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Bernard O. Wise

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DELINQUENCY A MENTAL HYGIENE PROBLEM

BERNARD O. WISE¹

We are appreciating with increasing certainty that there is no fundamental difference between the normal mind and the functionally abnormal—the same laws apply to both, the difference being an emphasis, stress, or exaggeration of one or another of the parts of the mind's machinery. Psychiatry must not confine its efforts to only those who have mental or nervous diseases. This is after all, but one type of alteration in the so-called healthy state. It behooves us to work with equal diligence to bring within the scope of our understanding those who have a different moral sense. Call it unmoral or anti-social if you will. Boiled down it simply means looking at the question of right and wrong from a different angle. We speak of "deviates" and the "abnormal," but from what do they deviate and what is normal? Most everything in nature is found to have a general scheme of structure and likewise certain variations from the great predominant similarities. For instance, in determining normal intelligence we must find the intelligence rating of the greatest number of average people, make this the standard and expect great departures above and below the scale. At the very top and very bottom of the scale there are to be found the minorities who grow fewer in number as the more severe extremes are approached.

In a way quite analogous to this intellectual variation is the distribution over the emotional scale. There is the garden variety of plain everyday man on the street whom we expect to encounter most frequently. This average person is capable of yielding at times to the finer emotions and yet, at the next moment, if offended, to blow up in hot resentful anger, objectively none too pious behavior, or a display of none too angelic emotions. When we look for the extremes or the deviates from this flexible normal we expect, and find, those who are fixed at an extreme the "always good" and at its opposite pole, those who are perpetually and uncompromisingly "bad." Speaking first of those who are too good. By the very nature of things the man who is really good must enjoy being good and be well pleased with his goodness. It must be to him a source

¹ State Psychiatrist and Psychiatric Adviser to the Parole Board, Howard, Rhode Island.

of genuine inner satisfaction. It is well known that even martyrdom may be pleasurable. Perhaps this type of goodness should not be placed at the extreme in our curve, because it is a form of sublimation and fits in better with the group of those who are socially and inwardly adjusted. It is that other type which I wish to place among the deviates—the unhappily good. A pre-psychotic social history of the life of a surprisingly large number of insane individuals will reveal that for years they were considered to be docile, perfectly mannered, conscientiously considerate, and so definitely the acme of perfection they were pointed out to their fellows as models of behavior. But here is the catch. This inhibited, compliant individual who was really not expressing himself at all, was extremely dissatisfied with his personality, even though others rated him as noble. Unable to face reality at childhood's end, when adolescence brought on added burdens, responsibilities, and demands, the personality cracked under the strain. At this point, because a mental illness has destroyed the laboring personality, aggression, irritability, and other sinister traits raise their ugly heads. Borrowing some terms from the recent Spanish Civil War, one might say that self-expression is now permitted to these once very inhibited individuals who, under normal conditions could not slip past their too strict censors. The trick is done by permitting the emotions to run the blockade of critical conscience; through flying the false colors of distorted ideas, technically called delusions; giving a justification even though on false premises for the expression of heretofore blocked emotions. All of this is enacted in a setting of unreality.

The normal among us do not have to go to the lengths of a mental illness to obtain relief from emotional tensions. Society, wise in years and experience, looks between her fingers at a great deal of the disagreeable behavior among her members and permits an individual well-accepted in society to work off steam and remain mentally healthy within the confines of the social arena. This so-called well-balanced person is through devious ways allowing his emotions to express themselves directly or through indirect devices. This little bit of the "Old Nick" in most of us, normally assumes its not too important place along with the hundreds of other characteristics, many of which are lovable, philanthropic, and even altruistic. These occasional flashes of animus should, for the most part, have burned themselves out by the age of six; and any recurrent flare thereafter generated by frustration should be met with adequate means to extinguish it without too much distress to the individual's conscience or threat to his neighbor's safety.

Hate and aggression, if conditioning and training be mismanaged, can assume an all-prevailing importance, overshadowing all other emotions and objectives. The child who senses the love and consideration of parents who have admirable personal attributes will be perfectly willing, after he has had his little fling of willfulness, to take over his parents' moral teachings as his own beliefs, ideas, and views on ethical topics. There are two methods employed by society to hold the individual in line, training him in childhood to conform to the rules or punishing him when he grows up. The future adult representative of a culture is given frequent inoculations of the group's accepted cultural ideals in his youth. This is done by suggestion, precept, and example over a long period of time; it works gradually, but surely, and is extremely potent. If this vaccination takes, the new member of society has been so completely permeated with the belief in the correctness, and even the sacredness, of the prevailing customs that they have become a veritable part of him, of his thinking, his feeling and his way of judgment. Whereupon, thereafter, if he transgresses upon this accepted code, he will forthwith punish himself—be it suicide, a neurosis, or a psychosis. But if the inner voice of conscience—which is in reality the digested and assimilated cultural ideas of the group—has not been implanted, society has then to resort to a more direct way of dealing with the nonconformist; namely, by physical punishment or imposed deprivation.

Why must the forceful method be necessary? Chiefly because the psychological laws have been run in reverse. If conditions in the child's environment threaten him or handicap his struggle to obtain a feeling of importance, worth-whileness, and self-appreciation; if through either subtle or manifest means his associates, parents, or siblings are unsympathetic or unreasonable, or if he believes them to be so; the child will naturally attempt to be free of them by either passive, active, or symbolical means. He will disavow and reject not only the unloved guardian but all of the moral teachings which are sponsored by those for whom he has neither regard nor respect. If he senses that the adults who assume the authority to command or, as they claim, guide him, are not truly sincere in their desire to safeguard his best interest, then certainly the ideas, philosophies, and religion which they preach will not be accepted. This is the enemy's propaganda and he will have none of it. The rebellious counter-attack will be fought with the weapons of sullen uncooperativeness, passive or active resistance, insubordination, disobedience and eventually an aggressive assault on the sacred laws of constituted authority.

Once a viewpoint and a pattern of behavior are established they tend to be self-perpetuating. The child who rebels against parental control will later challenge the laws of the state and so there begins an unhalting march from the principal's office through the reform school to the penitentiary. If this one-time tiny spark of rebellion is nourished, it feeds upon itself and goes out to look for allies and, finding them, gains courage and becomes more courageous in its rebellious operations, safe in the camp of the insurgents—the street corner gang—perhaps planning a robbery. The boy finds himself at home in this group; they share the same philosophy as he; he is recognized, even praised, for his anti-social capabilities. Now observe that the psychological laws of identification and suggestion are in operation even here. The boy finding himself appreciated by a welcoming group, feeling a solidarity and security with his criminal comrades, will become more and more deeply impressed with their minority opinions. This is brought about in no way greatly different from other persuasive influences wrought by prestige suggestion, the most dramatic of which is hypnosis and the commonest example of which is good salesmanship. We could well say that the parents of the delinquent child are not very clever salesmen. They cannot sell to their charge the idea of the desirability of social conformity. Something is missing in their sales promotion technique—insufficient prestige, the inability to command admiration and friendship or they are unskilled in the art of presenting, convincingly and attractively, the concept of social cooperation.

Why do parents fail to imbue their children with the highest ideals? Sexual maturity and the power to reproduce himself do not necessarily qualify an individual to be an intelligent, understanding, reasonable, kindly person, or a proper model for young children to emulate. Because one is a parent he is not necessarily fitted to be a teacher of ethics and philosophy, theoretical and applied. The state controls academic education. Pedagogy is a science based on years of research and a vast fund of knowledge with certified educators meticulously supervised and trained. But basic moral guidance in the home, during the particularly formative years of a child's life, is allowed to rest in the hands of any person beyond the stage of pubescence. Be he feeble-minded, utterly unmoral, anti-social, tyrannical, or just plain hateful, it makes no difference; he is the parent, guide, teacher, preceptor, and exemplar. In addition, he may be, not only intellectually, but emotionally, unfitted for his task. He may perchance be one of those parents who enjoys

the luxury of working out his own personality oddities on his child and, in so doing, throttles the child's gasp for self-expression, shutting off normal outlets of personality expansion.

Rebellion is absolutely necessary if the child's individuality and self-respect are to be maintained. It may be heresy, but from the psychiatric point of view, personal happiness, and even sanity, is occasionally possible of preservation only by revolt against authority; or in alignment with the ranks of the revolutionists—the street corner gang and the underworld; or even the inner world of the prison. Why should this be? The criminal is happier because there is no uncompromising destructive warfare waging between one part of himself and another. The criminal is neither a neurotic nor a psychotic individual. He will not punish himself.

The psychoanalytic school claims that often there is a hostility of the child toward one of its parents. A theory of the development of many mental illnesses is that these deep-seated hostile feelings clash headlong with the moral barriers, resulting in uncompromising, unrelenting conflicts accompanied by guilt which rend asunder the personality and force it to take refuge in certain secondary lines of defense—peculiar compensations—exaggerations of some already existent trait—some type of which stands ready in every one of us to take charge if we cannot make peace or clean-cut war between our inner selves and society. These postulations are controversial in classical psychiatry, but in the observation of delinquents they frequently are seen in full unmistakable operation, since the repressive forces of conscience and guilt are lightly, or not at all, applied leaving in plain stark view the antagonisms, hostilities and primitive drives openly expressed. Often there exists a certain limited amount of inhibition, but this is superficial and thinly veneered and what there is, is easily dissolved in alcohol. A few drinks and out they go to steal or burn or fight.

With the criminal there is no self-destructive battle within himself. The fight is between himself and society. There is a thrilling out and out game to out-wit the law in contest for supremacy. The battle is often stimulating and attractive. He may feel chagrin as losing, but rarely guilt. We can understand then why these people are found to be so happy-go-lucky, free, light-hearted and usually a long way removed from neuroticism. It is surprising to see how cheerfully they accept apprehension, conviction, and sentence; and the casualness with which they will insist that there is absolutely nothing wrong with stealing or in breaking the laws, ex-

cept the hazard of getting caught. Therefore, it is to be expected that the prisoner should be very much a sociable individual in his underworld. The criminal is not unsocial. He is anti-social. The patient in the mental hospital, suffering with dementia praecox is unsocial. But the wrong-doer, surrounded by those who share with him the same rebellious ideas, is a good mixer and is really distressed if he is forced to surrender his privilege of human association. The greatest punishment he can be given is solitary confinement. To the psychotic individual, however, solitary confinement is both an acceptable and a pleasureable experience.

It can be seen that the mental hospital offers sound training to one who wishes better to understand the personality drives behind delinquency. The forward-looking psychiatrist has realized for many years that the real cure for mental disease is its prevention. With this in mind, the great organization of Mental Hygiene has been erected on an international scale. Going over from the mental hospital to the State Prison, and studying the life history and pattern of its inmates, we are coming to realize that mental hygiene, more than any other single factor, holds out hope of reducing the penal population. The case histories of the socially recalcitrant and the mentally ill are often, surprisingly similar in the violation of the rules of child guidance. The results in both are failures as regards the development of a normal, socially and emotionally integrated member of society. There is pathology in both, though the clinical picture takes a different turn. There is no suggestion that the average prisoner is in any way mentally unsound; but rather, socially unsound. The closer the study, the more one is impressed with the fact that these have a common progenitor.

There is missionary work to be done in instituting long-range crime prevention through the medium of mental hygiene. But the psychiatric understanding of misbehavior need not wait long to reap a dividend of usefulness. The one most controversial and unsettled problem facing the states today is that of probation and parole. It is no longer a theoretical conjecture that psychiatric study of personality is valuable in assisting those upon whom rests the responsibility of deciding who may profit by the clemency of parole. The system of psychiatric advise to a state board of parole has been functioning for some years with nationally accredited results. It is to be hoped that the usefulness of psychiatry along these lines may be extended.