

1953

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Recommended Citation

Paul W. Tappan, Florita's Enquiry into the Causes of Crime, 44 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 17 (1953-1954)

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FLORITA'S ENQUIRY INTO THE CAUSES OF CRIME

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It is refreshing to study the thoughts of a widely experienced criminologist whose approach to the subject of causation departs from conventional treatments of the subject. The main line of Dr. Florita's paper will meet little opposition among American readers: *i.e.* his rejection of the idea that constitutional or physical abnormalities are the causes of crime. While this view may stir some opposition among numerous European criminal biologists, the great majority of criminologists here have rejected the Lombrosian and Hooten hypotheses on the role of physical factors, if anything, perhaps, too uncritically. The author's more positive affirmations as to causes of crime and his excursions into various implications of his theory may stir some thought, however. Not that the views expressed in his document are distinctly novel to our thinking, to be sure, but at a time when great emphasis is being placed upon a strictly individualized approach to the criminal as an abnormal deviate by many American criminologists, Florita's remarks may stimulate some reconsideration of the complexity of the problems involved.

At the request of the Editor, the writer will make an otherwise presumptuous effort to interpret Dr. Florita's remarks insofar as they may offer some special stimulus to our critical thinking in the States. The author appears to make these major points in regard to crime causation:

1. Crime is natural and normal, rather than aberrational behavior. Relatively few offenders are psychologically deviant, these few being found most often among murderers and sex offenders who constitute a small fraction of the criminal population: the extreme and dramatic cases that come to the attention of the medical authorities. As to the general mass-run of criminals, however, the thieves, burglars, robbers, embezzlers, etc., he finds that they are products of the social and cultural pressures that lead quite directly and naturally into law violations. As our sociologists in the United States have noted, the social control of human behavior today is based upon processes of gross

“denaturalization,” demanding stern repressions and behavioral substitutions to bring conduct into conformity with the varied social demands, often denying expression to most natural human wants. Florita suggests, much as Dr. Healy has before, that the offender is one who cannot find a socially acceptable channelling of his desires and who, therefore, achieves his satisfaction through means that the law disapproves.

2. Formulated as a causal hypothesis, the author suggests that crimes are generated by the life struggle and express our natural instincts in it; but these expressions are in conflict with the current (“actual”) needs for social order. The basic cause of these disapproved responses lies in “deficient social education,” a failure to establish adequate repression or redirection of the strivings for “food and a female.” (This explanation of goals may well be considered far too simple an hypothesis of motives, of course.) It is peculiarly within the deprived socio-economic classes that training is deficient, and causal explanations must be sought in a social etiology through which *normal* criminals express *natural* impulses in ways that the law has prohibited in the particular time and place.

3. While Dr. Florita finds that physical and psychiatric deviations occur in some criminals, he suggests that social factors are anterior to and responsible for these, and that such variations account not for the individual's becoming criminal but rather for the kinds of crimes that he may commit. Specifically he denies that these deviations are causal, except perhaps in a secondary sense, the real cause being always of a social origin. Thus a social condition may generate a neurological state of which crime is an ultimate consequence. In such cases, the author maintains, both the cause and the modè of treatment should be sociological rather than medical: educators, sociologists, moralists and legislators, not physicians or psychiatrists, should provide the therapy. He thus proclaims, though he does not formulate it specifically as a preventive program, that the remedy of the crime problem lies in so educating children to fight for life according to the social rules that they will not need to violate the law. This requires, too, he suggests, more careful thought as to the content of the laws.

This exposition of causation offers some germinal thought to the cogitation of American criminologists. In particular, it is useful in these days of devotion to Freud to recognize that crime is not itself an illness nor usually the product of illness in the sense of bio- or psycho-pathology. It is more than likely that we are misled in our literature by the forceful impact of fascinating but quite exceptional

cases in which some crimes against the person appear quite clearly to be symptomatic of emotional disorders and unconscious drives. Even in these instances, Florita suggests, any satisfactory solution to the problem should come from changing the social milieu out of which disorders derive rather than from partial measures of clinically manipulating the individual. It should be clear to American criminologists, who have been considerably influenced, by and large, by sociological research and analysis, that the *phenomena of crime are defined by legal and social norms*, and to a large extent, at least, by social causes, rather than by biological structure or psychological condition. A fair part of recent publications in the field, however, have neglected to recognize the implications of society and culture.

Dr. Florita's article should provoke further thought about the whole problem of normation, though his treatment merely introduces the problem. It appears that the literature on norms and deviations should make quite clear that *legal norms* are socially determined standards of required behavior, compulsives to action or avoidance that may differ radically from man's natural impulses. So, for example, in the demand that the soldier or the policeman must stand and face fire, that the angry victim of a threatened attack must retreat, that the erotic bachelor must contain himself, and that the envious may not appropriate. The law may set norms near or far from man's easy grasp: its object is not to satisfy the individual but to secure the group, generally to the loss and if necessary to the condemnation of those individuals who cannot easily conform or who will not do so. Such norms require frustration, sometimes neurotic adjustments, a sense of guilt active enough to support group controls.

In marked contrast to such legal norms is the *clinical standard* of normality that is based generally upon an *ideal*. It may be defined, perhaps, as an optimum psycho-physical adjustment of the individual. It is not always clear, however, as to what the individual should be adjusted to, but it appears that rather than an adaptation to legal and social requirements, emphasis is more commonly upon facilitating expression, avoiding neurosis or feelings of guilt, on healing the psychic wounds that the individual may have sustained from social and familial pressures upon him. Insofar as medical psychology and related fields are preoccupied with the neurotic and with the release of psychic constraints, they have had a limited utility for criminal diagnosis and therapy. Confronted by aggressive, antisocial, compulsive, and exploitative criminal types, orthodox psychiatry appears thus far to have been at a loss to determine either what goal of adjustment it should seek

or what measures of therapy it may usefully employ. In any event, the goal orientation of psychotherapy in a private setting differs strikingly from the objectives of law and penology and, while these are not always wholly incompatible, it is true nevertheless that many correctional clinicians have found it difficult or impossible thus far to coordinate their ends and methods with the necessities of penal law. The behavior scientist helps little to guide along the road to an effective instrumentation of legal standards by his mere insistence that criminals are deviated and should be relieved of responsibility by reason of their illnesses. At least as strong a case may be made, if indeed Florita has not made it, for exculpating the "normal criminal" who is developed and warped through his environment.

The norms commonly employed by the *social* scientist for purposes of measurement and evaluation of social problems differ significantly from both the standards suggested above. We generally use a *statistical criterion* of normality and of degrees of deviation therefrom. In this sense it is ridiculous, of course, to speak of a "sick society" or of most men, criminal or otherwise, as being "ill," though social reformers as well as some behavior scientists are wont to do so. From the point of view of attempting to measure objectively the prevalence of social or behavioral disorders, the social scientist cannot but be confused by the imprecision and diversity of idealistic normative definitions from which it is impossible to determine with any nicety who is healthy, normal or adequate in personal and social adjustments, to a complex social order and, more particularly, to its innumerable minatory controls.

This brings us finally to the point, noted in Florita's article, that criminal behavior may represent *etiologically* a quite *natural expression of normal impulses* that, from the point of view of society's definitions, however, are insufficiently educated and controlled. One may be quite normal in his psycho-biological structure and, so far as may be discovered, in his social conditioning and general social responses, yet be a criminal. In the experience of repeated crime he may find satisfying expression of his biological, psychological, and social needs in channels that are, from an etiological point of view, quite normal.

It is unfortunate that in this article Florita has not defined more precisely his notion of what "cause" is. The writer cannot agree to any proposition that biological and psychological factors are not causal. Moreover, the utility of establishing social factors as antecedent causes is dubious, excepting insofar as it goes to the problem of initial prevention of the circumstances out of which crime develops. Nor has

satisfactory evidence been established to support the proposition that medical and psychiatric authorities can make no important contribution to the treatment of criminals. The difficulty here is that each field of criminological specialization would like to provide all the answers. In this article, as in so much of criminological writing, there appears to be a tendency to generalize too broadly on the basis of a single orientation. It is valuable to have attention drawn again, however, to the significance of culture and group influences in producing crime and to the need for broadly social treatment approaches (as well as the ministrations of psychiatrists, psychologists, physicians, and case workers) to meet the complex problems of crime. Dr. Florita sees quite clearly, as often we do not, that crime involves basically matters of law, society, and correction rather than general psychotherapy, whether superficial or profound. He does not stress sufficiently the role that clinical experts may play in working out techniques to aid in correcting the criminal and conforming him to the minimum, essential demands of the social order.