

Melitta Schmideberg, Psychological Factors Underlying Criminal Behavior, v37 (6) Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology p458 (1946-1947) Available

<https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3432&context=jcl>

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS UNDERLYING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Melitta Schmideberg, M.D.

Dr. Schmideberg is Psychiatrist to *The Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency*, London; Member of the International Psychoanalytic Association. She has published numerous articles on the technique and theory of psychoanalysis in medical and other professional journals. She has analyzed about fifty delinquents and criminals, and is at present engaged in research in the psychoanalysis of major criminals and in writing a book on the subject.—EDITOR.

In old fashioned history books, the highest tribute paid to a king was to say that he was just, he helped the poor and punished the wicked. In those days a law-abiding people were sorely in need of protection against powerful law-breakers. Today the power of the state is firmly established. True, quite a number of crimes are never detected; but no criminal has the slightest chance of openly defying society. If we read of a man-hunt in the country we give the poor devil a fortnight at the outside; we know that by then the armed machinery of the law will surely have overtaken him. Society has the right and the duty to protect itself. But its superiority in strength over the individual delinquent is so overwhelming that it can afford to be generous. The least we owe the criminal is to make an attempt to understand him.

Types of Criminals

We may subdivide law-breakers, somewhat schematically, into five types: 1) The ordinary man who is driven to crime by overwhelming external circumstances. 2) The apparently normal individual who is carried away by an irresistible impulse. 3) The neurotic criminal who is driven by equally irresistible but unconscious forces, the nature of which is unknown to him. He regards his criminal tendencies as foreign to his personality and tries vainly to struggle with them. 4) The genuine criminal who prides himself on the delinquent exploits in which he expresses his anti-social attitude. 5) Lastly, a group of criminals whose behavior is the result of mental deficiency or organic illness. They present a medical and not a psychological problem so that I shall disregard them for the purposes of this paper.

According to the letter of the law a man who is impelled by hunger to steal is a criminal. I doubt if any decent person would so regard him. Society is more to blame for such "crimes" than the individuals who commit them. In so far as such offenses call for social rather than psychological measures

I need not deal with them here but I might add that such simple and clear-cut cases as the one just described are comparatively rare. Usually even quite simple types of offense present a psychological problem as well as a sociological one.

Crimes of passion or emotion appear clear enough. We all think we can understand the man who under strong provocation allows himself to be carried away by his emotions. Many people think that such a natural occurrence is not in need of any complicated psycho-analytical explanation. Nevertheless I believe that this type of reaction is much more intricate than appears on the surface and will be discussed in greater detail later.

The next type, the neurotic delinquent, has long been a popular object of psychological interest. A dim realization of the fact that he is driven by overwhelming irrational forces is reflected in confused conceptions of him as a "Jekyll and Hyde" or "double personality," notions which are scorned by judges and others who wish to maintain the traditional division of all mankind into black and white, and who retain the age-old belief that we are responsible for our impulses and control our own destinies. A patient of mine was caught trying to get into the subway without paying her fare. She is a decent and honest girl, who has spent the greater part of her life doing hard work for others, and has few material ambitions. On the day of her offense she was rather worried and in a curious state of absent-mindedness. She behaved most suspiciously and her reaction when found out was out of all proportion. She felt that no decent person would speak to her again, that her career would be ruined, and that she would have to commit suicide. Analysis revealed the following: at the time the incident occurred she was very worried over a sexual affair which had taken place years before. A man in authority had seduced her, and she was frightened that the matter would come out, but at the same time she wished to confess it and thus betray the man. It was not lack of morality, but a moral impulse—the urge to confess and the need for punishment—which drove her to cheat.

Unconsciously she confessed—and expected to be punished for—her guilty sexual behavior which she concealed, while parading instead a guilty non-sexual action. Her exaggerated reactions to being caught cheating reflected her feelings over the sexual matter for which she condemned herself so severely. The fear of having her career wrecked actually turned out to be anxiety felt on behalf of her lover, whose career she would have wrecked by betraying him. She suddenly remembered that he had once boasted to her of having cheated on the subway. When her case was dismissed under the "First Offenders' Act" her relief was mingled with resentment against all those

who had been kind to her in the matter. On the way home from the court she took the wrong train by mistake; had this been discovered she would have been suspected of repeating her offense. She felt all along that she simply had to get herself into trouble, and as there was no one else to punish her, she had to do it herself. As soon as she got home she developed a painful neurotic symptom which lasted for days.

I believe that a large proportion of offenses arises as a reaction to sudden mental stress. The psychological and practical consequences of the offense then combine to drive the person deeper still into crime.

Typical Psychological Mechanisms

The psychological mechanisms observed in this case are typical: the connection between the offense and the neurotic symptom; unconscious guilt and the need for punishment inspiring criminal behavior; substitution of a guilty non-sexual act for a guilty sexual one; identification with a person loved and hated at the same time by borrowing his guilt. And above all it should be stressed that all these complicated mechanisms were completely unconscious at the time of committing the offense.

The following case is a further illustration of the queer mixture of primitive instinct and moral impulse expressed in delinquent conduct, and of the inter-relation between these aspects and the delinquent's personality and sexual life. A woman patient had repeatedly made serious attempts on her life by taking luminal, which she obtained by forging prescriptions. She felt extremely guilty over her suicidal attempts, by which she contrived to upset her family deeply; yet the more guilty she felt the greater was her impulse to self-destruction. Although ordinarily restrained and correct in her behavior she was prepared to cheat and lie to any extent in order to achieve her purpose: luminal excused everything. She obtained no sexual gratification and very little pleasure out of life. Extremely inhibited and controlled, she could relax and express emotions only under luminal. Taking luminal had become a substitute for all guilty pleasures; for sexual gratification, for enjoying stolen sweets, and so on. Getting luminal by fraud signified getting money by fraud; by having breakdowns she forced her family to spend money on her which she did not dare to steal from them for more enjoyable purposes. In attempting to kill herself, too, she was carrying out a wish to kill her parents. The first act in the suicidal drama, the getting and taking of the drug, expressed all her guilty anti-social impulses; the second act, the death which was to follow, represented the death sentences for her sins. The more guilty she

felt, the greater became her urge to punish herself by suicide. An analysis was able to release some part of her suppressed hostility and it became easier for her to relax. She then developed a habit of dropping off to sleep whenever she felt depressed, instead of renewing her attempts at suicide.

Fundamentally Anti-social Criminals

But it is time that we turn our attention to the genuine, fundamentally anti-social criminal. The usual idea—and one shared by a number of analysts—is that the genuine criminal is lacking in moral standards and normal inhibitions and can be restrained from anti-social activities only by external pressure. In my view things are not so simple. It seems to me that it would be more accurate to say that the criminal has no satisfactory emotional relations and therefore no consideration for others, makes things or physical pleasures the center of his interest and suffers from an overwhelming need for immediate satisfaction with no thought of the future. Children handed over from foster-parent to foster-parent learn to avoid becoming attached to and placing reliance on people, and to derive all their pleasure from food and material things. Money takes for them the place of an ideal parent; it procures everything they want, protects them, feeds them, never fails them, and makes no demands on them. A child who has experienced little satisfaction in emotional contact with his mother but whose main source of happiness has been the physical contact of feeding, will very likely in later life seek pleasure and comfort either in alcohol, or in the adult type of physical satisfaction detached from any love-relationship—in promiscuous intercourse.

This development can often be observed in illegitimate children and others who have never had the opportunity of forming stable relations with loved persons. Others are brought to the same pass as a result of giving up emotional relations which they have found too painful and disappointing. Take the case of a prostitute, the only child of an extremely possessive and jealous mother who played on her emotions all the time. When she grew up the only emotional relationships she could have were of the over-intense type such as she once had with her mother. She usually soon found them unbearable and had to break them off. The only alternative to them was prostitution. She said to me, "My mother wanted to possess me body and soul; men can have my body, and even that only for an hour." It is often the case that delinquents steal things they could have got perfectly well by asking. But being given something, with the obligation of gratitude which it implies, has been made so unpleasant for them in childhood that they avoid it at all cost.

*Delinquency Only Outlet for Some with
Warped Emotional Life*

In analyzing criminals we find that it is not so much the material gain as such that they covet, but the feeling of happiness or relief from anxiety, which they can achieve only through material possessions or in the thrill of criminal activity. Paradoxically enough, most criminals are not money-minded. Few thieves have ever even tried to get rich. Their aim is usually to acquire and squander possessions. Delinquents who seem so uninhibited in their anti-social activities are often markedly inhibited in every other respect, in normal activities, work, interests, in imagination—or in the case of children—in play. The reluctance to work so characteristic of many criminals is not simply laziness, but usually the result of neurotic inhibitions in work. For people who are thus inhibited in every direction, who find no satisfaction through contact with others and have few resources of their own, delinquency is often the only outlet for their emotions and imagination. Their overwhelming need for immediate pleasure is actually a deep longing for a little happiness as a relief from a state of permanent dissatisfaction and depression. The excitement of crime and even of punishment is a momentary escape from their grey and drab lives. While most of the time they feel emotionally dead they come alive in their criminal activities.

It is recorded that Queen Elizabeth who as a baby had hardly a dress or bonnet to her name, in later life enjoyed the possession of some three thousand dresses. When she was in disgrace after her mother's execution, being given a dress must have appeared to her as a symbol of love and security. It seems that throughout her life as a powerful queen she never surmounted the frustrations and insecurities of her childhood. She must have bought so many dresses because they symbolized for her the love and emotional security which she could not buy.

Children's first thefts usually relate to food and sweets. Most delinquent children are extremely greedy, even if they are normally well fed. This excessive greed is largely due to an unconscious fear of being starved which may spring from unsatisfactory feeding experiences in infancy, from lack of love and pleasure or other frustrations. They gulp and swallow food as if it were the only meal they would get in their lives. It is this same fear of being starved and neglected that drives them to steal. Since they trust nobody, they have no belief in the future and live only for the pleasures of the moment. It is appreciation of the consequences and hope of ultimate satisfaction that enables us to postpone immediate gratification. Society tries to thrust fear of the consequences onto the delin-

quent in order to make him social. But fear of the future can hardly influence anyone without hope for the future beneficially. If the fear is more than he can endure he will seek momentary release from it in delinquency just as the alcoholic seeks oblivion in alcohol.

An absence of real confidence in the future is often combined with fantastic and exaggerated hopes, which are however, too unreal to influence present life and conduct. These hopes are simply fantasies which provide comfort and escape from an unsatisfactory everyday life. A delinquent patient was convinced that she was extremely gifted artistically and that in a few years time she would easily make thousands of pounds a year. But she had not even decided which form of artistic expression she would adopt. She was unable to do any sort of work apart from her criminal acts and was inhibited even in ordinary everyday activities. She felt that as she might die at any moment there was no use in starting anything worthwhile. Besides, it seemed to her a pity to waste the time of such a gifted person as herself on ordinary work. Her hopes for the future were really illusions of grandeur; by not attempting to translate them into action she avoided putting them to the test. One form that her general dishonesty took was that she avoided paying bills whenever possible. One day she suddenly realized that by doing so she renounced the further services of people whom she might one day need. It was quite a step forward in social adaptation when she began to consider the consequences of her behavior instead of simply escaping the momentary unpleasantness of paying. But she could take the future into account only when she began to feel that it had hopeful aspects. Her parents had so much impressed on her the responsibilities and dangers of the future that life was tolerable only if she refrained from ever thinking about the future. The ordinary person keeps straight mainly out of consideration for others and by realizing the consequences of any other course. Some disturbance of the operation of these two factors is an essential feature in delinquency.

Fantasy World of the Criminal

The impairment of reality sense, the lack of thought for the future, the denial of unpleasant facts and possibilities, an almost delusional belief in his own cleverness and ability to escape detection are characteristic of many criminals. A thief already under suspicion disclosed articles of clothing she had stolen, quite confident that the fact of her having sewn her own initials on them would convince others that they really belonged to her. By denying reality in this way the individual spares himself the need to become aware of frustrations and anxiety. The

almost delusional over-valuation of the self is a compensation for painful feelings of inferiority. The case of an adolescent delinquent may illustrate my point; a pretty girl with innocent blue eyes and a very bad record was sent to me for treatment. She was pleasant and well behaved, but apparently lacking in all genuine feeling, and she did not seem to realize the wrongs she did, or the disappointments she suffered. She was an illegitimate child, neglected by her parents. For some time in the analysis nothing seemed to touch her, until one day she unexpectedly burst into tears, displayed anxiety and hate, and very sudden and intense curiosity. She confessed that she felt worried about her body; she thought she was different from other girls. This emotional outburst started a new phase wherein she began to have more normal emotions, experienced anxiety and unhappiness, developed an obsession to wash continuously and at the same time gave up stealing. As long as she stole and lied she could forget her unhappiness and anxiety, her feelings that she was damaged and dirty. The stealing enabled her to live in a happier world. She could imagine that the objects she stole were presents given her by her parents whose love she so much missed. The extent to which she pushed her denial of reality was revealed when she said that not only did she not know the names for certain parts of her body, but maintained that she did not have these parts. When I asked her why in that case she went to the lavatory, she replied, because she had been told to. Why did she use paper? Because she had been taught to do so. Her childhood training in cleanliness gave her the feeling that she was dirty, worse than others, and that everything connected with her body and the lavatory deserved to be ignored. But if she was not allowed to feel the reality of her own body, how could she have a sense of the reality of anything else? She tried to ignore the existence of her wicked impulses and actions just as she had been taught to ignore her "dirty" physical processes, and exercised the same excessive control over her emotions as over her body, with a resulting impairment of her emotional and fantasy life, and her sense of reality. The fateful effects of a wrong training in cleanliness can be observed in many delinquents. A delinquent boy suffered from incontinence until late childhood and used to hide his excrements under the carpet, in the chimney, etc., in order to escape detection. When severe punishments had broken him of the habit, he began to steal money which he would secrete in the same places.

The Vicious Circle:

Why Usual Means of Punishment Do Not Reclaim

Here we may pause to draw some practical conclusions from

our observations. The usual method of treating criminals is to force them into line by punishing them. But if an individual is driven to steal because only the pleasure and excitement of stealing enables him to bear an unsatisfactory reality, then by making reality still more unpleasant we are not likely to succeed in reclaiming him. If his crimes express ideas of grandeur which he has developed in reaction to unbearable feelings of inferiority then it will scarcely be helpful to wreck the remainder of his self-esteem. If fear of physical or mental starvation and frustration compels a child to steal, then punishing him by denying him love, food, money or pleasure and thus increasing his feeling of insecurity is not going to cure him. No doubt it is true that fear and guilt will keep most people from crime, but these motives can never make them genuinely social. It is a loving attitude in the parents that teaches the child to become social and to accept reality. Because the parents consider his needs, he learns to pay attention to their feelings and demands. Because they forgive him his transgressions he becomes able to forgive them for the frustrations and disappointments he is destined to suffer. The baby's mind works on the "eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth" principle; because he hates and in his rages wants to attack and kill, he is in turn terrified of being hated and attacked and killed. It is only his parents' love and forbearance which convince him that his fears are unfounded. But when children are not given enough love and forbearance (I mean real love and affection and not fussiness!) their anxiety and sense of insecurity will increase and give rise to anti-social behavior. Thus fear of being attacked will drive them to attack others. That is one reason why the wisdom of flogging as a punishment for crimes of violence both in its direct effects on the individual and as a deterrent to others is so questionable. An anti-social boy felt that almost every conceivable object was potentially a dangerous weapon; fountain pens spit ink, torches dazzled, coins could be thrown and so on. If he saw two people talking together he thought they were discussing him. He lived in a state of persecutory anxiety, placing no trust in anybody, and defended himself against the attacks he feared by attacking others, by stealing or destroying the dangerous objects.

Law—The Criminal's Substitute for Parents

The criminal fights the law, which is for him a parent substitute, by breaking it. The ordinary citizen is much less aware of the law, of its procedure, its pitfalls and loopholes. No doubt there are "decent citizens" who are terrified of the law, but the majority treat it as they treated their parents, by humoring them, avoiding open opposition to them, criticizing them occa-

sionally or chaffing, but appreciating their good points as well, and on the whole not taking them too seriously. The criminal fights the law because he over-estimates it; he wants to take his revenge, he attacks it out of fear or disillusionment. Sometimes he fights the law because he is disappointed in his ideals of justice just as he hated his parents for not coming up to the standards of perfection, while often making atonement to them by putting himself in the wrong. Most criminals would be classed by doctors as "unstable personalities," "psychopaths," and the like. Delinquents such as these are really potential psychotics whose life of crime preserves them from insanity. The manifestly psychotic have few emotional relations with people, the criminal has mainly negative ones; while the psychotic has lost contact with reality, the criminal maintains it by means of his delinquency. Both have strong persecutory anxieties; but the criminal succeeds in finding for his fear of being persecuted a justification in reality.

Analysis of a Prostitute

A prostitute with very strong persecutory fears whom I analyzed could sleep only during the day, and feel alive only at night, when she felt safer, because everybody else was asleep and therefore less dangerous. She had practically no emotional contacts with others; her relations to them were expressed mainly in prostitution, stealing and litigation. Apart from other anxieties she suffered from a fairly serious street phobia which disappeared whenever she went out to prostitute herself. The fact that so many criminals are on the brink of a psychosis which they ward off by means of their criminal activities explains why punitive measures are of so little avail. The criminal is afraid of something much worse than any punishment the state can inflict; the shattering of his mental balance and helpless exposure to unbearable anxieties. Granting that unconscious anxiety is the strongest force impelling towards crime we can hardly be surprised if the results of our penal methods which work mainly by increasing anxiety are, for the most part, so unsatisfactory.

Fears of being starved and deserted form one motive for stealing and alcoholism. The fear of starvation when displaced onto the sexual life is one cause of prostitution—another is fear of physical attacks. A prostitute told me that if she met a bear she would try to tame him by intercourse. Because she unconsciously hated and feared all men, she wanted to "buy them off" by having intercourse with as many as possible. She hoped that they would be satisfied with the pleasure she gave them and desist from taking more from her or attacking her. She had been extremely difficult from her earliest childhood, had

been expelled from a number of schools for stealing, already had intercourse at the age of 14 and ran away from home at 16. To be free from parental control she married a man she met that very day and got divorced from him immediately. At 17 she had a baby by another man, and soon after that started to take up prostitution regularly. An extremely greedy child, she had been rather frustrated over sweets and this was an important motive for her stealing. This frustration over oral pleasures combined with stimulation from the caresses of an over-emotional and possessive mother contributed to make her sexually precocious. Her greed and fear of being starved was now shifted onto sex. It was especially important for her to get men to buy her drinks. She could not bear the idea that they should have any money left in their pockets, instead of spending it on her, or any semen left after she had had intercourse with them. The American expression "man eater" expresses the underlying cannibalistic basis of such attitudes. Most of her neurotic conflicts revolved around these cannibalistic tendencies. She was very keen that a girl with whom she had a homosexual relation should have her appendix operated. When this had been done she wanted to preserve the appendix and experienced a sudden impulse to swallow it. From fear of these cannibalistic impulses she had been a vegetarian for several years. She remembered how as a child she had said "If one eats animal's flesh, one might just as well eat human flesh." Thus the repression of her cannibalistic impulses had led to vegetarianism and neurotic disturbances of eating; but she managed to find a substitutive gratification of them in prostitution, stealing and drinking. But even in the sphere of sexual pleasure the inhibition still made itself felt. She experienced no physical satisfaction in sleeping with men who paid her; she felt too guilty to be paid for intercourse and enjoy it as well. Love affairs which gave her more satisfaction she had to spoil for herself because of her excessive guilt. If we consider the question of whether the criminal is amoral, we must admit that this patient was amoral in so far as she committed a number of delinquent acts without any guilt, that she did not care for her child, felt fundamentally hostile to law and social order, and to her fellow-men at large. But although she did not care for people as a child she used to feel extremely sorry for her clothes which she imagined suffered from the cold at night; and while she had no qualms about sleeping with men, she abhorred the unavoidable chance contacts of train and bus. She explained this by saying that it was easy to wash her body but difficult to get her clothes cleaned. She had in fact displaced her emotions from people onto inanimate objects, from her own body onto her clothes. For her her body was not

her real self; and so she could let men have it. Her real self was hidden, and might one day blossom, just as she hoped to recover her lovely singing voice which she had lost. By keeping her real self so elusive, it was safe from being hurt or defiled or possessed by anybody.

Another patient of mine used to be worried lest his genuine feelings might be thought pretense only, while he never cared if his play-acted feelings were believed. It did not matter what happened to these; they were not important, not his real self.

The prostitute patient who would have been regarded by most people as the very embodiment of an anti-social type suffered from grave neurotic symptoms and inhibitions and had a positive mania for tidiness and cleanliness. She talked easily of her life as a prostitute but it took years for her to confide in me that she went to church and was religious. She was hard on people whom she considered material minded and blamed me for not being idealistic and sincere enough. She had had a very strict Victorian moralistic upbringing, and because she felt it was hopeless to try and live up to her excessively high moral standards she gave up altogether. Prostitution was for her largely a substitute for suicide. She gave up her vegetarianism because she felt she was becoming so distant and superior to ordinary people that she was in danger of losing hold on reality. Prostitution represented the other extreme; it brought her back to reality and into contact with others and it made her inferior.

*Feelings of Moral Inferiority and Superiority
in Criminals*

There is a moral drive behind the striving for moral inferiority. Much that strikes one as cynicism is really a sort of confession by means of bad behavior. The neurotic feels guilty that others should have a better opinion of him than he feels he deserves, and is afraid of having to live up to that opinion. I happened to say "Goodbye" to a rather difficult child whereupon he rushed forward and said in quite desperate tones, "Not good boy," and pinched me in order to prove it. More than one delinquent has said to me, "At any rate I openly express my impulses and take the risks, while others who have the same impulses sit in judgment on me." A patient had a tendency to make himself unpleasant to everybody. He suffered from a neurotic inability to smile and had great difficulty in bringing himself to wash. He recollected going up to a little girl as a child and saying "ah-ah"; as an adult he repeated the same tendencies which he thereby expressed—the wish to shock and the need to confess—by making himself dirty, unpleasant and dis-

gusting. He felt too guilty to show friendly feelings or to try and make himself agreeable to people.

Moral superiority is coveted in the same way as material possessions. Guilt over this greedy longing for moral superiority may create a drive towards moral inferiority. A patient who described his parents, not without justification, as the "scum of the earth," believed that if he were better than they he would be betraying them. Because he felt guilty for wishing to rise above his parents, he had to emulate their bad behavior, be as promiscuous sexually as his mother, and as dishonest financially as his father. This unconscious reaction accounts very largely for the effects of bad company. Guilt over the smug satisfaction implied in "Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are," may create an urge to be worse than the other men. It is characteristic of certain types suffering from deep feelings of inferiority to seek friends of questionable character or inferior social status. They are also more at ease with people who are in some way inferior to them. The Germans have coined an expression to describe this tendency—*Der Zugnach Unten* (the downward tendency)—and it is often an important factor in the development of criminals from the upper classes of society. These people feel they do not deserve decent friends, good food, nice clothes or a good position.

The criminal, like every other individual, has feelings both of love and of hate. The ordinary neurotic usually suppresses the latter and parades the former; the criminal often masks whatever love impulses he may have behind his anti-social actions. The apparent lack of morality in criminals can be compared to that found in "savages." The old heathen Prussians made a practice of disembowelling Christians and were severely punished for it. But what appeared to the Christians as senseless cruelty was to the heathens a deeply moral act. They put the bowels around their sacred trees to heal the wounds inflicted on them by zealous Christian missionaries.

Peter Kürten who committed some forty brutal murders in Düsseldorf had fantasies, while carrying out his nefarious activities, of how he would save his home town from a monster and the grateful population would flock to pay him homage.

Most people dismiss queer contrasts in the behavior of delinquents by labeling them as "hypocrisy." But such a label simply begs the question. Much that is regarded as a conscious act of hypocrisy is due to unconscious processes of denial or repression as in the case of the adolescent delinquent girl, who denied the existence of her body processes and refused to recognize all the wrongs she did. In a new environment she was always pleasant and charming the first few days and then started giving trouble again. The disappointed foster parent described

her initial goodness as "hypocrisy," while what had actually happened was that her good intentions were too weak to last because they were based on a hope so flimsy that it was upset by the slightest disappointment. In other cases hypocrisy is seen where ambivalence is the true explanation. How can a person who pretends to be fond of his mistress slander her? But the feeling of love for the mistress is probably as genuine as the feelings of hate expressed in the slander. Or again the expression of good intentions to which the person does not live up are dismissed as hypocrisy without taking into account the underground forces that bring good intentions to nothing.

Analysis of Patient with Impulse to Murder

The two types of crime which according to the ideas of most people are satisfactorily explained by conscious motives are opposites: crimes of passion, and crimes for monetary gain. Murder from jealousy—the motive sounds plausible enough. Yet take the case of a young refugee I treated for some time. He was intensely jealous and had strong conscious impulses towards murdering the girl he most loved, so strong indeed that practical measures had to be taken to avoid the possibility of these impulses being translated into action. His associations revealed that he identified her in his unconscious mind with a notorious and brutal sadist (originally his father; the fact that the girl was a father-substitute explained largely the sexual difficulties he suffered). He needed her love so much to enable him to conquer his fear of a cruel father. This fear was one motive for his murderous tendencies towards the girl. Another was his wish to save her from what he felt to be the unspeakable infamy of being sexually possessed by a man. His agonizing jealousy turned out to be very largely due to the fact that unconsciously he derived intense pleasure from the idea of the girl having intercourse with others but felt terribly guilty about it. At a later stage in his analysis, when his jealousy had been very largely reduced, he reported to me that he had seen two women making love in their bedroom and remarked that he had never in his life seen anything so enchanting.

Understanding Crimes of Passion

Children's tantrums give us some help in understanding crimes of passion in adult life. In a bad tantrum the child loses contact with reality and enters a state of temporary madness in which he attacks others not so much from hostility as from fear.

While people feel too guilty to express their hostility in cold blood, and can do it only if they can work themselves into a state where they no longer feel responsible, it follows that the

right way to deal with tantrums is not by trying to increase control but rather providing outlets for primitive aggression in ordinary everyday life.

While some people are too guilty to express prohibited yearnings as long as they retain some control over themselves, there are others to whom the most frightening situation is being overwhelmed by their impulses. To borrow a comparison of Freud's, a rider may be reluctant to admit defeat, and prefer to claim that he really wanted to go where his horse has carried him against his will. A man became so frightened at having shot his girl accidentally that he turned round and fired at her deliberately. An anti-social boy was in the habit of urinating deliberately in the middle of the room or on the furniture—a repetition of his earlier bed-wetting. He preferred the deliberate naughty boyish urination to the humiliating and babyish bed-wetting. I mentioned earlier the prostitute patient who was remarkably lacking in spontaneous reactions. Excessive control over her physical activities was a reason for her hysterical symptoms; constipation, temporary inability to urinate, disturbances of menstruation, losing her milk when nursing, and losing her singing voice. What she feared most was a sudden break-through of uncontrollable impulses, which for her signified losing control over her bowels, and being thought mad. She was very much alarmed by an impulse to murder her baby which suddenly emerged, but added that she would not have been so distressed over deliberately planning to murder it. As a prostitute she naturally had numerous sexual experiences but she could not enjoy spontaneous sexual feelings or wet dreams. She felt this as a great loss. She maintained for a long time that she derived no emotional satisfaction from prostitution, flogging or from the abortions which she performed for a consideration. Only gradually there emerged in analysis pleasurable fantasies of flogging or practising abortion on persons who were emotionally important to her. By doing these things to persons of no emotional significance, in return for money, in a rational way and with a rational justification, she managed to avoid feeling guilt.

Generalizations on Make-up of Criminals Unsafe

But can we say that all criminals suffer from unconscious conflicts, latent psychoses, anxiety and guilt rather than from lack of inhibitions? I do not know. I can only say that the delinquents I have analyzed were like that. But we have only just started with the analytic investigation of criminals, and we shall not be in a position to make reliable generalizations before we have analyzed many thousands—a task that is likely to take some twenty or thirty years. In the meantime we should

be careful not to handicap ourselves by premature generalizations based on superficial observations or analogies.

Effect of Bad Social Conditions and Illegitimacy

Owing to lack of space, I shall not be able to deal with the psychological effects of bad social conditions. But the fact that delinquency is more frequent among the poor than among the rich is suggestive enough. After what I have already said about the effects of early frustration and punishments, about anxiety and a sense of insecurity as instigators of crime it is obvious even without going into detail what pernicious results must ensue from lack of food and pleasure, economic uncertainty and unemployment, bad housing conditions, a succession of foster parents and early experiences of seduction and rape. One factor of paramount importance is illegitimacy, even if it does not result in neglect. The guilt and shame the child feels on behalf of his parents may induce him to lead a particularly moral life in order to atone for his parents' sin; but it may also weigh so heavily on him as to prevent him even from attempting to lead a decent life. The parents usually expect the child to become the punishment for their sin, and as likely as not he will come up to their expectation. The feeling that one is expected to turn out badly is a sure inducement to do so. In addition parents rarely have a balanced loving attitude to their illegitimate children. The feeling of being inferior to others from birth by something it is never in their power to remedy is a severe handicap, though occasionally it may by way of over-compensation lead to great achievements. But if in addition to these handicaps the child grows up without a father, is treated with contempt, and pushed from one home to another, we need not be surprised if he develops into an enemy of society.

*Effects of Prisons on the Criminal
Prisons as Schools for Crime*

Without understanding the mind of the criminal it is not possible to understand the effect of prison and other punishments on him. Certain ill effects of prison are known but little is done to remedy them. The delinquent is denied a normal sexual life. Unless he has recourse to homosexuality or masturbation, he is confronted with the task of controlling not only his criminal tendencies and need for normal activity, but also his sexual impulses. The pent-up sexual energy and suppressed emotion is one important factor in bringing about prison-psychoses and breaches of prison discipline. The usual idea is that breaches of prison discipline must and can be checked only by corporal punishment. It would be more effec-

tive and humane to have a resident psychotherapist in every prison who could give the prisoner at least temporary relief when he can control himself no longer. Kürten, the Düsseldorf mass-murderer, has described in a most impressive way how his hatred grew beyond measure under the influence of prison treatment. When in prison he deliberately committed breaches of discipline simply in order to be sent to the punishment cell, where he could lie in the dark and indulge his sadistic fantasies. After his first prison sentence (for theft) he committed arson, after the second he attempted murder. He attributed his career as a murderer to the wish to revenge himself for his sufferings in prison.

Prisons work, as we know, through fear. But it is not sufficiently realized how the whole prison system aims at increasing deep unconscious anxieties. "Walls that have mouths" are bound to stimulate persecutory fears; isolation cells awaken claustrophobic reactions; the absolute subordination demanded increases the unconscious dread of the father.

The one drawback of which society is really aware is that prison becomes a school for crime, that convicts learn evil from one another. The psychological background is that the common fear and hatred of the jailers forge bonds of alliance and mutual identification among the convicts. The greater their persecutory fears, the greater their need to conspire. If in the hope of limiting the infection the jailers manage to prevent the convicts forming contacts, they only wreck whatever love and social impulses still survive in them. A better way of counteracting bad influences in prison is to give the prisoners a chance to have some human relation to those who represent society, and to provide outlets for their emotions and impulses. As things are today, the convict is forced to suppress his impulses to such an extent that he is not likely to be in a position to deal with them satisfactorily after his release. Thus the obligatory suppression of all instinctual life in prison favors a renewal of criminal activity afterwards. The relief from guilt obtained by punishment is an additional factor of great importance. The life of the habitual criminal is a recurring cycle of crime and prison much as the drug addict oscillates between phases of addiction and deprivation, the latter being the psychological preparation for the former.

But prison has its reassuring aspects as well. A servant said, "You cannot imagine the relief of not hearing the bell ring." The beneficial effect of prison, very much like that of a nursing home, arises from the escape it provides from family and everyday conflicts, and the relief it brings from responsibility and immediate anxieties for the future.

Again the artificiality of prison life is one of its most serious

drawbacks, especially in the case of longer sentences. How can an unreal atmosphere be a good preparation for facing life again, especially for people who already have serious difficulties in adaptation?

The Probation System

The great advantage of the probation system is that it introduces the human element and care for the delinquent as an individual and gives a man a second or even a third chance. But it is not enough to give the delinquent a second chance, we must see that he is in a position to take it. Being on probation may bring some people especially great psychological difficulties. I was instrumental in having a patient of mine put on probation instead of being sent to prison. The result of my efforts was that the patient reproached me most bitterly even long after the probation period had come to an end. Probation was like being a child again under parental control, and was felt as a profound humiliation. She felt she could not even breathe freely, or embark on any activity while the probation officer had the right to know everything and to interfere with anything. The fact that the officer did not exercise these rights made little difference. On the contrary, the less concrete the reasons for the patient's objections the more she felt surrounded by intangible dangers. The situation which seemed to her a replica of that of childhood had stimulated all her worst persecutory fears. Prison and corporal punishment were masculine things surrounded with a certain glory of suffering. Probation and mental suffering were weak feminine matters, humiliation without recompense. Had she been regarded as an ordinary responsible person she would have been sent to prison; the fact that this exception had been made for her proved that she was different, inferior and possibly mad.

The extreme reactions of this patient may explain some of the difficulties probation officers encounter in handling certain cases. What may appear as utterly unreasonable or ungrateful behavior may often be due to unconscious guilt or to persecutory anxieties.

Psychological Effects of Punishment on Non-Criminals

It is not enough to understand the criminal; we must also study the reactions of society to criminals. They are equally complex and influenced by many unconscious factors. Though great strides have been made in achieving more humane and sensible treatment, the results on the whole are disappointing. The standards of life have improved, schooling has become universal, social work is becoming more widespread, many medical and other amenities are provided, social legislation

has become fairer, but still crime does not decrease. One explanation is that society does not adopt a rational long term policy. People derive an emotional satisfaction both from reading about crime and from punishing criminals. Prevention of crime and the treatment of potential offenders has no sensational appeal.

Society, like the individual, has the right to protect itself. But we can see how far this right is taken into consideration when a pickpocket who is likely to repeat his crime is sentenced to six months imprisonment while a man found guilty of manslaughter, an offense which he is not likely to repeat, gets a term of ten years. The difference becomes clear if we compare the treatment of dangerous lunatics with that of criminals. The former are locked up for purely practical reasons. A further claim made in favor of punishment is its value as a deterrent. But we are not justified in taking this deterrent effect so much for granted until investigation has shown whether the number of people driven to crime by punishment and fear of punishment does not exceed those who are effectively deterred by it, and whether punishment does not mainly deter those who are in any case unlikely to commit crimes, while those who contemplate infringements of the law render themselves immune by deluding themselves that they will never be found out. The history of penal methods shows that abolition of the brutal punishments of the past has not been followed by an increase in the incidence of crime.

In my view the chief significance of punishment lies in its psychological value for non-criminals. The ordinary citizen derives sadistic satisfaction first from the crime itself and then from the punishment inflicted for it.

As long as the majority of people have had or still have a hard struggle to adapt themselves to the demands of society, with very little corresponding reward they will be reluctant to renounce the pleasure they derive from seeing the transgressor punished. But in obtaining enjoyment from the punishment of criminals we satisfy our moral impulses as well. Criminals are scapegoats for the criminal part of our own selves. The violent internal conflicts between the moral and criminal parts of our mind are alleviated by making war on, punishing or reforming criminals in the outside world.

But if it is true that the maintenance of a criminal class is of great psychological value to us all, then we may be sure that our best intentions and our most active efforts to abolish crime will be impeded by our unconscious needs. Society's attitude towards criminals bears a marked resemblance to that of the neurotic parents who consciously do their best to bring their child up in a satisfactory way but are driven by unconscious

forces to turn him into a difficult, hostile and unhappy human being.

It will take a long time to develop a more rational approach to these matters. Many improvements are needed in the field of prevention, in the actual treatment of criminals and in after care. Social factors cannot be separated from psychological problems. Our approach should be influenced both by scientific knowledge and by human sympathy.
