

Cesare Lombroso

by PS 1379 Raymond Cremona

Perhaps one of the pioneers of modern criminological studies is Cesare Lombroso. Lombroso was born in Verona (then under Austrian rule) in 1835. He was the second in a family composed of five children. His ancestry from his father's side could be traced back to "North African Jews". His mother who was the dominant figure in the Lombroso family came from a wealthy industrial family.

Cesare received a medical degree from the University of Pavia in 1858. In 1859 he received his post graduate degree in surgery from the University of Genoa. It is believed that Lombroso being of a Jewish ancestry would have been prohibited from attending school if his birth place (Verona) was then under Italian rule. Early at school Lombroso showed distinctive indifference to contemporary studies. He married to Alexandra. He had two daughters namely Gina and Paola. Gina later married to William Ferrero one of Lombroso's main doctoral students. Paola later married to Professor M. Carrara.

As soon as he graduated he enlisted as an army physician. It was during the time in the army that through co-incidence he developed his particular presumption that individuals could be singled out as criminals and delinquents from "the look of their faces". During his observation of about 3,000 army soldiers he tried to establish if there was any difference of attitude of persons coming from different regions. He ended up developing a theory that relates tattooing to deviance and face characteristics to criminal behaviour. He also requested and attained permission to study mental patients at St. Euphemia mental hospital (near Pavia). In 1876 he received his first professional appointment at the University of Turin in 1906 Lombroso was honoured with the "Legion of Honour" by the Paris government. Lombroso died on the 19th October, 1909.

"The born criminal"

According to the Lombrosian theory illustrated in the book "L'Uomo delinquente" (the delinquent man), with great contrast with former classical teachings such as those of Beccaria (Italian) and Bentham (British), serious and heinous offenders are born with criminalistic attitude and with physical features that tends to propel them towards delinquent behaviour.

Cesare Lombroso while explaining criminal behaviour, gave credit to other indirect environmental effects such as lack of education, alcoholism, publicity given to certain criminal acts, and hot temperature that he related with violent crime. Nevertheless Lombroso emphasized that the primary causes of crime are the biological features that are mainly inherited.

According to his theory, criminals suffered from "atavistic anomalies". They are physically adopted to primitive times. They are born primitive to live the way primitive (lawless) people lived and hunted. He believed that criminals have bigger jaws, and strong canine teeth. Both features common to animals who eat raw meat. Lombroso believed that criminals have behaviour that can be compared with that of persons suffering from a mental disease and persons suffering from epilepsy. He believed that criminals are persons who have not genetically evolved enough.

Other kinds of criminals

Lombroso acknowledged that besides the born criminal there are other kinds of criminals. One particular kind of criminals is the "criminaloid". This kind of criminal lacks most of the distinctive "atavistic features" (external looks) which are prominent in the "born criminal". Criminaloids are impelled towards crime by their passion towards easy money. They usually have more brains than the "born criminals" although they have less natural control on their behaviour compared to normal conventional persons. They may be easily effected by conventional and unconventional association. He submitted that examples of criminaloids are pickpockets, smugglers and frauds ("white collar criminals"). Criminaloids association with the "born criminals" when incapacitated and alcoholism make this kind of delinquents evolve into individuals, very little different from other more merciless criminals.

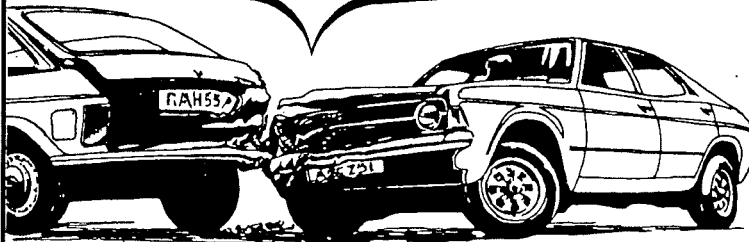
Lombroso also studied the "insane criminal", whom he identified as a kind of a "more serious born criminal". The "insane criminal" acts without any compassion, despicably, and impulsively. This category of criminal individuals was defined by Lombroso as including the "habitual criminals", in other words those who systematically commit crime and deviant behaviour with indifference. Lombroso suggested that these individuals should



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be segregated from other forms of criminals and the rest of the society. This kind of criminals have serious "atavistic anomalies" (very distinctive features) that can distinguish them from the rest of the society.

Another kind of delinquency singled out by Lombroso was that discharged by "Criminals by passion". This kind of criminals contrasts with the "born criminals". They act deviantly through an uncontrollable passionate moment ("furia the sangue"). According to Lombroso, they are usually very regretful for their deed and often contemplate suicide after their actions. Most of the criminality committed by this category of criminals are homicides. The last kind of delinquency that was singled out by Lombroso was that of the "occasional criminals of pseudo-criminals". According to Lombroso individuals performing such criminal acts are impelled into criminal activity by "insignificant reasons" (mostly by sociological and environmental factors).

Conclusion

Cesare Lombroso lived in an era of rapid industrial growth. Criminology was starting to take the modern trends of studies. After Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who was the founder of the "positivistic" criminological studies and the "evolution of species" of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), Cesare Lombroso known as the "father of criminology" was the most distinguished "positivist" (bio-criminologist). Lombroso never did admit the concept of "free will" in criminal attitude as submitted by the "classical teachings" of contemporary "academic circles". He believed that behaviour is more pre-determined especially by inherited biological features.

Even though that his own experiments were usually lacking in concrete scientific proof, they were a good attempt to gear-up research into biological studies on criminology. His studies were used by several other criminologists, such as Enrico Ferri (1856-1929) who was one of Lombroso's pupils. Ferri was a Member of the Italian Parliament, lecturer, a lawyer, journalist and a famous scholar. However Ferri's interest in "sociolism" convinced him that though there is certainly some validity in biological perspectives in criminal behaviour, he believed that the main causes of criminality were mainly social, political and economic factors.

Another follower of Lombroso was Raffaele Garofolo (1852-1934) a Magistrate, Senator, and a Law professor. He agreed with Lombroso and

Ferri that criminal attitudes should be studied and that individuals are not equally free to commit crime (Beccaria's "free will"). The first main challenge to the Lombrosians theory came from Charles Buckman Goring (1870-1919). The last criminological researcher who promoted biological determinism and related body types to criminal behaviour was William Sheldon (1898-1977).

Although through the years sociological factors prevailed as the main causal factors of crime, Lombroso's research could never be totally refused. In Malta we have a saying "tagjrfu minn wi`u" (you recognize him from his face). Present biological research on crime causation does not include the measurements of the face features, or the way a person moves his head (either rapidly or slowly), how sharp is his vision, or the measurement of ones' teeth or jaw. (September 11. 1995).

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