PSYCHO-ANALYSIS AND CRIME

PREFACE

by

Professor Cyril Burt

From the days of Aristotle to the close of the last century, the study of the mind was regarded, not as a branch of science, but as a branch of philosophy; and the philosophers, being themselves rational and highly intellectual persons, confined their analysis of the mind almost entirely to its intellectual aspects. Even the most empirical of the schools, the Utilitarian, still held that the actions of all men were based on reasoning, and could be interpreted as a logical consequence of balancing the relative amounts of happiness and unhappiness to be gained by alternative courses of behaviour.

To rational thinkers of this type the conduct of the common criminal remained an outstanding enigma. The sole explanation they could offer was to suggest that criminals must be a class apart. They took it for granted that every normal man was endowed from birth with the capacity for discriminating between right and wrong—a capacity that was variously named the 'moral sense', the 'ethical faculty', or simply 'conscience': but they supposed that, by some freak of nature or some reversion to a prehistoric state, certain persons were occasionally born devoid of this faculty, just as others come into the world with no thumbs or only eight toes. Such anomalous individuals would exhibit criminal propensities from their earliest years; and, unless medical science could devise some way of ingrafting the missing faculty into the brain, would remain throughout their lives beyond all cure or reformation.

The hypothesis of the 'born criminal'—*il reo nato*—was most fully worked out by Lombroso in Italy, and was popularized in this country by Havelock Ellis. Towards the end of the nineteenth century it found its way into Acts of Parliament. A special class of persons called 'moral imbeciles' was recognised by statute; and, under proper conditions, they could be certified as mentally deficient, and dealt with accordingly. When the vicious behaviour only emerged in later life, it was inferred that the criminal, instead of being born morally defective, had developed a special kind of mental disease, termed 'moral insanity.' Even at the present time many psychiatrists hold that crime is to be regarded as a symptom of mental illness, which demands treatment at the hands of a medical specialist by means of 'psychotherapy.'

The view that all normal conduct must be rational conduct—carried out with a full consciousness of aims and means—still finds wide acceptance. Teachers, parents and magistrates continually ask the deliquent: "Whatever made you act like that?" If he is frank, the culprit mumbles: "I do not know." And the answer comes closer to the truth than might be imagined. It seldom occurs to the questioner that—quite apart from a natural impulse to seize this or that bit of enjoyment regardless of all consequences—the criminal's life may be governed by deep underlying motives of whose existence and nature he himself is unaware. Yet in daily life we are well aware how blind both saint and sinner are to their motives and their failings. When Tommy snatches up a knife and stabs his sister, are we seriously to suppose that Tommy has rapidly argued: "The world in general will be happier, or at least the world in which I live will be happier for me, if I here and now proceed to wound Elizabeth?" Do we not rather assume that he is behaving like an angry cat or dog, and, in a thoughtless fit of rage, has turned on the nearest person who seems to be thwarting him? And if hitherto he has been outwardly well-behaved and self-restrained, we shall probably suspect that some long-drawn-out situation has been secretly playing on his deeper emotions, until at last the exasperation has grown too great for his powers to control. In short, we tactily realise that, to understand such exceptional actions, we have to assume, not an exceptional class of persons, but merely the persistence of rough, irrational, and emotional springs of action, which come into play when, not the person, but his situation becomes exceptional, and which the criminal himself would never stay to analyse, even had he the skill to do so.

Such an analysis would indeed require far more than mere common sense or rational introspection. To understand the behaviour of a kitten or a puppy, we need to know something of the creature's mental mechanisms and the way they have evolved; and this in turn demands the scientific studies of the biologist and the physiologist. So, too, in order to understand the conduct of any human being, we must know something, not only of his own past history, but of that of his race. And consequently, to solve the problem of crime, the psychologist has been compelled to leave the philosopher's arm-chair; and, borrowing the empirical methods of the scientific observer, has begun to carry out systematic researches. Only in this way can we hope to comprehend the variety and the complexity of the motives underlying even the simplest of such actions.

Psycho-analysis, as Dr. Foulkes so clearly points out, is essentially a study of unconscious human motives. It begins with the assumption that the average human being does not know, and without expert assistance cannot know, the underlying causes of his actions. It assumes that, like the cat or the dog, he comes into the world already equipped with powerful instinctive impulses, which may be repressed or modified, but can never be wholly eradicated, simply because they are innate. It assumes further that the way in which these impulses are first handled in early infancy by those who have the care and control of the tiny child is of the utmost importance for the subsequent development of moral character; that the early changes in these impulses are the result of conflicting tendencies which the child himself can hardly appreciate; and that all through life they provide a reservoir of powerful energy which, whenever they are aroused, must find some outlet. Hence to understand and treat the emotional but irrational actions of the older child or the adult, a systematic theory of the working of these blind impulses is necessary.

The theory elaborated by Freud was put forward in the first instance to explain nervous disturbances such as hysteria; and his evidence has done much to persuade psychiatrists that the behaviour even of the man who is not suffering from nervous disorder is the result of similar mental mechanisms. Thus instead of supposing that the criminal is suffering from a mysterious mental disease we are led to believe that many of the symptoms of so-called mental diseases are merely the effect of natural human reactions to unnatural social conditions.

On the Continent these doctrines appeared almost revolutionary. When Freud began his teaching, German and Austrian psychology was still at the philosophical or intellectualistic stage. In England and America the new tenets were more readily accepted. Indeed, the essential principles hardly seemed new. Stout at Cambridge has long been emphasizing what he termed the 'conative' side of mental process, that is, the importance of impulse and emotion in all human conduct. At Oxford, McDougall has been extending the Darwinian notion of instinct to explain the behaviour of human beings in society. In America, William James and his followers had founded what they called the 'dynamic' school of psychology. Every junior student could echo Stanley Hall's famous aphorism that the human mind was like an iceberg, with seven-eighths of its bulk submerged below the visible level.

On the other hand, in the study of abnormal mental conditions, this country was admittedly behind the Continent.

In France the principle of 'association', developed by British psychologists to explain normal mental processes, was supplemented by that of 'dissociation' to explain the abnormal. In particular, much attention was paid to one type of irrational or unconscious motive, that of 'suggestibility'—the process whereby some particular idea becomes 'fixed' and split off, and so dominates both thought and behaviour to the exclusion of all rational criticism. Suggestibility was studied in its more extreme manifestations—those of hypnosis and hysteria; and was found to be largely explicable by the notion that certain emotionally-toned ideas might be, as it were, dissociated from the rest of the personality. This view was developed in France by Janet, and incorporated into British psychology by McDougall.

Freud, in the eighties, studied with Janet at Paris; and, like Janet, adopted the notion of 'dissociation' to account for the unconscious influence of certain motives. Janet demonstrated that these dissociated and unconscious ideas could be recovered under hypnosis, and successfully abolished by suggestion. Freud went further. He held that the dissociation was due to an *active* incompatibility between the dissociated elements and the rest of the personality; and he was able to show that actual hypnosis was by no means indispensable to reveal their nature to the physician and the patient. Instead, he developed a special technique, which he called 'psycho-analysis'—that is, the unravelling of the tangled knots into which the personality has become tied up.

The special merit of Freud and his followers is that they worked out an elaborate and systematic scheme of concepts to explain in detail the operations of the unconscious portions of the mind. This was the task of many years. Freud himself was constantly revising and extending his views. Nor was his teaching always accepted without modification or criticism by other members of his school. In particular, Jung and Adler were led to reject or re-model some of Freud's boldest hypotheses: Jung, for example, removed the central emphasis placed on sex and early childish experiences, and gave greater prominence to current mental conflicts; Adler stressed the special importance of the individual's sense of his own inferiorities, and held that the need to compensate for such inferiorities was a powerful if not the predominating source of irrational conduct.

Led in this way to examine the moral and social aspects of human behaviour rather than the rational or intellectual, psychoanalysts have naturally shown a special interest in actions that a

civilised community commonly regard as immoral or antisocial. Several members of the school have made direct contributions to criminology by their intensive study of delinquent personalities. Dr. Foulkes, himself a pioneer in this field of investigation, has summarised the more important results. As he points out, practical difficulties have prevented the work from being very extensive or prolonged. Psycho-analysis is a lengthy and therefore an expensive mode of treatment. Hence it is scarecly possible for leading practitioners to devote the same amount of time to studying the minds of burglars, thieves, or convicts that they can give to a psychoneurotic patient able to afford the necessary fees. We have therefore to be cautious in assuming that the mental mechanisms discovered in persons from the more intelligent, better educated, and more conventional classes have their precise analogies in the case of the prisoner from the slums.

Nevertheless, certain broad conclusions seem well established. So far as they have gone, these studies have done much to confirm the fact that criminal conduct is by no means to be explained in terms of a simple innate criminal tendency or an innate absence of the moral sense; in the main such conduct would seem rather to consist of natural if irrational reactions to adverse environmental conditions—especially to maladjustments between the individual and his immediate social surroundings.

From the standpoint of treatment, this marks a definite advance. Nowadays a psychiatrist hardly ever certifies a man as a moral imbecile. Instead he realises that psychological study and advice may do much to cure the potential criminal and the young delinquent, and often help the hardened offender. Nor is the treatment limited to changing the person himself. It may often be necessary, not only to re-educate the delinquent, but also to enlighten those who are in direct and constant contact with him; or, when that is impracticable, to remove the delinquent to more suitable social surroundings—a foster-home, a residential institution, or a hostel attached to a psychological clinic.

The results have been most encouraging, particularly with the young. Work with school children, for example, has proved that it is far more hopeful to try to improve the so-called moral imbecile than it is to train or treat the intellectually defective. If the young delinquent is detected at an early age, before his undesirable tendencies have set and hardened into fixed habits, then, provided his intelligence and health are normal, there is every hope of reforming him. In particular, recent studies of such cases have amply borne out one of the fundamental doctrines

of the Freudian psychologist, namely that the traits of character are largely determined by the events of the first few years of the child's life, and particularly by the attitude that he forms during that initial period to his mother and father. Of all the causes of delinquency, unwise treatment at home, or an unfavourable home atmosphere, proves to be at once the commonest and the most influential.

But there can be no question that the innate temperament of the criminal also plays a part. Instead of regarding criminals as a class apart, as was maintained by the Italian School under Lombroso, most British psychologists have followed Darwin's lead, and have taken the view that human beings, good and bad alike, all inherit a number of elementary instincts, similar to those inherited by lowlier animals—the ape, the tiger, and the wolf. Under primitive conditions of life, these instincts were as serviceable to prehistoric ancestors as they are to the wild animals that roam the forest or the prairie; but in a civilized city, if given free play without restraint or suitable readaptation, they can only issue in what is bound to be condemned as vice or crime. The strength of these instincts, however, like that of all other hereditary characteristics, must vary widely from one person to another; and those who are born with stronger sexual, pugnacious, or acquisitive instincts no doubt are more easily tempted into thoughtless modes of conduct which bring them into conflict with the law and with the police. Nevertheless, since they are inborn, such impulses cannot be stamped out or annihilated by a sheer effort of will. The attempt at simple suppression is more likely to result in the continued existence of the impulse in a dissociated or subterranean fashion. There it still goes on operating; but it operates unconsciously, and so is less amenable to intelligent direction or rational self-control. The energy embodied in it must, like all energy, find some outlet for discharge; and if the natural vent is blocked up, it is apt to explode in a kind of side-burst; and then, as with all explosives, the violence is apt to be all the greater because the charge has been compressed.

Nevertheless, if dealt with at an early stage before they have become solidified as habits, these instinctive impulses can be greatly refined and altered. They can be attached to higher ideals; they can be harnessed to useful aims; and their mode of expression can be modified out of all recognition. These changes, Freud, in another of his picturesque metaphors, calls 'sublimation.' And perhaps one of the most valuable of all his contributions to scientific treatment is his account of the different ways in which such sublimation may be achieved.

Next to hunger and thirst, the most obvious example of an animal instinct inherited by the human race is that of sex. The sexual passion has long been regarded as wild, blind, and unreasoning, and as a principal source of vicious and unlawful behaviour. The criminal conduct to which it leads is not necessarily a sexual lapse. It may, as any novel or biography will illustrate, issue in other actions, equally thoughtless—bouts of anger, jealousy, depredation, reckless adventure and the like. Freud has further shown how, in less obvious and more devious ways, the same primitive emotion may lead to irrational conduct which, on the surface, has no clear connection whatever with sexual situations.

The emphasis that Freud lays upon the sex impulses has formed one of the greatest obstacles to the acceptance of his theories among the supporters of law, order, and healthy morality. It should, however, be noted that, as Freud himself is careful to point out, his use of the word sex is exceptionally wide. The uninstructed reader is apt to suppose that Freud is referring solely to the reproductive instinct. Such a reader perhaps may find it easier to understand the Freudian doctrines if he substitutes the word 'personal' for the word 'sexual.' To describe the attitude of a child towards its mother as definitely 'sexual,' or the relation between two persons of the same sex as developing on a 'homosexual' basis, sounds perverse if not fantastic to the ordinary man. Yet the analogy is suggestive. Our attitude towards other members of the same species, male or female, is almost inevitably coloured by strong emption, and unquestionably rests on an instinctive basis; and to a biologist there is a striking resemblance between this and the more definite operation of the sexual impulse. Perhaps, therefore, while Freud finds it helpful to stretch the well-established notion of a sexual instinct—or of sexual instincts, for in higher creatures a number of different impulses are involved—and to make it cover these more general attitudes, the plain reader may find it more instructive—and less paradoxical —to think of the sex instinct (in the narrower sense) as one particular case, though perhaps the most striking case, of the strong emotional tendencies that are innately excited by the close and active presence of a member of the same species.

Be this as it may, we should all feel deeply indebted to Freud for calling our candid attention to these animal aspects of our common human nature and for making it easier for enlightened people to refer openly and scientifically to personal problems which a previous generation shrouded with euphemisms or with silence. From the practical standpoint the important fact is

this: we now clearly understand that the moral and social attitude of each human being all through his life is largely determined during early childhood by his emotional attitudes towards the persons with whom he is in intimate and daily touch, that is, more particularly, the members of his own family. And thus the majority of the unconscious motives that influence both social and antisocial conduct are personal motives, arising out of our habitual reactions to other types of personality which, for reasons arising out of our own past history, excite in us strong feelings of liking or dislike.

Because of the daring hypotheses he has propounded and the bold conceptions he has introduced, Freud and his psycho-analytic doctrines have attracted much attention in the popular press. The cold and commonplace findings of other branches of psychology, expressed as they are in highly technical terms, receive little notice. Hence members of the ordinary public, misled apparently by the similarity of the words, constantly identify psycho-analysis with the whole of psychology. Thirty years ago the phrase 'psychological research' commonly suggested 'psychical research' to the popular mind; and the press of that day took it for granted that the London County Council's psychologist on his appointment would be expected to treat all his cases by hypnosis. To-day the phrase more frequently suggests psycho-analysis and sex; and the confusion affects the attitude of education committees so strongly that it has been found desirable to change the name of 'psychological clinics' to that of 'child guidance clinics'. Such misapprehensions have greatly impeded the progress of the psychologists' work. It should therefore be clearly stated that Freud and the leading psycho-analysts were primarily concerned with a special group of practical problems only. They were themselves not professional psychologists. They were often unacquainted with other lines of inquiry and with the results of research in allied fields. The brilliant theories that Freud himself propounds and the ingenious speculations that he advanced, he himself revised and amended over and over again. Now they require urgently to be subjected to careful testing and an empirical verification on a wider scale.

There is still a disposition on the part of many of Freud's adherents to ignore the contributions made by other branches of psychology, and to be impatient of the slower methods of investigation adopted by the more patient and more cautious theorist. They are perhaps a little too ready to accept a plausible hypothesis at its face value, and to disregard the need for statistical confirma-

tion. Hence, every psychologist who, in the true spirit of science, looks not only for suggestive hypotheses, but for objective confirmation which will turn those hypotheses into facts, will welcome Dr. Foulkes' appeal for more extensive and more systematic research.

Both the benefits and the limitations of psychoanalytic methods are revealed most plainly by inquiries already undertaken on the proportions of successes and failures achieved by various forms of psychotherapy and at different psychological clinics. Although between the psychiatrists belonging to different schools of thought there is a sharp disagreement over the theoretical principles they support, actual analysis of their results discovers that there is but little difference between the percentage of cures that reward their several endeavours. It would seem that the one essential for successful treatment is a detailed and sympathetic study of the criminal himself and of his personal problems, and that the particular mode of study is of smaller importance; and, so far as direct psychotherapy is concerned, it appears to be rather the personality of the psychotherapist that counts than the particular doctrine he upholds.

But psychotherapy alone is not sufficient. Often it is not so much the child delinquent or the adult criminal himself who needs study and reform: it is rather the situation in which he lives—his social circumstances, his mode of life, and the attitude of his parents or companions toward him. And such a study may need, not merely the work of the psychiatrist examining his patient as an isolated case in the consulting room, but also that of the social investigator who investigates the home life, the daily work, and the leisure occupation of the delinquent. Many cases of delinquency arise out of simple maladjustment between the delinquent and the demands made on him at school, at home, or in his place of business. In such instances the essential line of approach may require the application of intelligence tests, a visit to the school or place of employment, and, it may be, the help of the vocational psychologist to suggest a more suitable type of employment.

Thus the prevention and cure of delinquency is the co-operative task of an expert team. It needs the doctor, the psychologist, the social worker, and possibly other specialists as well. But, since motivation is always the kernel of the problem, the psychoanalytic approach, if not in all cases essential, may still be the most illuminating. It is consequently of great advantage to have a clear and authoritative summary of the

leading tenets of the Freudian school set out so clearly as Dr. Foulkes has done. His account will be of value, not only to specialists in this field, but to parents, teachers, magistrates, social workers, and all who are interested in the study and prevention of crime.