

Spring 1934

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Recommended Citation

Walter Webster Argow, *Efficacy of Prison Mental Tests As a Guide to Rehabilitation, The*, 24 *Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology* 1074 (1933-1934)

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THE EFFICACY OF PRISON MENTAL TESTS AS A GUIDE TO REHABILITATION

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In questioning the use of mental tests, one must examine the ultimate objective of the process. Mental tests give abstractly the quality of experience for which they are devised. They attempt a chemical analysis of the mind. But the psychological laboratory differs from the chemical in the controlability of its subject matter, a chemical can be kept in a desired state for the length of an experiment but a human cannot be so limited. In other words, there is a vaster amount of attendant circumstances to be considered in the case of the human being. Nor can enough tests be applied to determine the exact quality of the experiences. A man must be examined as a particular complex individual. Albert Einstein has ably supported this argument by making this statement while he was in California: "Why does this magnificent applied science which saves work and makes life easier, bring us so little happiness? It is not enough that you should understand the technique in order that your work may increase man's blessings? Concern for the man himself and his fate must always form the chief interest of all scientific endeavor." This the essence of a most humane philosophy. But criminal procedure has not been humane. It appears that when society has incarcerated one of its members, it ceases to recognize that individual any more than it would one out of a flock of sheep. First, partly through necessity, it deprives him of his name; and then it begins slowly to annihilate his personality, until, in sheer desperation, he builds up a mighty defense mechanism to hide (that he may cling to it) the last vestige of his individuality. This consummates in a sullen, defiant prison attitude which marks the thinking processes even as pallor does the face. It is the first duty of the psychologist to break down this attitude and replace it with one more plastic.

There exists a problem of satisfying the blood-thirsty demands of the Criminal Code and at the same time punishing the misdemeanant in proportion to his act. The desire to hurt back, first on the part of society then on that of the offender, the old vendetta system, has never succeeded in promoting a healthy attitude. Forceful measures

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merely antagonize and remove farther the possibility of reformation and restoration. Since the first notes of Psychology were sounded in the overture of Philosophy, it has been recognized that there exist no two people alike (see John Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*), physically or mentally. But this fact has never been considered in the administration of justice, because once imprisoned, a man becomes a *convict*, one of a body of malefactors. This attitude has easily grown into a vicious circle: with incarceration comes (as I have pointed out) a loss of personality which engenders a loss of respect on the part of society, which makes for an indifferent attitude, and indifference is the prime stimulus of the disaster. Working backwards, psychologists have examined the reactions to punishment, and have employed tests to aid in the intrinsic classification of prisoners. Not yet have they definitely arrived at the discovery of the primary reasons for crime; this stage may only be hypothesized.² However, it has been established that there is a definite correlation between types of crime and types of personality. This has been done through a psycho-legal study of individuals. These mental tests, usually of the Binet-Simon type, indicate adaptability to corrective measures and furnish basis for a certain grouping. But is this sufficient—will the usual mental tests accomplish what Einstein has named as the goal of science (and truly Criminology is a science)—will his technical endeavor materially aid the criminal himself and his keepers to salvage him for a worthier fate?

In the light of recent findings, the distinguished Edward L. Thorndike has expounded the theory that learning ability does not fade with the progress of age, rather it is a psychological unwillingness in the adult mind to descend to the basic levels of education and build up again (see *Adult Learning* Chaps. 10 & 11). This fact is significant, for if the psychologist can work upon this unconscious "pride" and bring the individual into a receptive state, the process of reeducation can be aided and salvage accomplished. Thus, by using an intelligence test to determine native capacity and by careful suggestion along socially acceptable lines, a prognosis may be reasonably certified. However, there is one point of contest—anyone who has had experience in testing adults (and some "hard-boiled juveniles") is familiar with the attitude of offended dignity that some assume when given the ball-and-field question of the Binet test. This attitude, probably to be met with more in prison than anywhere else, is sometimes very difficult to overcome, often influencing the score to a great degree. A friend of mine once told me of a case of an adoles-

²See David Cantor: *Crime*. N. Y. 1932.

cent youth brought into the laboratory to be tested on several occasions because of the unusual results. The testers were at loss whether to consider him as feeble-minded or psychopathic and hence he became a problem. The situation was tersely explained one day when he told my friend, who was not testing him, that "he'd be darned if he'd make a fool of himself before a lot of professors." His ability to conceal this attitude constituted the problem.

In our present procedure of criminal justice, it is supposed that all psychopathic cases are sent to institutions for the criminally insane. That is true of the more obvious cases, but what of the borderline group, or those who cannot afford adequate scientific defense? I cannot provide statistics on the subject but it is easy to see on a not-so-intimate tour of inspection that our prisons contain many unstable personalities. According to some theories of crime, all criminals are slightly unbalanced in different phases of their thinking processes to make them act so. With the growing respect for the defense mechanism manifest in the vengeful attitude of the convict, it would be well to study psychic trauma and its relation to crime. Some "hurt" in earlier life may be concealed under blustering or unsocial behavior. The intelligence test gives an indication of a psychotic temperament if repeated several times (testing high one time and low the next without visible reason), but it does not hint as to what the ailment might be, nor does it test the element of emotionality. We see, then, the need of such a test. To this need a series of non-intelligence tests have been compiled. Woodworth's Personal Data Sheet and Pressey's X-O test for the emotions stand high on the list. Before the individual's examination is completed, a whole battery of tests, each for something different, must have been applied.

While considering the examination of the mind, let us include Psycho-Analysis. This type of examination has been handed more blows because of the very intangibility of its method. The delicate tool of hypnosis, acting as a lever lifts consciousness and allows the examiner to trace the ills in the patterns of subconscious experience. Coupled with the association test, psycho-analysis has taken its place among the scientific treatments, diagnostic and therapeutic, of the mentally ill. Space does not permit a fuller discussion of its uses. It is plain that it is a valuable aid in prison work.

Quite often the police and those familiar with the work of criminals are confronted with a type who says that he just could not help committing the act. Casting aside all those who offer this alibi as a plea for pity, there are many with whom this is a genuine truth. Dr.

Thayer, of New York, has said that 30% of the State's prisoners ought to be treated by doctors instead of wardens as patients rather than as prisoners.³ This is not coddling, it is scientific treatment as opposed to witch-doctory.⁴ It is an unusual warden who understands the power of a compulsion neurosis, but it is quite likely that most all have experienced the overpowering desire to scratch after watching a fly scale somebody's ear. Little do they realize that the same impulse which stimulates them to scratch is half-brother to that which causes the peculiarly weak-willed person to steal a car when he sees the key in it. The question of morals in that case sinks into the background. These must be dealt with charitably. Paranoiacs, victims of psychosis often existing in submerged forms, are prompted to commit overt criminal acts through an imaginary inner voice.

There is an inadequacy in the mental test in a culture rich in abnormal disorders. There is a tendency on the part of those psychologists who have made an exhaustive study of some particular test or group of tests to over-estimate its effectiveness in revealing mental qualities. The diagnostic surgeon who specializes in X-Ray or similar apparatus is apt to lose his sense of perspective and become encumbered with the mass of detail laid before him so that it is difficult to identify each item disclosed in its relationship to the entire system. In other words, the tool is in danger of becoming the master. It is easy to introduce at this point the controversy between scientific materialism and philosophic relativity, certainly both attitudes enter the subject of crime prevention, but either extreme is to be shunned. In following the paths of man's mind, we find many beliefs rooted there without apparent source. These beliefs and impressions guide the behavior in overwhelming ascendancy over the conclusions of calculated reasoning. Reactionary behavior is composed of inherent impulses, past experience, and present physical status. Experience, no doubt, plays the heaviest rôle. Hence, in giving mental tests, the element of the "personal equation" is to be considered. The technique of solving that equation involves family history and environment—and the *rapport* between examiner and patient. This is where mental testing steps out and individual psychoanalytical treatment steps in.

Assuming that the mental condition of the prisoner has been diagnosed and he has been classified as to native ability and other traits (both normal and criminal), the next move is toward re-

³Lit. Dig. 4-11-31 p. 19.

⁴Jesse Stutsman: *Curing the Criminal*, N. Y., 1930.

education and social re-organization. The scourge of prison life is idleness, but this has been somewhat remedied, to the other extreme in some cases. Today prisoners are being taught useful trades in many of our state institutions. Alabama has prided herself on being an outstanding worker in this field. However, there has been one phase overlooked; even as the industrial institutions have erred, the prisons have been without personnel management. Men have been hurled into jobs where they physically or mentally did not fit and consequently, could not succeed. To correct this situation, mechanical aptitude tests peculiar to every kind of job are being devised. For general index the Stenquist Assembly and the Kelley Construction tests are used, but the famous "Wiggly Block" test gives the most far-reaching results. Guided by these findings the prisoner can be placed in that sort of work to which he is most suited, where his interest will not flag and his energy can be used to the best advantage. The prison now ceases to be an institute of punishment and assumes the aspect of a shop of human salvage where unknowns can be analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Through the process of amicable re-education, the individual delinquent may be started along a path in keeping with his intelligence and temperament so that when he emerges from the prison he may carry the credentials of skilled training in an acceptable trade.

In the foregoing part of this paper, I have stated that mental tests alone are insufficient in the work of human rehabilitation. This requires me to suggest constructively a more positive procedure. There must be a definite working plan to follow where each individual can pass through an entire system, and have him emerge, with the record of the findings, a more thoroughly understood person—a procedure similar to that followed in a physical examination in the Ford Hospital at Detroit, Michigan.

Let us suppose that the psychologist is entering a fresh culture; that is, a prison where none of the inmates have been examined. A group test (both literate and illiterate) of the entire prison to get the entire perspective should be followed by individual treatment of those showing greatest promise for adaptation. As much as possible, unstable personalities should be weeded out and set aside for special diagnosis. When the situation permits, a definite working procedure should be inaugurated. This procedure may be instituted directly in a prison familiar with testing.

After a prisoner has been in the institution for about two weeks that he may become accustomed to the strange routine of his new environment, he may be submitted to a diagnosis. First, a Stanford-Binet to determine his mental age and adaptability, followed by a group style test such as the Otis Self-Administering or the Morgan Mental, as a check-up on the Binet. By this time psychopathic cases will be evidenced by a gross conflict in the scores of the two tests or even by overt behavior. These shall be independently classified to be treated later. Those consistently testing at 12 years or under in both tests may be given the Pintner-Paterson Series of form boards. Those with sufficient mentality may be placed in routine jobs.

Returning to the intelligent group (over 12 years), a Downey Will-Temperament or Woodworth's Inventory will sidetrack those needing individual treatment. The others, testing stably (according to the psychologist's faith in the test), may be given the Stenquist Mechanical Aptitude or the Ruth Electrical Aptitude to show ability in those lines. Further tests for dexterity or the Wiggly Block for more administrative positions may be given if desired.

Now to return to those who have tested as psychopathic and unstable. The intelligence test is of little service to the psychologist in these cases. No general program can be suggested, for each case must be treated individually. If the psychologist has no training in it, it is best to call in a psychiatrist; this would suggest that the employment of an expert who would work with the prison physician, as a necessary addition to the staff.

The psychological procedure is brought to an end but the psychologist's work is never done. At all times this member of the prison staff is on call, as necessary as, and coöperating with, the prison physician. There must be a constant check on the behavior of those tested, each one must have a follow-up. When a man is released from prison he must leave with a healthier attitude toward society and a greater desire to find his place in their midst. This may sound Utopian but it is the substance of a studied program. However, as Prof. Goodwin Watson, of Columbia University, said (in a letter), "Psychologists may be expected to be educators, and not miracle workers." The effectiveness of the mental test and the treatment it suggests depends upon the scope of the psychologist, his understanding of psychometry and abnormal psychology, and the scientific character of his attitude toward the prisoners.

The foregoing is a picture of what our prisons may be with the aid of modern psychological equipment. The trained psychologist coming into the prison soon learns well enough what tools he needs to fit his particular situation. The job now seems to be to get the trained workers in the jails, and to assure them freedom of operation. How long will it take the public and the old-school administrators to learn that this is the only way to curtail the nation's crime bill?