

PSYCHOPATHIC PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY*

By

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SINCE there is little general agreement either on the nature of psychopathic personalities or on how to deal with the problems within organized society which their behaviour creates, we are justified in any attempt to present these problems in a new light and to examine the impact of recent work upon them. There is, moreover, an urgent need to clarify our own ideas on the subject in the hope that we can present them in practical form to those social agencies who so frequently meet with the psychopath as a perplexing hindrance to the smooth working of the State's affairs, whether in the schools, the courts, in industry, in the services or in any part of our national life in which planned co-operation is desirable. The psychopathic misfit for whom the increasing complexity of society has allowed no place, and for whom as yet science has found no certain remedy, often manifests his disability at least as much in a disorder of citizenship as in one of personal adjustment, and in no field of our work are we so constantly reminded that it is impossible to consider the patient in isolation from the milieu in which he must live. While the brain is a part, and the controlling, communicating part of the somatic mechanism, the concept of the mind of an individual is not so confined. In that the individual is a member of a group, part of his mental life belongs to that group and plays a part in forming its characteristics. In favourable circumstances this contribution is repaid by the guidance and support which membership of a group can provide. When an individual is so constituted that he is without the inward mechanisms necessary for the efficient working of this process of interchange, the result may be unhappiness for him or loss of harmony in the group. Thus, although it is to medical science that the appeal for an explanation or a remedy is most often made, the psychopathic personality is a responsibility which we must always share with the social sciences. Since the defect of personality is usually a constitutional one, the problems it creates are as likely to be solved by manipulation of the environment of the psychopath than by any effort to change his spots. This is not to say that the leopard in our kraal is not to be rendered more tame, or that he cannot be afforded the help of psychotherapeutic cosmetics, so long as the therapist in his preoccupation with the spots does not forget the savage heart that lies beneath them.

The size and complexity of the human brain is accompanied by wide variations in structural detail. Not only do the inherited potentialities of each organ of mind vary between the widest limits within the species, but the process of development from conception to full maturity is fraught with innumerable opportunities for minor failure which, while not lethal to the organism or productive of gross developmental anomalies, may slow down or stop the develop-

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ment of some specialized function in a way which comes to light only when that part of the apparatus is called into use. Thus, while all men may be equal in the theological or social abstract, they are necessarily disparate in respect of the different qualities of personality (or some are at any rate more equal than others) and while all have an equal right as citizens to the advantages of living in a community and to share in its work, the mental apparatus available for this participation varies in efficiency. The standard of physical health or of intelligence necessary for social efficiency is such that the majority can attain it, and if they cannot, allowance can be made, as it is for the disabled or for the mentally defective. Certain other qualities necessary for citizenship are, however, less easy to assess and even the total lack of them may be difficult to ascertain. For this reason we are often at a loss when we try to make allowance for them within the present framework.

The following table shows some groups of non-intellectual disability often found in association with inability to fit smoothly into the social scheme. It will serve for the moment as a rough guide to the features found in different types of psychopath.

TABLE I

Some Types of Defect found in Psychopathic Personality

1. *Emotional responses beyond the normal range*
Lack of control of immediate emotional responses or of swings of mood. Tendency to transfer emotional responses to socially inappropriate objects.
2. *Cognitive deficiencies*
Inability, in restricted fields, to profit from experience. Lack of appreciation of shades of meaning or of the remote effects of behaviour, inconsistent with the general level of intellect. Inability to identify with the feelings of others. Inability to comprehend and learn the advantages of giving, or of postponing immediate gain. Unusual forms of mental imagery and imagination. Difficulty in distinguishing phantasy from reality, or project from accomplishment. Inability to think in other than concrete terms.
3. *Lack of uniformity or constancy in thought or behaviour*
Lack of capacity for attention. Lack of motor initiative and drive. Concentration of drive into a single channel or dispersion over too many fields. Uneven mental output with unpredictable impulses and periods of aggression.

Defects such as these are rarely complete, but by comparison with the psychopath's efficiency in other fields, such as intelligence, the deficiencies are relative. There is an uneven maturity in the different aspects of personality. It renders difficult the integration of the different aspects of the individual's personality so that he is apt to adapt at a different level in respect of each quality. The painter, for instance who adapts at one level of artistic integrity and at a very different level of sexual or financial morality is a psychopath if he or others suffer as a result. On the other hand, the mental defective who also lacks financial morality is not a psychopath, because his adaptation in this respect is consistent with his expected efficiency in other spheres. This disparity of the different qualities of personality is very characteristic of the psychopath.

Behaviour which is psychopathic in one social group and in one age may be acceptable and even laudable in another. Mercier (1921) pointed out that matricide has been so frowned upon in European communities that it has been practically eliminated and that when it does occur it is nearly always the act of an insane or grossly psychopathic person. There are primitive communities, however, in which matricide is the accepted method of dealing with the female past reproductive or working life. This does not mean that a man who slays his

mother would be psychopathic in one community and not in another, for the characteristic of the psychopath lies not in the behaviour in which his abnormality is expressed, but in the abnormality itself, the inability to grow into the accepted pattern of the group into which he happens to be born. Stress has been laid on the cognitive aspects of psychopathy including controlling or "feed-back" mechanisms. It is characteristic of most types of psychopath that they are incapable of a consistent insight into their attitude towards their fellows. It is because they cannot efficiently observe their own progress in relation to other people that they cannot keep in step. Just as mechanisms exist within the brain by which it can regulate its own metabolic environment, so practically every manifestation of its activity is subject to a form of control by which the details of any act are observed and checked for consistency with the general purpose or goal. A person, for instance, who is unable to hear his own speech has great difficulty in speaking normally. If there is a disturbance of the central apparatus by which are received and integrated the different sensory signals from the mechanism of phonation, the patient may speak nonsense without being aware of the fact. Some individuals, because of an inborn variation of mechanism of this kind, are unable to follow the normal method by which children are taught to speak and to read, and this is seen in its extreme form in congenital word-blindness where although the intellectual potential of the child is normal he is seriously hampered in developing his communications with the world of men. Unless accurate diagnosis is made the child is quite unaware of the reason. He is thus likely to rationalize, to invent his own reasons and to turn against the society with which he cannot maintain normal contact. This has its parallel in some forms of psychopathy.

There are some kinds of human, but not necessarily individual, activity which are planned at an entirely conscious level. In planning the ascent of Mount Everest, for instance, the group concerned considered and rejected as inexpedient many ideas and plans, while deciding to use others which were more likely to succeed in the conditions known to be present on the mountain. Here the monitoring process is being extended to the future and is dependent on what I have called elsewhere *conative awareness* (Kennedy, 1950). Between the simple kinaesthetically-monitored motor act, the complex mechanism of speech and the plan made at a conscious level there is, in individual conative thought, a continuum of processes of a monitoring kind. At one end the individual is fully aware, in the middle the process is automatic unless his attention is directed to it, and at the other end it is wholly unconscious. Foresight is simply this process, projected at all levels into the future.

It may thus very reasonably be supposed that when any kind of action is contemplated, a mechanism comes into play by which it is monitored not only for immediate expediency, but for compatibility with the general attitudes and trends of the individual as installed in the great reference library of the brain, laid down in the formative years of life. Training and early experience thus lay down the codes and attitudes by which later conduct may be guided, and in this lies the importance of infantile experience and of the first contacts made with parents, family group and finally society itself. This *personal codification* of the principles learned from early experience has, as the psychoanalysts have shown, an immense determining influence on later conduct. If, however, the mechanism for monitoring or reality-testing is deficient or undeveloped, the individual has a greatly diminished chance of keeping in step and is dependent on the sort of crude defence mechanisms and compensations which are a feature of adaptation in the psychopath and in the severely neurotic.

On this basis, social inadequacy may be due:

1. To disorders of *personal codification* in the course of development and maturation.
2. To disorders of the nervous mechanisms of reference and in the monitoring of behaviour.
3. To disorders of the effector mechanisms and of emotional control.
4. To the effects of compensatory mechanisms and of the conflicts arising from the dissimilarity of the patient's attitude with the range of attitudes which are favourable to the integrity of the group, and his consequent rejection or retreat.

So far I have discussed the negative aspects of psychopathy and have presented it mainly as a state of defect, whether inborn or due to failure of post-natal development or maturation. This view at least affords us the hope that in some cases we will eventually be able to classify the psychopath by naming what is lacking rather than by regarding him as a positive psychiatric entity with the symptoms and signs either of an active disease process or of psychodynamically-determined behaviour trends. We should then know better how to support the weaker parts of the personality structure, just as the word-blind child if accurately diagnosed, can by some indirect approach such as stereognostic reading, be brought to full intellectual parity with other children of his age. The presenting symptoms of the social illness which we diagnose as psychopathic personality, as it is referred to us, are mainly caused by the reaction of the brain or the mind to its defect. The same thing is seen in other partial defects. The child with serious mathematical disability for instance, by the time it reaches skilled aid may be presenting alarming evidence of hatred of the school and all its works, of which failure to succeed at mathematics may well be taken for a symptom instead of the cause.

If psychopathy is to be regarded as a defect-state it would be expected that the psychopath in the course of his maturation would either become aware of the ways in which he differs from others or would develop compensatory mental mechanisms to shield himself from this knowledge. In my view the life-history of the psychopath often reveals evidence of ill-formulated feelings of inferiority, and compensation for these has much to do with the formation of the picture he presents to the world. As an illustration of this I would quote one of the reasons why the churches have much to fear from the psychopath in their ranks. The man who becomes dimly aware that his sense of moral values is not such that he can keep his behaviour within permissible bounds will sometimes seek to ensure his safety and conformity by binding himself to a course of conduct more strict than the average man, and by undertaking to teach his fellows the true path. He may feel more at home in a field where ecstatic experience may be permissible, even desirable. For this reason, too, the explosive dysrhythmic, his emotions blown hither and thither by the storms that disrupt his nervous activity, may also seek comfort and satisfaction in religious experience. It is in ways like these that the underlying defect is so often covered up by the compensatory mental mechanisms developed in the attempt to adapt to an unlike world.

It has often been noted that many psychopaths seem to settle down by middle age and to fit in much better with their fellows. Where psychopathic behaviour is due to positive factors such as endocrine determinations of exceptional strength, this might be expected as the fires of instinct die down. It is possible also that where the psychopathy has a negative or defect cause, late development may occur just as it does in the field of intellect.

It is, I think, necessary to emphasize the very primitive state of our knowledge in this field. The quest for underlying principles is made more interesting, however, by the fact that the initial stage of clinical description essential to the throwing of light on any problem has been so thoroughly and so well accomplished. Not only have we descriptions by men of the calibre of Mercier (1899) and Henderson (1939) in our own profession, but the description of psychopathy and its social effects has produced some of the finest literature. In the novel and the play, which are dependent on the interrelation of differing personalities, the contribution of writers as widely differing in time and style as Euripides, Dostoevsky, Ibsen and Dickens are equalled only by the glimpses of new worlds of ideas which we have been given by the gifted psychopaths themselves. In fact, if we are to achieve any way of conveying telegraphically the features of any given psychopath without reference to unproved psychopathological theory, we can probably do worse than to compare them with the characters that have lived in fiction, in history and in the criminal courts. Thus we might call a patient, for convenience, a suburban Medea, a small-town Nero, a backstreet Don Juan, a medical Macchiavelli, a potential Landru, or a would be Casanova or Helen of Troy. The psychopath, in terms of behaviour, has perhaps been described enough, and we are now at the interesting state of testing hypotheses in the hope that they will receive enough confirmation to achieve respectability as unifying theories.

Before discussing this stage it will perhaps be well to clarify our thought by referring briefly to some of the fallacies which may be obscuring our view of the true nature of psychopathy. One of these relates to theories of evolution from the primitive or the infantile. Because in some respects a psychopathic individual behaves like a savage, to call him a "savage in broadcloth" may be a satisfying description, but is not one upon which aetiological conclusions can be based. The man is not a savage and would certainly be rejected by savages as a misfit. Similarly, the claim that in the field of emotion a psychopath is a child because he has failed to follow the usual ontogenic path of emotional development is only permissible if one regards a mental defective as fixated, say, at the age of three. It is a method of describing his relative mental powers, but it gives us no help in regard to qualities other than intellect and it is based on an erroneous concept of mental defect as a simple *uniform* arrest of development. The other defect in our classification of the psychopath is that he is often described by his resemblance to psychiatric disease entities, usually of the kind in which the describer is interested. In fact, some writers such as Brill have gone so far as to regard psychopathy as virtually identical with pre-psychosis, or to describe the psychopathies as variants of neurosis in terms of the constructs of theoretical psychopathology. I think this danger is best illustrated by an analogy. When arriving at a London railway terminus I often have my shoes cleaned by a man with whom I have discussed the classification of his clients. So far as I can make out, this classification is a descriptive one based on factors such as quality of shoes and socks, care of shoes and trousers, degree of haste and fidgetiness, interest in the work being done, conversation, whether needing replies, and regularity of custom. This man is able to deduce a good deal about his clients from the appearances at that end of their persons that he has scrutinized with professional skill. His interest in the rest is remarkably limited. His main method of testing his conclusions is by reference to the size of the tip, but having concluded, say, that his client has lived abroad or has a manservant, he has little interest in confirming this by direct enquiry or by seeking for supporting evidence. This would have been the method

of science, and in neglecting it he is content to remain in his happy shoe-oriented world.

The psychopath can be classified for practical purposes from many points of view, legal, clinical, or administrative, and one would not wish to dispute the classifications already proposed. In order to illustrate further possibilities, however, two classifications of a fundamental kind are given in this paper, one in terms of the qualities that he lacks (Table I) and the other in terms of his social efficiency (Table II), i.e. without reference to his personal adjustment or

TABLE II

Classification of Psychopathy in Terms of Social Efficiency

<i>Satisfactory Adjustment</i>	Personally unhappy but capable of original thought as poets, inventors, supporters of strange causes, zealots, occultists, hypochondriacs. Those with single interests who, apart from their enthusiasm, are normal in that they contribute as much or more than they receive from society. Includes individuals with a hypertrophied social conscience which causes personal unhappiness.
<i>Less Well Adjusted</i>	Aggressives, malcontents, dreamers, sensualists, drifters, informers, neurosis-prone individuals, pathological liars, latent inverts, some recidivists.
<i>Socially Maladjusted</i>	Addicts, alcoholics, parasitic and dependent persons, negative individuals without drive, persons almost unemployable, white-collar swindlers and business opportunists, prostitutes, spivs and others who lower the morale of the group.
<i>Antisocial</i>	Moral-oligophrenics, antisocial perverts, anarchists, vengeful paranoids, the angry and explosively violent who constantly offend against law.

unhappiness. The most practicable way of determining what kind of psychopathy is present is often by a process of progressive restriction, i.e. by reviewing the things that the patient is not. The following list of objective features common to large groups of psychopaths should assist a diagnosis by increasing probability. Such a diagnosis is necessary, of course, if we wish to predict what the psychopath will do next, and diagnosis is as necessary as in any other kind of disability:

Their behaviour mystifies others who find it difficult to account for it in terms of their own motives. Their solution of daily problems differs from that of the average man of comparable intellect, yet they are lacking in insight as to the ways in which they differ from their fellows.

Their output is irregular and unpredictable and their response to alcohol and drugs is unusual. Their emotional responses are at the extreme of the normal, they cannot estimate their appropriateness, or respond consistently to the same situations at different times.

Owing to their condition they attempt to meet stress in inefficient ways and are in consequence vulnerable to neurosis. They have difficulty in keeping their attention on the immediate needs of adaptation to daily life. On the other hand they may be preoccupied with the present alone and incapable of considering the future. They are often egocentric and find no reason for any other attitude.

They are sometimes criminal and may share with the criminal the weakness for accepting the immediate gain with restricted foresight for later consequences. They are not insane, but cause more unhappiness and disharmony in others than the insane. This unhappiness they are unable to appreciate.

Out of place in this world, they may seek to reform it by new politics or religions or to leave it by suicide.

The above qualities and deficiencies are relative and are yet consistent with high intellectual attainment and with useful contribution to the group or to the advance of civilization in general.

After description, empirical classification and tentative hypothesis, the next step in the scientific approach to psychopathic personality is the testing of hypotheses. If psychopathy is due to certain defects, and we suspect what these defects are, can we produce them artificially, can we make a psychopath? Attention has been drawn (Jefferson, Kennedy, Ritchie, Zangwill, 1950) to two experiments which nature and surgery have carried out for us. The first of these is the epidemic of Encephalitis Lethargica, which in damaging the central regions of the brain in a large, almost random, group of subjects during the ten-year period 1916-1926, in different types of community and at different stages of the development of their central nervous system from birth to maturity, has provided what Adolf Meyer would have called an ideal "experiment of nature". The second experiment has been carried out for us by Moniz and his successors who have produced fairly circumscribed destruction of brain-tissue in the frontal regions.

My own interest in these experiments has been in connection with the so-called "moral sense" which appears from study of my own material to be dependent on an awareness of the appropriateness of a contemplated course of conduct in relation to patterns of behaviour installed in the brain. These patterns are the resultant of the post-natal development of the social instinct and the effects of experience upon it. The lack of foresight found in the brain-damaged appears to be due to a general lack of awareness in the conative field. This accounts for some of the extraordinary unforesightful acts which are sometimes found in the presence of a normal intellect both in severe moral defectives and in the victims of encephalitis lethargica. Acts such as picking up a hot iron or confidently hanging from a string which cannot possibly support a person's weight appear to occur where the disease has been incident at the stage when a child is learning to avoid danger. In the same way socially unforesightful acts occur in those where it has been incident between 8 and 20 when the sense of social responsibility is undergoing rapid development. The man of normal test-intelligence who kills a man for his new suit and leaves his old one at the scene of the crime, is a striking example of this sort of defect. The type of moral defect seen in the post-encephalitic and in the patient with gross character change after brain-damage are very different, and it is possible to isolate the factors they have in common and in which they differ. They serve to illustrate the fact that it is possible by means of comparatively small structural damage, or by interfering at critical phases of development, to produce an individual who *lacks the physical means of being morally aware*.

Between conception and maturity the opportunities for minor damage to the nervous system are many, and for every failure that can produce a mental defective or a cripple there must be some that produce variations which are not so obvious. Intrauterine anoxia, intrauterine encephalitis and toxæmia, the trauma of birth with its venous hæmorrhage and white asphyxia are obvious causes, while the importance of kernicterus due to Rhesus incompatibility is now being realized. If the damage done is insufficient to produce changes appreciable by the relatively crude methods of neurological examinations or its psychometric extensions, it may still be sufficient to produce defects which will

come to light only when the affected mechanism is tested under the stress of adolescence. It is a chilling thought that the more medical science is able to save life, the greater the prospect of minor structural damage in the survivor. We are now able successfully to rear many premature babies weighing less than two pounds and we know already that some of these have in other respects an unequal chance in later life. We operate on hydrocephalic infants where much damage has already been done, we treat tuberculous meningitis successfully with the aid of drugs which themselves do irreparable damage to nervous tissue. It is often said that a case of accidental head injury which reaches hospital alive will usually survive even in spite of much loss of tissue, a field in which subsequent character-change is already well recognized. It is not that we should not welcome these advances, but the type of defect which results needs careful study so that we can allow for it in the process of social rehabilitation. Two new possibilities to which attention has been recently directed are the effects of cerebral anoxia after operations on the heart, and the cerebral effects of prolonged anaesthesia with controlled hypotension.

If we are to follow out the comparison of the aetiology of psychopathy with that of defect, we must not ignore the influence of heredity. Most psychiatrists of experience can remember instances where an unusual psychopathic trait has been seen in more than one member of a family, and East and Hubert (1939), for instance, noted the tendency for sexual perversion to be inherited, provided that one took the general tendency to perversion as the unitary trait and not its actual form. Recent work on twins by Slater and Shields (1953) and Shields (1954) strongly suggests that character-traits, including abnormal ones, show evidence of inheritance to a greater degree than most diagnostic entities in psychosis and neurosis. Similar work on behaviour disorder in children (Rosanoff *et al.*, 1934), criminals (Kranz, 1936) and homosexuals (Kallmann, 1952) strongly supports this view. It may be that we should review with a less critical eye the work of those such as Reid (1901), who showed, without carefully controlled study it is true, that alcoholism and criminality and other effects of psychopathy occurred with such frequency in some families that there was ample room for the operation of inherited predisposing causes as well as precipitating causes in the environment.

It will not, I hope, be thought that in emphasizing factors of constitution and central nervous structure, I am anxious to convey that the psychopathic type of character deviation cannot be due to the failure of complete development of the function of mind in the presence of normal brain structure. The case of Caspar Hauser drew our attention to the fact that an individual with a presumably normal nervous system, but with no human environment with which it can react, is as surely mentally defective as one with demonstrable brain anomalies. In the same way it can hardly be expected that a child brought up in an atmosphere of negative affective relations and complete absence of social responsibility will develop normally, even if the physical substrate exists. The difference between the two cases is that in the structurally normal there is always hope of bringing them to a socially compatible outlook through resocialization in a reasonably favourable environment, and this is in fact what we are doing with no little success in our Approved Schools and Borstals, so great is the natural tendency to recovery. When however we are hampered by defect which we have at present no means of making good, we cannot replace, but can only readjust.

As the structure of the group in which we live becomes more complex and as it becomes more necessary to make laws, and especially regulations on the

assumption of a conforming attitude in each individual, the number of those who will be unable to subscribe to the spirit of the regulations, especially to such highly civilized codes as those relating to road-traffic or income-tax, for instance, is likely to increase. It is unfortunate that the Welfare State can be to some only an incitement to exploitation; and the dangerous spread, as the result of food rationing, of the cult of the spiv, showed that we are having to test the citizenship of some of our population too far. Only the primitive call to martial virtues of a less civilized kind was able to avert a general deterioration in citizenship, and the threat is by no means gone. The law, in particular, has constantly to deal with individuals for whom at present it has little provision, the kind of man, as Macaulay said of George Fox, whose "intellect was in that most unfortunate of all states—too disordered for liberty and not sufficiently disordered for Bedlam". Can our study of the subject help the law to provide for the future? At the present our efforts in the courts, where we so often persist in using a language entirely foreign to the honest judges and juries, seems to excite as much negative as positive reaction.

We can no longer deport our more serious misfits, we cannot destroy them. We know that punishment will make no radical change, although there is reason to believe that with specially devised and realistic sanctions they can be made reasonably happy and can approach self-support. At present we remove from the community only those with gross intellectual defect, those who are criminal, yet manifestly not responsible for their crimes, those who are dangerous to others and those who have repeated in crime so often that all hope of reformation has gone. If we could, without reference to theories of psychopathology on our part, or of *lex talionis* on the part of the legislators, learn to measure the extent of social responsibility of the individual as judged by his behaviour, we should be able, if they fail in a therapeutic environment, to plan a means of giving a satisfying life to these incomplete human beings in whom our laws and customs can give rise only to perplexity and frustration. To retain them as citizens of whom the normal duties are to be expected may often only add to their burden. Faith in human nature and preoccupation with the liberty of the subject are admirable attitudes, but the provision of a suitable but separate non-penal environment for those subjects who are lacking in the qualities essential for citizenship in an overcrowded world is essential if the march of civilization is not to be held back to the pace of its stragglers.

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