the offender to self-reformation.

It is illuminating to some prisoners to find how many of the following five steps in reformation have been taken and how much it will cost to take the remaining steps:

PSYCHOLOGIC STEPS TOWARD REFORMATION

1. To *regret* the damage to the offender and to others caused by his mistakes.
2. To *intend* to do better.
3. To *make a plan* of how he may live day and evening for a long time (3 to 5 years) while practicing his good intentions.
4. To *decide* to follow the plan for the time set and to *determine* to adhere to it.
5. To go out and *live* the plan as determined.

Other methods are better adapted to some offenders; but by whatsoever the individual method or combination of methods, so long as each offender's case is analyzed and the best characterial remedy for his ills is supplied, so long is the penal institution laboratory

doing humanitarian work scientifically and making progress. Such laboratory activities appeal most strongly to the philanthropically inclined with a scientific training, especially when the possible sociologic and economic value of the material conserved is considered. The problem of finding and presenting to each offender his best plan of action is a scientific, sociologic, humanitarian undertaking well worthy the best energies of any man.

Whatever procedure is employed in an individual case, the following general principles can hardly be ignored:

AXIOMS OF A CONSTRUCTIVE PSYCHOLOGIC INTERVIEW WITH AN
OFFENDER

1. Appeals to the emotions are to be avoided.
2. Appeals to reason, self-interest, filial allegiance, patriotism, conscience, etc., are of value.
3. A thorough knowledge of the full case history is absolutely essential.
4. Discussion of specific offenses is a sure way to divert the subject's attention from the vital issue: his method of rehabilitation.
5. Attention focussed for a longer or shorter time on vital mistakes in decision or behavior such as leaving school too early, neglecting an opportunity to learn a trade or to stick to some job or otherwise to advance are often of service.
6. Eliciting the admission that the actual main object of pursuit in life as shown by decision and behavior has been "To have a good time" rather than to progress and develop one's powers is often of value.
7. The teaching that progress involves self-denial and that self-reformation is a long, hard, uphill process demanding the exercise of the best that is in a man is not to be overlooked.
8. Promises made to the examiner are to be avoided. The physician is not the arbiter. The offender's own personality is his sole secular reliance.
9. The physician is not a religious teacher; though his religious training may assist him to live his own life and he may suggest that the offender's own religious training may assist him to resist temptation.
10. The teaching that while old friends are not to be cut nor avoided; but are to be courteously treated when met and then left hurriedly after less than one minute of *social* talk is helpful.
11. As one reforming himself forms new and safe friends he may tactfully avoid entangling himself with undesirable former acquaintances.
12. The process of self-reformation will not be completed when the prisoner's self-imposed term of practicing his plan of correct living expires. At that time a new plan will be in order.
13. Any method suggested to an offender must be adapted to his intellectual capacity. The best plan of self-rehabilitation for each offender exists, may be found and skillfully, sincerely and convincingly presented.

The form of case summary for case record and for presentation to those authorized to receive it will depend upon local requirements, of course. A form of case summary is submitted, however, to illustrate a method of case presentation when mental disease conditions, as well as characterial deviations, have been considered in addition to intelligence age level.

MASSACHUSETTS REFORMATORY LABORATORY PSYCHOPATHIC
EXAMINATION

Case Summary

John Doe. Age, 22. Married.
Mental age level, 16. I. Q. 1.
Category: Supernormal.
Mental Disease: None.

Laboratory Classification: Psychopathic personality.
Sociologic Maladjustment: Forger and unreliable.

Characterial Deviations: Is too impulsive in thought and behavior. Has not been trained to consider others sufficiently. Is reluctant to attribute causes of failure to his own decisions and action. Has been a shiftling, but hardly realizes it.

Remarks: This man's own problem (marital as well as behavioristic) is very complicated and he needs to follow good counsel, as he is nervously unstable and habitually verbose and impractical.

ARGUMENT

1. Our essential problem is the diminution of criminality.
2. After adequate case study the prison physician may indicate to the prisoner his best course in the process of self-reformation.
3. Since self-reformation involves a change in behavior, something more than intelligence must be invoked by the offender, viz., character; hence the importance of character study.
4. The devising of a working plan for long practice in self-reformation is of very great importance to the offender.