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Police Science Book Reviews

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POLICE SCIENCE BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by

Richard L. Holcomb*

TRAFFIC ACCIDENT INVESTIGATOR'S MANUAL FOR POLICE. Northwestern University Traffic Institute, Evanston, Ill., 1957. Pp. 617. Illus. 346. \$7.50.

This is beyond question the best book yet written for police officers. The material is well presented, authoritative, and complete. There is no doubt that the prevention of accidents is the most important problem confronting the police. Any program of accident prevention, by the police or any other agency, must be based upon good accident investigation. This manual tells how to make the investigation in a manner that is so thorough and so well explained that it puts all other police texts to shame. It is unfortunate that we do not have equally good manuals on other police functions.

It would be easy to write a long review of this publication, and it would take a long review to describe the contents and the excellent method of presentation. However, it is sufficient to say that there are no wasted words on any of the 617 pages and that the 346 exhibits include photographs, drawings, diagrams, and charts greatly supplement the text.

This book is a standard in the police field. Every law enforcement officer should have a copy, and more important, read and study it. The methods presented are designed for accident investigation, but many of them apply to other sorts of police investigations.

I cannot recommend this manual too strongly.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SEX OFFENDERS. By *Albert Ellis* and *Ralph Brancale*, Charles C Thomas, Publisher, Springfield, Illinois, 1956. Pp. 132. \$3.75.

As psychiatry and psychology approach maturity, the general public has shown its growing faith in their findings by more reliance upon them for solutions to needs of the day. With public acceptance has come legislative approval, including the adoption by most of the states of the "sexual psychopath laws." The rationale of such laws has been briefly this: some persons, if not all, who commit "sex crimes" are really not criminals but are sick; therefore, the humane and up-to-date thing to do with them is to give them psychiatric treatment instead of putting them in jail.

But although legislatures have been anxious to pass such laws, most of the informed criticism has condemned them. Without trying to set down all the hostile comments on the "sexual psychopath laws," let me name a few. At the outset, critics have said that "sex psychopathy" is too vague and undefined a term to justify legislation. It is also argued that sex offenders have the lowest rates of recidivism of any sort of crime. More seriously, many have seen a strong likelihood that due process will fail because of procedures set up in these statutes: for instance, that they will result in detention for indefinite periods for small offenses. Some have feared that enforcement of these laws (especially post-Kinsey!) would swamp our mental hospitals with inmates. Others have said that even the most modern diagnostic and therapeutic methods were so uncertain that cures as a result of these laws would be unlikely. The best several writers have been able to say for "sexual psychopath laws" has been

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that in any case they do small harm because they are not used. There is a host of writing condemning these statutes; few have written in their praise.

Yet much of the criticism has been a priori; very few studies of the sex offender laws have been made, and still fewer can claim much statistical validity. For example, Abrahamsen's group at Sing Sing made an interesting study of 102 sex offenders, useful as far as it went; but the inmates studied are only a small sample of sex offenders, being largely convicted felons, and there are other statistical objections to Abrahamsen's report. California and Michigan have published long surveys of their experiences, complete with statistics, but no one till now has tried to study this problem so scientifically as the difficulties require.

The book I am reviewing, however, is an attempt at a careful study, and a most interesting and convincing one, too. The authors have put together psychiatric, psychological, and social data on 300 sex offenders examined at the New Jersey Diagnostic Center between May of 1949 and June of 1950. They have used a battery of the latest diagnostic and testing techniques in their study of these 300 cases and their findings are the most reliable ones I know of.

The short introduction outlines their methods, while pointing out weaknesses in other studies and admitting also that no truly "scientific" study of the subject may ever be made. Then, having decided (as have many before them) that legal classifications of sex offenders are too vague and broad for careful analysis, they set up their own system of classification, basing classification not on legal labels but on the nature of the sexual behavior which gave rise to the criminal charge against the offender.

Following the setting up of these new detailed classifications of offenders is a very detailed study of 21 major hypotheses frequently advanced by students of this subject. To give them all in detail would need as much space as the book itself uses; I shall summarize only a few.

For instance, most writers have argued that "sex offenders have one of the lowest rates as 'repeaters' of all types of crime." From this it would follow that they are a minor problem in criminal jurisprudence. As this book's figures show, this hypothesis is true only because criminals in general are recidivists; also, that "minor" sex offenders tend to be "repeaters" whereas that is not true of "major" sex offenders, such as rapists.

Again, many people have objected to legal use of the phrase "sex psychopathy" on the ground that it is not accepted as a clear diagnostic entity. That this view is right is very plain when we consider the vast variation in personality types in those examined by this study. In fact, of the 300 subjects tested, only 9, or 3%, were diagnosed as psychopaths, whereas many were severely neurotic or were psychotic.

As for the claim that these laws make a great risk that long detention will be visited on persons who are not insane and whose acts are not inherently very dangerous to society, our authors wisely confine themselves to their own state of New Jersey, where, they say, the maximum sentence for the crime of which the sex deviates have been committed limits their detention for psychiatric purposes, and where procedure has limited those treated for these offenses to persons severely deviated and ill.

I had always supposed that the big majority of sex deviates never came to official attention. In this it seems I was substantially right, although if one limits the term "sex deviate" to persons seriously emotionally disturbed, the authors believe that most of them sooner or later get enmeshed in the toils of the law.

One great fear fathered by the "sexual psychopath laws" has been that of flooding our state mental institutions with untreatable offenders. In my home state of Iowa, after a short flurry soon after our law was passed in 1955, we have had no such burden on our institutions, though the Act has increased their population somewhat; this is probably because few county attorneys here use the statute. In New Jersey, say our authors, there has been no very

great added load on state mental institutions, since only 84 of the 300 men studied were committed, and their stays were limited anyway by the maximum sentence for the crime of which they were committed. Also, their screening methods are better than those in Iowa and most other states. In fact, states with such laws on the books would do well to examine the New Jersey statute and how it has worked, with an eye to revising their own statutes along New Jersey lines.

There are several other important hypotheses I have not space to discuss. I have, however, tried to show that some of the common views of experts in this field are borne out by New Jersey experience and some are not; the subject is ripe for a fresh approach.

Finally, our authors, in the main portion of their book, agree that the New Jersey statute is a good one and go on to make proposals and findings of a general sort. One cannot lay it down too strongly that, regardless of the authors' recommendations, indeed quite in line with their own views as set forth in their final chapter, this is a most complex problem still. To treat under such laws only "major sex deviates" means we must decide what is a "major sex deviate." Do we, for example, define that person as one whose *acts* are violent or as one whose *personality disturbance* is severe? The answer is vital for a severe personality disorder may express itself in relatively non-violent activity. Our authors would limit operation of such laws to those with severe personality disorders or mental diseases. But this requires excellent diagnostic sources; how many states have enough qualified doctors and staffs for the job, and how are they to be housed and paid? Our authors ask that "All sex offenses should be specifically and scientifically designated and defined in the law in meaningful, consistent, nonoverlapping terms." Amen, say I, but who is to do this in the present confused state of psychiatry, not to mention the state of legislatures which must pass such changes in the laws? In short, this is a most difficult and intricate problem, both theoretically and practically. Nevertheless, the New Jersey experience reported by our authors is encouraging.

One other chapter deserves mention. Mr. Ellis has given us ten pages or so on "Interrogation of Sex Offenders." As he says, this sort of thing requires trained personnel, but usually is conducted by people with no specialized training. So he recommends that this part of the procedure be carried on by professionally trained people with backgrounds in psychology or psychiatric areas. "They should be individuals who have had [my comment, are not currently having?] a reasonably active sex life themselves, preferably including some nonconformist sex behavior [my comment again: definition please!] and who have no serious sex problems." Dear me! In addition, they should have a "specialized knowledge of the historical, sociologic, and anthropological aspects of sex, love, and marriage relations," plus criminology and sex crimes! At the same time they must be able to talk to those they are questioning in plain Anglo-Saxon one-syllable language. And so on. Now what sort of person, excluding Mr. Ellis and me, is such a Leonardo da Vinci of sex? I doubt whether Iowa, at least, overflows with this sort of Renaissance man. The fact is that I doubt that any place today has many people of this sort available for this kind of thing, and therefore, though I agree as to the importance of interrogation and its technics I doubt that in my lifetime I shall see it regularly handled by people as qualified as these. I suspect it will remain in the hands of police, county attorneys, and judges, none of whom, alas, are superhuman. Perhaps it is as well.

All this should not be taken to minimize the scope or importance of this book. As aforesaid, it is the first real try at analysis of a most vital part of the law, using the most modern methods, and written by persons with real personal competence and of the highest order of training and impartiality. Everyone concerned with the administration or study of the "Sexual Psychopath" laws should read it carefully, for it is a milestone on the road to greater understanding of a most serious human problem.

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